

# KANSAS

## *Wildlife & Parks Magazine*

FOR HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS | \$2.75 | JULY-AUGUST 2018





**STATE OF KANSAS**  
Jeff Colyer, M.D., Governor

**KDWPT COMMISSION**  
Gerald Lauber, Chairman  
Tom Dill, Vice Chairman  
Gary Hayzlett  
Aaron Rider  
Harrison Williams  
Emerick Cross  
Ward Cassidy

**KDWPT ADMINISTRATION**  
Robin Jennison, Secretary  
Todd Workman, Asst. Sec. Administration  
Keith Sexson, Asst. Sec. Wildlife,  
Fisheries, Boating  
Linda Craghead, Asst. Sec. Parks, Tourism  
Jake George, Wildlife Director  
Doug Nygren, Fisheries Director  
Stuart Schrag, Public Lands Director  
Linda Lanterman, Parks Director  
Jason Ott, Law Enforcement Director  
Ron Kaufman, Info. Services Director

Chris Tymeson, Chief Legal Counsel  
Joy Duncan, Chief Financial Officer

**KANSAS**  
*Wildlife & Parks Magazine*

Mike Miller, Executive Editor  
Nadia Reimer, Managing Editor  
Dustin Teasley, Graphic Designer Specialist  
Marc Murrell, Staff Writer  
Annie Campbell-Fischer, Circulation

**2 | Kansas View**

Generational Shift *by Robin Jennison*

**18 | The Porcupine**

Research found porcupines in at least 35 Kansas counties. *By Jonathan Conard*

**22 | A Quarter-century of Stream Surveys**

KDWPT crews survey and document Kansas stream life. *By Mark VanScoyoc*

**26 | Shooting Ranges in Kansas**

Find a place to shoot close to home. *By Rick McNary*

**31 | Night, Lights, Action!**

Joe Bragg catches his summer crappie after dark. *By Brent Frazee*

**35 | Squirrel Hunting – A Forgotten Tradition**

Once popular with hunters, few are harvested today. *By Michael Pearce*

**39 | Wilson State Park: Window To The Smoky Hills**

Wilson State Park beckons all to scenic Wilson Lake. *By Jennifer Leeper*

**43 | Grandpa Harry & Ole Mr. Browning**

Grandpa passes on his old Browning shotgun to Ethan. *By Rick McNary*

**44 | Species Profile: Spiny Softshell Turtle**

**45 | Backlash**

It's All Relative *by Mike Miller*

# Contents

**FRONT COVER** Though present in at least 35 counties, porcupines are an unusual sight in Kansas. Jay Miller photo.

**INSIDE FRONT COVER** Scenic Wilson State Park serves as the perfect place to stop and stay awhile. Staff photo.

**Contact the Editors:** [mike.miller@ks.gov](mailto:mike.miller@ks.gov) or [nadia.reimer@ks.gov](mailto:nadia.reimer@ks.gov)

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

*Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine* (ISSN 0898-6975) is published bimonthly (every other month) by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124. Address editorial correspondence to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124, (620) 672-5911. Send subscription requests to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124. Subscription rate: one year \$12; two years \$20; and three years

\$29. Articles in the magazine may be reprinted with permission. Periodical postage paid at Pratt, KS and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*, PO Box 16325, North Hollywood, CA 91615. For subscription inquiries call toll-free 1-866-672-2145.

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





# KANSAS *View*

with Robin Jennison

## Generational Shift?

State wildlife management agencies have felt the effect financially of an aging Baby Boomer Generation. Those of us born from 1945-1965 have been the backbone of funding for wildlife and fishery programs since the 1970s. After World War II, American soldiers came home with spare time and income that allowed them to spend time outdoors with their families hunting and fishing. Their children – the Baby Boomers – became a generation that grew up hunting and fishing and continued pursuing outdoor recreation as adults. Today, the youngest Baby Boomers are in their 50s.

Several years ago, we identified the fastest growing segment of hunters and anglers as those 65 and older. That is alarming because after the age of 65, these license buyers begin to fall out, especially hunters. We knew that to maintain our wildlife management programs, we'd need to attract a new constituency. License revenue funds our wildlife and fishery programs, but we also depend on social and political support from our citizens who value our outdoor heritage, so as the percent of our population who hunt and fish declines, there is cause for concern.

There are many reasons why hunters and anglers make up a smaller percentage of our state's population today than they did 30 years ago: the Kansas population has grown and has become increasingly urban, people are losing their connections to rural Kansas and/or relatives who farm and ranch, there's a multitude of competing activities, difficulty and cost in gaining access to private land, and making the time required for hunting and fishing. So it would make sense that with such a complicated issue there would be no single or simple solution.

We've focused on a variety of efforts to reverse the declining trend: removing barriers, providing outdoor skills training, increasing access to private land, conducting special hunts, promoting education and awareness, and participating in collaborative efforts with various conservation organizations.

There are positive signs that these efforts are not in vain, but perhaps the most encouraging trend we're seeing is the current generation's interest in outdoor activities. The Millennial Generation may be the next Baby Boomers, and in fact, they are the largest generation now. Millennials, those born between 1981 and 1996, are obviously interested in getting outdoors and as Baby Boomers drop out, we'll need to attract Millennials to the outdoor experiences Kansas has to offer.

We're seeing more and more interest in outdoor activities such as paddle sports. Kayak sales have increased by double-digit margins in recent years, and more paddlers are taking advantage of opportunities available on the Kansas and Arkansas rivers, both of which are designated as National River Trails. Kayaks are affordable, easy to transport and provide paddlers safe access to public waters for fishing and boating recreation. There's nothing quite as relaxing as floating on a lake or lazy river, whether you're there just to enjoy the scenery and peace or you're sneaking up on a likely large-



Dave Adams photo

mouth bass haunt.

Interest in trails is high, and those who like to bike and hike have it made in Kansas. Between the hundreds of miles of nature trails in Kansas state parks and wildlife areas, and the 56-mile Prairie Spirit Trail and 117-mile Flint Hills Trail, Kansas has plenty to offer. There are renowned mountain bike trails such as the Switchback Trail at Wilson State Park, and many parks also accommodate horse riders with camping areas featuring paddocks and horse trailheads.

Another positive sign is the growing visitation at Kansas state parks. It makes sense because in addition to the extensive trail systems, our state parks provide convenient access to water for paddlers and anglers. And park managers are continually adding activities and special events for those who want more from their park experience than a place to park their RV.

Other encouraging signs include the incredible growth in high school trapshooting programs. In 2018, more than 1,200 Kansas students representing 58 Kansas schools participated in the Kansas State High School Clay Target League's spring trapshooting season. That's up from 710 students and 39 teams in 2017.

Archery in the Schools continues to grow, as well. More than 300 grade, middle and high school students competed in the Kansas Archery In The Schools state tournament last April. More than 100 Kansas schools have archery programs in place.

And a recent news article featured a Kansas high school fishing team that is sponsored by the school. Bluestem High School in Leon bought a boat for its fishing team, and members have traveled across the U.S. to participate in bass fishing tournaments. If participation in high school fishing programs in southern states is an indicator, there is potential for these programs to grow in Kansas.

This is a great time to enjoy the outdoors in Kansas because of the variety and quality of our resources. To ensure these outdoor traditions continue, it's incumbent upon us to get current and future generations involved.

**Liking the Slot Limits at Milford**

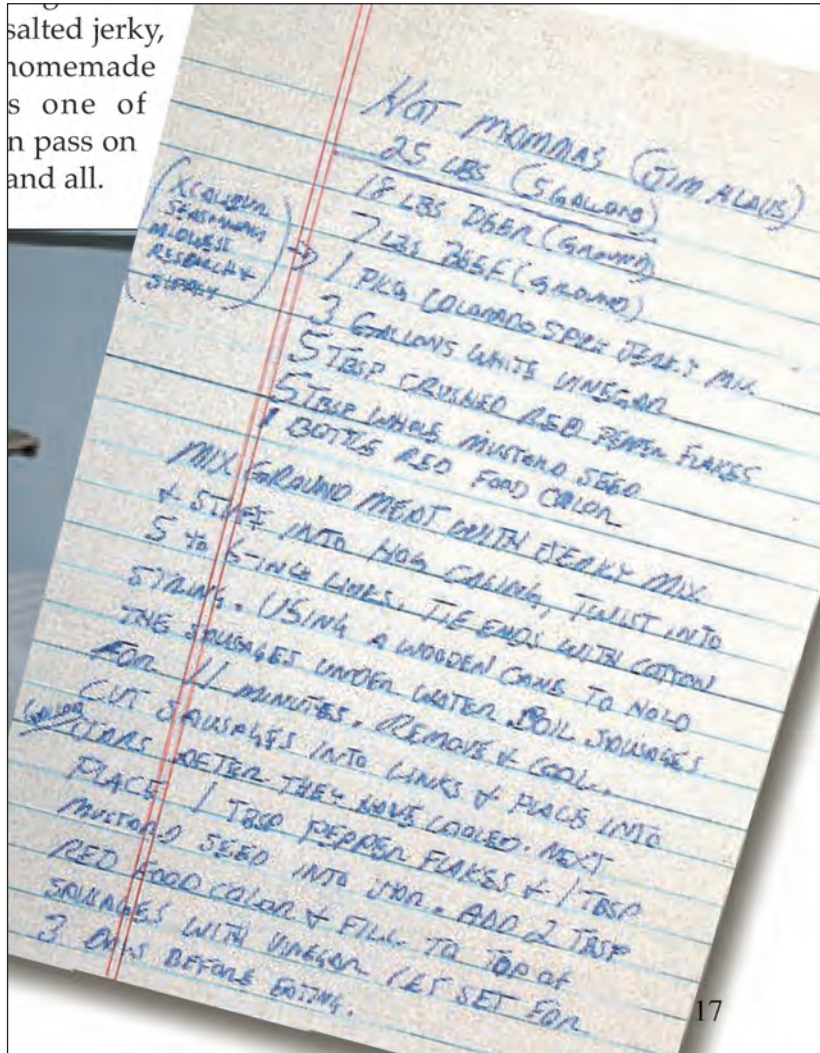
Dear Mike,

I just wanted to congratulate the parks and wildlife department for finally getting the slot limit instituted at Milford lake. It was way over due. The taking of such great fish was a travesty.

Here's a 38-pound blue catfish my wife caught last October that's still in the lake.

Thanks again to you and your staff for putting out such a great magazine. We read it from cover to cover when we receive it. Kansas is such a great place to be out in the outdoors!

*Rocky Both  
Wichita*



**Reminisce over a Recipe**

Mr. Teasley,

When we moved I lost your recipe for Hot Mommas. I would like to get it. I can't find my magazine with that recipe in it. If you can, would you please send it to me. Hope this is not a bother.

Thank you,

*Emerson F. Kemp  
Clay Center*

P.S. When I worked at G.T. in Clay Center years ago I worked with a Teasley. I think his name was Armond and his wife Jan. Just thought you might know them.

Dear Mr. Kemp,

It was no bother. I dug through the archives and found the recipe in an article, "Eatin' Wild," in the November/December 2006 issue. I'm happy to send it to you.

Jan and Armond Teasley are my aunt and uncle. I have fond memories of them. Armond was a truck driver and my first time outside the state of Kansas was riding with him to deliver soda bottle preforms to Limon, Colo. I also remember him coming out to our farm for many opening day pheasant hunts.

Thanks for jogging my memory.

*Dustin Teasley  
graphic designer specialist*

# BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

## Summer Birding a Welcomed Challenge

---

The weather in Kansas can be brutal in July and August, with hot days and warm nights. Those of us who like to birdwatch wait impatiently for fall to arrive. However, as I have mentioned in past columns, fall migration actually begins in July for some species and drags out for several months. Summer can be perfect to work on birding skills with confusing plumages of adult birds in molt, as well as fresh juvenile plumages of young birds. Identification can be a real hodgepodge! But it is also a great opportunity for those of us with years of experience to help beginners learn more about the hobby we love.

I have a coworker, Randy Oller, who spends his day doing IT work (computer stuff). He's good at it but I usually don't have a clue about what he's doing. His day-to-day job has little to do with the natural things in Kansas that many of us enjoy as part of our work. However, he came to me recently with some bird identification questions. I gladly helped because I would sooner jump off a building than do what he does every day and I figured he needed a break! We went on a short walk and I was able to show him birds common in our local natural area. We went through some of the general ID stuff, like judging size, coloration, and songs. He seemed eager and interested.

I asked him about his sudden interest in birds and what he wanted from it. He said when he was in his 20s (not that long ago), he didn't really care about that sort of thing. But he did fondly recall time spent on his grandparents' farm when he was a youngster. His grandmother had hummingbird feeders, bird baths and other attracting features out and really enjoyed having birds around. Randy said that as he has gotten older, his appreciation of the natural world around him has grown. His story was familiar to me.

Mississippi Kites especially intrigued him and he asked me about some of the things they did, and why they are not around all year. Since our first short field walk, he's noticing other species of birds in our area, and is already wanting to know more.

Randy has three young sons and he wants to teach them about birds and other wildlife we have in Kansas. The best mentors in my life have been grandparents, par-

ents, friends and coworkers who were willing to spend some time teaching. People will enjoy birding for different reasons, but everyone who experiences it will gain an appreciation for our natural world and the wildlife in it. Consider becoming a mentor to someone with a budding interest in birding - young children, retired folks or anyone in between. Sharing your knowledge with someone will be as rewarding to you as it will be for them.





# LAW MATTERS

with Colonel Ott

## Game Warden Zerick Kuecker

---

This month's Game Warden profile features a Q&A with Zerick Kuecker (pronounced Kicker). Officer Kuecker is assigned to Greeley, Hamilton and Kearny counties. He has worked as a game warden with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism for three years and was named Officer of the Year for 2017.

### **What is the most memorable investigation that you have worked on?**

For some reason, red trucks seem to be popular. I've had two poaching cases that involved red trucks. With both cases, I was over an hour away when I got the call. Both times the trucks were not the same model or color reported, but we were able to find the suspect vehicles and make the cases.

### **What is the best thing about being a game warden?**

Having a mobile office and being able to travel throughout my district and other areas. There are lots of wildlife and good views.

### **If you weren't a game warden, what would you be doing?**

I like to build things, so I would probably be a fabricator/mechanic of some sort.

### **What do you enjoy in your spare time?**

I hunt, fish, and enjoy being outdoors. That's what got me here.

### **What/Who influenced you to become a game warden?**

My family has been my main influence and biggest motivator along the way. Growing up hunting with my dad and grandpa sparked my interest in an outdoor-related career.

