



# KANSAS

*Wildlife & Parks Magazine*

FOR HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS | \$2.75 | NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018





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

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# For The Love of Kansas

If you've read the words printed on this inside cover page with any regularity, you've probably noticed a different title, byline and image for this issue. For readers who may not be familiar, I served as the Assistant Secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) for the past seven years, overseeing the Parks and Tourism divisions. In August, Gov. Colyer appointed me Interim Secretary when Robin Jennison announced he was going to be the general manager of the Kansas State Fair. However, you probably won't notice whole-sale changes to the theme of this column.

Former Secretary Jennison loves Kansas, and he worked tirelessly to raise the awareness of what Kansas has to offer both to residents and nonresidents. That's exactly what I've been doing for a good portion of my career and what I will continue to do. It's a two-part job - first, making our residents aware of what an amazing state Kansas is and second, convincing nonresidents to visit.


And you know what? As good as Kansas is, it's getting better. Because of the hard work of KDWPT employees, the outdoor opportunities we enjoy in Kansas today are unprecedented. Kansas is a destination state for deer, turkey, upland bird and waterfowl hunters. In fact, Kansas ranked number one last year in quail harvest and Number two in pheasant harvest. The white-tailed deer hunting we have is known worldwide and interest in Kansas turkey hunting has grown steadily. Access for hunting and fishing has never been more available with programs such as Walk-in Hunting Access (WIHA), iWIHA, Special Hunts, FISH, and Community Lakes Assistance.

Visitation at the 28 state parks we manage has never been higher, and after losing State General Fund support and struggling with funding for years, the Park Fee Fund is now stronger than it



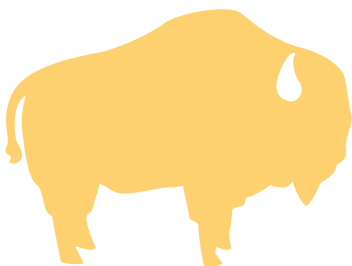
has ever been. Our park staff deserve credit for creating outdoor experiences that make our parks more than just places to park RVs or set up tents. When I look at the variety of events and activities available at state parks around the state, I'm amazed. And we added two new state parks this past year. Little Jerusalem in Scott County is truly a geological marvel; the largest Niobara Chalk formation in Kansas; and Flint Hills Trail State Park, which is our longest trail at 117 miles, connecting historic communities between Osawatomie and Herington.

While outdoor opportunities are key to bringing people to Kansas, there are many reasons people visit our state and the overall impact of tourism might surprise some who think of us as a "fly-over" state. According to a study conducted by Tourism Economics, visitor spending in Kansas was \$6.7 billion in 2016, generating \$10.8 billion in total business sales. Obviously that's huge for the state's economy, but our Tourism team works diligently with many rural communities across Kansas where seasonal tourism can have a dramatic impact on their local economies. Once we get people to Kansas, they fall in love with the people, the land and the opportunities, and we can get them back. Our job is to get them to visit in the first place.

I'm proud to say I'm from Kansas, and I will always promote our great state. It's been a privilege to serve the people of Kansas through KDWPT and I'm excited about continuing that service in my new role. 



*with Linda Craghead*  
*Interim Secretary, KDWPT*







## Letters To The Editors

Write the editors at: [mike.miller@ks.gov](mailto:mike.miller@ks.gov) or [nadia.reimer@ks.gov](mailto:nadia.reimer@ks.gov)

### Special Seasons

Editors:

This is a picture of the 14-point buck I shot on September 9, during the state's special season to accommodate disabled hunters. I'd like to thank Wildlife and Parks for the opportunities it provides. The warmer weather makes it much easier since I can't feel heat or cold

in my legs and hunting later could be dangerous. Many disabled hunters have such circulation problems.

It is also nice that in early September the deer are still in summer patterns, and easy to study and set-up for. Many of us have very limited mobility within our wheel chairs. I about have to have a deer walk into where my rifle is pointed. Fortunately, that's easier to figure out in September than December. We watched this buck for two years, and had a place picked for my wife, Terry, and brother, Kent, to set up my wheel chair when the season began. It takes a lot of their time and effort to get me hunting. The special season in September makes the chore about as easy as possible.

Sincerely, J.W. Marr  
Coyville



Editors note – J.W. Marr was a security guard for the presidential helicopter for President Gerald Ford when his spine was broken in 1984. He has been a quadriplegic since.

Still, with the help of his family and friends, he's shot leopard, Cape Buffalo and kudu in Africa, and elk and black bear in the Rocky Mountains.

The Marr's live in a remote house near the Verdigris River, so J. W. can look outside and see wildlife about any time.



### Baby Snapper "turtle"

Hello,

I wanted to share these pictures of a baby snapping turtle I found on a city sidewalk in Alma. I brought it home to share with my 2 young grandsons; they were fascinated by it.

We freed it near Mill Creek when we were done studying it. I wonder how it made it into the center of town?

Thanks for a great publication!

Elaine Deiter  
Alma





# BIRD BRAIN

*with Mike Rader*

## Late Fall Is For The Birds

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The Kansas weather has been unpredictable so far in 2018, with very dry conditions over much of the state early in the year and then the monsoon season for lots of us in late summer. Several large rain events occurred in northwest Kansas, bringing water back to some of the reservoirs, and this should make for some great birding opportunities for this late fall and early winter. Waterfowl and other species that birders like to see, including loons, grebes and gulls will be showing up to utilize the abundant habitat. Some of my favorite lakes to visit in my part of the state include Wilson, Kanopolis, Webster and Waconda. A great way to get to know these areas and the other fantastic lakes we have available to bird watch all over the state is to participate in a Christmas Bird Count. Information about the counts can be found at: [www.ksbirds.org](http://www.ksbirds.org)

Christmas Bird Counts in Kansas fall into two types – those that are submitted to the National Audubon Society (NAS) and to the Kansas Ornithological Society (KOS) for publication and those that may just be turned in to KOS because of the dates they are conducted. To be considered and published by NAS, the counts must be conducted between December 14 and January 5. Counts accepted for publication by KOS can be conducted from December 12 through January 12, 2019, giving Kansas counters a little extra time to get in a few more locations. These events are enjoyable and educational and you'll get to know other birders and learn about species that make Kansas their winter home.

As I have often mentioned, taking kids out to bird watch can be a rewarding experience for both the mentor and student. And this is a perfect time of year to mentor a young birder because field trips are usually shorter, considering the shorter day length. Short outings reduce the potential of boredom or the “are we done yet” attitude but if it's cold, be prepared to hear some grumbling. However, I've found that many kids don't notice the cold once they are out in nature and active. And you don't have to worry about ticks and mosquitoes.

Keeping bird feeders full and adding water features to your yard in fall and winter can entice birds to come in for close observation better than any other time of year. Take advantage of that and you can practice your bird identifications skills up-close, personal and at your own pace, especially if doing a Christmas Bird seems too rushed or intense. Make birding fun and something to be enjoyed for a lifetime!



Karole Erikson photo





# LAW MATTERS

A Busy Time of Year

with Colonel Ott

I hope this issue finds hunters and anglers deeply enthralled in enjoying the Kansas outdoors. Cooler weather and the great hunting and fishing opportunities available in Kansas make this a perfect time be outdoors..

Some lucky hunters have already bagged a buck with their bow or smoke pole (muzzleloader) while others are still hunting or waiting for rifle season. You have chased the walleye, catfish or hunted doves and ducks this fall. Or maybe you've taken some time to explore state parks, trails or public lands.

With all of the great outdoor activities going on right now, Kansas game wardens are busy, as well. Our charge is to protect the natural resources and citizens of the State of Kansas and that is what we do. Our time is spent patrolling, conducting surveillance, investigations and other law enforcement functions. It truly is one of the busier times of the year for us.

Kansas Game Wardens enforce not only all state law, or statutes, but also regulations, which are approved by the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission. The seven-member, bi-partisan Commission approves regulations such as season dates, bag and creel limits and equipment restrictions. A full listing of statutes and regulations are available [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com), in the law enforcement section. Information can also be gleaned from the *2018 Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Summary* pamphlet, available wherever licenses are sold.

Sometimes the violations are unintentional and create a good learning tool for game wardens to educate the public. Other times they are intentional and done to cheat the system. This is a disservice to the game animals, citizens of Kansas and ultimately the individual violating the law. Game wardens are authorized to enforce these laws and regulations and violations can be either misdemeanor or felonies, depending on the situation.

Please get out and enjoy outdoor activities. Remember to introduce someone new to the outdoors whenever you get the chance and to teach them to do it the right way. We all have the charge to continue promoting the Kansas outdoors.

Kansas game wardens will always be here to help and educate. Give us a call if you have any questions. We're happy to help.

Hope to see you out in the great Kansas outdoors.



As you go afield, follow the laws and regulations regarding your activity. Common violations we run into this time of year include:

1. Hunter orange requirement violations during firearm deer season
2. Permit fraud violations
3. Improper permits
4. No hunting license
5. No shell-limiting plug in shotgun when hunting migratory birds
6. Using lead shot in steel-only areas and seasons





## The Year of the Snake

with Daren Riedle

As the year comes to a close, I think back to what I consider are some of its defining moments. My conclusion: 2018 will go down as the year of the snake.

Snakes are one of those critters that always seem to garner media attention, and unfortunately, not for the right reasons. Coverage of snakes is often sensationalistic, negative, and worse - inaccurate. That's why this magazine issue, I'm setting the record straight.

Venomous snakes are found statewide in Kansas. This includes the prairie rattlesnake, massasauga rattlesnake, timber rattlesnake, and the copperhead. The cottonmouth has occasionally been found along the Spring River drainage in extreme southeast Kansas, but it is doubtful whether the species is truly a regular resident of the state. In fact, most cottonmouth sightings are typically misidentifications.

The western diamondback rattlesnake is not native to Kansas. This species was introduced at Kanopolis Reservoir in the 1990s by some unscrupulous individuals, and for reasons unbeknownst to us.

Fatalities from snake bites in the United States are rare; According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, there were 10,843 copperhead bites and 6,145 rattlesnake bites between 2011-2016. Of those nearly 17,000 reported bites, 13 resulted in fatalities. Of the 13 fatalities, it was reported that four of the individuals were bitten while attempting to catch the snake, or while cutting off the rattle or head, presumably as a "trophy." For this reason, I encourage you never to pick up a venomous snake, alive or dead. The sticker shock alone for most snake bites - which can exceed six figures - is just one more reason to play it safe.

If you are bit, the key to lessening the severity of the bite is simply to seek immediate medical attention. Contrary to one story published last summer, it is NOT necessary to capture or identify the snake prior to seeking medical treatment. Snakebites in the United States are typically treated with a polyvalent (multi-species) antivenin. That means it's good for all rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths.

As many of us who grew up in Kansas and spent time outdoors know, when snakes are active, pay attention to where you walk and put your hands. And to reduce the chance of snakes occupying your yard, simply reduce the amount of cover and food for their primary prey: rodents.

On the flip side of the coin, there were some positive snake related posts last summer, as well. There was a wonderful video floating around of a group of hikers marveling at a timber rattlesnake as it crossed the trail in front of them. By giving the snake some space, and leaving it alone, all parties were able to enjoy the sighting and go their separate ways unharmed; this is how it should be. There is a level of admiration and respect to be gained by sitting and observing a snake crawl, undisturbed, through its environment. Remember, snakes are an important component of Kansas ecosystems and are, actually, quite beneficial to humans. A topic for a future column perhaps? I think so.

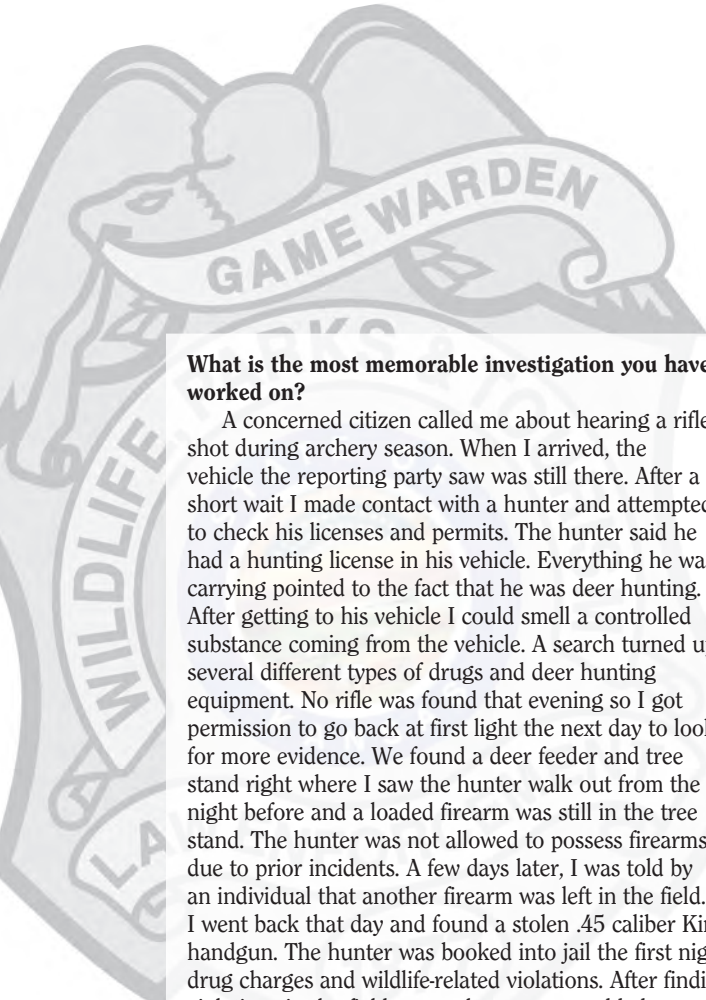
For now, my suggestion is this: Be vigilant and aware. And if you keep an open (and curious) mind, I'm betting it will make most, if not all, of your wildlife encounters positive ones - despite what the media may tell you.

Spring is just a couple months away. If we're making 2019 the year of the snake again, let's do it for the right reasons.



Daren Riedle photo





# Game Warden Profile

Scott Skucius, *Ellsworth and Lincoln Counties*

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

A concerned citizen called me about hearing a rifle shot during archery season. When I arrived, the vehicle the reporting party saw was still there. After a short wait I made contact with a hunter and attempted to check his licenses and permits. The hunter said he had a hunting license in his vehicle. Everything he was carrying pointed to the fact that he was deer hunting. After getting to his vehicle I could smell a controlled substance coming from the vehicle. A search turned up several different types of drugs and deer hunting equipment. No rifle was found that evening so I got permission to go back at first light the next day to look for more evidence. We found a deer feeder and tree stand right where I saw the hunter walk out from the night before and a loaded firearm was still in the tree stand. The hunter was not allowed to possess firearms due to prior incidents. A few days later, I was told by an individual that another firearm was left in the field. I went back that day and found a stolen .45 caliber Kimber handgun. The hunter was booked into jail the first night for drug charges and wildlife-related violations. After finding more violations in the field, more charges were added.

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

I enjoy the flexibility, being able to work during the day one day and night the next. I also like the fact I don't know what each day may bring. The change from hunting season to boating season and not having to do the same thing year-round also is a plus.

