

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks Magazine

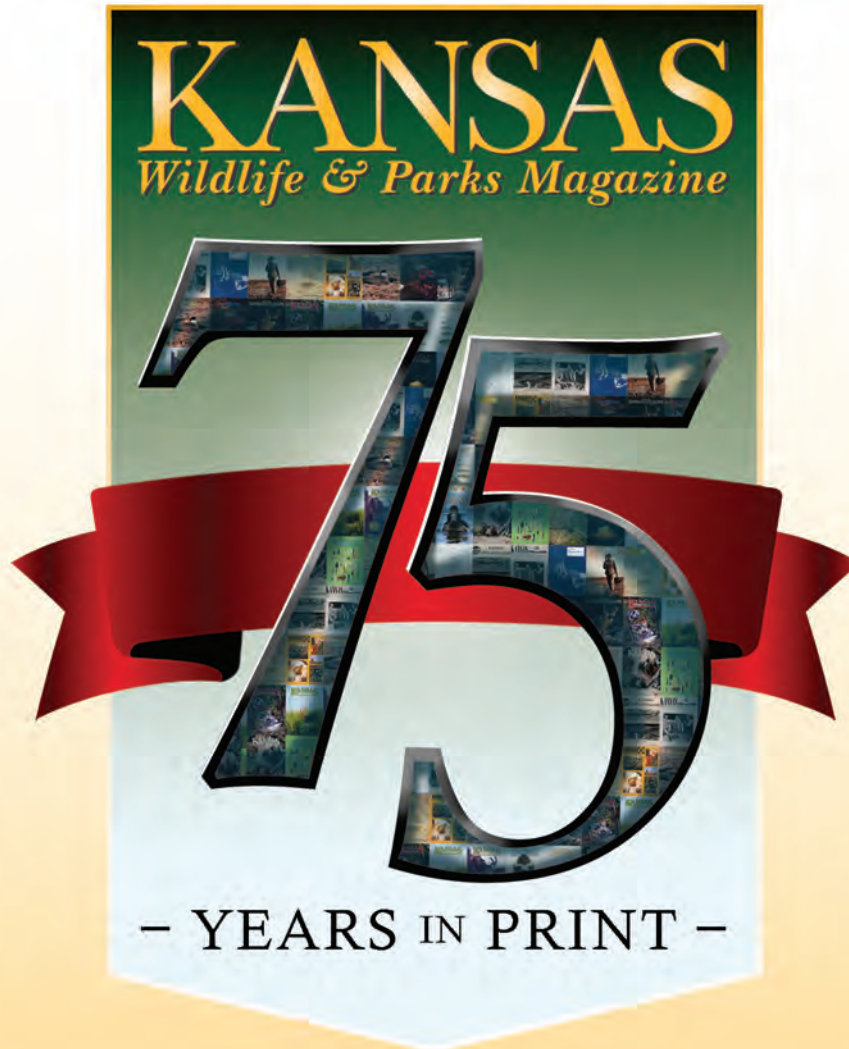
FOR HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS | \$2.75 | NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2017



We're celebrating 75 years in print in 2018!

Use promo code **ANV75** with your online purchase of a new, gift, or renewal subscription and receive the special anniversary issue for free!

Available at ksoutdoors.com/Services/Publications/Magazine



STATE OF KANSAS
Sam Brownback, Governor

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

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

Chris Tymeson, Chief Legal Counsel
Frank Jarmer, Chief Financial Officer

KANSAS
Wildlife & Parks Magazine

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

2 | Kansas View

Commission Big Game Permits *By Robin Jennison*

18 | On Call, Fire And All

Department employees fight wildfires. *By Trent McCown*

20 | An Artist's Call

Joe Bucher hand-carves amazing commemorative duck calls. *By Marc Murrell*

24 | Racing After Rabbits

The music of Beagles draws rabbit hunters to Kansas. *By Jeff Prendergast*

28 | Snowshoeing In Kansas

Snoeshoeing is a unique outdoor adventure. *By Rick McNary*

32 | How To Make A European Deer Mount

Preserve your memory of the hunt with a skull mount. *By Jon Blumb*

36 | 2017 Upland Bird Hunting Forecast

Where to find the best pheasant, quail and prairie chicken hunting in 2017

40 | Fairweather Fisherman, NOT

Gerald Lauber fishes when most anglers sit by the fire. *By Brent Frazee*

43 | Christmas With Grandpa Harry *By Rick McNary*

45 | Backlash

You've Got A Friend In Frank O'Brien *By Mike Miller*

Contents

FRONT COVER Joe Bucher's hand-carved, commemorative duck calls are a treat of color, detail and realism. Abrielle DeCavele photos. Dustin Teasley graphic.