### **How are you involved in your communities?**

I help with a variety of youth hunts and hunter education programs in western Kansas. I also have done some educational programs with the schools.

### **What is your favorite area in Kansas to hunt or fish?**

Mule deer are my favorite game to hunt. I love spot and stalk hunting with a bow. I also enjoy hunting birds and watching the dog work. I do this mainly in western Kansas.

### **What activities can people enjoy in your area?**

Being in southwest Kansas, we are limited on water. On the Arkansas River, there are quite a few people who float the river. And there is a sand dune park in Syracuse, but most of our activities are hunting related.



### **Do you have any special certifications or training as a game warden?**

As a game warden, I am a certified Kansas peace officer and attend the same training as other law enforcement officers. I am also a certified Glock armorer for the Department.

### **What is your most embarrassing moment while on duty?**

I may have gotten stuck a time or two and had to request a tractor.

### **Do you have any advice for someone who is considering a career as a game warden or in the wildlife management field?**

If you have a great passion to become a game warden, it is the greatest job in the world. Don't plan on becoming rich with this job. It is a job that you get out of it what you put into it. It can be a challenging field to get into, but keep your head up and it can happen. I would recommend getting experience wherever possible. Also, different states have different requirements, so pay attention to that when choosing a degree in college.

### **Do you have a dream of an outdoor adventure that you'd like to fulfill?**

I'd like to do a few more big game hunts in other states, but I took advantage of some of those opportunities before I was hired as a game warden.

### **What is one thing about your patrol area that most people don't know?**

Coolidge is the home of Cousin Eddie, from the National Lampoon Vacation movie series. My district has a large variety of wild game including mule deer, whitetail, elk, and turkey. It also has bobwhite and blue quail, prairie chickens, pheasants, and lots of waterfowl that pass through.

# CAST IT IN

text and photos by Brent Frazier

Lynnea Nelson, 11, is a bit young to have big dreams about making a difference in the world. But maybe she is ahead of her time. How else could you explain a girl her age tackling a problem that many adults couldn't handle?

Her story centers on fishing line that is catching more than fish. It has become a big problem nationwide – discarded fishing line washes ashore and entangles everything from birds to small mammals.

That problem struck home for Lynnea in April 2017, when she and her mom, Rochelle, were birding on Lake Shawnee. As they were following a path along the water's edge, they spotted a coot that was tangled in discarded line. The mother and daughter, who live in Carbondale, carefully cut the bird loose and watched as it flew away. But the images of that struggling bird haunted Lynnea.

"It was so sad to watch it struggle like that," she said. "The hook went through the web in his foot and he couldn't go anywhere."

"I know the fisherman who threw out that line didn't mean any harm, but we saw what it could do."

"I looked online and saw pictures of other birds and animals that became wrapped up in fishing line – and some that died – and I knew I had to do something."

So she went to work. She found a website that showed how to make a fishing-line receptacle and with the help of her mom, constructed her first one out of PVC pipe and rubber lining with a slit in it for the opening.

"We didn't want to have the opening wide open because cavity nesters (birds) could get in there and get tangled up in the line," Lynnea said. "I think what we built looked pretty good."

She had to go before the Carbondale City Council in March to get approval before putting the first receptacle up at the city's lake. She passed with flying colors and proudly put her first one out. It wasn't long before anglers were using it, stuffing discarded line into the container.

That, in itself, would have been a success story. But it was only the start. Lynnea, with the support of her mom and dad, put out three recycling containers at Melvern Lake, two at Overbrook City Lake, and have plans to put up four at Lake



Shawnee and another at Shawnee County State Fishing Lake. They have been busy collecting the line out of the bins and sending it to Berkley, a nationally-known manufacturer of fishing line which has a recycling program. Since 1990, the fishing tackle company has recycled more than 9 million miles worth of fishing line, using it to make everything from plastic fish habitat to plastic park benches.

Meanwhile, Lynnea dreamed even bigger. She started the "Cast It In, Kansas" program, and set a goal of bringing her program statewide. There was only one problem: the cost.

"It cost \$70 to buy the parts and put one of these bins together," Rochelle said. "We knew we couldn't handle that on our own."

"We tried several things like a Go Fund Me page on Facebook and we did get donations from several Audubon chapters, but it still wasn't enough."

The Nelsons got their break when they got the support of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. They applied for funding through the Department's Chickadee Checkoff Small Grants program. Chickadee Checkoff allows Kansans to check a line on their individual income tax returns to directly contribute to wildlife and habitat programs – especially those benefitting non-game wildlife, or wildlife not normally hunted.

Since its inception in 1980, Chickadee Checkoff has raised more than \$4 million. And through the small grants program, people like Lynnea who qualify can then receive a small grant for projects that work towards the program's mission.

Lynnea and her "Cast It In" project was green-lighted, and before long, the Nelsons received a shipment of 30 recycling bins, paid for and already put together.

Now they are in the process of deciding how to distribute those receptacles to other parts of Kansas.

"When I started this, I had no idea it would get where it is now," Lynnea said. "I didn't do it for the attention or anything."

"I just wanted to help."





# HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

## Hunter Education Program Turns 45

The Kansas Hunter Education Program is turning 45 this year. Many things have changed since 1973 when the legislature mandated that our department develop a hunter education program and get youngsters under the age of 16 certified. What started as a basic four-hour firearm safety class has expanded into a 10-hour, comprehensive course with topics ranging from hunter ethics to principles of wildlife management. Now, we not only teach firearms safety when using rifles and shotguns but, by necessity, include information regarding hunting with handguns, black powder firearms, archery equipment, treestands and hunting from a water craft. Hunting entails much more today.

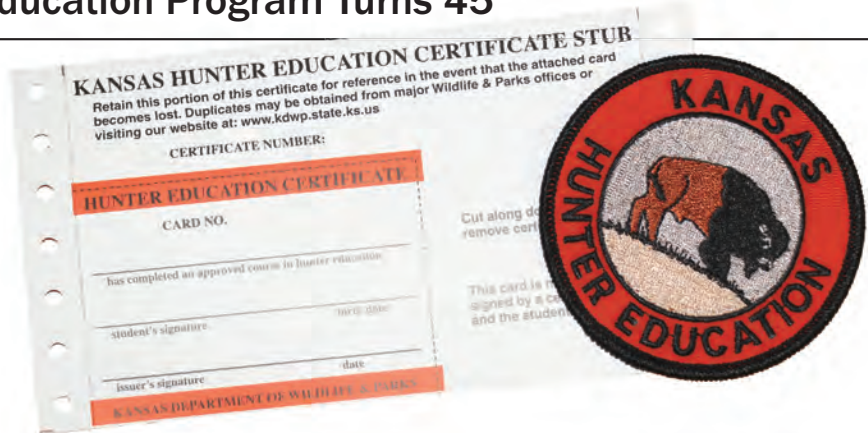
I was recently browsing through a copy of the 1959 revision of the 1957 NRA Hunter Safety Manual. The stated purpose for that course was to teach “proper gun handling in circumstances related to hunting.” It goes on to explain “The sole aim of this course is to give the hunter basic information, which should enable him to avoid hunting accidents.” Our cadre of more than 1,300 current volunteer hunter education instructors is tasked with more varied topics but none that take our focus away from safety in the field. The number of hunting incidents recorded in Kansas each year are extremely low when you consider the number of days hunters spend in the

field annually. In 2017, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported 245,779 licensed hunters in the state, and those hunters spent more than 5 million days hunting. During that time, Kansas had 11 hunting incidents reported to our Law Enforcement division. That means that 0.0000447 of the hunters in the state were involved in a hunting incident! To me, this means those guys who began teaching hunter education so many years ago must have known a thing or two about being safe.

Every year, events occur that cause a renewed focus on gun safety. And Kansas Hunter Education continues to provide timely training to hunters starting off on this adventure. Our stated mission is to produce safe, knowledgeable, responsible and involved hunters. Our stated goal is to prevent hunting incidents and ensure the future of the hunting tradition. We are not perfect in our quest. We do not always pro-

duce the safest hunters in the field. Sometimes the fluid circumstances of the hunt allow for decisions that end in a hunting incident where a hunter is injured. Kansas has not had an incident that resulted in a fatality since 2015, but every fatal incident causes us to try harder to keep another family from experiencing the hurt and loss that comes with such an incident.

We do not promise perfection, but we do commit to giving our best effort to produce hunters prepared for the field. If we are to accomplish this, we must accept a few givens. First, fair chase must be more important than harvesting an animal. Second, hunter integrity must dictate our actions. And thirdly, we must choose to do the right thing especially when no one else is watching. We must rise to this occasion and commit to be the best hunters we can, every hunt. We have 45 years of success behind us - let's keep going.



## WHAT AM I? ID Challenge

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



### Clues:

1. I live in the water
2. I'm known as a tenacious fighter.
3. Crayfish are one of my favorite meals.

>>> See answer on Page 13

# Fish Squeezer

with Tommie Berger

## Making The Best of Weird Spring Weather

Interesting weather we had this spring. The slow warm up really impacted our outdoor activities. Drought conditions persisted through the winter and early spring and are probably still impacting some areas. It will be interesting to see what takes place the rest of the year.

Every spring I host a 4-H fishing project for the local 4-Hers. I start the program in March and run it through April on Sunday afternoons. This year I had to cancel four of the six fishing outings due to (you guessed it) weird weather. The water temperatures stayed in the 40s and 50s for a month and a half. Luckily, we ended up going to the river one day to find a little warmer water and the kids had a ball catching carp, a few channel catfish, and even one smallmouth bass.

Then, on the first of April, came youth turkey season. I had a youngster, Colton, who was eager to harvest his first turkey. I donate a guided youth turkey hunt every year to our local Pheasants Forever chapter, purchase the required turkey permits, and take the lucky kiddo hunting. When the season started, the turkeys in our area were just beginning to scatter out. One evening I managed to pull an adult gobbler away from a flock, and Colton did a great job of being patient while that bird slowly eased its way in. The next evening we went back to a spot near the roost and just before sundown we had a flock of about 15 jakes come running over the hill right into our lap. Things happened fast but Colton was up to the task. Another turkey hunter was born.

Then along came Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in early May. My classes this year included Intro to Fishing, Sunfish Fishing, Limb Lining, and Fish Cleaning and Cooking. The water



temperatures were still behind but we had an absolutely beautiful weekend, weather-wise. All my Intro to Fishing ladies caught fish; actually we caught six different species of fish from the pool below the dam at Rock Springs. My Sunfish Fishing ladies caught four different species of sunfish – bluegill, green sunfish, orange-spotted sunfish, and longear sunfish. They also found out you can catch nice-sized largemouth bass and channel catfish on a small hook, bobber, and a little piece of worm.

Limb Lining class was interesting. We normally spend the first part of the class talking about catfish and making up our lines – two each. After class, we go to the wader room to put on chest waders. Most of the women in class have never put on waders, so we always have fun wiggling into neoprene chest waders over our day clothes. Then, we hit the local stream to collect bait with a minnow seine – minnows, small sunfish, crayfish, and maybe a leopard frog or two. With bait, we go to Lyons Creek to set our lines, which we check just after dark. This year, only channel catfish were caught, but that was because we lost our bait bucket full of bait just after we set our first two lines. (The instructor messed up, thought the bucket would float – it didn't.) And the bugs were absolutely the worst I've ever seen – we had midges in our mouths, noses, eyes, ears. It was not good, but provided another unique outdoor experience.

Fish Cleaning and Cooking class went great. We had white bass, crappie, bluegill, and catfish to clean and the women got to practice with both a standard and electric fillet knife. Then the students from the mushroom hunting class came by with more mushrooms they collected. Wow, fried crappie fillets and more mushrooms, a combination that's hard to beat. It capped off a fun weekend for all.

Yep, weird weather aside, we sure know how to make the best of things.

### WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"ACTUALLY IT ONLY SLEEPS TWO,  
BUT IT TAKES FOUR MEN TO SET IT UP."

# EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

text and photos by Marc Murrell

## Old Dog, Ned Trick!

I've been fishing for nearly five decades and can honestly say there aren't many techniques or tactics I haven't seen. But on occasion, something new comes along and I'm intrigued (though this particular lure and technique has been around for years). Apparently, I'm just slow to catch on (pun intended).

It was coined after and designed by Ned Kehde, a well-known and avid angler from Lawrence. Each time he fishes, Kehde's goal is to fish for four hours and tally 100 fish, of any kind. He uses a finesse technique with a lure known as the "Ned Rig." He records each fish caught on his click counter. After what I've experienced in the last year, I found that in certain situations it's almost a guaranteed fish-catching machine!

My good friend and boss, Mike Miller, and I were baptized into the Ned Head brotherhood on Coffey County Lake. Fellow angler and magazine contributor, Brent Frazee had given us a pack or two of the plastics made by Z-Man and a bag of 1/16-oz chartreuse mushroom jig heads.

"You guys need to try these," Frazee said. "They're killer at Wolf Creek."

We did and the results speak for themselves. Miller and I caught 67 fish, mostly wipers and white bass, but plenty of smallmouth and largemouth bass, and even a crappie and walleye or two, in 2 ½ hours.

I have no idea what it actually resembles, but a hatching larvae of some insect is my best guess. Frazee said it looks like "a goose turd," and he's right, at least in the green pumpkin color. It's so easy to fish anyone, regardless of experience, can fish it. That day I simply employed a slow, steady retrieve and any time my line would stop, or I'd feel a thump, I'd set the hook and the fight was on.

The Z-Man plastic for the Ned Rig is crazy durable, too. I likely caught 35 fish or so before I had to replace it. If aircraft manufacturers made airplanes out of it, planes would just bounce, rather than crash - it's that durable.

Other examples of extreme fishing success followed. Pond fishing earlier this spring found me using it and I caught 21 largemouth bass and 4, 12-inch white crappie on the same jig and body in less than 90 minutes.

Critics say it's not a big fish bait, but

I've caught wipers up to 8 pounds, white bass up to nearly 3 pounds and largemouth bass over 6 pounds on several different color variations of the Ned Rig. I've only fished a 1/15-ounce head, in black, chartreuse and green, and my favorite plastic colors are green pumpkin and June Bug, but others work, too. You can cut some of the Z-Man plastic worms in two, or buy the Ned Rig plastic "pre-made" in the TRD (The Real Deal).

Just when I thought I was old enough I couldn't learn anything else, this rig pops up. I've swallowed the tactic hook, line and sinker, to the point I've dropped \$100 on components since my freebies from Frazee. And I've stashed some in every one of my tackle boxes just in case.