## If you were not a game warden, what would you be doing?

I imagine I would probably be a county or city law enforcement officer.

## What do you enjoy in your spare time?

I enjoy hunting and spending time with my family and friends. Watching sporting events, mainly the Kansas City Chiefs, Royals and Kansas State Wildcats. My wife and I enjoy traveling and we have a black Labrador puppy, so I'm busy training her.

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

My grandpa and dad had the most influence. When I was younger, our family was at the lake every weekend boating and fishing. Then when I got old enough my dad took me hunting every weekend. I believe that's where the passion came for this occupation.

## How are you involved in your communities?

I assist with hunter education and help with youth pheasant hunts. I also assist with the Luke Nihart Memorial Turkey Hunt.

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

I'm a big fan of northcentral Kansas. It has turkey, whitetail deer, upland birds, and migratory birds - all the things I enjoy hunting.



## What activities can people enjoy in your area?

Boating and fishing at Kanopolis Lake is the main attraction. The small town festivals and county fairs throughout are always enjoyable, too. In the fall and winter when hunting seasons begin, the local restaurants and motels start to fill up.

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

I was just promoted to boating enforcement specialist, so I completed the Boat Accident

Investigation Course last January, and there are several other trainings that I will need for this position. I've also been trained in Seated Field Sobriety and the Standard Field Sobriety Test. All officers attended at least 40 hours of training each year, ranging from defensive tactics, firearms, interview and interrogations.

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

Last summer while patrolling boaters at Kanopolis I pulled up to check a boat that I was pretty certain there was a 12-and-under life jacket violation occurring. When I asked for the age of the individual without a life jacket on I was off by a long way. The individual was in their 20s and it was pretty embarrassing being that wrong.

## Do you have any advice for someone who is considering a career as a game warden?

You can always call or if you see a game warden, don't hesitate to ask questions about his or her job. Most people don't realize the wide variety of things we do. If you want a job that isn't the same day in and day out, this job is for you.

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

I would like to go on an archery elk hunt when they are bugling. As much as a gobbling spring tom turkey does to my heart I would love to see what an elk bugle would do.

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

My area is home to Kanopolis Laked and the fishing in early spring can be amazing for walleye and saugeye. Kanopolis Lake also has an abundance of public land around it that is managed by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and KDWPT. Lincoln County is my other assigned county and it is one of just six counties in Kansas with zero active oil or gas production.





The Outdoor Education Section of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism is pleased to announce that Tanna Fanshier has been hired as the Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) Program coordinator. Fanshier is excited to begin working in this new position with the agency.

The world we live in is extremely fluid and public perception and public opinion can change from day to day and hour by hour. Just because hunting has been around for generations doesn't mean it will continue into the future. People who have been distanced from nature don't understand the natural world. It is no secret that for the last 30 years the percent of our population who hunt and fish has declined. It would be a mistake for hunters and anglers to assume that hunting and fishing will continue to be accepted forms of outdoor recreation without a significant effort on our part. Just preaching to the choir is not going to save our hunting and fishing heritage. It is time for us to step outside our present and comfortable sphere of influence and expand our circle of influence.



New R3 coordinator, Tanna Fanshier, accepts an award from biologist Sean Lynott of the Kansas Chapter of the American Fisheries Society at the chapter's business meeting last February.

In our effort to make R3 a priority, KDWPPT created a new position to coordinate the effort. Through coordinating and collaborating with all portions of the agency and partnering with outside organizations with similar goals, we are working to increase participation in all outdoor activities, but especially hunting and fishing. There are a host of individuals interested in these activities but don't know how to go about it. It is time that we fixed that situation and actively invited them to join us. Fanshier brings expertise and a passion for the outdoors. During her studies at Kansas

State University she majored in fisheries, wildlife and conservation biology and honed her education skills teaching at Rock Springs 4-H Center. She is a talented writer and communicator, so I expect to see her byline gracing the pages of our magazine before too long. For those of you who communicate through social media channels, you can expect to see an increased presence in those areas, as well. For those of us who find the older firearms and more traditional hunting methods to be the most interesting, please rest assured that you will not be forgotten. Times

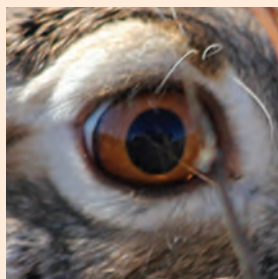
may change but that doesn't mean you have to start hunting in skinny jeans!

Reasons for hunting are diverse and always very personal. This activity has always been big enough to allow anyone interested to become involved. If we want to preserve the rich heritage of hunting for future generations, it is time for us to step up our efforts to invite and mentor new generations to the hunter's fire. This one of the most basic of all human behaviors. Let's not be the ones to see the last ember die away.

Welcome Tanna.

## 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 can reach speeds up to 40 mph
2. My ears give me away
3. I weigh 3 to 9 pounds, and stand up to 2 feet tall

>>> See answer on Page 14



# Fish Squeezer

with Tommie Berger

## Don't Forget to Have Fun



When you hunt, fish, or trap, are you having fun? I think we all can say that when we started outdoor activities, we were doing it for fun. My memories of fishing for carp and catfish with my dad are of having fun. Even with early mornings and long drives, it was fun.

Some may believe that competing in hunting, fishing, or target shooting takes the fun out of it. And I'll will admit that when I was fishing bass tournaments there were times when it wasn't all that much fun - windy days, 100-degree temperatures, and days when the fish had lockjaw. I eventually quit tournament fishing because it was more stress than fun. However, a little competition can be fun. Dad always made our trips into mini-competitions - a Pepsi or a chocolate malt for the biggest or the most fish, just between us. Whoever lost had to buy, but Dad always had money when I didn't.

When teaching youngsters to fish, I've never had one who was catching fish say they were not having fun, even when I offered small prizes for the biggest, most, or even smallest fish. Some kids really knuckled down when challenged to catch the most fish, others just took it in stride and were tickled if they lucked out and won a prize.

These days, teaching people about the outdoors is my fun. I just got back from the fall Becoming an Outdoors Woman workshop and I confess that I had more fun than the women did. I love seeing women catch their first fish and get excited - taking pictures, texting their husbands or boyfriends, and giggling. Several women at this fall's workshop caught the biggest fish of their lives. Boy, were they excited. And I was right in the middle of it - "Keep that rod tip up! Let him play and wear out. Don't horse him! Quit reeling, just let him swim around 'till he is tired!" And when a lady from my limblining class last spring told me it was the best outdoor experience of her life, that was fun for me.

Some of my 4-H archery kids this fall are just getting into archery and they have fun slinging arrows all over the targets. But I can get them to focus by putting balloons on the targets, and they have fun trying to pop them. I sometimes give pieces of candy for bullseyes, and that helps with concentration, too.

I do admit my programs are usually given to audiences that are there because they want to be, not because they have to be. But I also give programs at grade schools. Over the years, I've learned to have live critters for the kids to see and handle - turtles, crawdads, minnows, aquatic insects, and maybe even some larger fish. Hands-on activities make these learning experiences fun!

Make sure your outdoor activities are fun and if you can take a youngster along this fall, make sure they have fun, too. I guarantee it will enrich your soul.

### WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



COCHRAN!  
"I SAID BRING YOUR RAIN GEAR!"



# EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

## Skunks and Marriage

with Marc Murrell

They say marriage is a two-way street and I've traveled the same road for more than 31 years. I'm fortunate to have a loving and understanding wife who supports me and my hobbies - mostly. For some reason, Candace hates skunks, or at least she hates their smell.

A successful marriage is based on tolerance and compromise and my wife is above-average in both. Each fall I make half of our two-car garage into my fur shed where I skin, finish and stretch hides of all kinds, except skunks.

While my wife and I have normal husband-wife arguments, one of our arguments is not normal: we argue over skunks. I do my part, trying not to catch them. But their fur is worth \$5-\$6 and their essence (the liquid "bomb" they use as a defense mechanism) is worth \$15-\$20 an ounce. And the containers (called pods, each skunk has two) it comes in are worth \$25-\$30 a quart so in essence, pun intended, they're valuable.

My last brush with a return to bachelorhood happened a few years ago. I'd caught three beautiful skunks in raccoon

sets and really wanted to process them. I had strict orders not to have skunks in the garage, so I stashed them behind my shed in a plastic bag.

I took off work early to get them done before Candace got home. It was cold in the garage, I was in a hurry and in my haste, I nicked a pod. Bright, yellowish-green fluid leaked everywhere. I'm convinced this liquid could be used to win wars but I knew my wife would win this one. I grabbed paper towels and quickly saturated them with bright yellow fluid. Then, the garage door opened and I just knew I was going to be single soon. Fortunately, it was one of my twin boys home from school.

"Oh my God, Dad, what did you do?" Cody asked.

"Is it bad?" I said.

"I could smell it when I got out of the car!" (he parks on the street) he said.

I dunked the skunk hides in the deodorizing mixture and washed them like I was washing laundry on rocks at the river. When my other son, Brandon, got home, he bluntly predicted my

future.

"Mom's going to kill you," he said matter of factly.

I sent Brandon to the store to buy a case of cheap air fresheners and I strategically placed them EVERYWHERE.

I cleaned up and hung the skunk skins to dry. Fortunately, my wife had parent-teacher conferences that night and wouldn't be home until 8 p.m.

I texted several friends and described my predicament, but I didn't get much sympathy. If laughter is the best medicine I had a couple years' prescription.

I heard the kitchen door open and my wife's voice, "MAAARRRRCCCCC?" I feared the worse.

"Where are the boys?" she asked.

"HUHHHHHH?" I said, assuming she'd follow with death threats.

Nope. She never mentioned anything. I texted my buddies and told them I was home free but my jubilation was premature. Apparently, this skunk smell was on time-release. Two days later my wife was on her way home from school when I called.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Driving in a van that smells like \*\$\*#&#^ SKUNK!" she replied none too happy.

Turns out she volunteered to drive to lunch that day with several other teachers. Teachers must have sensitive noses and made reference to the skunk aroma. My wife, of course, likely started cussing me.

"Did you have a skunk in the garage?" she hollered.

"Uhhhh, no," I said with fingers crossed. "Skunks are everywhere now as it's mating season. I bet you hit one on the highway," I added. "That smell lasts forever, too."

I don't know if she bought it completely, but I'm still married.



Bob Gress photo

Striped skunks are common throughout Kansas, and are found from southern Canada to Mexico. They are nocturnal and eat mostly insects but will also eat carrion, crayfish, small vertebrates, eggs of ground-nesting birds, fruits, and corn. Skunk spray is a thiol, an organic compound with sulfur as a principal component.





## Holiday “Gourdaments”

text and photos by Iralee Barnard

Around Christmas time, while driving down a country road, my friend noticed many round, golden balls strung along a barbed wire fence. She was baffled and wondered who might have put them there. Was this someone’s idea of holiday ornaments?

This story may sound strange, but the sight is not unusual. If you haven’t seen them in December, I’m sure from May to September you have seen the huge triangular leaves and large yellow flowers of buffalo gourd (*Cucurbita foetidissima*) along roadsides. The numerous, vining branches, as long as 30 feet, climb

the fence, and when all flowers and leaves are gone at the end of the year, the dried gourds hang like spherical ornaments.

Usually found on the ground, these mature yellowish-tan gourds have been mistaken for a lot of things, including turtle eggs!

Buffalo gourd is drought tolerant and found in the western four-fifths of Kansas. Growing



A quilt featuring gourds makes for a decorative feature and interesting conversation.

as long as 10 inches, the grayish green leaves are foul-smelling when crushed.

The gourds are about 3 inches in diameter and contain around 300 seeds each. This wild plant is closely related to garden squash and pumpkin.

Buffalo gourd is a culturally-important plant to the Plains Indians. The Omaha, Ponca, and Dakota Indians considered it a powerful plant and attributed special mystical properties to this wild gourd. The root, in particular, had great significance. Partly due to the enormous size, the root was thought to resemble a human. After growing three or four seasons, the root may weigh up to 90 pounds. In older plants the fleshy tap root has been known to weigh 160 pounds.

American Indians used buffalo gourd both as medicine and as food. However, all parts of the plant are extremely bitter and must be processed to remove poisonous glycosides. The root was used to treat many ailments and provided a source of starch. Skin conditions were treated with a poultice of the fruit. The fruit can also be used as a soap substitute. To kill intestinal worms, an infusion was made from the seeds. Nutritionally the seeds contain a large amount of protein and oil.

Large insect galls are sometimes found on the leaf petioles. These conspicuous swellings are 3 inches long by 1 inch thick. The larva inside the gall is a clearwing borer moth (*Melittia snowii*) and is host specific on plants of the family Cucurbitaceae.

When immature, the gourds are dark green with lighter green markings much like watermelons. Considering the plant very beautiful, many years ago friends and I made a quilted wall hanging featuring buffalo gourd. Maybe one day I will paint some dried buffalo gourds red and white and actually use them as tree ornaments for Christmas.





## The Trout Fishing Temptation

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Water, cool and calm. Tiny spoon lures, and packages labeled “Mepps.” Flashes of silver, bright as can be, teasing the water’s surface. Frost. Sleek, slippery fish, almost too beautiful to touch. These are the things I think of when I think of winter trout fishing in Kansas.

Maybe it’s the time of year, going into the holidays; the novelty of catching something different; or, maybe it’s the limited window of opportunity you know have to enjoy it, but there’s some-

thing oh-so-tempting about this special season.

From the first of November through early April, roughly 30 locations throughout the state are stocked with ready-to-catch rainbow trout. These fish come from hatcheries in other states, and are paid for with a \$12.50 Trout Permit required by anglers 16 and older fishing for them. While most will be within the 10- to 13-inch range, you just might find you can catch one surpassing the 13-inch mark.

When it comes to fishing for trout in Kansas, there are two things to keep in mind: the type of water you’re fishing, and limits. Trout waters are either designated as a “Type 1” or “Type 2” water. Type 1 waters require all anglers 16 and older to possess a Trout Permit. Type 2 waters require only anglers 16 and older fishing for and possessing trout to have a Trout Permit. Anglers 15 and younger don’t need this permit, but they are limited to two trout per day without one. Trout Permit holders can keep five trout per day, unless otherwise posted.

And unless exempt, anglers need a fishing license in addition to a Trout Permit.

While trout thrive in Kansas’ colder temperatures, they don’t survive long past spring. The one exception to this is Unit No. 30 at the Mined Land Wildlife Area where year-round survival of trout has been documented. I was fortunate enough to fish this area while attending college at Pittsburg State University and, only now that I’m four hours away, realize what a neat opportunity we had down the road. Though I love my alma mater, if I could go back, it wouldn’t be to relive my college days, it would be for the trout.

You can find a list of trout-stocked waters, along with a schedule of when they are stocked, by visiting [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) and clicking “Fishing” then “Special Fishing Programs.”

After you get your permit, and select a trout water to fish, do one more thing for me. Take a moment to appreciate the calm water, the frost, and these beautiful fish – that special feeling is only attainable for a limited time.

Tempted?