INSIDE FRONT COVER A country road and star-sparkled night sky holds the promise of sunrise and a new day. Jay Miller photo.

Contact the Editors: mike.miller@ks.gov or nadia.reimer@ks.gov

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

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

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

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





Commissioner Permits Promote Hunting and Fund Conservation

Since 2006, the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) Commission has issued special big game permits to Kansas conservation organizations. Each year, seven lucky groups draw elk, deer or antelope permits that can be sold or auctioned to the highest bidders. The money is used to fund mutually-agreed-upon conservation projects. In the past 12 years, nearly \$500,000 has been raised and spent on wildlife conservation and hunting heritage projects.

Only local chapters of nonprofit organizations based or operating in Kansas that actively promote wildlife conservation and the hunting and fishing heritage are eligible to apply. An organization or chapter can draw a permit only once in a three-year period.

We have seven commissioners, so seven permits are drawn and they can include one elk permit, one antelope permit, or up to seven deer permits, depending on applicant


“Commission Big Game Permit Application” link. Completed applications must be submitted to Sheila Kemmis, Commission secretary, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124 no later than Jan. 1, 2018.

KDWPT commissioners will draw the lucky winners at the January 11, 2018 meeting at Acorn Lodge on Milford Reservoir. Winners will be announced at the meeting, and the groups will receive a voucher, which they can then sell or auction. Once the voucher is sold, the group subtracts the cost of the permit plus 15 percent and submits the rest to KDWPT with a proposal for a conservation project. When that project is approved, the money is returned to the group to fund the project. One exception to this procedure occurs if Kansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry (KHFH) draws a permit. In that case, KHFH keeps 85 percent of the total to fund deer processing.

The winning bidder submits the voucher to the department and is issued a corresponding permit and carcass tag. It does not count against any other big game permits the holder is eligible for.

Fifty-nine applications were received the first year, but that number increased to more than 100 the next year and has remained there ever since. In 2017, 142 eligible applications were received, and all seven drawn requested deer permits. More than \$70,000 was raised.

In the program’s history, the money has gone toward Walk-in Hunting Access, Archery in the Schools, Hunter Education, McPherson Wetlands, Jamestown Wildlife Area, Upland Bird Initiative, Youth wingshooting clinics, 4-H Shooting Sports programs, and more.

This program represents one of the many ways the department, and in this case the Commission, partners with state conservation organizations to enhance wildlife habitat and promote our outdoor heritage. Our programs would not be nearly as successful without partners. 



preference. All permits are valid statewide, during any season with legal equipment. Deer permits are popular because they are either-species, either-sex, and valid statewide during any season with legal equipment.

Applications can be downloaded from the department’s website, www.ksoutdoors.com. Just click on “KDWPT Commission” on the left-hand menu, then click on the

Letters To The Editors

Dear Mike,

I am a Kansan through and through now “stuck” in Missouri! I have accompanied a poem and drawing that I hope you will consider for publication in the *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*. The poem was written as a tribute to my dad, Edward DeForest. Dad worked as a creel census taker for several years for KDWPT at Melvern Reservoir. Dad was an avid Kansas outdoorsman until Alzheimer’s disease crept into his life.

When the morel mushrooms began sprouting, Dad could be found jigging for crappie at Tuttle Creek or Melvern Reservoir. He relished hunting pheasants and quail in the hedge rows and draws of Marshall County. Hunting mallard ducks on the Big Blue River with his Labrador Tar Boy accounted for many memories. A favorite hunting story recalled related to him shooting four Flint Hill prairie chickens with four shots when he was sophomore in high school.

I hope as Dad’s disease clouds his mind, his spirit remains free to roam the fields and streams of his beloved Kansas.

David DeForest
Fulton, MO

Kansas Buck

*Don't grieve for me;
My spirit runs the windblown Flint Hills cloaked by tall grass prairie;
I listened to lonesome coyote howls, and meadow larks singing;
I smell the farmer's fresh mowed hay;
My thirst is quenched by the Big Blue River's cool water;
I bed by aged cottonwoods, my lullaby is their leaves rustling in warm breezes;
In midnight darkness, my eyes view heaven illuminated by light of the Milky Way;
Don't pity me;
Life is good.*

Poem by
David DeForest

Illustration by
Diana Dickrader



BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

Spare Time For Sparrows

Some of the most awe-inspiring wildlife spectacles we'll see occur in November and December when hundreds of thousands of cranes, ducks and geese visit our marshes and lakes. It's a great time for birders and there are plenty of options.