So the next time someone says you can't teach an old dog new tricks, I'll politely remind them that might be true, but you can teach this old dog the Ned trick and I'm a happier angler for it!



# Life Unpaved

with Nadia Reimer

## Nature's Treadmill

---

We “run” to shut our alarm clocks off, we “run” through our social media feeds, we “run” our showers, we “run” our coffee pots, we “run” to the gas station, we “run” and grab lunch, we run to the car wash, we “run” to the store for dinner, we “run” and pick up the kids; we run, run, run. And while this type of “running” around is necessary to our everyday lives, there is an equally important type of running that is necessary to rejuvenate us from all of the other “running” around – literal running.

I know where your mind is going, “I’m not a runner,” and I’m going to stop you right there – if you have two legs that can move back and forth, you can be a runner, so let’s just squash that myth right now. You can run and you should, no matter how slow or fast, or short or far.

Running benefits our physical health – increasing our bone mass, our ability to burn excess fat, and improving our overall cardiovascular health – but more importantly, it serves as a powerful tool for nurturing and repairing our mental health. I’ve recently decided to train for my second marathon (mind you, I’m not a runner either) and just within three weeks’ time, I’ve already felt the benefits of getting back into running outside after some time off. I’m sleeping sounder at night, I’ve

gained more clarity surrounding issues that may be bothering me, and I come away from every run feeling more confident in my ability to achieve goals I’ve set for myself.

Now, you can run just about anywhere outside, but if your schedule and location allow for it, I recommend running at a state park. Not only will you get to enjoy some of the most stunning views our state has to offer, you can just about pick the terrain you want to run on, and feel safe while doing it! You don’t have to worry about loose dogs or vehicles flying past you at 70 mph – worst case scenario you might meet a young couple hiking a trail or a friendly camp host who waves “hello!” The cost is minimal, too, especially if you get a Parks Passport (you can get one at your county treasurer’s office when renewing your vehicle tags). Just \$15 you will get you a year’s worth of access to all state parks. Now, tell me one gym where an annual membership is just \$15. And even if there was one, do you really want to be a hamster on a sweaty-from-the-last-person treadmill? Me neither.

We have a lot of running around that needs done these days, but make sure some of that is the actual kind of running and that you do it outside. Your physical and mental health will improve. Nature is kind of awesome that way.



## Just a Click Away!

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

---

With the swipe of a finger or the click of a button, anyone who enjoys the outdoors can find a wealth of information online. But is the information helpful? I may be biased (since I work in our Information section), but if the information is coming from staff at the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP), you can be certain it will be helpful and specific to Kansas.

Our website, [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com), holds information on everything from hunting and fishing regulations, camping and state parks, to updates on current habitat and conservation efforts, and even where to find a shooting range.

The KDWP Facebook page has everything from news on current agency happenings and fun events you’ll want to attend, to entertaining outdoor memes that will brighten your day.

While instant access to information is convenient, sometimes nothing beats a good old-fashioned hard copy – we’ve got

those, too. Whether you’re hunting, fishing, hiking or just curious about a specific area, printed materials are available at no charge. Simply call the Pratt Operations Office at (620) 672-5911 or drop by any of our locations. Here’s just a snippet of what else we offer.

The perennial favorite Kansas Hunting Atlas is a must for every hunter. Published in late August, it provides a bird’s eye view of federal, state and Walk-in Hunting Access lands available for public hunting. In addition, the Upland Bird Forecast predicts pheasant, quail and prairie chicken hunting prospects based on surveys taken in the spring and summer.

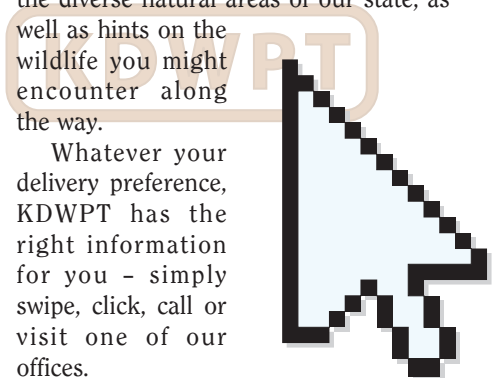
If catching fish is your passion, the Kansas Fishing Atlas showcases public fishing access throughout the state. It’s published in the early spring and can be downloaded online, picked up at a license vendor location, or requested via phone. And don’t forget our Fishing Forecast.

Fisheries staff work hard to compile data for this helpful tool designed to help anglers locate the fishing experiences they prefer most.

Our colorful Kansas State Park Guide gives a glimpse of the 26 (soon to be 28) beautiful state parks with available amenities, locations of boat ramps, campground sites, and nearby attractions.

And wildlife area brochures provide directions and maps to help you navigate the diverse natural areas of our state, as well as hints on the wildlife you might encounter along the way.

Whatever your delivery preference, KDWP has the right information for you – simply swipe, click, call or visit one of our offices.



# Park View

with Kathy Pritchett

## New State Parks

July brings us fireworks, hot weather, camping, water fun, and outdoor cooking to name a few. But this year in Kansas, July will bring something special: two brand new state parks. As of July 1, 2018, the Flint Hills Trail and Little Jerusalem Badlands are officially Kansas state parks!

The Flint Hills Trail State Park was formerly managed by volunteers from the Kanza Rail Trail Conservancy. This volunteer group had the vision, but not the means to turn the seventh longest rail trail in the nation (117 miles) into a premier destination. That's when the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism stepped in to leverage Federal Highway Administration Transportation Alternative funds made available through the Kansas Department of Transportation. The funding allowed improvements to the roadbed, bridges to be renovated or replaced and approaches to the trail to be developed. Communities through which the trail passes have begun plans to enhance trailheads and services to trail users such as the development of restrooms, and signage and parking designed for equestrians, hikers and bicyclists.

The trail is currently open and traversable from Indianapolis Road, 1 mile west of Osawatomie for approximately 93 miles to Council Grove, and passes through the communities of Rantoul, Ottawa, Pomona, Vassar, Osage City,

Admire, Allen, and Bushong. New construction is complete from Ottawa to Vassar, and from Allen to Council Grove with gates, handrails on all bridges, drainage work and new surfacing. There is a 3.5-mile detour on county roads west of Ottawa to cross an active rail line. New trail head parking lots are available at Pomona, Bushong, and Council Grove.

Little Jerusalem Badlands State Park, long the stuff of local legend, is a few miles north of Historic Lake Scott State Park. Laid down when Kansas was the bottom of a great sea, the largest Niobrara chalk formation in Kansas surrendered over eons to wind and water erosion, leaving the other-worldly formations we see today. The McGuire family owned the land for five generations until selling it to The Nature Conservancy with the stipulation that the rock formations be protected. This rugged area is fragile as well as home to many species of wildlife not common elsewhere, such as ferruginous hawks, cliff swallows, Say's phoebe and rock wrens. The Great Plains wild buckwheat is found in this type of chalk cliffs and nowhere else in the world. The site is also rich in history, as travelers for centuries have left their marks.



Representative of the Little Jerusalem area

Although it's now a state park, public will be restricted for now until appropriate parking, signage, access gates and trails are developed; The fragile landscape and the biological communities could easily be destroyed by careless use.

A large component of development will be education about how to enjoy the area while still preserving it. This will be a day-use only park; camping and other recreation opportunities are available at nearby Historic Lake Scott State Park. As we develop facilities and add staff, special events may be held to take visitors into areas of the park not normally open to the public. Access may also be restricted at certain times of the year to prevent disturbance of nesting ferruginous hawks.

Watch for updates on [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) as development continues.

Representative of the Flint Hills area



## Crappie Club Born of Necessity *by Brent Frazee*

When Joe Bragg started crappie fishing in Kansas, he was frustrated by the lack of information available.

“Kansas had bass clubs, but there wasn’t much for crappie fishermen,” he said. “Every time I went to the lake, I saw a lot of crappie fishermen, so I knew the interest was there.

“But there weren’t the clubs or many websites or Facebook pages,” he said, expressing his frustration in the lack of

how-to sources on crappie fishing.

In October 2015, Bragg changed that. With the help of friends such as Dustin Hobbs, he founded the Kansas Crappie Club – a Facebook page to exchange ideas and post information on where the fish were biting and how they were being caught, a website ([www.kansascrappieclub.com](http://www.kansascrappieclub.com)) and a tournament circuit.

Today, that club is much more popular than Bragg ever imagined. It has 4,000 Facebook members, mostly Kansas residents, and tournament participation is growing. At an event at Clinton Lake this spring, 37 teams competed.

It’s mostly for bragging rights, but there are cash prizes awarded. And many non-profits benefit. Under Bragg’s direction, the proceeds go to designated charities – everything from Special Olympics and Toys for Tots to Fishing’s Future, and to provide free fishing licenses to disabled veterans.

“We wanted to give back, and at the same time, promote the sport of crappie fishing,” Bragg said. “We want to grow even bigger, but we’re happy with the way things are going.”

If you enjoy crappie fishing, this may be the club for you.

## Horsing Around

*text and photos by Jennifer Leeper*

### A Cause for Horsing Around

Horses and their humans took to the trails at Perry State Park for the 6th Annual Perry State Park Wild Horse Trails Fundraiser last September. The event featured a three-hour, guided ride for faster horses and a two-hour course for slower horses. Since 2012, the fundraiser – organized by the Friends of Lake Perry Wild Horse Trails group – has supported maintenance and improvements to Perry’s equestrian trail system. Perry State Park is located on the shores of Perry Reservoir just northeast of Topeka.

“We cleared about \$3,800 last fall,” said event coordinator, Dewayne Burgess. “The largest expenditure since last year’s fundraiser was a used tractor and new brush cutter to mow trails.”

Previously, volunteers had to bring a mower and tractor to maintain the trails.

“Having a dedicated tractor and mower that is kept at the park maintenance yard makes that process much more convenient and results in much more frequent mowing, and that benefits all of our users.”

According to Burgess, the funds raised over the years have primarily gone to the purchase of building materials for horse corrals at the 16 utility sites in Perry State Park. “As you know we are all volunteers, so none of the money is used for wages or compensation of any kind.”

Burgess said Perry isn’t alone in hosting benefit trail rides. Eisenhower State Park hosts a ride in October that supports



trail maintenance and funds that park’s equestrian camps. The fundraiser trail ride at Kanopolis State Park features a moderate skill level trail ride and supports trail and campground maintenance at Kanopolis.

### Equestrian Trails Statewide

Throughout Kansas state parks, equine visitors and their human companions are welcomed with many options. In the east, Hillsdale State Park in Miami County offers 32 miles of marked trails in the Saddle Ridge equestrian area, located on the east side of the reservoir. In the High Plains, there is Lake Scott State Park in Scott County, featuring a horse camp area in addition to miles of trails hugging a picturesque view of Lake Scott. In the southcentral region, El Dorado State Park boasts hitching posts right on the lake’s shoreline and campsite amenities such as corrals. In the northern slice of the state, Prairie Dog Nature Trail, on Sebelius Reservoir, offers an easygoing 1.5-mile ride featuring scenic lake views and prairie dog viewing at the trailhead.

To register for the 7th Annual Perry State Park Wild Horse Trails Fundraiser this fall, contact Burgess at (785) 230-5241 or [dewayneA10msn.com](mailto:dewayneA10msn.com). To discover more about equestrian trails in Kansas state parks, visit [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com).





## Over-clean That Fish

While planning a family fishing trip for paddlefish, I did some online research about the palatability of the large, primitive freshwater creature. Reviews of the meat ranged from “fantastic” to “I couldn’t get past the smell of it cooking” to “will never try again.”

Now, I wrote an article about preparing paddlefish meat about 10 years ago, but I felt it was time to revisit this fish – especially in light of the online reviews I was seeing.

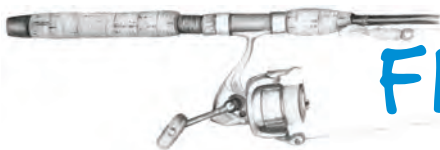
The culprit causing the “bad taste” reviews is most likely the slow-twitch muscle, commonly called the “red meat” and paddlefish have a lot of it. Even those of us who usually love the flavor of fish don’t like the taste of the red meat on a fillet. On a paddlefish, this muscle can be more than an inch thick near the lateral line and has a consistency of potted meat: slippery and mushy. Gross, right? And

red meat can make up nearly 40 to 50 percent of the paddlefish fillet. This extreme ratio may be why inexperienced paddlefish anglers are often disappointed when cooking the meat for the first time – they try to save as much meat as possible and include the red meat. I recommend taking extra care and over-cleaning your paddlefish fillet. Believe me, you won’t be missing anything.

On a snagging trip this past spring, both of my children harvested their first paddlefish and my wife caught her first one in almost 20 years. The fish averaged 35 pounds live-weight, and we probably got 15 pounds of raw fillets from each. After thorough red meat removal, we netted about 6 to 8 pounds of delicious, clean, white fillets from each fish.

Paddlefish meat is appealing to me because, unlike other fish, its meat can be easily grilled without breaking apart or falling through the cooking grate. And since paddlefish are cartilaginous, the meat is boneless.

The next time you snag a paddlefish, try this trick. I bet you’ll be leaving rave reviews.



## FISHIN'

### In The Dark

*with Mike Miller*

It’s rare for me to think about fishing during the middle of the day in July and August. Not only do I assume the fish are less active because of the warm water temperatures, but I know I’m less active because of the warm air temperatures. I caught fish on hot summer days when I was a kid, but it was because of persistence, not because the fish were particularly active. Now, when I fish in the dog days of summer, it’s either at dawn, dusk or in the dark.

I learned an interesting night fishing fact from an old-timer years ago and I’ll admit I was skeptical. He told me stories of catching big bass at night with a black jig-and-pig combo. I couldn’t imagine how bass would locate a lure that didn’t vibrate or



rattle and would seemingly blend in with the inky depths. Then I read an article about using black topwater baits at night, which were more visible because the fish were looking up and the black color created a more visible silhouette. Most predator fish attack their prey from below, so any dark color that creates a good silhouette works.

By experience, I learned that a black spinnerbait with a Colorado blade will catch bass in the pitch dark. It’s difficult to understand how bass relate to their underwater world, especially at night, but we know their night vision is good. And then there’s the lateral line – a system of tactile sense organs along the sides of the body and in the head – that serve to detect movement, vibrations and pressure changes in the surrounding water. The lateral line can help fish locate and catch prey when they can’t

see, such as at night or in very turbid water. The fish I’ve caught on moonless nights while slow-rolling a spinnerbait had no trouble locating and hitting it because of the color and vibration caused by the spinning blade. Strikes were jarring.