# Park View

with Kathy Pritchett

Always work to be done

Fall is slipping into winter. Turkey and pie in the oven, pumpkin spice lattes, hearty soups for supper, wood smoke in the air, colorful leaves swirling at your feet, the silent smell of the first snowfall. I love this time of year.

Hunters are sitting in deer stands, duck blinds or tromping through fields. This year's abundant rain should bring a good harvest of game. Many will make state parks their field headquarters. But outdoor folks besides hunters welcome the changing seasons, too. Wildlife photographers have a heyday with migration and fall color.

Kansas state parks are open year-round, so campers can return to a cozy cabin or toasty camper after a day outdoors. Hardier souls may brave tent camping. While cabins can be reserved year-round up to a year in advance, campsite reservations are not taken from October 1 through March 31. Campsites are first-come, first-served through this time. There should be open spots, though, except for K-State home game weekends at Tuttle Creek State Park. The 2019

annual vehicle and camping permits go on sale December 14, 2018, at noon. Reservations for 2019 campsites can be made beginning at noon on December 17, 2018.

This is a magical season of transition in state parks. With the summer rush of visitors gone, staff turn from constant mowing to projects that will improve the parks for the next year.

Special events such as campground Christmas displays, fishing tournaments, trail runs and rides, shooting events, and rendezvous continue. Park offices are closed for the legal holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day, but often are closed for the week of such holidays. With the advent of our online permitting system, you no longer need to go to the park office to purchase permits - you can do it online! Go to [www.kshuntfishcamp.com](http://www.kshuntfishcamp.com) or [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com) to get what you need.



Kansas Parks Division director Linda Lanterman, also President of the National Association of State Park Directors, presented the President's Award to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of Kansas for its work to make Little Jerusalem Badlands Kansas' newest state park. TNC owns the property but leases it to KDWP in a cooperative effort to protect the fragile area, while allowing public access. Rob Manes, director for TNC of Kansas, accepted the award.

## NORTHCENTRAL KANSAS OUTDOOR YOUTH FAIR

The 13th Annual Northcentral Kansas (NCK) Outdoor Youth Fair was held in Osborne on September 8, 2018, attracting the largest number of participants ever. By 11 a.m., 387 kids, ranging from age 1 to 17, were registered, along with accompanying family and friends. Attendance has increased every year, since the event started with 18 attendees in 2006. The youngsters came from 51 different communities, proving that this is truly a regional event.

Local volunteers provided 26 activities and exhibits for the kids. In addition to fishing and shooting sports, there were many other stations such as rope making, canoeing, astronomy, bow fishing, mountain biking, dog training, tomahawk throwing, and wild-game tasting.

Attendees also enjoyed the 900 hamburgers and 400 hotdogs that were served at no charge. Every kid received a commemorative t-shirt, and each was entered into drawings to win prizes for three different age groups. Prizes included gift certificates, outdoor gear, guided hunting and fishing trips, several firearms, and three lifetime hunting or

fishing licenses.

The events and activities (including ammunition) of the NCK Outdoor Youth Fair are free to all participants and attendees. This would not be possible without the generous support of the event's 170-plus sponsoring businesses, individuals, and organizations in central Kansas. There were also nearly 100 volunteers who made sure the youngsters enjoyed the day. The event is coordinated by the Osborne County Pheasants Forever Chapter.

Make plans to attend next year's NCK Outdoor Youth Fair, Saturday, September 7, 2019. To assist with the event or for more information, contact John Cockerham at 785-346-6527 or Chris Lecuyer at 785-218-7818.







## Comfort Foods

We all have foods that stir childhood memories. The smells and tastes, even the act of preparing these foods, can take us back. I have many, but some border on strange.

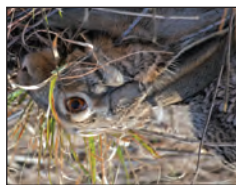
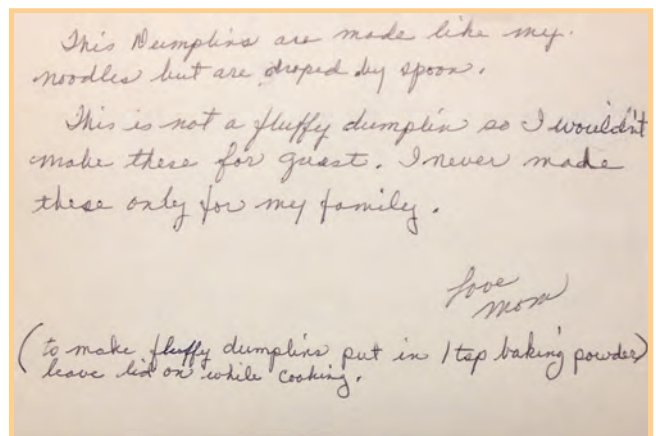
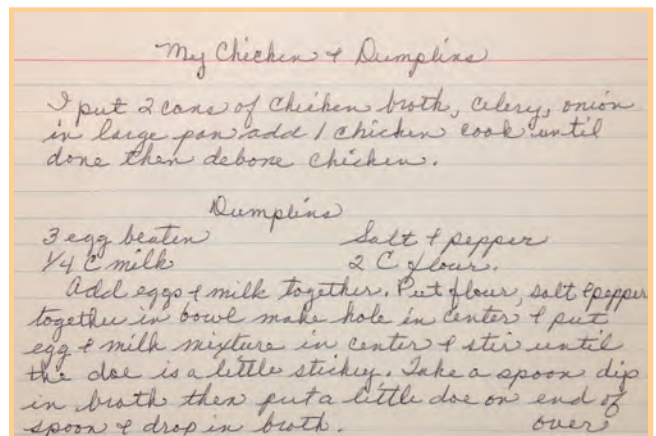
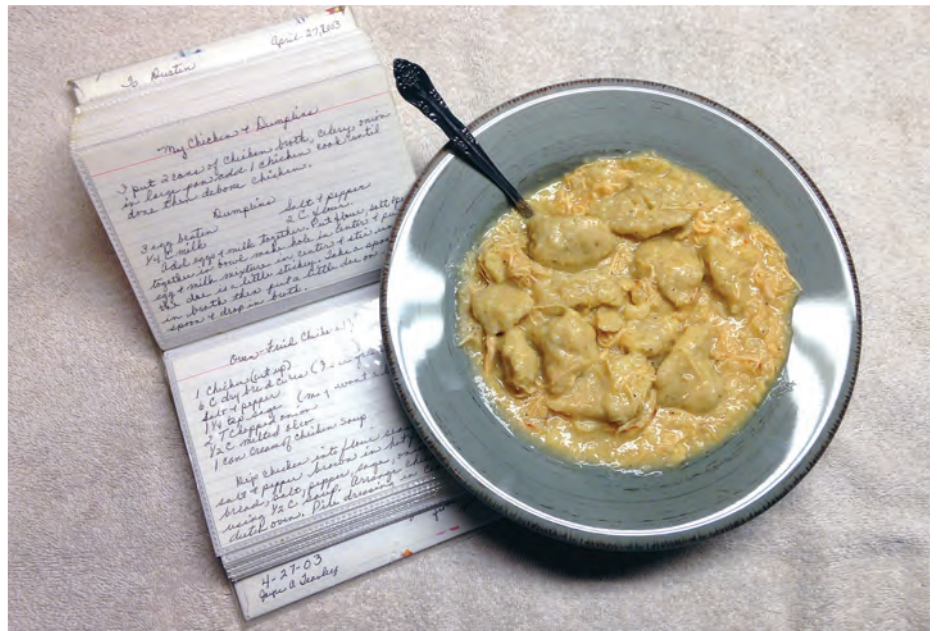
The first cold snap of fall brings two specific favorite foods from my childhood to mind, Mom's chili and her chicken and dumplings. The chicken and dumplings are the best but as it was told to me, her special recipe was an accident.

Mom hated her dumplings because one time she accidentally used her noodle recipe instead of her dumpling recipe to make dumplings. But it turned out that everyone loved them and she never went back to her old recipe. Dumplings are supposed to be light and fluffy but Mom's were dense and more like a piece of chicken. The missing ingredient in the dumplings was baking powder.

Anyway, my wife, Heather, had a craving for a batch of chicken and dumplings. And although Heather prefers fluffy dumplings, she uses my mom's recipe because I am so fond of it. After checking the freezer, we realized we were going to be short on chicken but we came across a large package of wild turkey harvested last fall.

I freeze a lot of game in zip-lock bags filled with water to increase the freezer life, but I was afraid that a full year was too long. Following the recipe, Heather included the wild turkey pieces with the chicken in her pressure cooker and once it was done and cooled, she deboned the chicken and shredded it and the turkey meat. She finished the recipe on the stove.

It was a fantastic meal. The turkey was a perfect addition to the chicken and the meal was a great break from the ball field vendors and fast foods we had consumed through summer and early fall athletics. It was like a signal to us to slow life down a little, spend more time together in the kitchen - and remember Mom.



“WHAT AM I?” answer: jackrabbbt





# The Way I See It

with Todd Workman

## A Career Celebrated

While rummaging through some old boxes in my basement, I came across a box of old plaques and trophies. I don't know why I keep those old things, but they mean something to me – nobody but me. I guess they signify an accomplishment and there was a handshake and a congratulations and then you take it home and throw it in a box.

Sometime in December of this year a piece of wood will be presented to a special man. This piece of wood will have to be far from ordinary. It must come from the heartwood of an oak tree, signifying the strength and fortitude of the man receiving it. There will likely be hundreds of people on hand to see it presented. Most of those folks will have had a hand in creating the grain of the wood that embodies the memories that make the wood so special and rich. On this plaque will be a plate that will commemorate 50 years of service to Assistant Secretary Keith Sexson.

Through all of the victories and defeats, trials and tribulations, failures and successes that challenged his life and KDWP, Keith handled them with class. He set the example of how to handle adversity, failure, defeat, and victory with humility and humor. He showed us how to

dissect important issues and negotiate for the good of the natural resources and how to do it with grace.

He was always cheery on the phone and greeted you with a big smile and a heartfelt handshake that made you feel like he was

truly glad to see you. I appreciated that because I know he wasn't always glad to see me.

This celebration event will show all of us what Keith Sexson meant not only to our agency, but to all of the wildlife agencies in America. He heads up or is an integral part of several national organizations made up of agency staff who oversee and regulate our natural resources. People will come from all over to share stories and congratulate Keith on his career.

I am looking forward to that day in December only because it is Keith's day to celebrate his accomplishments and display the immensity of his positive influence over an

entire generation of wildlife professionals. I am not looking forward to sticking my head into his office and feeling the loss when he's no longer sitting at his desk.

Keith, I wish you the very best in your retirement, as you have given us the very best of yourself. I know your grandkids will be looking forward to more time with you. Don't be a stranger. Come and visit us and know that the candy is in my lower left hand drawer whether I am there or not. Safe travels.



Let me give you a little history. Keith founded the agency in 1491 – a year before Columbus landed in the Americas. Well, that might be stretching it a bit, but I think somebody told me he arrested Buffalo Bill once for shooting over his limit of bison. At an outdoor show, Chuck Norris said something bad about Kansas and Keith scissor-kicked him in the head and made him say “Uncle Keith.” Hey, with great accomplishments come greatly exaggerated stories. What I can tell you (that is the absolute truth) is that Keith is the heart of the agency.







## Sea Gull Succotash!

text and photos by Dan Witt

Gulls are not usually featured items on our Kansas birding plate in Kansas. However, real birders know gulls, and occasionally a stranger will come through and light up the list-serves and e-mails. There was a black-backed gull that hung out at Clinton Reservoir in 2014 that had everyone's attention.

Our most common gulls are ring-billed and Franklin's. The Franklin's gulls get a lot of press due to their migration: we get about 90 percent of the Franklin's through Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira. I have seen thousands with their black heads flashing in the sunlight as they swarm in unison over the Bottoms. I researched their migration and lots of them end up in South America. That is a healthy trip! A couple of bird writers report that we get about 20 species of gulls migrating through Kansas. I haven't seen that many, but I'm not educated enough to recognize some of the less-frequent visitors. But I watch the birding websites,

reading posts from the terrific birders who keep us informed.

Gulls follow tractors and eat the bugs, worms, and rodents that are turned up. And ring-billed gulls will invade garbage or trash dumps, eating almost anything. "Gullible" comes from the propensity of gulls to fall for almost any kind of food. Their ability to adapt is nothing short of amazing. David Seibel and I traveled to Wyoming one year for a photography course, and he taught me to attract gulls with bread in some of the towns on our route. We got some great photographs!

In my research, I discovered the great black-backed gull, which lives in England and weighs up to 5 pounds and has a wingspan of more than 5 feet. They can live up to 15 years. A large population of "feral" gulls lives in some of the seaside communities and some even migrate to London, which is some distance from the coast. There are reports of them killing and eating small

dogs, pigeons in Hyde Park, and various other small mammals. They no longer go to sea to feed. It's so bad even the prime minister has suggested a "conversation" about gull control. The information suggested they attack humans fearlessly and steal food from hands and plates. One comment read, "Their droppings fall like pints of whitewash, defacing everything." I can't improve on that description. Gulls are protected, so it is not legal to cull the population or harass them in any fashion.



My favorite is the Franklin's gull. They are light and delicate and can be confused with terns. When you see thousands of them flying in concert or catching an updraft and soaring very high - it will be a memorable moment in your birding career. In the spring they have a black head with a white eye ring. In the fall they have dark areas on their heads, but it is not solid. You can go to the Bottoms and Quivira right now and see these gulls in action. While you are doing that, keep your eyes open for other waterfowl and cranes. Bring your camera and you can get great shots of gulls and shore birds in close proximity to the roads. You won't be disappointed.







## Find Your Way to Orienteering

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

What if you got lost on a hiking or hunting trip without a GPS device to give you directions home? Would you know how to find your way? What if you wanted to get lost on purpose?

I've always considered my internal compass to be accurate and finding north usually isn't difficult. But after taking an orienteering class at the fall Becoming Outdoors-Woman workshop, I have a greater appreciation for Google Maps and the ease at which it allows me to get where I'm going.

Orienteering isn't just getting familiar with your surroundings. It's really immersing yourself in them and using a plan, compass and hopefully sound judgement to determine the fastest route to your destination. Orienteering originated in Sweden in the late 1880s as part of military training and throughout time has spread internationally as a competitive sport. In a nutshell orienteering is an ambitious team navigation sport using a map and compass to cross various types of terrain, stopping at checkpoints to record a symbol, letter or obtain a punch in the shortest amount of time.

Orienteering races take place on courses for which each team is given a topographic map and a list of clues or controls that when located should lead them to the finish. Sound easy? If you aren't familiar with topographic maps, your trek can get complicated, especially when the stress of competition in unfamiliar territory is added in. Your team determines its own success by how well you strategize and adapt.

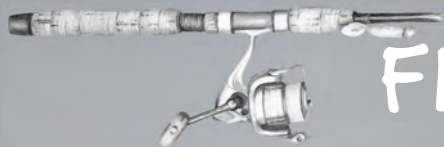
The terminology associated with orienteering can be overwhelming and I recommend getting familiar with it before you venture out. The small orienteering class I participated in

and the course I explored provided just a glimpse of the sport has to offer.