I try to get out to Quivira, Cheyenne Bottoms and Wilson Lake several times during this season to satisfy the urge to be outdoors and in nature. Similar experiences can be found all over Kansas, but the central lakes and marshes are the ones that hold special meaning to me. Sunsets on the Big Salt Marsh of Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, with tens of thousands of geese and cranes present, count as some of the most spectacular wildlife watching memories I have.

November brings the migrant and wintering sparrows - the bane of some birders because of identification problems, but I love these little guys. They begin arriving in October, but the species that spend most of the winter here ramp up in abundance in November. Take some time to enjoy them and if you have trouble with identification, consult a local expert or good field guide.

Many sparrow species visit backyard feeders, allowing up-close observation. Black oil sunflower seeds are number one

on the menu, but it's best to have a variety of seeds out. Seed mixes that include white or red millet, cracked corn, milo and a sprinkling of striped or black sunflower seeds will draw sparrows and are less expensive. Safflower seed is good for cardinals and some sparrows, and niger (thistle) is better for finches. These seeds tend to be more expensive and also have a limited number of species that will eat them. However, I have the best all-around luck with black oil sunflower seeds and I always put out some suet to keep the woodpeckers and nuthatches happy.

December brings the annual Christmas Bird Count season, providing another great excuse to watch birds. Lots of counts are scheduled in Kansas, so check out the Kansas Ornithological Society website, www.ksbirds.org, for locations and contact information. Those who compile bird count reports welcome birders from beginners to experts and can mix birders of different skill levels, so beginners can learn the finer points of winter bird identification. A Christmas Bird Count is rewarding for the birds observed and the camaraderie and experience with fellow birders makes it fun.





CFAP Celebrates 30 Years *by David Breth*

The Community Fisheries Assistance Program (CFAP) is a popular Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) program. In fact, the agency received the American Fisheries Society Outstanding Sport Fish Restoration Program Project of the Year award for CFAP in 2009. The main objective of CFAP is to remove the fees for anglers on local community-owned lakes. KDWPT uses Sport Fish Restoration funding to lease waters owned by a city or county and then removes any fees formerly charged for fishing. The goal is to provide free, convenient access for anglers close to home. State and local fishing regulations and license requirements still apply. A bonus of the CFAP program is that KDWPT fisheries biologists manage the waters with an emphasis on providing high-quality fishing opportunities.

Another important, but perhaps not as well-known, facet of the program provides grants to develop and improve

public fisheries. These competitive grants can be used to help fund projects designed to enhance fishing access, improve the condition of the fishery, or develop facilities that enhance angler use. Cooperators must provide at least 25 percent local matching funds, with the maximum assistance from KDWPT being \$40,000. KDWPT Fisheries Division staff use criteria to score applications. The number of grants awarded each year depends on available funds. Examples of projects funded include construction of fishing piers, docks, restrooms, pavilions, parking areas, access trails, fish cleaning stations and boat ramps; shoreline stabilization; placement of aerators, fountains, and fish feeders; and dredging and renovation.

Many communities used grant money to help make their property a Family Friendly Facility (designated in the *Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary* with an FFF) by ensuring adequate security lighting, flush toilets, regular security patrols and easily Since the first grant was awarded in 1987, commu-



nities statewide have invested more than \$3.5 million in local funds on nearly 700 projects to improve angler access and fishing in Kansas.

In the most recent licensed angler survey, CFAP lakes and ponds ranked second in preferred fishing locations, just behind reservoirs. Approximately 90 percent of community-owned waters are enrolled, and all are listed in the regulations summary. Take time to visit these excellent fishing spots and wet a line with your family and friends. Your best fishing trip could take place in your hometown!

When It Gets Cold, Get Out *by Jennifer Leeper*

It's easy to put off outdoor recreation in the winter months, but Kansas has much to offer those who are willing to venture out when temperatures dip.

Hike a trail

Whether you prefer a wide open landscape or a panorama of snow-covered trees, there are plenty of options for hikes on frosty days. **Perry State Park Loop Trail** near Ozawie offers a moderately-rated challenge for hikers, who can follow and enjoy Perry Lake up close, along 11 trails that cover more than 20 miles of forested hills.

The **Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve** near Strong City offers stunning, wintry views on nearly 11,000 acres of tallgrass prairie and a chance to encounter a majestic bison herd.