The old-timer’s story was true; those black jig-and-pigs will catch bass at night. The only downside to night fishing, at least if you’re fishing from the bank, is the potential for backlashes on a casting reel. Any unseen weed or limb can catch your lure during the backcast and cause a backlash worth cussing about.

“WHAT AM I?” answer: smallmouth bass



# The Way I See It

## Driving Me Silly

with Todd Workman

A company I once worked for required employees who drove company vehicles to take the Smith Driving Course. The five keys to safe driving were embedded in our brains: 1. Aim high in steering. 2. Get the big picture. 3. Keep your eyes moving. 4. Leave yourself an “out.” 5. Make sure they see you.

These principles are the foundation of my driving habits and they have saved me countless times. However my wife, Marilyn, has never subscribed to them, and that ultimately led to the death of my favorite hunting truck – Old Blue.

Old Blue was born in 1993 and we were inseparable from the start. That truck never let me down, always carrying my fish, pheasants, deer, woodcock, turkeys and quail safely home. Old Blue made 10 trips to Canada without a break down or even a flat tire. But despite the truck’s unwavering loyalty, I inexplicably allowed my beloved truck to be destroyed.

I was well aware of my wife’s driving challenges but despite my attempts to coach her in the Smith Driving techniques, she stubbornly refused. (I always knew she was listening, too, because she usually did the exact opposite of what I recommended.)

On the fateful day Old Blue bit the dust, a 100-year snowstorm was forecast, so Marilyn and I went to the grocery store first thing to stock up on emergency supplies. Exhausted from the shopping marathon, I let Marilyn drive Old Blue home. Before I even fastened my seat belt, she backed into a car.

“I’m not used to this big stupid truck. Look what you made me do!” she shrieked.

As I was about to reply, I was distracted by the sight of a clown – orange hair whipping in the wind – getting out of the parked car we had just hit. His wide, painted grin belied the fact that he was angry as his big floppy shoes slapped the pavement toward our truck.

“He looks happy, but I don’t think he is,” Marilyn said, her voice quivering a little.

When we got out to survey the damage, I noticed something familiar about this clown, but I couldn’t put my finger on it.

“I just got this car fixed and you went and put a big dent in it. I hope you have insurance,” the clown snapped.

Marilyn handed him our insurance card and he gave us both a business card in exchange. When I saw the name on the card, I quickly tucked it in my pocket and hid my surprise.

After the exchange was complete, I quickly got back in Old Blue to hide my laughter.

“This isn’t one bit funny!” Marilyn snorted.

“You hit a clown – in his clown suit! I don’t care who you are, that’s hilarious!” I laughed.

Once home, the storm picked up, but Marilyn still had a few last errands to run and amazingly she asked to use my truck because it had four-wheel drive.

I figured she’d already hit a clown; what are the odds that anything else would happen.

“I guess,” I said, as I headed out to work. “Just be careful.” An hour later, I got the phone call.

My supervisor and I raced to the scene to find Old Blue face down in the neighbor’s yard, its life fluids draining onto the fresh snow.

“It’s old and doesn’t steer right!” Marilyn blubbered.

“Looks like she entered the ditch here,” my supervisor said, playing detective as he pointed to the tracks in the snow. “The mud plume indicates she accelerated, possibly in a panic to get out of the ditch. She then struck your neighbor’s driveway culvert. There are no tracks for about 20 feet – she must have been airborne. She then landed on this decorative boulder and sheared off most of the truck’s front end. I think Old Blue is a goner, Todd.”

Marilyn scowled at my boss. “Thank you, Mr. CSI,” she puffed. “Who told you to come over here in the first place?”

With her last comment hanging in the air, she stormed off, leaving us to watch Old Blue ride off into the night on the bed of a wrecker.

“Are you gonna tell her that I am the clown she ran into this morning?” my boss asked.

“Nah,” I said. “It’s hilarious, but I don’t think she would think it was one bit funny.”



LimangDesign/Shutterstock illustration



## Dotted Gayfeather: A Summer Favorite *by Iralee Barnard*

---

People often ask me to name my favorite wild plant. That is a tough one because there are so many plants to admire throughout the year, at any given time my answer is different.

Right now, from August to October, I'm likely to say gayfeather – more specifically, dotted gayfeather (*Liatris punctata*). It is a handsome plant with several pale-purple to deep rose-purple, feather-like spikes composed of small tubular flowers with five pointed lobes. The flowers open from the top of the stem down, so flowering lasts for an extended period of time. These plants grow knee-high. The narrow, closely-spaced leaves of dotted gayfeather are covered with tiny, translucent dots of resin that can be seen when held to the light, giving the plant its common name. This plant is also called blazing star, snakeroot or colicroot (the last two because of historical medical uses).

Dotted gayfeather has a host of reputed medicinal applications. The root is the part most often used and is said to cure stomach, bladder, and kidney problems. The root has also been used as a wash to calm itchy skin, as a poultice to reduce swelling, and boiled to drink for throat inflammation or to suppress coughing.

After flowering, each flower stem becomes a fuzzy wand of tan to white plumed bristles. Each tuft of bristles is attached to a seed. Eventually the seeds fall from the plant and the bristles

help carry the seed in the wind or stick onto passing animals.

Dotted gayfeather belongs to the sunflower family. It is a long-lived native prairie plant that grows on upland and rocky slopes with full sun. A long taproot, sometimes more than 15 feet deep, makes this one of the most drought resistant of all six species of *Liatris* found in Kansas.

If stems are cut at the beginning of its bloom and dried, dotted gayfeather will hold its purple color and can be used to make beautiful winter bouquets.

The plants are palatable to livestock and to wildlife such as elk, deer, and pronghorn. And its nectar is a favorite of bees and butterflies – such as tiger swallowtail, painted lady, clouded sulphur, and red admiral – while birds feast on the seeds.

Dotted gayfeather is a true Great Plains plant, found from Minnesota south through Texas, and from Montana to New Mexico. It may be seen in every Kansas county. If you are out at one of your favorite lakes this month, look for the purple spikes of dotted gayfeather.

**“If stems are cut at the beginning of its bloom and dried, dotted gayfeather will hold its purple color...”**

Nancy Goulden photo



## When Two Worlds Collide

text and photos by Dan Witt



My friend Pat Cale and I have been to Africa several times for bowhunting adventures. Those trips are so memorable - not only from the standpoint of hunting but also from the exposure to the African people and animals we enjoyed. The first couple of times were spent mostly learning about the animals and acquainting ourselves with the land, customs, and critters; We concentrated more on hunting during the later trips. We came back wiser and always happy after each trip.

My wife and I recently went to the theater in Kansas City to see "The Lion King." It was a breath-taking performance - the music by Sir Elton John striking those wide African chant/melodies and the brightly colored costumes were just dazzling. The

show opened with a life-sized fake elephant walking down the aisle from the back of the theater to the stage. It took several people inside that critter to make it walk. Another actor was on huge stilts with his feet and his hands held long front legs with a giraffe head extending well past his own head. There were wart hogs and impala cavorting around the stage, all portrayed by humans. Sandra didn't know many of the animals that my hunting experiences made obvious to me, so it was fun to share with her what I knew from having been there.

The reason I bring all of this up is because I was awed by the precise depiction of these animals by people in costume. It was almost eerie to see such a realistic depiction of the walking posture and gait of the elephant and giraffe. The impala herd was on a bicycle contraption that was built to put them in motion, and they moved exactly like the Impala in Africa move. Not to mention the wart hogs ran with their tails up as they do in real life.

The main theme of the show centered around the palpable hate that hyenas and lions share for each other. The cruelty in real life between these two species has been depicted in

*National Geographic* and other wildlife presentations. The lion is king until outweighed by sheer numbers of hyenas; You have to know that information to understand the presentation. It made a great story.

As I sat there enjoying the show, I had several thoughts. The vast majority of people watching, and acting in, the presentation probably had no idea just how precise the depictions of these unique critters were. Likely someone with a background in anatomy and the behavior of African animals (perhaps a professional hunter) spent some serious time getting that aspect of the show exactly right.

Which led me to my next thought. Most of the people there probably don't understand the mind and life of a hunter, too. (We know all too well some high profile errors in judgment have shown a less-than-correct view of hunters in Africa.) And while I'm not here to debate those issues, I am here to say there is more of a connection between those artists on stage and the hunters that I was privileged to meet on the Dark Continent than one may realize. There are some collisions in this world that make magic. This was one of them for me.

### Big Blue Cat With a Twist by Connor Chance-Ossowski

"Many go fishing all of their lives without knowing it is not the fish they are after." - Henry David Thoreau.

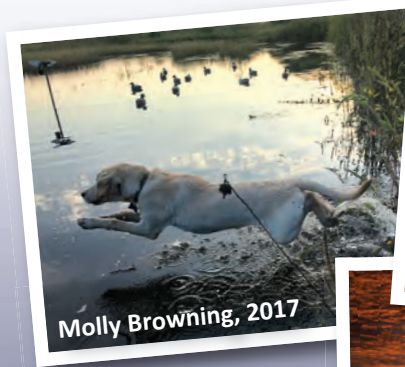
I don't imagine Thoreau put much thought into the chance of catching a 35-inch piebald blue catfish when he fished, but it might have changed his view. I know such an experience had an impact on me.

All last winter, my fellow biologists and I discussed making a trip to Milford Reservoir after ice-out to fish for blue catfish. When the ice goes out at Milford, gizzard shad congregate in the upper end of the reservoir and big blue cats follow. Talk of hooking into a trophy blue cat only made my cabin fever worse. Watching the rod tip bend, hearing the drag peel, and holding one weighing more than 20 pounds was on my bucket list.

I'm biased when it comes to whiskered fish since I

have been angling for catfish with my father since I was a child. I remember many weekends that were filled with nothing but hotdogs and Pringles, listening for the bells





## Deadline to enter: Oct. 14!

Show us what makes YOU "Wild About Kansas!" Photo submissions for the 6th annual Wild About Kansas photo contest are being accepted. Submission categories include:

- Wildlife
- Outdoor Recreation
- Landscapes
- Other Species
- Hunting and Fishing

### RULES

Entries must be submitted no later than **11:59 p.m. on Oct. 14, 2018**. Photos must be .JPEG or .JPG format. All photos must be submitted electronically. Photos that do not meet the minimum file size requirements (1 MB) will NOT be accepted.

Photographers can submit up to three (3) photos total, regardless of category. 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 nonresidents, and there is no age limit.

### JUDGING

Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and 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 2019 January/February photo issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*.

### FOR MORE INFO

**DESKTOP VERSION:** Visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com), click "Publications," then "2018 Wild About Kansas Photo Contest."

**MOBILE VERSION:** Visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com), click "Menu," "Publications," "Magazine," then "2018 Wild About Kansas Photo Contest."

on our rods to signal a bite, and hearing the cicadas and bullfrogs singing in the background. And we usually had a stringer full of channel catfish by the end of the weekend, too. Those experiences fueled my passion, and are a large part of why I now work in fisheries management.

On February 27, the wind was out of the south and gusting over 20 mph. Not long after I arrived at Milford, Ben Neely caught a blue catfish that weighed 33 pounds. Ely Sprenkle and Jeff Koch each caught fish that weighed more than 20 pounds, and we all caught a good number of fish that were under the 25-inch to 35-inch slot length limit. Our arms were getting tired, so we decided to call it a day and began to pack our gear. I reeled in my first pole and as I was heading to the second pole, I saw the rod tip bend over and the pole started heading toward the water. Fortunately, I grabbed it before it disappeared

into the water and began a fight with what would turn out to be the most unique catfish I've ever caught. It was peeling drag from my reel but as I fought the fish closer to shore, Koch exclaimed, "It's an albino!" I didn't believe him initially, but when he grabbed it by the tail, my hesitations were put to rest.

What were the odds that I would catch a 35-inch, 20-pound-plus piebald blue catfish? My bucket list item could now be checked off in bold, thanks to Milford Reservoir.

The state of Kansas provides great fishing opportunities across the state, but if you're feeling the itch to hit the shoreline after the ice thaws, I highly suggest making the trip for a chance at a trophy blue cat at Milford Reservoir. You might just hook into a once-in-a-lifetime fish.



Karole Erikson photo

# THE PO

by  
Jonathan Conard  
*assistant professor,  
Sterling College*

Unless you spend a great deal of time in the woods, you probably haven't seen a porcupine in Kansas. However, they're here and you might be surprised at the range of this unique species.

As dusk settled over Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in central Kansas, field crews drifted to the bunkhouse and the species tallies started to accumulate on the blackboard. Biologists and students from Fort Hays State University, Sterling College, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were on a mission to record as many species as possible at the wetland during a 24-

hour period – an effort aptly named the “Bioblitz.” Species recorded that day included many of the usual suspects – an assortment of waterfowl, songbirds, reptiles, fish and common mammals, but there were a few surprises. One of the sightings that generated the most excitement was from a crew that happened across a porcupine perched high on a tree branch along the

western edge of the refuge.

While the porcupine sighting that evening was unexpected, porcupines have roamed across Kansas and throughout the Great Plains for centuries; they just aren't observed very frequently. As early as 1903, D.W. Lantz described porcupines as being found “in rough canyons of western Kansas” but specifically noted that they are “not common” in

# PORCUPINE

the state. While early reports of porcupines clearly indicated that they occurred in western Kansas, the fact that they are relatively uncommon and widely scattered makes it challenging to ascertain exactly how widespread they are in the state.

The porcupine sighting during the Bioblitz appeared to be an isolated incident; perhaps just a wandering individual moving through the area, that is, until two years later when a porcupine was noticed again around the refuge. That time, Matt Schmidt was part of a research team from Sterling College surveying white-tailed deer at Quivira NWR when something caught his eye – a porcupine ambling across the road and off into the pasture. Schmidt, now a game warden with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, recounts that at first glance, he couldn't believe he'd actually seen a porcupine. Staff at Quivira NWR also noted several sightings of porcupine were reported throughout the refuge that year.

Intrigued by the number of

recent sightings on the refuge, a research team from Sterling College, led by Lacey Buckwalter, spearheaded an effort to determine exactly where porcupines are found in Kansas. However, Buckwalter soon realized that porcupines are not easy to survey using traditional methods. Fortunately, at least for the study, when porcupines are present in an area, there is a good chance they will eventually be detected, not by wildlife biologists, but by dogs.