In addition to improving your land navigation and map reading skills, orienteering is a great activity for team building, physical fitness, and exploring the wonderful outdoors. Finding each checkpoint is exciting and builds confidence, and anyone can participate, including children. It's available year-round and can be done in most weather conditions. There are a variety of competitive orienteering events from trivia orienteering (correctly answering a question at each checkpoint to indicate you arrived), to night orienteering (where the race takes place at night). Foot orienteering is based more on endurance and your course is not marked. In addition to those challenges, you must run while racing! Trail orienteering is perfect for the map lovers as well as people with limited physical mobility. There are orienteering clubs in Kansas and across the United States. If you're looking for a new outdoor activity that will expand your mind and body muscles, orienteering might be just what nature ordered. For more information about orienteering in Kansas check out [www.orienteerkansan.com](http://www.orienteerkansan.com) or [www.orienteeringusa.org](http://www.orienteeringusa.org)



Mikhail Grachikov/Shutterstock illustration



## FISHIN'

## Changing Braided Line

with Mike Miller

I'm a proponent of keeping fresh line on my fishing reels, and I used to change monofilament several times each season. It's easy to tell when monofilament needs to be changed because it gets nicked up, breaks easily or just has so much spool memory it doesn't cast well. But today's modern braids and super lines can certainly be kept on reels longer.

Braids and superlines don't get spool memory, are abrasion resistant and are difficult to break no matter how old they are. However, I have noticed a problem with braids that have been left on a reel too long. The line gets so limp it continually wraps around the rod tip and guides between casts. While limp line will cast well, it's inconvenient when it continually wraps on the rod tip and if you're not paying attention, casting a heavy lure with a loop of braid around your rod tip will end badly for the your rod.

I always use a monofilament backing on my reels when I spool braid or superlines, because they will slip on the spool without the backing. And its economical to fill the spool half-way or more with old mono then finish it with braid. Even the heaviest braids have small diameters and it can take several hundred yards to fill a spool, and you'll never get down the second half the spool while fishing. When you need to change simply remove the braid to the mono backing and re-fill. Another way to save is to transfer old braid from reel to another. The old, worn line goes on first and you're left with new line that's probably never left the spool.

I've used braids for more than one season, but when they loose their color and become completely limp, it's time to change.







# Keith Sexson

## 50 Years of Wildlife Conservation

Keith Sexson belongs to an exclusive club. This is his 50th year working in wildlife conservation, entirely with one agency – the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. Sexson will retire in December and he may be the only member of that club. However, what sets Sexson apart more than his longevity, is that his work over the past 50 years has benefitted the lives of everyone who hunts, fishes and enjoys the outdoors in Kansas – everyone. And Sexson will leave Kansas' wildlife and natural resources in the best shape they've ever been.

Sexson is part of a generation of wildlife professionals who forged a plan for managing our wildlife and natural resources. And they did it with an incomprehensible dedication – long hours, low pay, and often difficult working conditions. They did it for the love of the resource and for the benefit of those who've paid the way – hunters and anglers.

"It's kind of interesting to think how I started down this road," he said. "I don't think we had a gun in the house while I was growing up. My dad didn't hunt. He wasn't opposed to it, but he was busy doing his own thing.

"But I began to take an interest in hunting and shooting, and I got a J.C. Higgins .22 rifle for Christmas when I was in the fifth grade," Sexson remembered.

He spent his time hunting and exploring on the 15 acres his parents owned on the edge of Weskan and during summers he spent on his uncles' farm. While in high school, Sexson and his friends hunted together. With money he earned working on the farm, he purchased a shotgun for pheasant hunting.

"I started getting *Outdoor Life*, *Sports Afield*, and *Field and Stream* magazines. I suspect my parents bought them for me because there were always these high school magazine fundraisers," he remembered.

"Then I joined the Outdoor Life Book Club, and I read books by the likes of Jack O'Connor about hunting dall sheep in Alaska. So, I guess that was how I was introduced, on my own, to the outdoors and that interest grew around wildlife and hunting."

Sexson talked about an image stuck in his memory that he thinks helped steer him to his life's work: the old Kansas Forestry Fish and Game Commission emblem on agency trucks.

"Kenny Knitig was the game protector who lived in Goodland and I remember him stopping by my uncles' farm to visit with them. So, his truck and his job as a game protector just kind of stuck in my mind," he said.

Sexson attended Fort Hays State University where earned a bachelor's degree in zoology.

"While I was there, I was hit again with this emblem," he said. "At the top of Albertson Hall, which was the science hall, there was a group of

agency biologists officed there – Jim Norman, Bill Hanzlick, Bill Hlavachick, and a fisheries biologist who's name I can't recall. And there was always a green truck parked outside with that emblem on the side. I remember wanting to be a part of that organization."

In 1969, Sexson was working on a master's when two positions with the agency opened up: furbearer biologist and quail biologist. He applied and was offered the quail biologist position, located in Garnett.

"By that time, I was married and had two kids, so I left them in Weskan and moved to Garnett to find a house," he said, remembering his initiation to southeast Kansas. "I fished at the city lake in the evenings after work and I ended up with the worst case of chigger bites you could imagine."

The humidity of southeast Kansas also required





adjustment and he recalled that after moving his family down in July, everyone slept on the floor in front of a window air conditioner. His office was in his home at the time.

Sexson's station was moved to Burlington where he shared a real office with regional public lands manager, Richard Hager. He was also promoted to the upland bird group supervisor position, supervising quail, prairie chicken and pheasant biologists.

When the agency went through a reorganization, his station moved to Emporia where he worked with deer biologist Bill Peabody and prairie chicken biologist Jerry Horak. When Peabody moved to Pratt, Sexson was recruited to take the big game group supervisor position in 1979.

Working on deer management was one of the most challenging and most rewarding parts of his career.

"We worked with field staff to get their opinion of what the deer population was like and brought that information together to make recommendations on permit quotas," Sexson said. "And that was pretty important at the time because it impacted people, deciding whether or not they were going to get permits."

Commission meetings were well attended when the deer recommendations were discussed, with bowhunters, muzzleloader hunters, and rifle hunters all vying for their piece of the seasons.

"Over time, I think we did a good job accommodating the various interests. It helped that the deer population didn't stop growing," he added with a chuckle. "We may be overly complicated in terms of what we offer now and someday that may need to be simplified."

After more than 15 years as the big game group leader, Sexson began to think about what was next. Though working with the deer program was rewarding, he knew that to make bigger impact, his next step was something administrative.

"The first opportunity to do that and move to Pratt was when Bob Hartmann retired," Sexson said. "He was supervising the wildlife and fisheries research and survey group. When his job opened up, I applied and was offered that position and moved to Pratt in 1995."

In 2000, assistant secretary Rob Manes left, and then

secretary Steve Williams appointed Sexson to acting assistant secretary. Soon after, he was appointed as assistant secretary and held that position through three governors and three department secretaries. Through all of those changes, he kept a positive, level-headed attitude.

"I never had an issue that looked like it would kill me or anyone else, or that it would completely upset the whole system," he said. "There were little things that came that were challenging. Sometimes you can change minds and sometimes you just have to make it happen."



As retirement nears, Sexson has thought little about what he will do without this job he has devoted the last 50 years of his life to.

"People have asked me often what I want to do in retirement and I don't have a good answer," he said. "I think I need to bring myself back around to those days when I was reading *Outdoor Life* and Jack O'Connor. Take it back to that level of just enjoying hunting and shooting. And I have two grandsons who I need to spend more time with outdoors."

When considering who influenced him in his career, it was tough for him to narrow it down to just a few. But when he began talking about the people he has worked with, he became reflective.

"They have made this job a pleasure to come to work every day because the people I work with are so dedicated, they just make things happen," he said, thoughtfully. "My job, really, has been to make sure they have the resources they needed to do good things. I also always appreciated when someone I supervised knew when they needed to come to me and when they could make a decision on their own."

In a quieter tone, like he really didn't want anyone to know this, he added. "That's why in the 20 years that I've been in Pratt, it's really been kind of an easy job, you know. I have always had good people."

The truth is that of the thousands of people who have worked for this agency, he's one of the best. Everyone will miss his knowledge, work ethic, and compassion. But those of us who've worked with him daily, will miss his ever-present smile and positive, can-do attitude. He never saw barriers, only solutions. — Mike Miller, editor





# 2018 Upland Bird Forecast

What to expect when hunting pheasant, quail *and* greater prairie chicken this year  
text by Jeff Prendergast | photos by Jon Blumb

## Forecast Factors

Two important factors impact upland game numbers during the fall hunting season: the number of breeding adults in the spring and the reproductive success of the breeding population. Reproductive success consists of the number of nests that successfully hatch and the number of chicks recruited into the fall population. Annual survival is relatively low for pheasants and quail, therefore, the fall population is more dependent on reproductive success than adult

breeding population levels. While reproductive success is a major population regulator for prairie chicken, this species' greater annual survival helps maintain hunting opportunities when nesting conditions are poor.

This forecast examines breeding populations and reproductive success of pheasants, quail, and prairie chickens. Breeding population data were gathered during spring surveys for pheasants (crow counts), quail (whistle counts), and prairie chickens (lek counts). Data for

reproductive success were collected during late-summer roadside surveys for pheasants and quail. Reproductive success of prairie chickens cannot be easily assessed using the same methods because they generally do not associate with roads like pheasants and quail.

This year, Kansas was very dry between October and April, resulting in poor habitat conditions entering the nesting season. Heavy May rains in the western half of the state greatly improved cover, while eastern regions

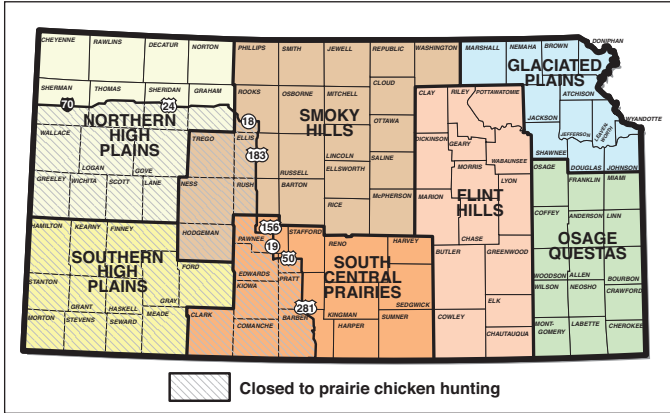


remained dry. Dry conditions limited burning in the Flint Hills, retaining better-than-average nesting cover and may have improved nesting success across all eastern regions. While mois-

relatively high densities. A late 2017 spring blizzard in western Kansas reduced nesting success and resulted in a decline in the 2018 pheasant crow survey. Winter precipitation was limited

## QUAIL

Last fall's Kansas bobwhite quail harvest was the highest recorded in the country, finishing just above Texas, and while hunting isn't expected to be quite as good in 2018, Kansas will still have one of the best quail populations in the country. Precipitation patterns observed over the past five years altered vegetation, increasing both the quality and quantity of habitat, allowing for a modern quail boom. While total harvest has remained well below average due to lower hunter participation, the average daily bag has remained at the best levels observed in 20 years. The bobwhite whistle survey in 2018 showed only a slight decline compared to the 2017's highest values ever recorded from this survey, which began in 1997. Dry weather in the east and wet weather in the west provided optimism for high production and another banner year. Early reports indicated lots of birds along roadsides and throughout wheat fields during harvest. However, observations on the statewide roadside survey were significantly down this year, with only the Osage Cuestas showing improvement. Densities in the eastern-most regions are not as high, but all regional indices remain



ture in the west is usually a good thing, there can be too much of a good thing. Heavy rainfall continued in the west during the nesting season, with some areas receiving more than 12 inches above normal rainfall. Storms resulted in several localized hail and flooding events, which likely caused additional mortality within the impacted areas. Overall, extreme conditions appear to have reduced production this year, as indicated by lower roadside counts. The resulting vegetation may challenge hunters as there is excessive winter habitat this fall. However, this winter habitat should also guard against losses from severe winter weather.

was delayed, which typically benefits pheasant production, the short wheat limited its usefulness for nesting. Roadside counts indicate a below-average pheasant population this year. The combination of heavy cover and a later peak hatch may have reduced the number of detectable birds on the counts, but generally survey conditions were ideal. The best areas will likely be in the northern half of the Kansas pheasant range with areas of high densities also found in central and far southwestern regions.

## Statewide Summary PHEASANT

Kansas reported the second highest pheasant harvest among states in 2017, and Kansas will still have one of the best pheasant populations in the country this fall. Pheasant hunting in Kansas should be fair to locally good this year. Pheasant densities had been slowly recovering from 2013 to 2016 with a few areas reaching





near or above their respective long-term averages. The best opportunities will again be found in the central regions, extending east into the northern Flint Hills.

#### GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

Kansas is home to greater and lesser prairie chickens. Greater prairie chickens are found primarily in the tallgrass and mixed-grass prairies that occur in the eastern third and northern half of the state. The Southwest Prairie Chicken Unit, where lesser prairie chickens are found, will remain closed to hunting this year. Hunting opportunities will be best in the Northern High Plains and Smoky Hills Regions this fall, where populations have been increasing or stable. All prairie chicken hunters are required to purchase a \$2.50 Prairie Chicken Permit in addition to their hunting license. This permit allows hunter activity and harvest to be measured and will improve management activities and inform policy decisions.

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## Regional Forecasts

### *Northern High Plains /Northwest*

**Pheasant** – Pheasant hunting opportunities should remain fair to good, but there will be fewer birds in the area than last year. The spring pheasant crow survey index was the highest regional index this year but remained below-average for the region. There was a significant decline in the regional pheasant index on the roadside survey this year compared to 2017. Production was assumed to be negatively impacted by heavy rainfall throughout the summer, which was confirmed by ongoing research in the region. The highest densities will be found in the northern half of the region, particularly the northeastern counties.

**Quail** – Quail are limited in this region and most are taken opportunistically by pheasant hunters. The best areas are in the eastern counties of the region; areas where

adequate woody cover is present. This region is at the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range in Kansas and densities are relatively low compared to central and southern Kansas. Densities on the summer roadside survey decreased this year and remain the lowest in the state.

**Prairie Chicken** – Prairie chicken populations continue to expand in both numbers and range within the region. Lesser prairie-chickens occur in the southern and central portions of the region and remain closed to prairie chicken hunting this year (see map for unit boundaries). Within the area that is open, the best hunting opportunities will be found in the northeastern portion of the region in native prairies and nearby CRP grasslands.

### *Smoky Hills/Northcentral*

**Pheasant** – Pheasant hunters should expect fair to good opportunities throughout much of the region. The spring crow survey





saw a slight decrease, followed by a decrease in the summer roadside counts. Despite this decrease, the Smoky Hills had the highest regional roadside density in the state. Regional harvest estimates were highest in the Smoky Hills last year but are expected to decrease with decreased densities. The northern half of the region contained the highest roadside counts; however, counties in the southwestern portion of the region along the border of the South-Central Prairies observed good counts as well.