Finally, with its picturesque canyons and bluffs, **Historic Lake Scott State Park** is another great place for a winter trek, and even a winter weekender in

one of the cabins perched near the lake. *National Geographic Traveler* listed this state park gem as one of the top 50 parks in the U.S.

Fish the ice

It may not be Minnesota, but Kansas does provide icefishing opportunities. Plenty of Kansas anglers love to fish through the ice, but our latitude and winter temperatures limit our ice. Safe ice requires single-digit temperatures for a number of days, and during some winters, we just don't get it.

When we do, you'll see a community of anglers trudging out on frozen lakes with poles and tackle in hand. Cutting a hole in the ice requires hand-cranked or gas-powered augers.

Any lake with good populations of white bass and crappie is a good candidate for icefishing, just as long as it has at least 4 inches of good hard ice covering it.

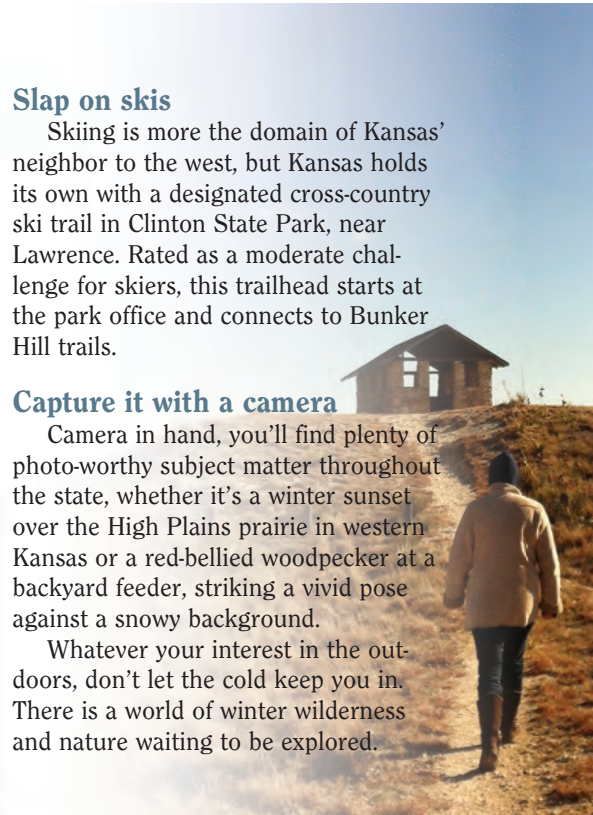
Slap on skis

Skiing is more the domain of Kansas' neighbor to the west, but Kansas holds its own with a designated cross-country ski trail in Clinton State Park, near Lawrence. Rated as a moderate challenge for skiers, this trailhead starts at the park office and connects to Bunker Hill trails.

Capture it with a camera

Camera in hand, you'll find plenty of photo-worthy subject matter throughout the state, whether it's a winter sunset over the High Plains prairie in western Kansas or a red-bellied woodpecker at a backyard feeder, striking a vivid pose against a snowy background.

Whatever your interest in the outdoors, don't let the cold keep you in. There is a world of winter wilderness and nature waiting to be explored.



Jennifer Leeper photo



The Ninety-seven Percent *with Wes Sowards*

Ninety-seven percent. That is the percentage of Kansas land that is privately owned, leaving only about 1 percent open for public outdoor recreation. One goal of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's (KDWP) wildlife biologists is to ensure future generations enjoy the same wildlife resources and outdoor opportunities we have today. To accomplish that goal, biologists must work with private landowners.

Currently, the state relies on 29 wildlife biologists and biologist technicians to help support that mission. They work in every county in Kansas, providing our connection to landowners. One of the most valuable tools they have is KDWP's Habitat First program, which is designed to help landowners enhance wildlife habitat by providing technical advice and cost-share options. Funding is provided with license revenue and the federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program, which is derived from excise taxes on firearms and ammunition. Biologists also help deliver wildlife-beneficial practices and funding included in the federal Farm Bill. These tools are the backbone of programs conserving and enhancing wildlife habitats on private land. However, it is a daunting task.