A porcupine has more than 30,000 quills covering almost all of its body (with the exception of the underbelly, ears and face). The quills are perhaps

the most distinguishing feature of the species, and the name porcupine is actually derived from the old French term "*porc espin*," roughly translated as "pig with spikes." Each individual quill has microscopic barbs that can firmly embed the quill into any potential attacker. While it is a myth that porcupines can throw their quills, porcupines can wield their tail as a formidable weapon to strike at a predator and deliver quills quickly and effectively. Once the quills are embedded, they can work their way farther into the flesh if not extracted promptly. Veterinarian Scott Randolph removes quills from a few dogs each year at his

Jonathan Conard photo



Porcupines are found in the western two-thirds of Kansas and are most commonly seen in the rough areas of the Red Hills.



adaptable and occur in a variety of habitat types. They are commonly found in coniferous forests but can also inhabit grasslands, deciduous forests of the Northeast, and even some desert areas. Their dens can be found in trees, hollow logs, under rock outcroppings, and even under the occasional outbuilding or shed.

Porcupines are the second-largest rodent species native to Kansas (the beaver is No. 1). They use their gnawing incisors to effectively strip bark from trees during the winter for forage. During the summer and spring growing seasons, they'll feed on tree buds, leaves and ground vegetation. Porcupines also have a strong physiological demand for sodium during this time and will avidly seek out any available source of salt. While tree leaves and bark are an important component of their diet in many parts of their range, it is paradoxical that in Kansas porcupines are rarely found east of the Flint Hills where the greatest amount of woodlands occur.

It is not exactly clear what limits the eastern distribution of porcupines in Kansas. There appear to be sufficient woodland areas and it is unlikely that predation plays a major role in stopping porcupines from spreading further east. In fact, there are few predators aside from the mountain lion


and fisher (a relative to badgers, otters and mink) that will regularly prey on porcupines.

In addition to refining the current distribution of porcupines in Kansas, Buckwalter was also able to glean some interesting insights into porcupine activity patterns. When looking at the time of year when dogs were most likely to encounter porcupines, she found encounters peaked sharply from August-October. One possible explanation is the increase in movement that occurs as porcupines prepare to enter the breeding season, which occurs in early autumn. Female porcupines are only receptive to breeding for a short time and males must travel widely in order to find a mate. Following successful copulation, the female porcupine carries offspring for a lengthy 210-day gestation period before giving birth to a single porcupette. The young porcupette is born fully quilled, but (fortunately for the mother) it is surrounded by an amniotic membrane and the quills do not harden until hours after delivery. Following delivery, the mother will nurse and tend to the porcupette for about four months. Before the baby porcupine is able to forage and climb trees, it will spend most of the day hiding near the foraging tree used by the mother. During this time, nursing will occur nightly as



Most dog/porcupine encounters occur August through October when porcupines enter their breeding season and are on the move.

the mother returns to rendezvous with the porcupette following a day of foraging in the treetops.

Although much of natural Kansas has changed markedly in the years following pioneer settlement, the porcupine is a unique species with a distribution that was briefly, but adequately, characterized by Professor M.V.B. Knox of Baker University more than 140 years ago: "Found sparingly in the western parts of the state." 

# A Quarter-century of Stream Surveys



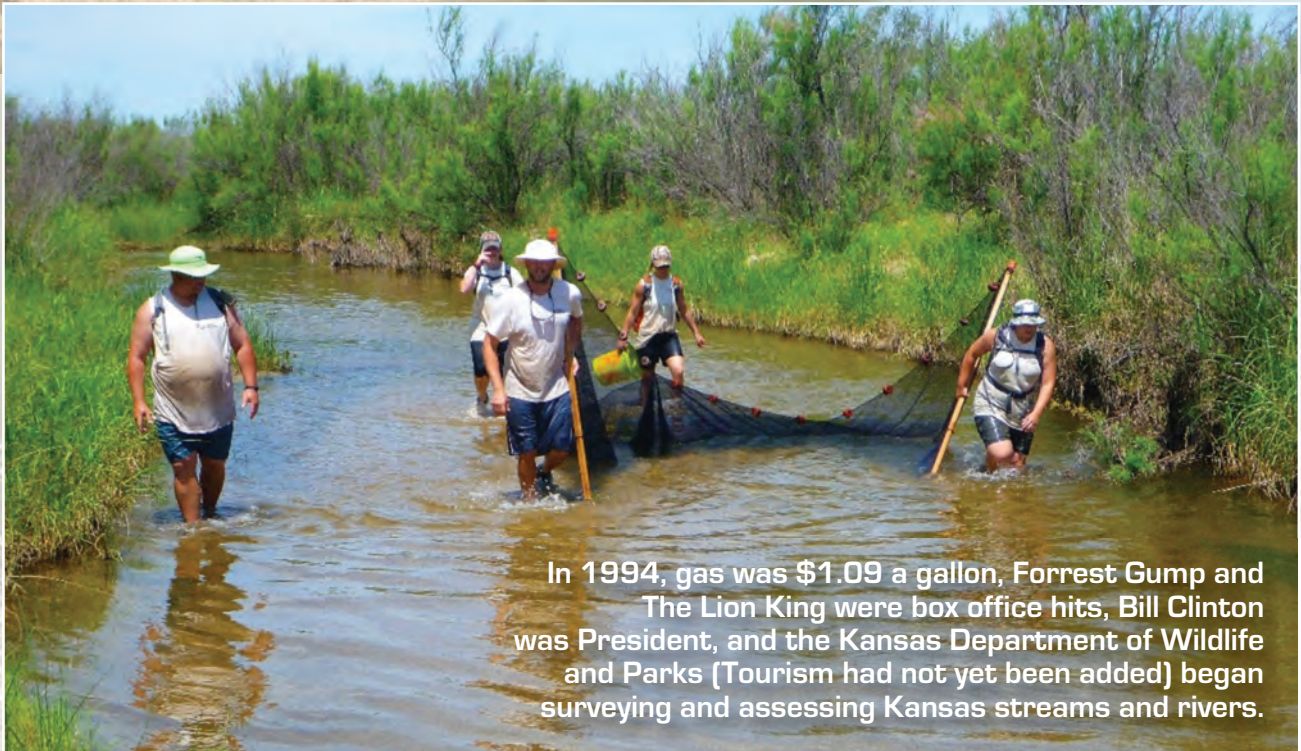
*text and photos by*

**Mark Van Scoyoc**

**Stream Survey and Assessment Program coordinator**

**Ryan Waters, stream biologist**

**Jeff Conley, stream biologist**



In 1994, gas was \$1.09 a gallon, Forrest Gump and The Lion King were box office hits, Bill Clinton was President, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (Tourism had not yet been added) began surveying and assessing Kansas streams and rivers.

## **Why Survey Streams and Rivers?**

Before 1994, the only consistent fish surveys were conducted by Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) district fisheries biologists, who were managing sport fish in our reservoirs and state fishing lakes. However, the idea of surveying Kansas streams was suggested as early as the 1970s. It is a monumental task, considering there are approximately 134,000

miles of streams and rivers in the state, with 34,000 miles of those perennial, or flowing year-round.

Eventually, biologists went on to survey 450 sites to assess the percentage of game fish versus non-game fish in these systems. Other variables, including in-stream habitat and basic water quality data, were also collected. Unfortunately, these surveys were not regularly performed and fell by the wayside until the 1990s.



## The Stream Survey and Assessment Program

KDWPT's Ecological Services section is charged with the task of surveying and assessing native species within the state. In 1994, then section chief Chris Mammoliti procured grant funding from the Environmental Protection Agency to survey streams as part of the Regional Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (REMAP). The program was designed to collect information and answer questions about the ecological conditions at the local level. And protocols were established to ensure that data was collected in the same way at all survey sites. Information describing fish, mussel, and aquatic invertebrate communities constitutes a large part of the survey work. Additionally, information related to current habitat conditions, discharge rates, and a snapshot of water quality are also collected. The Stream Survey and Assessment Program (SSAP) was born.

In addition to providing biologists with current ecological conditions of Kansas streams, SSAP data is instrumental when the status of threatened and endangered species and species in need of conservation (SINC) are reviewed. Furthermore, ecologists have baselines that can be used when conducting reviews of projects to determine whether operations associated with these projects will have adverse effects on the habitats of sensitive species.

Over the years, the focus of SSAP has changed. Instead of randomly surveying sites statewide, staff began systematically surveying the 12 major river basins of the state. The physical characteristics of each of these basins, as well as the species inhabiting them, are unique. It takes about two to three years to complete a basin survey. As basin surveys are completed, biologists will start over to document changes that may have occurred over time.

### Multi-agency Coordination

Coordination with other state and federal agencies has become an important aspect of modern conservation. Data collected by SSAP plays an important role in determining



The variety and beauty of fishes found in Kansas streams may surprise even those who have lived near these streams all their lives. Orangespotted sunfish, pictured above, are found in streams throughout Kansas.

whether species are considered threatened or endangered at the state and federal levels. Species Status Assessments conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service consider information collected by state agencies for final determination. The current status of the Arkansas darter is a prime example of how SSAP data influences this process. Listed as a threatened species in Kansas, the Arkansas darter was petitioned for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Extensive data collection throughout the range of this species in southwest Kansas played an important role in the "not warranted" decision, meaning the fish will not be federally listed. A petition has also been submitted at the state level to possibly down-list the species to SINC because of this decision.



The Stream Survey and Assessment Program hires eight to 12 college students each summer to assist in conducting surveys. Crew leader Ryan Waters, far left, has been with the program for 25 years.

## Ecological Technicians

Each Summer, KDWPT hires eight to 12 seasonal technicians who help collect aquatic data, assist with aquatic education sessions, and perform tasks biologists don't have time to complete. These technicians are usually college students studying biology, and those who return after one summer help train new technicians. Over the past 25 years more than 100 people have served as technicians and many have gone on to biology-related careers. To date, nine are employed by private firms, 21 are either teaching or continuing their education in biological sciences, and 26 are employed at the federal, state, county or city level.

This summer, KDWPT stream biologists Ryan Waters and Jeff Conley are leading crews of ecological technicians in field surveys. Waters is a 25-year veteran of the program, and Conley has been both a technician and biologist with the department for nearly 20 years. Under their expert guidance, crews are surveying for fish referred to as pelagic spawners, species that move upstream to spawn and whose buoyant eggs float downstream to complete the first part of their life cycle. Some pelagic spawners include the plains minnow, brassy minnow, sicklefin chub, sturgeon chub, and

the peppered chub. All of them are considered SINC species and some are being considered for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. Waters' crew will survey areas in northwest and northcentral Kansas within the Republican River drainage. Conley's crew will survey segments of the Kansas River beginning at Junction City and ending at the confluence with the Missouri River in the Kansas City area.

## Education

SSAP hasn't just been about collecting aquatic organisms for the sake of collecting them. Understanding what's in the water is important because what affects animals will eventually affect all of us. Ecological Services staff have put nets, tweezers and other equipment in hands of thousands of Kansas youth and allowed them to discover what swims in the streams and rivers flowing through our communities. Staff hope it's experiences like this that will remain with the stu-

Kansas is 97 percent privately owned, so most of the 134,000 miles of streams are located on private land. Stream survey data could not be completed without permission from landowners, who have generously allowed crews access to streams in remote, rugged areas.





Education is an important part of SSAP, and Ecological Services staff teach thousands of Kansas youngsters about our native aquatic life every year. But the surveys can teach all of us about what's swimming just beneath the surface in Kansas streams.

To learn more about Kansas streams and SSAP, go to [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com) and type "Stream Survey and Monitoring Program" into the search box.

dents through adulthood, and that they, too, will develop an understanding and appreciation for Kansas streams and rivers.

### Working With Landowners

Another benefit of SSAP has been the opportunities for landowners to learn about aquatic life in their streams. It's not uncommon to get comments like "I had no idea that was in here," or "That's pretty incredible," when we electro-fish and seine our survey sites. We can't thank these landowners enough for allowing us access to these areas. Without permission for our

crews to be there, drive our trucks on their property and get our equipment in their streams, we never could have collected the data that prevented the Arkansas Darter from being listed. And we wouldn't have been able to provide young people valuable work experience to further their education and careers. Not to mention, everyone on the crews has seen some great natural areas in Kansas that are often overlooked.

At the end of the day, we're doing our best to make sure the systems keep flowing and native fish keep swimming in them. The challenges of managing a resource that is habitat to hundreds of aquatic species – and critical to our everyday lives – will always be present. But it's a welcomed challenge because our rivers and streams are resources that should be enjoyed by all. 🐃



# SHOOTING RANGE

text and photos by  
Rick McNary

Do you remember the thrill of plinking your first tin can with a Daisy Red Rider BB gun? Or the joy of winning a stuffed animal at the fair after shooting tiny metal ducks crossing back and forth? That excitement of hitting the target is the same whether you're 10 years old or 80. And while you can certainly head back to the fair to relive those glory days, there are far better options out there, and you'll find many of them on Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) lands.



# RANGES IN KANSAS

## Partnerships

Unique to many of these shooting ranges is the cooperation amongst federal, state and local entities. Several of the shooting ranges are located in KDWPT state parks, which are on land leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or other federal agency. The ranges are managed by volunteers who usually belong to a “friends group,” a local nonprofit formed for that purpose. This dynamic arrangement shows the ability of public and private partnerships to provide a venue for recreational shooting sports across the state and nation.

One such nonprofit is the Friends of Fancy Creek at Tuttle Creek State Park.

“We would not have this shooting range without a local military veteran, Bill Long,” said Todd Lovin, Tuttle Creek State Park manager. “He was in this office constantly and was our biggest ally. Once the range opened, he was always here either helping with maintenance or teaching new shooters.”

“Our volunteers are key to the success of our shooting ranges,” said Lovin. “They provide the targets, do the maintenance, certify shooting

range officers (SROs), and teach and host clinics.”

SROs are trained to provide a safe, educational and enjoyable experience at the ranges.

“It took more than 20 years to convert the old honor camp into a shooting range,” says Richard Seaton, president of Friends of Fancy Creek.

“The range charges \$10 a day or \$100 per year, and we sell advertising to help pay for upkeep and provide our SROs with a small stipend to cover meals and gas,” Seaton continued. “We have hunter education classes, Women on Target events and a Kid’s Day each year. And the range is currently going through an upgrade that will help us do more.”

Women on Target (WOT) is a program developed by the National Rifle Association (NRA) designed to introduce women to the shooting sports.