**Quail** – Quail hunting should be fair to good throughout the region this year. The spring whistle survey showed a slight decrease this year. Significant decreases were observed on roadside surveys as well. Given there has been very high densities for the past three years, the region retained the highest roadside index for quail in 2018, despite the losses. While quail in northcentral Kansas have seemed ubiquitous across the landscape the past few years, they have historically been spotty in the region. The Smoky Hills will likely offer above-average densities; however, with declines this year, quail will return to more historic patterns. Densities were best in the central portion, extending eastward toward the northern Flint Hills.

**Prairie Chicken** – Prairie Chicken hunting opportunities in the region will be good to great. This region includes some of the highest densities and access in the state for prairie chickens. Greater prairie chickens occur throughout the Smoky Hills where large areas of native rangeland are intermixed with CRP and cropland. The best hunting will be found in the central portion of the region, but several other areas support huntable

densities of birds in appropriate habitat. Lesser prairie chickens occur only in portions of a few counties in the southwestern portion of the region and those areas are closed to hunting (see map for unit boundaries).

### *Glaciated Plains /Northeast*

**Pheasant** – Pheasant densities across the region are typically low, especially relative to other areas in central and western Kansas. Success will remain poor with hunting opportunities existing only in pockets of habitat, primarily in the northwestern portion of the region or areas managed for upland birds. Spring crow counts this year declined from 2017. Roadside surveys showed increases; however, only two routes observed pheasants in 2018.

**Quail** – Quail hunters should expect fair to locally good opportunities this year. Bobwhites on the spring whistle count remained stable and above-average. This included a few routes that maintained extraordinarily high counts for the region. Roadside counts indicated a slight decline, although northeastern Kansas will have densities similar to the western regions this year where larger decreases were observed. While urbanization and succession have deteriorated habitat and caused long-term population



declines, carry-over birds from 2017 should maintain above-average opportunity for this area. Opportunities are expected to be similar to last year and above average. Roadside counts were highest in the northwestern portion of the region.

**Prairie Chicken** – Very little prairie chicken range occurs in this region and opportunities are limited. Opportunities for encounters are highest in the western edges of the region along the Flint Hills, where some large areas of native rangeland still exist.

### *Osage Questas/Southeast*

**Pheasant** – This region is outside the primary pheasant range and very limited hunting opportunity



is available. Pheasants are occasionally found in the northwestern portion of the region in very low densities.

**Quail** – While long-term trends have been declining, spring surveys have been steadily increasing over the last decade and remained stable this year. Roadside surveys indicated there was a slight increase in 2018, likely in response to dry weather in early summer. This was the only regional increase for quail observed this year. Hunters should expect densities similar to slightly above last year and remaining above average. Areas where birds were found last year should offer the best opportunities, with the best hunting in the northwestern counties in grasslands extending east off the Flint Hills.

**Prairie Chicken** – Greater prairie chickens occur in the central and northwestern portions of this region in large areas of native rangeland. Populations have consistently declined over the long term. Fire suppression and loss of native grassland has gradually reduced the amount of suitable habitat in the region. The best hunting opportunities will be in large blocks of native rangeland along the edge of the Flint Hills region.

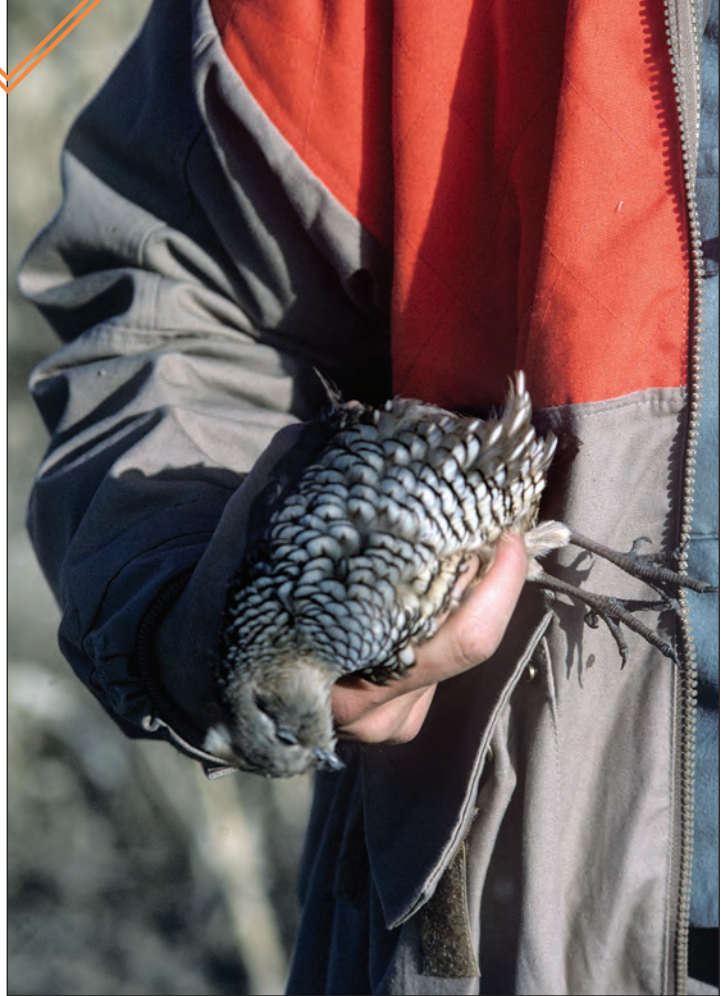
### **Flint Hills**

**Pheasant** – This region is on the eastern edge of the primary pheasant range and offers limited opportunity. Highest pheasant densities are typically found on the western edge of the Flint Hills. While the spring crow counts remained stable this year, the summer roadside survey indicated a decrease. The best opportunities will be found in the northwest portion of the region bordering the Smoky Hills.

**Quail** – Quail hunting in the Flint Hills should be fair to good. The region had a slight decrease in the index of whistling bobwhites after record highs last year. While summer roadside counts were lower than in 2017, regional reports indicate good bird numbers, very good cover, and weather that likely promoted production — particularly in the northern half of the region where estimates largely improved.

Additionally, carryover birds from high spring densities will help maintain opportunity. Quail densities in the core of the Flint Hills should have improved this year, where prolonged drought reduced large-scale annual burning, increasing available nesting habitat. The northern half of the region recorded the highest roadside indices this year.

**Prairie Chicken** – The Flint Hills is the largest intact tallgrass prairie in North America and has served as a core habitat for greater prairie chickens for many years. Since the early 1980s, inappropriate range burning frequencies, both too little and too much, have gradually degraded habitat quality, and prairie chicken numbers have declined. Production should improve in the core of the Flint Hills this year due to prolonged drought reducing large-scale burning and



increasing available nesting cover. Hunting opportunities will likely be better than last year throughout the region.

### **Southcentral Prairies**

**Pheasant** – Pheasant hunters should expect a fair to good season this year. The spring crow survey indicated a decline from 2017. However, the summer roadside survey showed a slight increase from last year. Based on roadside surveys, opportunities are expected to remain similar to last year with highest pheasant densities found in the northern tier of counties along the border of the Smoky Hills region.

**Quail** – Quail hunting should remain fair to good throughout the region. The spring whistle survey showed a significant decrease, followed by a decline on the summer roadside survey. Despite this decline, the region





maintained near average densities, with the second highest regional index on the roadside survey. Like the Flint Hills, reports indicate quail numbers may be better than roadside surveys have indicated. The intermixing of quality cover provides more consistent opportunities in the Southcentral Prairies compared to other regions. Roadside counts were highest in the north-central portion of the region, although relatively consistent counts were observed throughout

the region and quality opportunities should exist region-wide.


**Prairie Chicken** – This region is almost entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens and areas included in their range are closed to prairie chicken hunting (see map for unit boundaries). Greater prairie chickens occur in very limited areas in the remainder of this region. Prairie chickens within the open unit in this region will occur in very low densities within the remaining large tracts of rangeland in the north-eastern portion of the region.

### *Southern High Plains /Southwest*

**Pheasant** – Pheasant hunting will remain fair to good, with bird numbers similar to last year. The pheasant crow index decreased this spring after heavy spring snowfall impacted nesting success in 2017. Roadside surveys showed slight declines in the region, after heavy rainfall throughout spring and summer likely decreased production. The highest densities will be in the

western half of the region where the rainfall wasn't as extreme.

**Quail** – Opportunities will remain fair to good. The quail population in this region is highly variable depending on weather. Whistle counts were significantly higher, with populations recovering from losses from a 2017 late-spring blizzard. This increase returned the spring surveys to well above the long-term average and was the highest regional density for the year. Above-average precipitation created good habitat, but poorly timed rainfall events appear to have negatively impacted production. Roadside surveys were down from last year. The highest densities will be found along riparian corridors where adequate woody structure exists. Scaled quail are also found in this region but made up a smaller proportion of quail observations this year than in 2017.

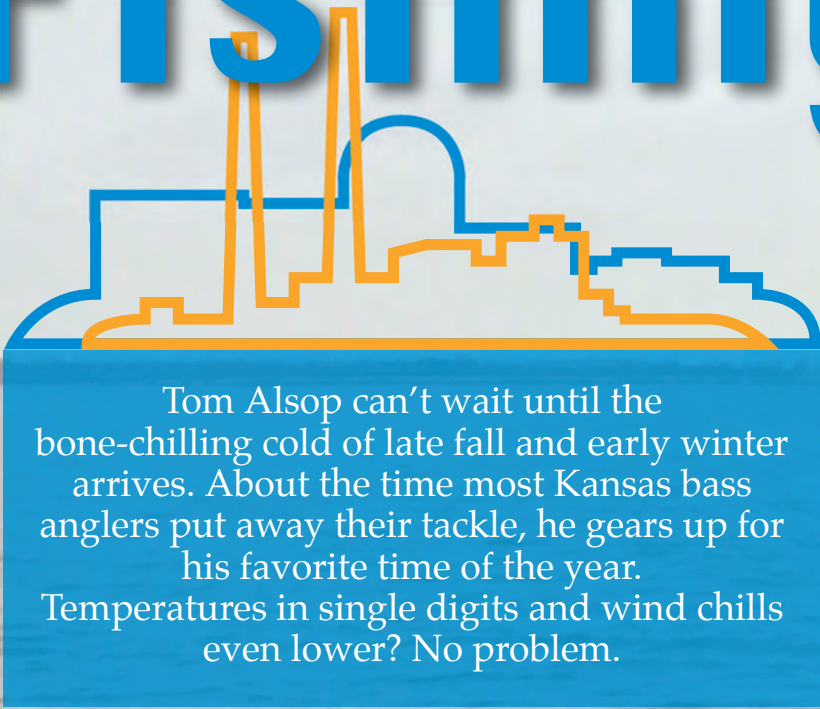
**Prairie Chicken** – This region is entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens. Prairie chicken hunting is closed in this area this year. 





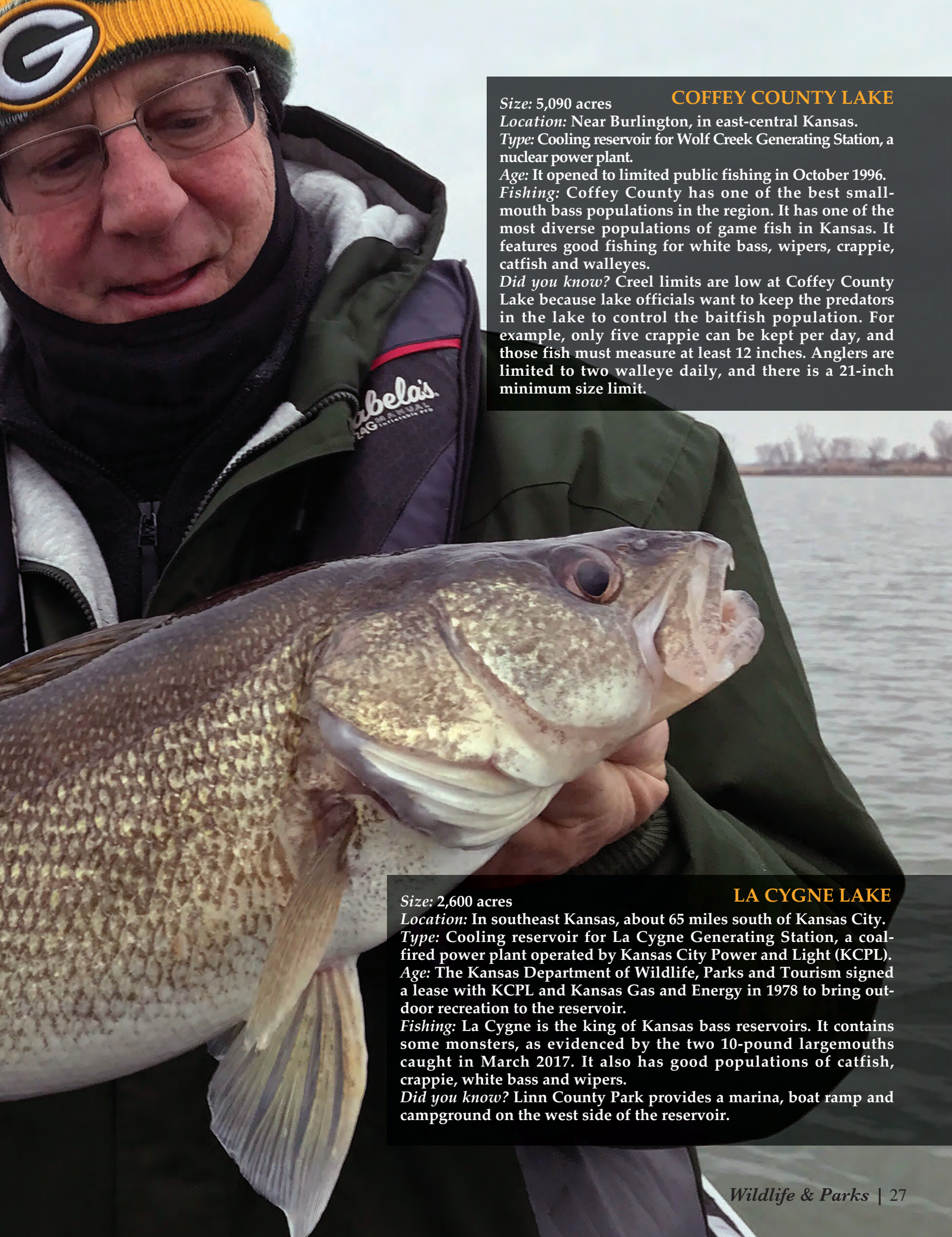
text and photos by Brent Frazee

# POWER-PLANT Fishing



Tom Alsop can't wait until the bone-chilling cold of late fall and early winter arrives. About the time most Kansas bass anglers put away their tackle, he gears up for his favorite time of the year. Temperatures in single digits and wind chills even lower? No problem.





### COFFEY COUNTY LAKE

*Size:* 5,090 acres

*Location:* Near Burlington, in east-central Kansas.

*Type:* Cooling reservoir for Wolf Creek Generating Station, a nuclear power plant.

*Age:* It opened to limited public fishing in October 1996.

*Fishing:* Coffey County has one of the best small-mouth bass populations in the region. It has one of the most diverse populations of game fish in Kansas. It features good fishing for white bass, wipers, crappie, catfish and walleyes.

*Did you know?* Creel limits are low at Coffey County Lake because lake officials want to keep the predators in the lake to control the baitfish population. For example, only five crappie can be kept per day, and those fish must measure at least 12 inches. Anglers are limited to two walleye daily, and there is a 21-inch minimum size limit.

### LA CYGNE LAKE

*Size:* 2,600 acres

*Location:* In southeast Kansas, about 65 miles south of Kansas City.

*Type:* Cooling reservoir for La Cygne Generating Station, a coal-fired power plant operated by Kansas City Power and Light (KCPL).

*Age:* The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism signed a lease with KCPL and Kansas Gas and Energy in 1978 to bring outdoor recreation to the reservoir.

*Fishing:* La Cygne is the king of Kansas bass reservoirs. It contains some monsters, as evidenced by the two 10-pound largemouths caught in March 2017. It also has good populations of catfish, crappie, white bass and wipers.

*Did you know?* Linn County Park provides a marina, boat ramp and campground on the west side of the reservoir.



**W**hen Kansas power plants Wolf Creek and La Cygne generate electricity to keep home-bound bass anglers warm, Alsop knows it's time to get out.

"I catch more bass in the winter than I do any other time of the year," said Alsop, 53, a well-known tournament angler from Overland Park. "With the warm water flowing into the lake, the fish don't know it's winter.

"They're a lot more comfortable than we are. They're active. And that's the time to go."

Alsop can relate a fish story from last winter as an example. It was the coldest day of the year, with the wind chill a reported 10-below. That was perfect for a hot day of fishing, in Alsop's eyes. He and his son, Kyle, set out in the fog-shrouding Coffey County Lake, the cooling reservoir for Wolf Creek Generating Station, and quickly discovered they were in for a special day. Working Zara Spook topwater lures – yes, topwater baits in the middle of winter – they caught and released more than 100 fish, most of them largemouth and smallmouth bass.

"The water temperature in the area where warm water entered the lake was 65 degrees, and the fish were active," Alsop said. "The baitfish were drawn to that warmer water and the bass followed them in.

"It was crazy, catching that many bass, and most of them keepers, in the middle of January."

### High-powered Fishing, Kansas Style

Welcome to the electric world of power plant fishing. From late fall through early March, it's perpetual spring for the fish living in the cooling reservoirs.

The plants at Wolf Creek and La Cygne pump water from the reservoirs to cool generators, then send it back into the bodies of water in a heated state. When the demand for electricity is highest – as it is in the cold of late fall and winter – the water temperature climbs, often into the 60s at a time when other reservoirs are iced over.

"Being out in that kind of weather isn't for everybody," said Alsop. "It weeds out the fair-weather fishermen.

"You have to dress for it. That day we caught all those bass, we saw only one other boat on the lake. But I'll put up with the cold for that type of fishing."

Brian Ondrejka, a Wisconsin transplant turned popular Kansas fishing guide, knows all about putting up with a little pain to make a big fishing gain.



La Cygne Reservoir, in Linn County, is arguably the best trophy largemouth bass water in Kansas. Last spring, fisheries biologist Don George reported sampling 17 bass longer than 20 inches per hour of electrofishing.

He, too, can tell stories about some wild fishing in the coldest part of the year. Like the time in January when he and his dad were out on a gloomy, misty, 40-degree day at Coffey County.

"My dad cast a swimbait into 3 feet of water and he caught an 8-pound walleye, the biggest he has ever caught," said Ondrejka, who runs the Kansas Angling Experience Guide Service out of his home in Lawrence. "What was wild, that walleye had a partially digested shad still in its mouth.

"The fish were just gorging themselves."

Such success is hardly a fluke for Ondrejka, though. He caught his personal-best smallmouth, a 4-pounder, in the winter at Coffey County. His customers have caught wipers in the 8- to 9-pound range, and everything from white bass to big catfish.

His key to finding the gamefish? It might sound simplistic, but he focuses on areas that are rich in shad.

"Sometimes, the gulls make it pretty easy," he said. "If they're concentrated and diving down on the water, they're feeding on shad. That's where you want to be."

Ondrejka often uses spinning tackle with 10-pound test braided line and a 10-pound test fluorocarbon leader. He casts swimbaits on a one-quarter-ounce jighead. He also catches fish on a



variety of crankbaits, lipless baits and other plastics.

That's in contrast to Alsop, who rolls out the big tackle when he is fishing topwater for bass at either Coffey County or La Cygne. He uses a 7-foot, heavy-action rod and a baitcasting reel spooled with 50-pound test braided line.

"I don't want any stretch in my line when I hook one of those big ones," said Alsop.

## La Cygne: Home of The Big Ones

As spectacular as the cold-weather fishing can be at Coffey County, La Cygne has an even better reputation for producing giant bass. Anglers and fisheries biologists alike know the big ones reside in the 2,600-acre reservoir about 60 miles south of Kansas City.

Alsop landed a 10-pound, 6-ounce largemouth bass at La Cygne in 1996. Six years ago, his son Kyle – who later went on to become a national champion angler in the collegiate ranks while at K-State – caught one that weighed 9 pounds, 2 ounces.

But their bass, which were released, certainly weren't in a class by themselves. La Cygne was back in the news in March 2017 when two 10-pound bass were caught and released.

First, Jeremy Conway of Lawrence landed a 10.55-pound largemouth on his first cast in a tournament. A day later, Kit Lueg of Stilwell caught one that tipped the scales at 10.1 pounds. Though both bass were released, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism fisheries biologist Don George is convinced they weren't the same fish.

"It's not uncommon to find 8- to 9-pound bass when we do electrofishing surveys," said George. "We've even caught a few over 10 pounds.

"Part of it is that the fish have a longer growing season in the warm water. We have a good shad population, and we think there are some remnants in the gene pool of the Florida strain largemouths that were stocked years ago."

Florida strain largemouths, which grow bigger than their northern cousins, were stocked in the early 1980s in hopes that a trophy fishery would develop. When surveys indicated their survival rate wasn't good, stockings were discontinued. But George theorizes that some genes from those fish still remain in the La Cygne bass population.

During testing last spring, George sampled 17 bass longer than 20 inches per hour of elec-



At Coffey County Lake, anglers must check in and out at the gate house. Everyone onboard a boat must wear a life jacket at all times. Special length and creel limits are designed to keep numbers of predator fish high and numbers of shad in check.

trofishing. Those fish were measured, then released.

That data from biologists, and anglers, led Bassmaster Magazine to put La Cygne on this year's list of the top 100 bass lakes in the nation.

"What's cool for me is that around 1980, I was a fisheries aide for Fish and Game (then, the Kansas Fish and Game Commission) and I helped stock Florida strain bass at La Cygne," George said. "I was with them when we went to Little Rock to pick up the fish, then I helped stock them.

"It's come full-circle. This recognition (Bassmaster Magazine) is a fantastic acknowledgement of what we have at La Cygne."

## Big Ones Don't Come Easily

Don't get the wrong idea. These giant bass at La Cygne, and plentiful bites at Coffey County, don't come easily. For every spectacular day of fishing at the two power-plant reservoirs, there are plenty of others when the fish just don't cooperate. Temporary lulls in the generating schedule, whether for scheduled maintenance or a lack of demand for electricity, can cause the water temperature to plummet in the winter. When that happens, La Cygne and Coffey County quickly become like any other Kansas reservoir – filled with cold water and sluggish fish.

But when conditions are right, the fishing can be memorable.

Both reservoirs have miles of riprap and rocky banks, ideal fish habitat. And when the water is warm, the fish often move shallow and are active.

"I don't have trouble getting people to hire me in the winter, even when it gets real cold," Ondrejka said. "A lot of people have seen my videos and they know I'm not just telling fish stories." 🐟







# Hunting Normal

text and photos by Michael Pearce  
outdoor content manager, Tourism Division

Each fall, a community comes together to ensure youngsters battling life-threatening illnesses can forget and live normal for a while. It's called Life Hunt.

A lifetime with muscular dystrophy has robbed Mavrick Harper of fleet-footed games of tag or stealing third base in a big game. But last December the progressive disease couldn't subdue the 10-year-old's enthusiasm on a morning in Pawnee County.

Around and around a patch of brush he ran. The limp that was so obvious walking to a deer blind earlier seemed gone. So was his shyness.

"I can't slow down. I've never been this excited," said Mavrick, his usually soft and slow southern voice echoing through the Arkansas River lowlands. "I just shot a buck and I'm just so excited."

He chattered nearly non-stop through a 20-minute photo shoot and loading the big-bodied

whitetail onto an open trailer. Mavrick so loved his buck he wanted to sit beside it on the open trailer ride back to Larned. He didn't miss a verbal beat when told he'd have to ride inside the SUV. He blithered on and on.

"We spent two days trying to get him to talk and now we can't get him to shut up," said Tim Schaller, flashing a wry grin, as he sat in the SUV driven by his son, Randy. "It's pretty obvious why we do this."

Schaller's "this" is the annual Life Hunt held during the firearm deer season in Pawnee County. In its 16th year, Life Hunt has annually hosted at least two kids with life-threatening illnesses. Mavrick and his brother, Trevis, share the same disease and were last year's

Life Hunt youth hunters.

Maladies have included several kinds of cancer, potentially fatal heart conditions and ominous tumors. Some have arrived having already experienced more than 50 surgeries in their short lifetimes. Some have been confined to wheelchairs or missing up to three limbs. Sadly, some have died within a few months of their trip to Kansas. Others regressed so fast that Life Hunt was probably the last hunt of their young lives.

Life Hunt specializes in taking kids who might otherwise never get a chance to go.

"No matter what, we always find a way to get them out hunting," said Schaller. "Always."

And it's the "we" that helps make Life Hunts so special. What



began as an idea Schaller and a few hunting buddies came up with has grown to incorporate hundreds of citizens in and around small-town Larned.

“People just keep stepping up to help – there have been so many,” said Schaller, a Larned architect. “So many have contributed a lot and they were never really asked.”

Life Hunt began when Schaller and some local hunting buddies, his son Randy and Mike Houser, decided it was time to share what they’d long taken for granted – great deer hunting in Pawnee County.

Year after year, hunters bow-killed great bucks. Dens were full of shoulder mounts, and antlers the size many hunters never take, were hanging in rows in garages.

“We finally just decided there had to be a better use for these kinds of animals,” said Schaller, “and we started looking into a way to share them with others who might never get a chance

otherwise. It’s had its challenges, though, that’s for sure.”

Initially the hunts resembled those of able-bodied hunters. Guides and hosted children sat out in the elements, or maybe within a thin-cloth blind, which left many of the kids chilled to the bone because of their conditions. Since, things have evolved to enclosed and insulated blinds with heaters if needed. Special shooting tables have been added to help often weak or unsteady young shooters to make good shots.

When one young hunter, 14-year-old Nicholas Santonastasso, arrived with no legs and just one

Mavrick Harper has dealt with muscular dystrophy all of his life. The Life Hunt let him forget his challenges and enjoy Kansas deer hunting for three days.

arm with one finger, volunteers rigged a shooting rest that Nicholas could move and aim with his chin and shoulder, then pull the trigger with his finger.

On the first morning of his hunt Nicholas made a perfect shot on a heavy-horned nine-pointer, the kind most of his hunting friends back in New Jersey have never seen.

“I can’t even call it a dream hunt because it’s so far past anything we ever dreamed about for Nicholas,” said his father, Michael Santonastasso.

Just getting the kids any ole deer has never been the goal at Life Hunt. Guides want the kids to go home with a true trophy,

“These kids haven’t been sitting at home dreaming of just shooting a deer. They’ve been dreaming of shooting a big trophy,” Schaller said not long after Nicholas shot his trophy buck several years ago. “A lot of people shoot deer, but few people in the country ever get to shoot





Trevis Harper made a perfect hit on a big doe late on the last morning of his hunt.



bucks like these kids (often) get. We want them to go home with something to show off, to have stories to tell and be envied by local hunters for a change.”

And so it has usually gone. Matthew Billy, 11, the other youth who hunted with Nicholas, shot a typical 12-pointer that probably scored more than 160 inches on the Boone & Crockett measuring system. In 2012 Ryan Teall, a 14-year-old from northern Florida, shot a tall-tined eight-pointer that scored around 140 inches.

“Let me tell you, here in the Florida panhandle if somebody shoots a 110-inch buck it’s a giant,” said Byron Barlow, Ryan’s stepfather. “People who’d been hunting all their lives came to see it, and listen to the story. Ryan

loved showing it off.”

Barlow also said the Life Hunt experience “...was probably the highlight of Ryan’s life.”

Sadly a brain tumor took Ryan’s life a few months after his Life Hunt.

The hunts involve far more than just the guide who takes the child hunting afield. Life Hunt has always tried to relieve as much financial stress as possible on a family sending a child. For many years the hunt covered the cost of the young hunter and a parent/guardian. The cost of the deer permits has always been paid, too. Through time, and as community support has grown, more and more of the event is funded for the Life Hunt participants. Funds have always been raised to pay for expensive non-resident deer permits and travel for the youth and parent or guardian. Often they travel by air.

The hunt’s first night is a fund-

raising dinner and auction, with most of the food, cooking and auction items donated. Many local citizens and businesses annually write checks to the program.

“How can you not help support something like this – something so special for these kids,” said Jim Froetschner. “You look at all the work the people like Tim and Mike do to get the kids a good hunt, and providing some financial help really isn’t such a big deal. We’ve enjoyed getting involved, and having a chance to meet the kids and their families at the banquet.”

Like several businesses, Froetschner’s auction house has a “wall of fame,” with photos of all of the kids, and their deer, who’ve participated in the 16 hunts.

“We get a lot of people who come through here and really look at those photos,” said Froetschner. “You can’t look at those pictures and not feel happy for those kids. But they also make you really





Maverick's buck was made possible by the contributions and volunteer efforts of many members of the Larned community. Organizer Tim Schaller is continually amazed at community members' generosity.

Last year B & B Quality Meats, in Larned, processed Maverick's buck for free. Macksville taxidermist Mike Winebarger volunteered to mount last year's deer, for free, too.

Increases in funding has allowed the already great event to offer even more. For the past five years, Life Hunt has also

invited a Wounded Warrior. Instead of just the ill child, and one adult, the hunt can now pay the transportation expenses for the child's entire family. All five members of Maverick's and Trevis' family came to Larned last year. Their father, Jake, accompanied the boys and guides afield. That left their mother, Brandee, and little brother, Evrett, plenty of free time.

"I got to sleep until 8 this morning at the hotel and it was so wonderful," said Brandee Harper. "With three boys at home, you have any idea how often that happens? Not very often. The hunt has been like a vacation for all of us. It's been good to all get out together."

Just as importantly, most families have said, is the way the Larned community has welcomed them. Brandee Harper com-

mented on the town's friendliness at last year's Christmas parade, and in the library and businesses.