“The women come for the camaraderie and the fun,” says Marci Ritter, president of the local WOT group. “Some drive a long ways to attend and are surprised with how much they enjoy it. Our SROs are great at helping people learn the pleasure and safety of the sport.”

## Shooting Is Fun

If you've never been to a public shooting range, you may be under the impression that these facilities are only open to those who hunt. The reality is, many of the people who frequent these ranges don't hunt – they simply shoot for fun.

"Some guys golf as a way to relax. I do the same by trying to put bullets through a black circle," says Warner Janof, a local who frequents the Hillsdale Shooting Range, located in Hillsdale State Park, just 30 miles south of the Kansas City metro area. "For a good shot, you have to control your breathing and make your trigger pull as smooth as possible. There is something calming about the process of slowing yourself down to make a good shot and it is rewarding when you make one."

Like Janof, many of the people on the ranges are not hunters. Rather, they are there for the fun and challenge of shooting with a rifle, pistol, black powder or shotgun. National statistics reflect this, too. The fastest growing sport in the nation is the USA High School Clay Target League. Formed in 2012 with 30 participants, it has grown to more than 20,000 in 2017. In Kansas alone, there are 58 teams spread out among the states' high schools with more than 1,200 active members from grades 7-12.



The modern shooting ranges located at Tuttle Creek State Park's Fancy Creek Area, Hillsdale State Park and opening soon at El Dorado State Park, include multiple shooting stations and distances for rifle and handgun shooting. Hillsdale also has trap and skeet ranges.



## Hillsdale

The Hillsdale Range and Training Facility registered more than 8,500 users in 2017. The local nonprofit at Hillsdale provides operational management and a part-time employee, Virgil Corbin.

"We started in 2007 and didn't break ground until 2012," says Corbin. "When we first applied, we requested \$250,000. However, by the time we did all the preliminary work, more money became available so we were able to secure another grant for a total of \$1.5 million. But that was just to build the range; it takes \$350 a day to run it when it's open. Our group raises the money to do the maintenance and pay me for 20 hours a week although I'm given the opportunity to work 60."

The Hillsdale Shooting Range offers a 200-yard rifle range with six shooting positions, a 100-yard rifle range with 20 shooting positions, a 50-yard pistol/rim fire rifle range with 24 shooting positions, two combination trap/skeet fields, and a meeting room.

The grant Corbin referred is a combination of both federal and state dollars, all funded in one way or another by shooting sports enthusiasts and hunters. The Federal Wildlife Aid and Restoration Act was established in 1937 and became known as the Pittman/Robertson (PR) Act (because of the sponsors of the bill, Senator Key Pittman and Congressman Absalom Willis Robertson). Previously, the 11 percent excise tax on all firearms and ammunition went into the U.S. Treasury. However, the PR Act redirected those funds to the Secretary of Interior to provide states the revenue needed to fund wildlife restoration. Species once nearing extinction, such as white-tailed deer and wild turkey, were conserved because of this money.

"The Pittman/Robertson Act makes federal money available to states through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," said Kent Barrett, KDWPT

Hunter Education coordinator. "I'm involved in this process because it funds hunter education programs."

Kansas' Hunter Education program is carried out by more than 1,300 volunteer instructors who provide training to more than 9,000 people each year. And many of the classes involve live-fire training.

"We apply for 75 percent of the cost for building new shooting ranges or upgrading existing ones," added Barrett. "The other 25 percent is paid for with revenue from hunting licenses and permits or donations from groups like the National Wild Turkey Federation."

State wildlife agencies depend on funding from PR grants, which are allotted to the states based, in part, on the number of hunting licenses they sell each year. Funding was relatively stable until gun and ammunition sales spiked between 2008 and 2015, providing additional money to the states for wildlife programs and shooting range development. The industry grew from \$19.1 billion to \$49.3 billion dollars in sales and related jobs grew from 166,000 to 280,000 in that seven-year period.



"The extra funds generated from those sales must be used and that's a wonderful problem to have," say Ross Robins, KDWPT Education Section chief and shooting range grant manager. "It used to be when people asked us for a public place to shoot, we had to send them to Missouri. Now, we can provide access here in Kansas. The Pittman/Robertson money gives us the resources to build a new facility like the one that will open soon in El Dorado State Park."



Concrete lane walls and baffles make the El Dorado range safe and quiet. It's located west of the El Dorado State Park office in the Shady Creek Area. The range should be opened in the fall of 2018.

## El Dorado

The El Dorado State Park Range Facility is scheduled to open late summer of 2018. It will feature a 20-lane, 100-yard rifle range; 62-lane 25-yard handgun/rifle range; 30-lane 15-yard handgun range; five-lane shotgun patterning range; and a combination meeting room/storage building with restrooms.

"The main reason we built this is so people could have a safe place to shoot," says Seth Turner, El Dorado State Park manager. "We had numerous calls each year about people out practicing in our public access areas and that's not legal or safe for anyone."

The project cost is estimated at \$2.3 million dollars and uses concrete side and end walls in addition to sound-silencing baffles.

"We started with the paperwork in 2014 and even called in the assistance of a national range expert to help us with the project design," Turner explained. "We ended up choosing a location right next to the park office because it offered minimal impact to the environment and is the most secure. We also saved money because we used dirt from the site to build the berms, rather than truck it in from elsewhere."

While the range may not be open yet, it's sure to be worth the wait.



## Hollister

The Hollister Shooting Range – located near Fort Scott on the Hollister Wildlife Area – is a cooperative effort of KDWPT, the Old Fort Sharpshooters, Kansas Wildscape and the Kansas National Guard. It offers a 100-yard rifle range for rifles and pistols and a trap range for shotguns.

The Old Fort Sharpshooters friends group, consisting of more than 140 members, manages the day-to-day operations of the range from mowing grass to organizing friendly competitions.

“Our club members are quick to share anything with you, even their guns,” says Eric Gray, club member. “People love to come to Hollister because of the people. The camaraderie, friendly competition, support and teamwork make it an inviting place for people to connect with old friends and make new ones.”

## Fun With Friends and Family

What Gray says about Hollister is true at other ranges. I stopped by Hillsdale to take photographs and the two men running the skeet range insisted that I try one of their guns. They would not let me leave until I had successfully shot a clay pigeon from the sky.

During a down time in the rifle area, a young couple stood by a target, holding hands and talking about their shots.

“The range is a place we can go to connect and grow as a couple,” said Aaron Moreland. “We learn how to communicate with each other and push each other to improve.”

Other KDWPT ranges include the Cheney Lake Shooting Range located on the Cheney Wildlife Area on the north end of the lake. It is operated by part-time employees and includes a 100-yard rifle range, 25-yard pistol

range, benches and a restroom.

The Shawnee County Hunter Education Instructor’s Association operates the Shawnee State Fishing Lake Hunter Education Range, 8 miles north and 4 miles west of Topeka. It has a 100-yard rifle range, pistol shooting area, trap range and archery range with 3-D targets.

And there are two unsupervised ranges – the Dan Brown Memorial Range and the Glen Elder Wildlife Area Range.

The Dan Brown Memorial Range is located near Maxwell Wildlife Refuge in McPherson County and provides handgun, small-bore rifle and high-powered rifle shooting. The Glen Elder range allows shotgun, pistol and small-bore rifle.

## Plan a Visit

You can find the days of the week and hours the supervised ranges are open at [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com). Simply click on “Activities” on the top menu and scroll down to “Shooting Ranges.” There, all public and private shooting ranges in Kansas are listed.

Plan a day-trip and check out one of these ranges. You might find a 10-year-old girl sighting down the barrel of a .22 rifle with Mom giving instruction, a young couple holding hands by the target, a couple of buddies trying to out-shoot each other, or a senior citizen anxious to impart years of wisdom.

While you probably won’t walk away with a stuffed animal, you’ll meet new friends and learn a new sport. Most likely, you’ll be hooked by the people, spending time outdoors and the challenge of putting a hole through the center of a target.

And that’s what keeps you going back. 🐮







# Night, Lights, Action!

text and photos by Brent Frazee

Joe Bragg was fishing the night shift.

As the sun melted into the horizon, other fishermen at Perry Lake called it a day and headed for the ramps. But Bragg was just starting. He couldn't wait for darkness to fall and for the late show to begin.

"It looks like we're the only boat out here," Bragg said over the drone of his outboard motor. "But I'm used to that.

"Everybody thinks you have to fish during the day to catch crappie. But I just love this night fishing.

"It's a great way to catch 'em, especially when the weather gets hot."

Moments later, Bragg proved his point. He anchored near a brush pile in the Slough Creek arm of Perry Reservoir, then lit several lanterns and hung them from rod holders. He also tossed out a floating halogen light that was hooked to a battery.

Instant light. And instant fish attractor. Well, maybe not instant. Bragg knew he would have to be patient, waiting for the food chain to form under his boat. But it would happen. It always happens.

"First, you'll see the plankton," said Bragg, 39, who lives in Topeka and runs Thump Thirty Guide Service. "Then, the little minnows will show up and after that the shad.

"Once you get a good school of shad circling around, the crappie will move in," he added.

Bragg sat in his boat seat and relaxed in the moment. Stars sparkled in the dark sky and the yips of coyotes sounded in the distance.

"The lake is a different place at night," Bragg said. "It's so peaceful.

"Sometimes, you just have to be patient. You have to wait for that food chain to set up."



**Waiting and watching the food chain develop under the lights is exciting and will pay off big as the crappie follow shad chasing smaller fish eating plankton.**

## Lights

Bragg sipped on coffee and stared at the fish finder at the bow of his boat. By the minute, the screen became more cluttered with the marks that indicated the baitfish and crappie were moving in.

As the bobbers, illuminated by light sticks Bragg taped to them, bounced in the cone of light, one of them slowly cut through the water and then plunged. Bragg set the hook and felt the tug of a big crappie.

"This one has shoulders," he said.

A second later, the 12-inch fish was in the boat and Bragg was off to a good start. He had several dozen minnows in an aerated cooler when he started the night. But that population steadily dwindled.

Bragg and I visited three spots from sundown to about 3 a.m., and we found fish at each stopping point. By the end of the night, we caught and released more than 100 crappie in a variety of sizes. The biggest measured 14 ½ inches, the smallest – well, it wasn't much bigger than the minnow we used for bait.

"Hey, little guy, get back down there and tell your grandma it's time to eat," Bragg said in a face-to-face encounter with one of the dinks he caught.

For Bragg, that was further proof that the night life can be very productive for Kansas crappie fishermen.

He starts in the spring and sets up near brush piles off spawning banks, often in 8 to 12 feet of water. By summer, he moves to the flooded timber in the back of major creeks and ties off a tree. He often fishes in 14 to 16 feet of water, but the crappie can be suspended anywhere from a few feet down to just off the bottom.

That's where the slip bobbers he uses come in. With a bobber stopper on the line, they can easily be adjusted so the bait holds at the desired depth.

"Sometimes, the mud flats at the back of the creeks will just be crazy with shad in the summer," Bragg said. "After the lights have been out a while, there are times when the screen (of his fish-finder) will almost black out.

"You dream about those kind of nights."

## Gear

Bragg uses some tricks to get the crappie to bite. He gets a three-pole permit from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), and encourages his fishing partners to do the same. That way, they can have six rods out—three arranged in rod holders in the front, another three in the back.

He uses a 10-foot medium-light spinning rod with 20-pound braided test line and a 1-ought Aberdeen hook. By the time he tapes light sticks to the bobbers, the setup looks like a group of fireflies hovering over the surface.

"A lot of the time, I'll catch crappie right on the edge of the light," Bragg said. "That's why I



Fishing at night can be very productive and when anglers are boating 100 or more crappie before 3 a.m., you know the technique is a good one.

## Experience

Leaving the lights on for crappie is nothing new for Bragg. He got started when he was just a little guy growing up in Florida.

"Down there, it got so hot during the day that it was hard to fish during the day in the summer," he said. "My dad and I would go out at night in his little johnboat and just hang a lantern over the water.

"We caught a lot of fish that way."

One of those fish, in particular, stands out for Bragg to this day.

"I was fishing off the bank and I hung a lantern from the limbs of a big log in the water," he said. "That bobber went under and I thought I had a big bass.

"I just had a cane pole and I thought it was going to break. But I got it in and it was a 3-pound crappie. My dad couldn't believe it. He said, 'Biggest crappie I've ever seen.'

"I was proud of that fish. I still remember it."

use bobbers to try to get them out from the boat a ways."

He has found that the crappie will feed looking up. Sometimes, he can even see on the sonar screen the crappie streak up to engulf his bait.

"Crappie will always feed looking up," Bragg said. "I think they're sitting in that brush pile, they see a minnow just overhead and they'll swim out to grab it," Bragg said explaining why he sets his bobbers to hold the minnows just above where the crappie are.

## Fish Kansas

After serving in the Army and surviving combat in the Middle East, Bragg settled in Kansas, not far from where he was once stationed at Fort Riley.

That's when he really became hooked on crappie fishing. He ventured to reservoirs such as Perry, Clinton, Melvern, Pomona and Milford, and discovered a gold mine.

Kansas is considered one of the best crappie-fishing states in the country, with its nutrient-rich water, its abundant shad and rapid

**Action can be so fast at times, that keeping up with two rods can be a workout. The bait bucket usually suffers heavy losses over the course of the evening, too.**

growth rates of fish.


"We have a lot of fertile, open water in our reservoirs and that leads to great production of shad," said Doug Nygren, KDWPT Fisheries Division director. "Because of the makeup of our fish populations, crappie have free rein on those baitfish and their growth rate is impressive.

"What's even more impressive about Kansas, in my opinion, is that we have many reservoirs that have strong populations of crappie," added Nygren. "We don't have to take a backseat to many other states when it comes to our fishing."

Bragg can attest to that. He runs a tournament circuit, the Kansas Crappie Club, and is constantly impressed by the size of the fish he sees brought to the weigh station.

Bragg catches his share of big ones, too. He is constantly experimenting with different ways to catch trophy crappie. He puts out brush piles, uses his electronics to find new spots and has fine-tuned seasonal patterns to locate the big schools.

During the summer, night fishing is his favorite method. He stresses safety – wearing a life jacket when under power, knowing where the navigation channels are, clearing out the tracks on his GPS so that he can follow the dotted line back to the boat ramp the same way he went out, and letting people know when and where he is going to be.

"Some people are a little uncertain about being out there at night," he said. "But as long as you're safe, it can be a great way to fish." 





# Squirrel Hunting

## *A Forgotten Tradition*

by Michael Pearce  
*outdoor content manager, Tourism Division*

"You probably don't remember me," came a soft-spoken voice I couldn't place when answering the phone about a decade ago. "I called last year to talk about squirrel hunting. I hadn't been since I was a kid, and..."

Ka-ching! I remembered and finished his story for him. His name was Robert. Raised in Elk County, he and his brother had hunted rabbits and squirrels with an old .22 when they were boys. Ammo had been especially tough to get "during the war." His mom only gave them a few shells at a time to make sure none were wasted. They didn't hunt quail and prairie chickens because shotgun shells cost too much, and the birds didn't provide as much meat as the mammals.

The need to bring meat back to their poorly-producing farm had put some pressure on the boys to succeed. His older brother had been the better shot and did most of the shooting.

He'd read an article I'd written about squirrel hunting the previous year, had called the next day for some advice and said he was going to try it again.

When he commented on my great memory, I came clean.

"My memory's not that great," I said. "It's just hard to forget someone who sometimes seems to be the only other guy who hunts squirrels in Kansas besides me."

We then talked about his squirrel hunts of the past season. In closing the conversation, I asked that he call and update me more regularly, which he did every few months.

When he called with the first few reports, he started the conversation with "this is your other Squirrel Guy." Eventually he shortened it to, "this is S.G."

S.G. always seemed to have good things to report. I remember one call when he was so happy – after two or three seasons of avid hunting, he'd finally met another squirrel hunter on the Fall River Wildlife Area.

"We aren't the only ones," he joked. "Kansas has three squirrel hunters."

Obviously we have more than that, but there's no question squirrels make up only a tiny part of the American hunting scene these days. However, years ago they were one of the nation's most sought-after game species.

## A RICH TRADITION

Squirrels may have contributed more to the settlement of the eastern half of America than any game animal. The virgin eastern forests contained so many squirrels there are reports of hundreds being shot per day in contests in the Ohio River Valley. Long after deer and wild turkey had been extirpated, squirrels continued to thrive in settled areas.

For more than 200 years, squirrels were a valued food source in rural America. In fact, they played major roles in two of America's best contributions to the hunting world. Coupled with a relatively new concept of rifling, the long-barreled "Kentucky" or "Pennsylvania" rifles, with their hair triggers, brought a new kind of accuracy and killing range to the woods in the mid- to late 1700s. While they were largely made for shooting gray squirrels at 50 yards and beyond, they also did a number on British soldiers in the Revolutionary War. There's a witnessed account of Daniel Boone putting a patched round ball through a British officer as he peeked his head around a tree more than 200 yards away.

Squirrel hunters were probably a huge reason the .22 rimfire long rifle round was an immediate success when introduced by the Stevens Arms Company in the 1880s. That same round eventually became widely used for small game hunting and target shooting around the world.

The preponderance of American soldiers who'd grown up stalking and shooting wary squirrels with .22s showed in conflicts from World War I through Vietnam.

A Marine friend who served three tours in Southeast Asia said he probably owed his life to point men who'd grown up hunting squirrels because they excelled at spotting the enemy and were



Michael Pearce photo

crack shots.

Carlos Hathcock, the famed Marine sniper of "One Shot, One Kill" fame, owed much of his success as a sniper to his experience hunting squirrels when he was a boy in Arkansas.

Squirrel hunting has a rich history in Kansas, too. Fifty years ago, I remember lively debates among Thompson's Barber Shop patrons in Tonganoxie about whether the .22 rifle was a better squirrel gun than the .410 shotgun. It's probably safe to say more kids in my Tonganoxie junior high classes hunted squirrels than any other game.

But it seems that's about the time the popularity of squirrel hunting began to fade across Kansas and the rest of America. Rising populations of deer, wild turkey and Canada geese surely contributed. So has the increase in hunters' income, giving them more money for things like decoys, drives to western Kansas for pheasants or trips to the Rocky Mountains for elk.

S.G. said he hadn't hunted squirrels since he'd left Elk County for college. He described his occupation as "an engineer, the nerdy kind, not the 'choo-choo' kind." For decades he'd had good bird dogs to hunt quail throughout the Flint Hills. And he

and friends traveled each fall to western Kansas, as well as other states, to hunt pheasants.

But on that first call to me years ago he confided that both his dog and main hunting buddy had died. He'd also lost access to most of the private lands he'd once hunted. Battling thick CRP grass for pheasants was also too hard on his aging body. For a few years, S.G. resigned to never hunting again. Then he read the late-summer article on squirrel hunting I'd written, and he called. He learned squirrel hunting has so much to offer.

## GREAT PUBLIC LAND HUNTING

When S.G. was growing up, "No Hunting" signs were about as rare as new Cadillacs on the dusty backroads where he and his brother roamed in Elk and neighboring counties.

"Back then if you wanted to go hunting, you just walked out of the yard or went on a short drive," he recalled. Several times he said the difficulty in finding quality hunting places that weren't crowded was one of the reasons he'd given up on pheasants and quail.

I assured him he had free access to some of the best squirrel habitat in Kansas at most of the state wildlife areas in the eastern three-

fourths of Kansas. Many surround creek or river valleys that grow some of the state's largest stands of timber.

In addition to the large wildlife areas at the upper ends of major reservoirs, S.G. learned many state fishing lakes offer a few hundred acres of public hunting with plenty of trees.

Since he lived on the east side of Wichita, I recommended he look at the wildlife areas around Marion and El Dorado reservoirs, looking especially for areas with bur oak and walnut trees. Raised in the country, he knew how to spot both as well as shagbark and pignut hickory trees.

Eventually S.G. expanded his squirrel hunting to other public areas. Sometimes he took his camper and spent a night or two at a state park. He, and often his wife, explored some of the camping areas of eastern Kansas so he could give gray squirrels a try.

Sometimes he fished the lakes, rivers and streams at the public areas he hunted. Squirrel entrails, he found, were great bait for channel cat. He liked casting them into the deep holes of the creeks in the public hunting areas. Such

places, he said, brought back great boyhood memories of fishing the Elk River and clear streams that fed it when he was younger.

### NINE-MONTH SEASON

A retiree, S.G. had the luxury of picking and choosing his days for hunting. He already knew heavy winds often meant most wildlife wouldn't move about much. He knew hunting in a light drizzle could be good but he wisely skipped days when it was raining.

But even being picky about his days, he had ample opportunity to make more than a dozen hunts a year, thanks to Kansas' liberal squirrel season – June 1-Feb. 28. Except for rabbits, no game animal in Kansas has a longer hunting season than squirrels.

Like a majority of the state's few squirrel hunters, S.G. wasn't a fan of the June and July hunts, dealing with the heat, humidity, mosquitos and ticks. He hit the woods on the occasional cool morning in late August. It's a time when squirrel populations are usually at their highest, and the animals are busy eating things like hickory nuts and walnuts. Most of his hunts took place then through

about Thanksgiving, but he went some warm afternoons through the rest of the season when he might see squirrels sunning on tree branches or rummaging for remnants of that fall's mast crop.

### CHOOSE YOUR EQUIPMENT

S.G. learned that, in addition to plenty of places and days to choose from, squirrel hunting likely offered more alternatives in hunting gear and methods used than any in Kansas.

When it comes to squirrel hunting guns, it really is hunter preference, starting with powerful pellet rifles. Any run-of-the mill pump or single-shot shotgun is adequate, as is any .22 rifle.

I assured S.G., on our first call about the sport, that any of the shotguns he used on quail or pheasants would work for squirrels with a field load of No. 6 shot.

He declined, saying he'd grown up head-shooting squirrels with an ancient single shot .22 of unknown brand. Eventually he and his brother pooled their savings to buy an ancient Winchester pump .22. With that gun long gone, S.G. decided to just go buy a new .22.

He started with a Ruger 10/22, a semi-automatic and liked it fine. Browsing at gun shows, he always had his eye out for super-accurate .22s, buying several and pairing them with full-sized scopes.

The engineer in him seemed to have fun matching different loads with different rifles, working toward the best accuracy possible. I remember he really liked a Remington 521-S, which has the feel and great-looking wood of a high-powered rifle. We found it ironic that's what I shoot, too.

For a while he did most of his hunting with .22 shorts, saying they were accurate out to the distances he shot squirrels. He liked that they were quieter than long-rifle shells and didn't carry as far beyond his target.



Michael Pearce photo

## HUNT SO MANY WAYS

The article that triggered S.G.'s first phone call was on calling squirrels. He picked my brain, wanting to verify the technique worked as well as I'd described. I promised him it did, so he tried it. Like most who try it for the first time, he said he felt silly making all that noise in the woods, shaking limbs and blowing on the call.

The Mister Squirrel call I had recommended is about the size of a nickel and you suck air through it to replicate the sounds of a young squirrel being attacked by a predator. Thrashing the ground with a leafy branch or hat also makes it sound like a hawk, owl or other predator battling the injured squirrel.

He said he liked it best when after a few seconds of silence, following a calling sequence, a squirrel would start going berserk, scolding and coming through the treetops toward his position. Other times he had to stalk towards the sounds of squirrels barking at his calls. But calling wasn't his only method for shooting squirrels.

Just quietly slipping through the timber, eyes to the treetops,



worked as well for him as a retiree as it had when he and his brother were boys. As the leaves dropped, he spent more time just sitting, waiting and watching. Sometimes he'd have to get up and make a stalk on a distant squirrel. Other times he just waited for one to come through the treetops. He rated a cheap camo cushion he kept attached to his belt as one of his best investments on those days he sat for hours

When I asked if he'd ever gotten so comfortable he'd fallen asleep in the woods, he said, "That's sometimes the best part of the day."

### "LIMB CHICKEN" DELIGHT

Growing up, S.G. had only eaten squirrel fried, the traditional way with mashed potatoes and gravy, and said it tasted just as good when he tried it again 50

years later. It took a few times for his wife to give it a try but she eventually did and liked it. At least once they cooked the squirrel in a huge cast iron skillet, over a hot bed of coals while camping. He rated it as one of the best meals of his life.

Eventually S.G. hunted them so much he called and asked about cooking alternatives. One suggested way he tried was to par-boil the squirrels a bit, then grill them with barbecue sauce.

He laughed when I first suggested "Squirrel Helper," after the way my stepmother steamed the meat off the bones and substituted it for chicken with the popular box dinners. But I think he tried it.

I suggested he also try it with any recipe that called for chicken. He called one cold, autumn day and said they had a big pot of "Limb Chicken and Noodles" simmering on the stove.

Sadly, I haven't heard from S.G. in several years.

And I don't know if he ever managed his goal of tagging along with someone who had a good squirrel hunting dog. When he was a boy, his family had a terrier-mix that was good at treeing squirrels and chasing rabbits from thickets. Hopefully one of the dog leads I gave him panned out, and he found such a hunter and dog in eastern Kansas or Oklahoma.

My best hope is that he and his wife moved to a southern state as he'd once mentioned.

By the end of our over-the-phone friendship he was in his 80s, and I'm afraid it's possible he passed on. But if so, and Heaven is all some say it is, I'm guessing S.G. is doing some squirrel hunting up there, too. 🐿️

Michael Pearce photo

Michael Pearce photo





# Wilson State Park

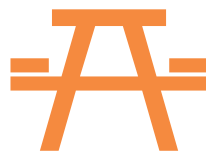
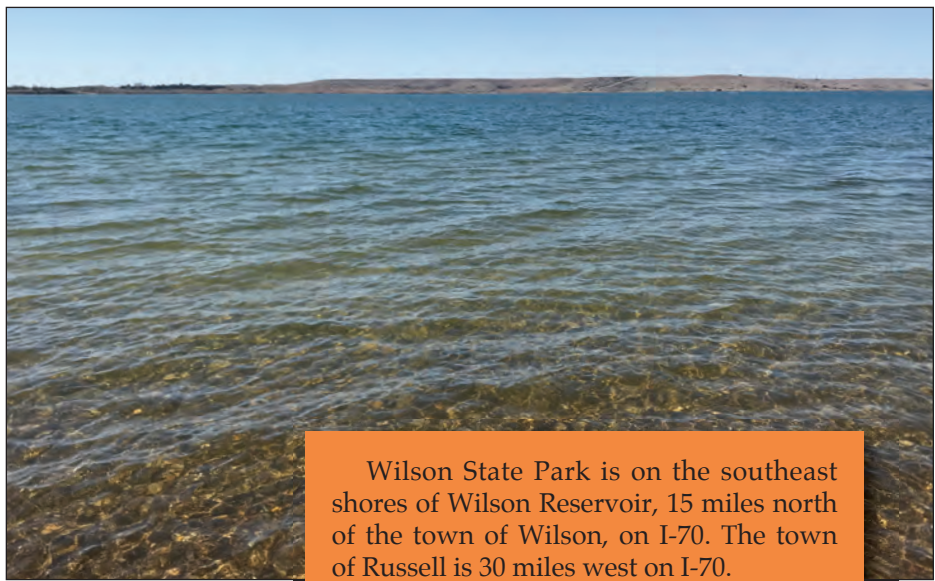
## Window To The Smoky Hills

*text and photos by Jennifer Leeper*

A few years back, Wilson State Park was included on an enviable list of 36 state parks voted the most beautiful in the nation. After visiting this park for the first time this past April, I discovered why it's a favorite outdoor destination among locals and visitors to the state.

Arriving on an early Friday afternoon, my husband, son and I settled into Sand Lilly, our lakefront cabin. The cabin featured the rustic comfort I have become accustomed to in Kansas state parks. From amenities such as air conditioning and heating to a kitchen with a stovetop and refrigerator, "roughing it" wasn't so rough, and these city comforts allowed us to focus more on enjoying the park itself, like listening to the almost immediate call of the water just outside our door.





Wilson State Park is on the southeast shores of Wilson Reservoir, 15 miles north of the town of Wilson, on I-70. The town of Russell is 30 miles west on I-70.

The Otoe area of Wilson State Park features 43 primitive campsites and 37 RV sites with water and electricity hook-ups. The Hell Creek Area offers 39 primitive campsites, 36 RV sites with electricity, 49 RV sites with electricity and water, and four RV sites with electricity, water and sewer hook-ups. The Hell Creek Area has eight cabins for rent, and all provide kitchens, modern bathrooms, showers, as well as heating and air conditioning.

Call the Wilson State Park office for more information at (785) 658-2465 or go to [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com) to download maps or make a cabin or campsite reservation.

## Clearly Beautiful

We decided to jet over to the marina, conveniently located just down the way from the park office. It offered a convenient store with many “lake life” must-haves such as sunscreen and charcoal.