The evening after he shot his buck, 14-year-old Nicholas, along with the others at that year's Life Hunt, had dinner at a local Mexican restaurant. Nicholas, no stranger to fun and pranks, got into a duel blowing spitwads through a straw with Houser. From another booth a man probably in his 80s got in on the fight when he bounced a spitwad off the boy's head. Others joined in. After that, for several long minutes it was a spitwad war with the kid from New Jersey against a half-dozen or more soda-straw snipers. Tiny pieces of rolled paper peppered Nicholas like wind-driven sleet. At times the boy was laughing so hard he fell over on the bench of the booth where he was sitting. Each time he pushed himself back up with his arm and shot another well-aimed spitwad at one of his attackers.

But have no doubts, it's the deer hunting that rates the highest of the so many memories kids take from a trip to Larned's Life Hunt. And, the deer hunting has mostly lived up to the dreams of the sick children. Life Hunt leases or has permission on several thousand acres of sandhills and river bottom land.

Large bait stations are maintained to help keep big bucks on the property, and away from

appreciate it if you have healthy kids and grandkids."

Schaller could almost write a book about how some of the donations have come to the Life Hunt program. One day a farmer he'd never met walked into the office and handed over a \$500 check, and simply said, "The wheat harvest was better than expected." The man then turned, and left. Schaller has read obituaries, of people he didn't know, that said instead of flowers, memorial contributions should be made to Life Hunt.

Leaving a local restaurant an evening during the hunt, a man in paint-stained clothes walked up and shook Schaller's hand as a way to put two \$50 bills in his palm.

"See that, \$100 and I don't even know that guy," said Schaller. "That happens all the time. Isn't that great?"



roads that, unfortunately, are often patrolled by poachers. The stations also help keep old, trophy bucks in a small area for the minutes it often takes a physically-challenged young hunter to prepare for the shot. Success rates have been 100-percent since the hunt began, though Schaller said many hunts have stretched to the last minutes of the last day.

"We've been blessed with a lot of eleventh-hour bucks, and usually nice bucks," said Schaller. "Sometimes it's like they just appear. We think we've had some divine intervention, there's no doubt about that and these kids deserve it."

Without question, though, he said the 2017 event offered the toughest hunting. Warm temperatures, high winds and a full moon all but ended daylight movement for big deer. Trail cameras showed mature bucks in front of every blind the days

before and days after the hunt. But sightings of huge bucks were almost nil during last year's Life Hunt for the Harper brothers.

Schaller wisely had Mavrick shoot a decent buck the second of the three-day hunt. He also shot a doe the last morning. Trevis put in long hours but saw no nice bucks. He did make a perfect hit on a big doe late on his last morning on the hunt.

More limited by muscular dystrophy than his brother, Trevis ran no laps around his deer. His father helped him up and down to touch, then tag his deer. The boy took a tumble amid the excitement. But nothing could hold back his attitude and happiness that spilled out loud and clear. Easily a dozen times he blurted out, "Awwwesssoome!" until the deer was loaded.

Leaving the pasture, the doe in the back of Houser's pick up, Trevis saw his brother and

Schaller parked up ahead. Trevis was hollering about his first-ever deer 50 yards before Houser pulled to a stop. When he failed to get his window lowered, Trevis compensated by just shouting louder about the deer, his perfect shot and how good the venison would taste.

Mavrick had taken his doe that morning and had stories to share, too. So, like good brothers, they did it at the same time, each trying to talk louder than the other. For several wonderful minutes the brothers rattled on louder and faster like a pair of Gatling guns.

Schaller, his son Randy, and Houser listened to the boys and just smiled.

Even at its toughest, Larned's Life Hunt brought immense joy to hunters who'd probably not experience it any other way. 🐻

Hunter success rates have been 100 percent since the program began 16 years ago. However, providing quality outdoor experiences is the goal; letting these youngsters enjoy the outdoors the way many hunters take for granted; even if just for three days.







# FORENSIC FILES:

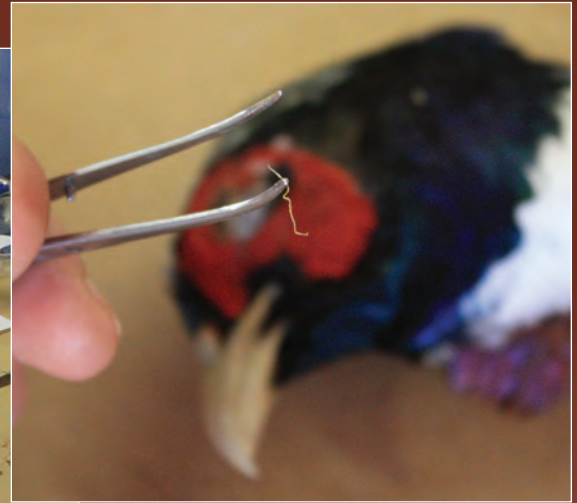
## ARE EYEWORMS KILLING QUAIL?

text by Jeff Prendergast  
wildlife biologist, Hays

Kansas Sportsman have enjoyed some of the best upland bird hunting opportunities in the country. While the Dakota's typically have higher densities of pheasants, and bobwhites are often in greater numbers in Texas; Kansas' position in the country maintains the highest combined density of these species ranking in the top 3 for harvest for both species annually. While this trend has continued, populations over the last 50 years have declined, most notable in the bobwhite quail. This decline is not limited to Kansas and has occurred across its entire range. Most states have observed a more dramatic decline than the Great Plains states. Even so the great plains have not been entirely spared. In 2010, conditions in the famous rolling

plains region of Texas appeared to be ideal for raising young, however fall surveys showed that the population didn't respond. This left researchers and hunters baffled and looking for an explanation beyond the traditional weather and habitat that could explain the observed population. Parasites emerged as one of the leading hypothesis, namely eyeworm. This parasite had been documented decades earlier within game birds, and additional investigation found that the parasite was found across a large region and a majority of the birds examined in the Texas study were infected. This left sportsman across the country asking questions about what the impacts of eyeworms could be in their backyard.





Biologists collected 289 bobwhite heads, 218 pheasant heads, 6 scaled quail heads and 4 greater prairie chicken heads, from hunters. They were then dissected to see if they carried eyeworms.

### **The Defendant: *Oxyspirura petrowi* Alias - “Eyeworm”**

Eyeworms are a parasitic nematode that anchor themselves in the eye and surrounding membranes and ducts to feed on blood from their host. *Oxyspirura petrowi* is a bird specialist eyeworm that has been documented in several species including important Kansas game birds (pheasant, quail, and prairie chickens), many songbirds, and domestic poultry. The species has an indirect life cycle meaning that it requires an intermediate host. In this case adults live and breed in membranes and ducts around the eye of the infected birds. Eggs are laid in tear ducts that drain into the throat and enter the digestive tract. The eggs are expelled in the bird’s excrement and ingested by an intermediate arthropod host—most likely a cockroach. The larvae develop in the arthropod where they create cysts waiting for the opportunity to infect their terminal host i.e. an unfortunate bird. Birds become infected when they consume an infected arthropod. Once consumed the larvae are triggered to be released from the cyst by the bird’s body temperature. They quickly migrate from the crop of the bird, along the esophagus, to the eye cavity where they anchor and develop into adults. Once mature, the parasites can migrate between the eyes and eye tissues searching for mates and re-anchoring to continue to feed on blood from the host.

### **The Victim: *Colinus virginianus* Alias - “Northern Bobwhite Quail”**

The northern bobwhite quail is arguably the most popular game bird in the country with steep hunting traditions. This bird is a native species that thrives in early successional or transitional habitat and thus thrived in the edge habitat created by the disturbance of settlers of North America. As the landscape moved toward climax communities, agricultural advancements intensified farming operations and reduced waste. These changes continue to reduce the quality and quantity of habitat available to bobwhites in Kansas, and across the country, and populations have declined in response. Bobwhites have very short life spans with the average of about 8 months and a recent study estimating 18 percent annual survival. However, they have a high reproductive output with as many as 28 eggs recorded in a single nest. This creates a boom and bust population cycle that is largely reliant on annual production of young. When conditions are good, nesting quail have much greater success greatly increasing the quail densities. When conditions are poor, nest success declines and there isn’t enough annual production to replenish birds lost in the previous year. Because of the biology of quail and inconsistent hunting pressure across the landscape, bobwhites can tolerate high levels of hunting pressure and harvest with minimal impacts to the populations.





### **The Investigators: KDWPT biologists**

In response to concerns of Kansas sportsman, KDWPT biologists attended an eyeworm workshop during the summer of 2017. At this workshop researchers from the Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch trained biologists from across the country on how to dissect bird heads and examine them for the presence of eyeworms. Upon returning from the workshop, biologists from across Kansas were asked to collect the heads of harvested game birds for evaluation of eyeworm infection. Since all our upland game bird species have been documented to carry *Oxyspirura petrowi*, and overlap with bobwhite quail populations, it was decided that all species should be evaluated for eyeworm infection. Pheasant, bobwhite quail, scaled quail and greater prairie chicken heads were submitted from 59 counties.

### **The Evidence**

From the submitted heads, 511 usable heads were provided including 289 bobwhite quail, 218 ring-necked pheasants, 6 scaled quail and 4 greater prairie chickens. The percent of birds infected was considerably lower than in states to the south, with just over 4 percent of bobwhite quail found to be positive for eyeworms, while just over 14 percent of pheasants were infected. While much higher infection rates were recorded for scaled quail and Greater

Prairie Chicken (50 percent of examined birds), sample sizes were small for both and all samples came from a single county. The parasite loads, total number of parasites per bird, was also much lower than in the Texas study. Considering all 511 sampled birds, only 6 birds were found to have more than 5 eyeworms and only 2 had more than 10. Both birds with more than 10 eyeworms had extraordinary high worm loads. One was a bobwhite with 28 total eyeworms and the other was a scaled quail with 31 total eye worms.

### **The Prosecution**

The definition of a parasite is an organism that lives in or on a host and benefits by deriving nutrients at the expense of the host. The fact that eyeworms are a parasite that is feeding on blood of quail means they are creating some level of energetic cost to the quail. When severe infections occur, tissues around the eye are swollen and inflamed causing birds to become restless and scratch at eyes. The distraction alone created by this irritation could reduce survival, as quail that are distracted are not as vigilant for predators and spend less time searching for food. It is unclear what damage minor infections may have on the eye, but in extreme cases the birds may become blind. With impaired vision all aspects of life become harder, and survival will be severely impacted. With bobwhites struggling with habitat loss and often poor environmental conditions, any additional strain on survival raises concern for what the population implications could be.



The percent of birds infected was considerably lower than in states to the south, with just over 4 percent of bobwhite quail found to be positive for eyeworms, and just over 14 percent of pheasants were infected.

### The Defense

Quail seem like they are born with one purpose in life – to die. Annual survival for this species is very low as mentioned previously, but their life history strategy compensates for this large annual turnover. It doesn't matter what the culprit is, be it exposure, starvation, predation, parasites, disease, or a hunter, the end result is the same. Even if an individual is experiencing a severe enough infection to reduce survival, that amounts to lower survival for the individual and doesn't necessarily translate into a population impact. Furthermore, researchers from Kansas State University evaluated lesser prairie chickens infected with high eyeworm parasite loads and found no impact on reproduction, survival, or movement. Low annual survival is observed year in and year out and when conditions are primed, populations see



explosive growths. As evidence that eyeworms are not limiting quail populations, one need only look back over the previous five years of population surveys. In 2013, coming out of the worst drought observed since the dust bowl, bobwhite populations were dismal with the lowest recorded statewide whistle index observed since the initiation of the survey in 1997. Within four years, this same index increased to the highest level ever recorded during 2017.

### The Verdict

Eyeworms are not guilty of limiting the population of bobwhites, or any Kansas game birds. Population responses to recent improved quality of habitat demonstrates that the ability for these game birds to boom persists. Parasites



naturally occur within wild populations of animals and *Oxyspirura petrowi* is not a new parasite. Records of this eyeworm date back at least to the 1940s, long before we saw the dramatic declines witnessed during the latter part of the 20th century. Information for domestic poultry suggest that eyeworm infections are often benign unless severe. Collected evidence suggests that current infection rates in Kansas are relatively low, and parasite loads of infected individuals are low. Arguments can be made that if survival of infected birds were significantly reduced then hunter harvested birds would not accurately represent the infection rate of birds that have already succumb. However, densities recorded on surveys suggest that it's unlikely we're seeing large reductions in survival. While there are current efforts at producing a treatment for eyeworms, it is unlikely that this would impact fall bobwhite populations and definitely not at a meaningful scale. During periods of scarcity, it is natural to look for quick solutions, but there are no silver bullets. Quail are less likely to be a natural byproduct of our intensive agricultural practices. Habitat takes work to create and maintain, but quail have been shown time and time again to respond to habitat where it occurs. 🐃





Jennifer Leeper photo

# Cedar Bluff State Park

## *Discover a Wilder West*

by Jennifer Leeper

*On the second weekend of September, my husband, sons and I set out to explore the inspiration for the “bluff” in Cedar Bluff State Park.*

*Just off Interstate 70, Cedar Bluff State Park is a welcoming retreat from a long car ride across Kansas – whether it’s a stop off before heading on into Colorado, or a destination in and of itself. High or low season, it is an example of the stark, rugged beauty synonymous with the High Plains.*

### **A Year-Round Attraction**

Though Labor Day officially ends the high season at Cedar Bluff State Park, this state park fills its cabins year-round.

“People start coming in early April,” said Peyton Brown, a seasonal employee in the park’s office.

Brown says as many as 20 or so families will call Cedar Bluff “home” over the spring and summer, then start their migration out of the park in fall.

Short-term campers frequent the area, too. The opening of dove hunting season over the Labor Day holiday, and deer hunting in September, keeps the park’s tourism momentum going, according to Brown. For this reason, the park’s cabins remain full even through the dead of winter.



After visiting the park office, my older son and I ventured into the park while my husband hung back at the cabin with our youngest. Even before we left the office parking lot, we discovered “Pa’s Pond” – a fishing hole designated for youth and those with disabilities. There, anglers can keep up to two fish, and there’s even a giant stationary fishing rod for the perfect photo opportunity.

We went on to check out the camping situation. Though the high season had now passed, there were still plenty of RVs scattered around the park. I wondered if these were campers who had already spent many hot days on the water to now enjoy many cool nights roasting S’mores around pit fires, or if they had just arrived. Either way, they were now cozy inside their RVs, enjoying the peace of the park.



Like most Kansas state parks, Cedar Bluff offers primitive camping, as well as RV sites with hook ups and rental cabins.

## Bound For Bluffs

Continuing on our way to search for the bluffs the area is known for, we set out across Cedar Bluff Dam, enjoying postcard views of the lake. We searched for any sign with ‘bluff’ somewhere on it, as we had been instructed to at the park office, and before long, we reached our destination; all 150 vertical feet of the tall limestone.

The distinctive smell of cedar trees competed for our attention with the drama of bluff-edge lake views. The bluffs were covered in them. The rugged beauty of this High Plains landscape seemed to broker the transition from Midwest to desert West, through yucca plants and bunches of scrubby short grasses. It’s quite the view.



## Beyond the Bluffs

Aside from picturesque bluff vistas, there is plenty to do at Cedar Bluff State Park. After all, the park boasts over 3,500 acres for outdoor recreation, especially fishing.