After shopping around, we returned to the shore with shoes and socks tossed aside and pants rolled to calves. My son enjoyed bare feet squished into sand and we enjoyed the endlessly exploratory spirit of a three-year-old from a nearby picnic bench.

I couldn’t help but notice how clear Wilson’s water is. One of the park office brochures boasted of “the clearest lake in Kansas,” but I would go further with the superlative of the clearest natural waters I’ve ever seen.

A gentle hum of lake activity provided a relaxing soundtrack as we headed back up the modest hill leading to our cabin. It was time to think about dinner, so my husband lit the grill and we enjoyed a feast of brats and chips. Our gracious neighbors – a retired couple traveling in a refurbished silver trailer, circa 1979 – invited us for s’mores, and we eagerly accepted, ending the day with new friends.

As we discovered at Wilson, much like our other Kansas state park stays, the layout of the cabins and adjacent camping areas designed for RVs offer the perfect balance of privacy and openness to socializing. There’s an easy back-and-forth rhythm between one’s own cabin or campsite, and campfire conversations with neighbors that enhances these park experiences.



## Rocktown

The same neighbors who shared their s’mores also shared advice about a great spot for hiking, so we set out for Rocktown first thing Saturday morning. It was a bit of a drive, toward the nearby town of Lucas, on the north side of Wilson Lake, so a car ride was required. The ride was an opportunity to see and get to know the west-central Kansas region on a new level.

I had forgotten all about post rock country, until I started noticing the trademark rock fence posts in a part of the state where trees are a scarce. We encountered these unintended monuments to the pioneer era in the park and surrounding areas.



Post Rock is also the namesake for the scenic byway that runs around Wilson Lake. The byway showcases the picturesque Smoky Hills region with 18 miles of rolling plains, highlighting more than 200 bird species, native grasses, and of course, the famous limestone rock posts quarried from the treeless landscape.

Eventually, we discovered the Rocktown trailhead, which is located in Lucas Park, one of U.S. Army Corps of Engineer (USACE) parks located on the Wilson shores. The 3-mile Rocktown Trail offered the climactic kind of adventure we were hoping for on a wide-open Saturday. Beginning as an easy stroll along a mown path through scrubby, shortgrass prairie, the hike advances to steeper inclines around Rocktown Cove, highlighted by a dramatic cluster of Dakota Sandstone rock formations rising out of Wilson Lake.

I could see how it would be tempting to dive off these formations; however, signs throughout the parks warned against it, so we took the directive seriously, restricting all cliff diving to our imaginations. We did ascend to the top of a couple of the formations, though, marveling at the view of the lake from that height.

Although, as our son had hoped, we didn't observe any of the lizard species the Rocktown Trail signage mentioned, we did see a snake slither quickly into a brushy area on the return hike to the car. Too bad our three-year-old was fast asleep against my shoulder at the time.



## USACE Parks

Those who visit Wilson should know about the two different types of parks because required permits and fees are different. In addition to the USACE's Lucas area, which is on the north shore, the Minooka area is on the south shore and the Sylvan area is below the dam. The Kansas state park areas, Hell Creek and Otoe are located on the shores of the Hell Creek arm of the lake on the southeast shores.



---

## Single-Track Mind

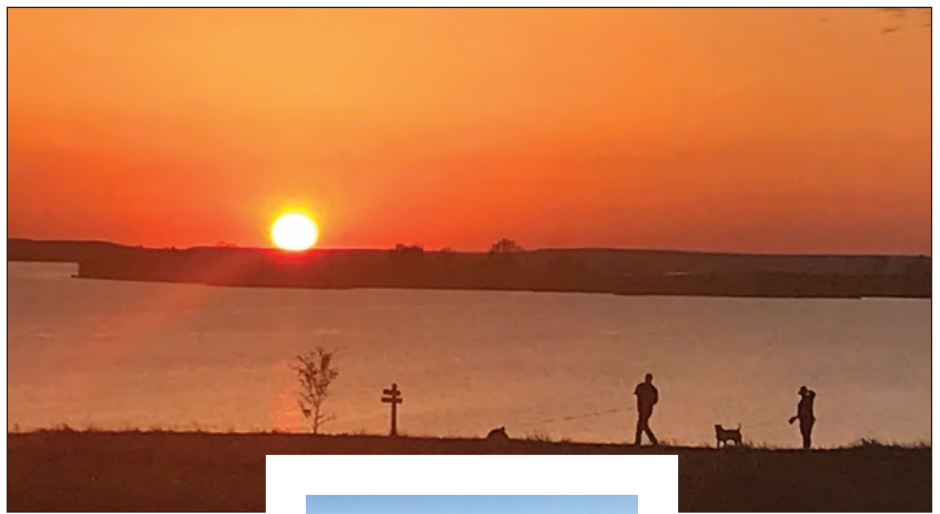
As my son napped and my husband enjoyed the peace with a book at a picnic table outside our cabin, I ventured out alone, hoping to confirm a rumor I had heard several times about Wilson State Park offering some of the best single-track biking in the region. I drove to Switchgrass trailhead, which promised more than 24 miles of EPIC-rated mountain-biking thrills. For the uninitiated, the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) gave the EPIC rating to the trail, and to put it in perspective, the Switchgrass Trail in Wilson State Park is the only EPIC-rated trail between the Ozarks and the Rockies. It's quite an honor, particularly for a state synonymous in the minds of many outsiders (and some insiders) with not-so-epic terrain.

After testing my two feet on the mountain bike-wheel rutted Switchgrass route, I was lucky enough to meet Amy Smith, her father, Bob Henderson, and Amy's three children who had just completed their own epic bike ride.

"It's correctly named the Epic because it's definitely epic," said Smith, who, along with her children, had biked the Switchgrass previously.

Smith's daughter, Ellea, mentioned her favorite part of the trail was a spot she dubbed the "roller coaster." Smith's daughter and both sons are competitive dirt bikers so I trusted their knowledge of what constituted an epic bike trail.

Besides an EPIC rating, Switchgrass features both a route for kids, which runs in segments of 2 to 5.5 miles, and one for older or more advanced mountain bikers that runs a total of 22.5 miles. The route also offers the option to shorten a ride at one of 12 cutoff points.



---

## A Sunset Ending

We spent our last evening at Wilson Lake enjoying the postcard views of the sky at sunset, complementing perfectly-grilled burgers and veggies. Our silver-trailered and haired neighbors hosted us one more time with watermelon and more amiable conversation.

As I watched the sun burn out over Wilson Lake, I noticed that even though the cabins were all full that weekend, there was no great swarm of boats on the water or even feet on dry land unofficially signalling the start of summer, or even spring for that matter, at Wilson State Park. Maybe the grueling winter had cast a spell on those who would have normally made a trip out to the park or lake by then and they hadn't emerged from their mental cocoons yet. That's okay. I was happy to enjoy the park stripped of such distractions, to discover for myself what those voters saw in Wilson when they recognized it as one of the most beautiful. Clearly, and epically, it is. 🐃

# Grandpa Harry & Ole Mr. Browning *by Rick McNary*

Harry wiped off the drop of gun oil that fell on the letter from Ethan. He marveled that an 11-year-old boy would regularly write his 89-year-old grandpa. As much as he loved letters from Ethan, Harry lived for the times his grandson left the big city to visit him at his cabin in the woods.

"This is what we used to call pen pals," Harry said, showing the letter to his dog, Chauncey. "Ethan and me are pen pals. Want me to read it again?" Chauncey's tail hammered the floor.

*Dear Grandpa Harry,*

*A family moved in next to us with a boy my age that I really like. His whole family likes to shoot clay targets for fun. Do you think you could teach me sometime? They have a real cute girl, too, and they tell me she's the best shot. Love Ethan,  
P.S. Tell Chauncey I'll see him soon!*

Chauncey sniffed at the cloth rag draped on Harry's leg.

"That's gun oil," Harry said. "Gettin' Ole Mr. Browning ready for Ethan. He's coming today."

As soon as the words tumbled off his lips, a car pulled up and a door slammed.

"Hi Chauncey," Ethan bounded in. "Hey, Grandpa, why's the old truck out of the barn?"

A '49 Ford sat in the driveway.

"You want to learn how to shoot so that's where we're headed. The state park's shooting range is nearby, so

let's load up."

Ethan raced to the truck and climbed inside. Harry slid a leather gun case behind the seat.

"What kind of gun is that, Grandpa?" asked Ethan.

"Gladys bought that Browning shotgun for me back in '48, so I call it Ole Mr. Browning. She paid a lot of money back then."

"What's it worth now?" Ethan asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Probably a lot, but that don't matter much to me," replied Harry. "Memories are worth more than money and that gun holds a lot of memories."

"Did you shoot clay targets back then?" Ethan asked.

"Oh, heavens no - the shells cost too much," Harry chuckled. "We were poorer than church mice and I only used that gun to hunt food. We would have starved without that gun."

"What's your best memory with it?" Ethan kept on.

"I suppose when your Daddy was about your age and I taught him how to shoot," Harry smiled.

"Was he any good?" inquired Ethan.

"Oh, he was a mighty fine shot. We could afford clay targets then so we practiced out by the pond."

"People on TV say that guns are bad," added Ethan.

"Well, it's people who do bad things, not the guns. I've had that gun for 70 years and it never hurt anyone, not even me."

The truck lurched to a stop at the range. Once in the shooting area, Harry unsheathed the gun.

"Wow!" Ethan cried. "That's beautiful! Dad learned on this gun, too?"

"Yep, he sure did," said Harry. "Took him five tries to hit his first target."

They spent the morning shooting with Harry sharing memories and giving instruction.

"You did a fine job," Harry sheathed the gun. "You hit the target on your first shot!"

"I wish Dad was still alive," Ethan hugged the old man.

"I do, too," Harry said, wiping a tear from his cheek. "You remind me an awful lot of him."

"You think he'd be proud of me?" asked Ethan.

"Of course!" Exclaimed Harry. "He'd like it you are doing the things he loved to do."

"Mom said I could get a gun for Christmas. What should I ask for?" asked Ethan excitedly.

"Well now," Harry said. "I told your Daddy that one day this gun would be his, then he could give it to his son. Since he's not with us, I reckon the day has come for Ole Mr. Browning to go live with you."

"You mean you're giving me this gun?" Ethan asked, shocked.

"No, Grandson, I'm not just giving you a gun," said Harry, softly. "I'm giving you a part of me, a part of your Dad and a lifetime to make your own memories with it."

# Species Profile: Spiny Softshell Turtle

Why did the turtle cross the road? Well, if it's a spiny softshell turtle, that's a trick question because you'll rarely, if ever, see one walking about pavement!

Spiny softshell turtles differ from their hard-shelled kin in that they primarily reside in or around water.

Spiny softshells are somewhat flat in shape, light tan or olive in color, with spotted and streaked legs. And their shell, or carapace, is soft with little bumps on top and dark edging.

The spiny softshell's nose is like a small snorkel, which is perfect since this turtle

likes to frequent sandbars and mud flats. They spend the warmer months catching sun, searching for food and cooling off beneath the mud, and the winter months submerging themselves several inches below the bottom of a pond or lake as they wait for spring.

The long neck of the spiny softshell allows it to lie in wait for its prey and strike from a distance. Their carnivorous palate includes fish, insects and frogs - necessary proteins to fuel their life which can span upwards of 25 years.



Daren Riedle photo



# Backlash

with Mike Miller

## It's All Relative

---

I try not to get irritated when I hear someone make excuses for not taking youngsters hunting or fishing, “because we probably won’t see (or catch) anything,” or “kids these days need instant gratification or they won’t have any fun.” What I hear is the adult putting their own expectations on the outing, and making assumptions that aren’t necessarily true. Think about it. Name any activity that guarantees success or instant gratification. Every activity has highs and lows, is sometimes exciting and sometimes boring, and is fun and not so fun.

I’ll admit I’ve used similar excuses myself for not going hunting or fishing, but while browsing through some of my own childhood and adult outdoor memories, I’ve decided that game and fish will never be the most important or memorable part of any trip. And I think we get in trouble when we start placing lofty expectations on any pending outing. A recent experience with some youngsters at a kids’ fishing pond prompted me to write this.

It was an evening employee picnic and the organizing group provided fishing poles and worms for any of the children who wanted to fish the nearby kids’ pond. It was brutally hot that evening without a breath of breeze; an evening I would not have gone fishing on my own. I would not have gone fishing that evening because of the heat and my assumption that the fish wouldn’t bite. However, I was already there and decided it might be fun to watch the kids fish, so I strolled over. In an instant, I was as excited as the littlest angler when his bobber suddenly went under and I forgot all about the heat and humidity.

The two little anglers nearest me were having a ball and the small bluegill in the pond were hungry. It didn’t matter that the fish they were catching were only 5 inches long. They pulled the bobbers under and tugged on the lines. Soon a few more youngsters were there and before I knew it, I was baiting hooks and unhooking bluegills. I’ll admit I was having as much fun as the kids, and their excitement and laughter was contagious. Obviously, my inner child isn’t buried very deep when it comes to fishing.

Granted, these were youngsters under the age of seven, but I still think my theory is sound. Don’t worry about whether or not you’ll catch big fish or any fish for that matter. If you find a way to make an outdoor trip fun, that’s what the kids will remember. And they’ll want to go again.



I’ve said it before, but it deserves repeating: It’s the time you spend together, not the results of the trip, that will stay with you. That’s what everyone will remember 20 years from now – and kids will remember that you cared enough to spend the day or hour with them, demonstrating how to tie an improved clinch knot, attach the bobber to the line, hook on a worm and cast the line. If the fish don’t cooperate, quit early, explore the shore, go get an ice cream cone and make plans for the next trip.

It’s easier said than done, but I recommend putting no expectations on any trip, other than spending quality time with kids, family or friends. Prepare as if you will catch fish, then quit worrying.

And it works for adults, too. As I prepared for my recent annual fishing trip in Canada, friends asked me what the fishing reports were and what the weather forecast was. I will admit I looked at the weather forecast, as undependable as it is, but I didn’t worry about it and I never looked at a fishing report. We were going regardless of either and we were going to have fun. Fortunately, the fish cooperated most of the time and the weather was beautiful. However, I’ll remember the time with my family – Dad, Aunt Barb and Brad – long after I forget how many fish were caught. There’s no greater pleasure in life than spending time outdoors with good friends and family. 🐻



**Nature – Show them it’s worth conserving.**  
*nature.org/kansas*



Matt Miles photo