“Cedar Bluff Reservoir remains an angler’s paradise,” said park staff, Amber McLaughlin. “With the underwater parking lots and roads, flooded timber stands, rock bluffs, gravel-strewn beaches – all surrounded by a rim of flooded salt cedar near the shoreline – anglers are sure to find fish.”

The reservoir is home to popular sport fish species, including crappie, walleye, white bass and wipers, channel catfish, as well as largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass.

As for hunting, white-tailed deer, and turkey are in abundance, providing ample





Jennifer Leeper photo



opportunity, and there are pheasants and quail, too. “Upland game hunters at Cedar Bluff will find diverse habitats of grass, weeds and crops to pursue ring-necked pheasants and northern bobwhite quail,” McLaughlin said. Cedar Bluff even offers youth/mentor hunting opportunities for waterfowl, deer and upland game. But the opportunities don’t end at hunting and fishing. The park also offers sand volleyball, horseshoes, shoreside basketball, a BMX track and an area for swimming. And wildlife viewing is another popular activity for the area, as visitors can observe bald and golden eagles, Canada geese, pheasant, turkey and deer, among other species.

### Taking a Step Back

Cedar Bluff State Park has a unique history. According to McLaughlin, the area sits along the Butterfield Trail stage line, which was a part of the Smoky Hill Trail connecting Atchison to Denver. “Many of the Cedar Bluff State Park campgrounds are named after the different stations found along the trail,” added McLaughlin.

Some of those names include “Broken Spur,” “Arapaho,” “Prickly Pear,” “Wagon Rut,” and “Crooked Arrow.”

Near the park, Threshing Machine Canyon – the site of an 1850s Native American attack on a wagon train transporting a threshing machine – features canyon wall carvings dating back to the early 19th century.

The park itself has roots in the early 19th century, with a proposal to dam the Smoky Hill River in 1912. The dam finally became a reality in 1951.

### Planning Your Stay

Cedar Bluff State Park features more than 130 campsites. The Bluffton area, located on the north shore, offers 96 utility campsites; two community shelters; a reservable group utility campground; two large showerhouses and dump stations; and numerous undesignated primitive campsites and picnic areas. There are also five modern rental cabins, and two boat ramps.

The Page Creek area, on the south shore, offers 36 campsites; a community shelter; two dump stations; two boat ramp facilities; two shower houses and vault toilets; a designated primitive campground, and numerous undesignated campsites.

However you choose to “rough it” at this ruggedly beautiful park, you’ll find something at Cedar Bluff that speaks to the wilder parts of you. 🐮



Michael Pearce photo



# Grandpa Harry

## Lesson On Jig Tying

*text and photo by Rick McNary*

“Grandpa! Chauncey!” Ethan ran up the snow-covered drive. “Where are you guys?”

Ethan had arrived a day earlier than his last note had said and no one was at the porch to meet him.

Harry Withers had a new lease on life after that day two years previous when he let Ethan read the notes he had sent home to Gladys during the war. Shortly after Ethan returned home, he started writing Harry and they began exchanging letters. Harry and Chauncey traipsed down the drive every day to check the mailbox.

Hearing the commotion of Ethan’s arrival, Harry slowly rose from his rocker and made his way across the wooden floor. Ethan burst through the door as Harry opened it.

“Whoa. Easy there Grandson,” Harry chuckled as Ethan hugged him. “These old bones are kinda brittle.”

“I’ve missed you, Grandpa,” Ethan cried. “I’ve been so excited to come here. I showed the kids in school that crappie jig you sent me and told them you made it yourself. They were real jealous when I told them you were going to show me how to make them and take me fishing at a heated dock. My teacher says she’d like to bring everyone on class trip to meet you.”

“Ah, shucks,” Harry said, humbly. “Can’t imagine what a bunch of kids would want in an old geezer like me.”

“Oh, Grandpa, they don’t think that at all. They think you’re awesome.”

“Chauncey and I dug out our equipment to show you how to make jigs. Come over here and let’s get started.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier to buy them in a store?” Ethan asked.

“Oh, I reckon it would, but you’d miss out on the fun of catching a fish on something you made yourself. Plus, you’d miss out on the lessons you learn while making a lure. Come here, let’s tie your first crappie jig.”

As Harry showed Ethan how to make the jig head in a mold then tie the feathers and chenille to the body, he wove stories about life and values.

Ethan tried to tie his first one. Then another. Then another. He grew frustrated.

“You made it look so easy, Grandpa. This is hard.”

“Just keep at it,” Harry said. “The harder you work, the more you’ll enjoy the reward when you get it right. There’s no feeling on earth like the satisfaction of combining exhaustion with accomplishment.”

Early the next morning, Harry fired up the ’49 Ford truck and rumbled down the lane. A few miles later, the old man, the boy and the dog jumped out of the truck and made their way to the heated dock on Spring Lake. A dozen anglers sat on benches and overturned buckets, lines in the water.

“Who ya’ got with ya’ there, Harry,” one angler asked. “Looks like a new fisherman.”

“This is Ethan, my grandson,” Harry said proudly. “He tied his first crappie jig last night and he aims to catch his first fish on it.”

“Well, he’s gonna have to work hard this morning,” another one said. “They quit bitin’ about 9 am and I haven’t had a lick of luck since.”

Ethan watched Harry turn a five-gallon bucket upside down for a seat and drop a jig in the water; he followed suit. Both sat in silence waiting for the twitch in the rod’s tip.

“I’ve got one, Grandpa,” Ethan shrieked as he set the hook. The other anglers applauded as he pulled his first crappie out of the water.

They soon caught their limit and jumped back in the old Ford.


“Grandpa,” Ethan said as they jostled down the road. “I’m keeping this jig as a souvenir. Maybe some day I’ll have a kid and I can show him how to tie jigs.”

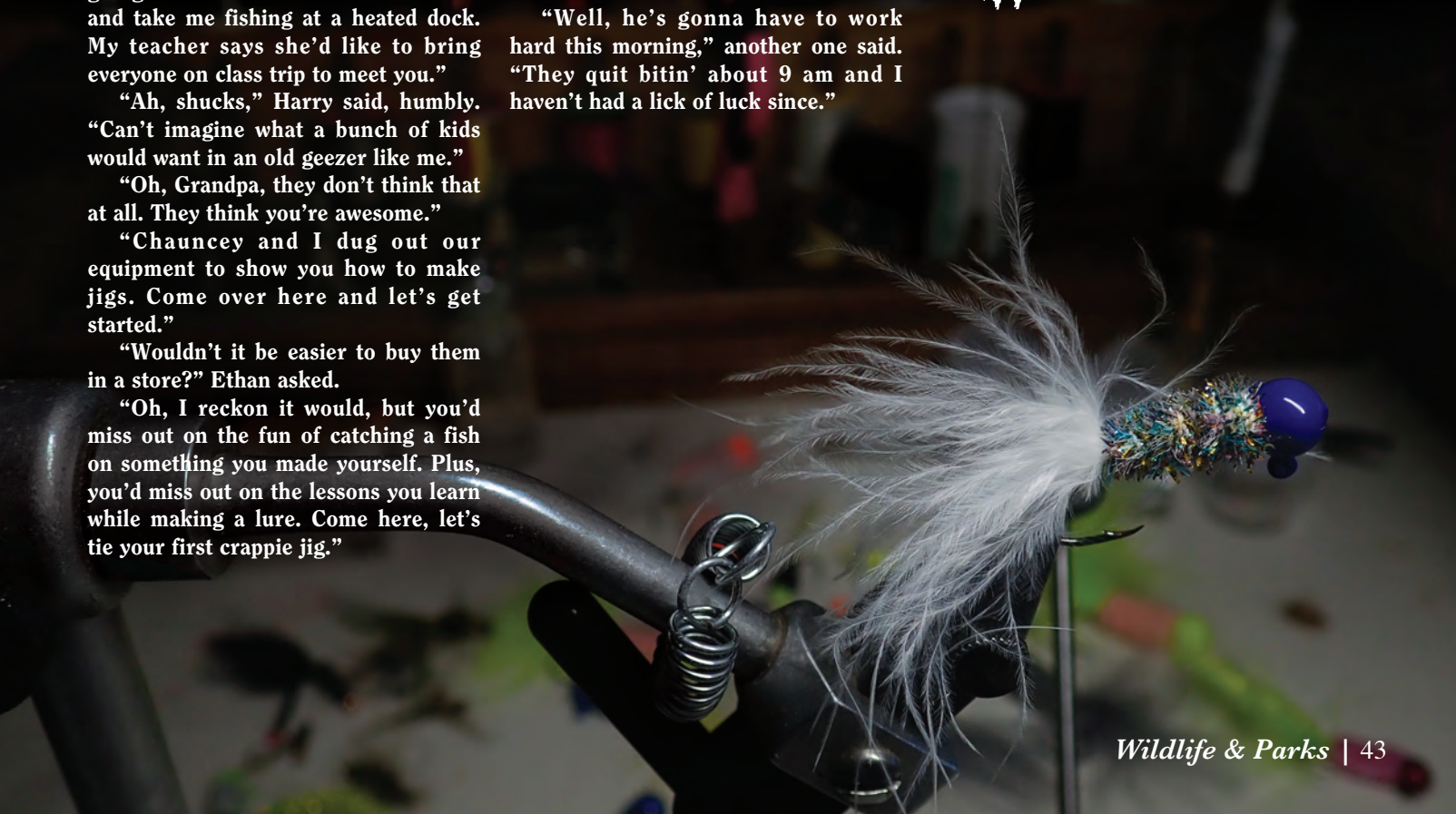
“Why wait until then? Harry asked. “How about I send that equipment home with you and you teach your friends.”

“Really?” Ethan asked. “Do you think I’m good enough?”

“No, not yet,” Harry said. “But tie a hundred jigs and you will be.”

“That would be fun to teach my friends! You know what else I’ll teach them, Grandpa? I’ll teach them that the harder they work, the more they will enjoy the reward.”

“Well then Grandson, I’d say you learned the most valuable lesson of all.” 





A photograph of a ringtail squirrel perched on a tree branch. The squirrel is looking towards the camera with large, dark eyes and prominent, pointed ears. Its body is covered in brown and grey fur, and its most distinctive feature is a long, bushy tail with alternating light and dark rings. The background consists of green leaves and tree branches.

# Species Profile **Ringtail**

*with Annie Fischer*

If you're out at night and you spot a ringtail, you'd better buy a lottery ticket. More common in the southwest United States, ringtails have been seen as far north as Oregon. While the ringtails in Kansas are rare and elusive, these adaptable critters can be found in the southcentral part the state.

Identifying a ringtail isn't difficult. The most distinguishing feature is its white and black ringed tail that is typically longer than its body. The masked face of a ringtail reminds you of a raccoon, except the ringtail's mask is white and its eyes are much larger. Ringtails weigh approximately 1 to 3 pounds and apart from their large pointed ears and long noses, their bodies look like house cats. They are skilled climbers, using semi-retractable claws and rotating hind feet to navigate their terrain.

While they spend a lot of time in trees near water sources, ringtail dens are found primarily in hollowed out trees, large rock crevices and abandoned buildings. Ringtails are nocturnal and are omnivorous and easy to please. They'll eat everything from berries to carrion. However, their diets consist mostly of small mammals such as mice and arthropods such as beetles.

These lightweights are prey to coyotes, bobcats, great horned owls and sometimes raccoons. Baby ringtails (called kits) are born from late April to early June. Populations of the ringtails are sporadic, and their solitary behavior makes an encounter with one extra special.

*Kurtis Meier photo*





# Backlash

with Mike Miller

## He Made a Difference

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Two wildlife conservation giants retired this fall. Read about Keith Sexson's career on Page 18. While Sexson invested 50 years of his life with the department, wildlife biologist Charlie Swank isn't far behind, lasting 44. Both are members of a generation of wildlife professionals who had an enormous impact on wildlife management in Kansas and because of them, we enjoy fantastic wildlife resources today.

Swank spent most of his career at the Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area near Great Bend, but he started with the department in 1974 as the manager of the Council Grove Wildlife Area. His interest in duck hunting led him to apply for the wildlife biologist position stationed at Cheyenne Bottoms. I'm sure he hadn't planned on spending the next 40 years there, but he has no regrets.

"I remember my first opening morning of duck season in 1976. Stan Wood was the area manager then and he told me to go open the gate and let the hunters in," Swank remembered.

In those days, hunters were required to arrive at the wildlife area's headquarters to select permanent hunting blinds, first come, first served. A long line of anxious hunters pushed against the gate, impatiently waiting for the well-before-dawn opening time as the lanky, twenty-something-year-old biologist ambled up unknowingly.

"When I unlocked the gate, they bowled me over and stampeded to the office door," Swank recalled, chuckling. "Stan saw the unruly crowd and locked the door so they couldn't get in.

"I was mad as heck so I made them all go back outside the compound and relocked the gate," he said. "I made it clear that they would have to act right if they wanted to check out a duck blind that morning."

Swank's first office was in a cinder-block building without heat or air conditioning and it wasn't particularly well sealed.

"I remember winter mornings when I had to brush a light skiff of snow off my desk that had blown in through the cracks," he said.

His job evolved over the years, but highlights include his involvement with wild turkey trap and transplant efforts, which resulted in a population that now provides some of the best turkey hunting in the midwest. Swank conducted countless wildlife surveys, which helped track population trends. And he enrolled, mapped and signed thousands of acres of private land for the Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) program, which has opened more than 1 million acres to Kansas hunters.

But Swank's most important contributions came through his work with landowners in his nine-county district. In a state that is 97 percent privately owned, improving wildlife habitat on private land is a necessary emphasis. The work department wildlife biologists do helping landowners find state and federal cost-share programs, designing wildlife-friendly management practices that fit into agriculture operations and providing technical advice, as well as loaner equipment to those



landowners has changed the Kansas landscape.


I always considered Swank a great source of knowledge and advice and often said "If you want to know exactly how it is, ask Charlie." He was honest and to the point. But he also had the most positive outlook about his work and his job as anyone I've known.

Swank is an avid big game, upland bird and waterfowl hunter and has rarely, if ever, been without a Labrador retriever by his side in the field. And for the past 20 or so years, he's had son Tanner along. I'd wager he'd say his most gratifying accomplishment was, with wife Deanna, raising Tanner, who recently graduated from Oklahoma State University with, (what else?) a bachelor of science degree in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, majoring in Wildlife Ecology and Management.

Tanner is one of the lucky sons who has hunted and fished with his dad throughout his young life, and is now following in his father's footsteps. In an article written by Mark Shoup in the July/August 2008 issue of this magazine, Swank was quoted about his career choice:

"The main thing is you don't do this because you want to hunt and fish. I love hunting and fishing as much as anyone, but I sought this job because I'm concerned about the resource and want wildlife to thrive. That often means sacrificing personal time hunting, but that's okay with me. If I had to do it over again, I'd do the same thing."

I'm betting Tanner heard similar words when he entered college. Even so, he has taken the first step to carrying on the Swank tradition of wildlife conservation.

Think about Charlie Swank and other biologists of his generation this fall if you hunt turkeys, walk a WIHA field for pheasants or just see a piece of land that stands out as quality wildlife habitat. We all owe Swank and his cohorts a huge debt of gratitude. Thanks Charlie. 





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