There are a variety of obstacles staff must overcome. An increasing number of people who own land in Kansas reside in other states, shifting operations, and reducing farm inventories. Also, most of the landowners staff work with ranch and farm full-time, so providing the necessary equipment and time that it takes to make significant improvements in habitat is difficult. With these factors in mind, KDWP and Pheasants Forever have joined together to employ habitat specialists who will work hand-in-hand with our wildlife biologists to put habitat man-



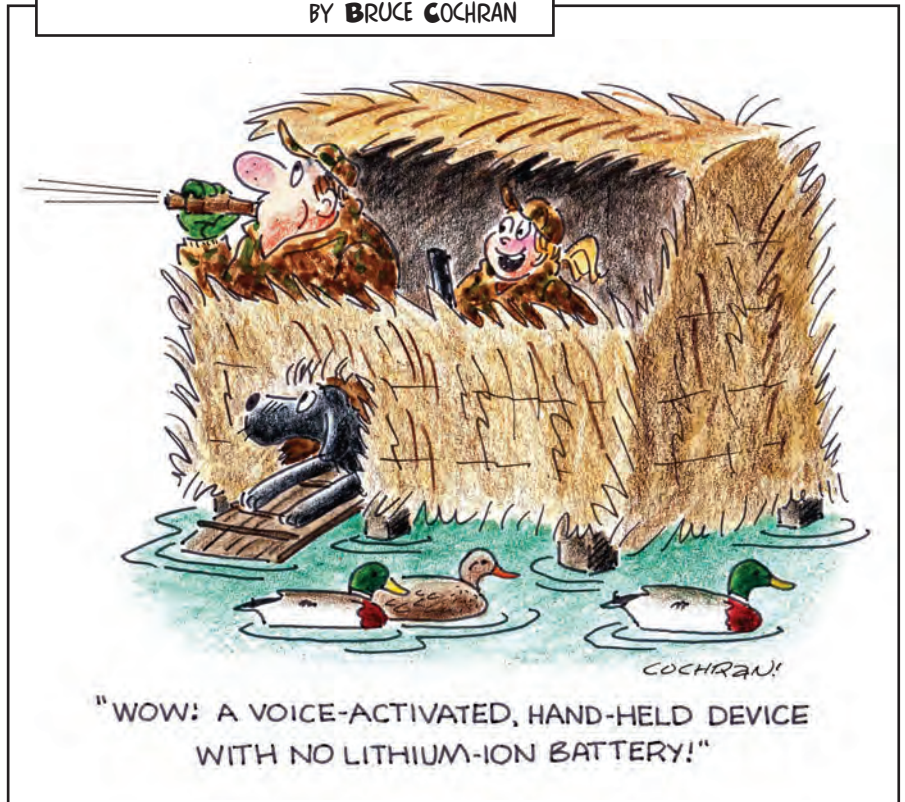
agement plans on the ground. This partnership is designed to create a more efficient workflow that ends with more technical services provided and potentially more beneficial habitat in place. One of the main priorities of this project is to work on private lands where public access is allowed, such as land

enrolled in KDWP's Walk-In Hunting Access program.

Providing the public with opportunities for the use and appreciation of our natural resources, consistent with the conservation of those resources, is a large part of KDWP's Wildlife Division mission.

WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

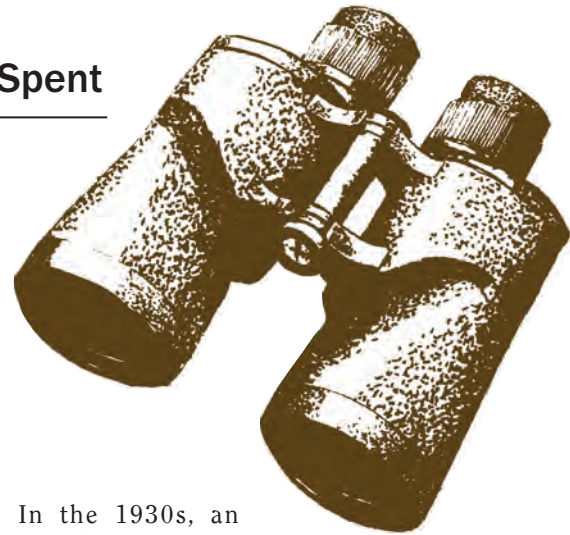
Quality Binocular – Money Well Spent

As my eyes have aged, I've gained a greater appreciation for the value of good optics. Let's consider for a moment a quality binocular. First things first, correct terminology is binocular not a pair of binoculars. As "bi" refers to twin barrels, we don't need to have four in order to see clearly with our two eyes. In hunter education, we teach our students to never use a rifle scope to survey the countryside but to use a binocular for safety. By using a binocular we won't point our firearm at something we don't want to shoot (firearm safety rule No. 2).

The numbers on a binocular refer to the magnification and the size of the objective lens. For example, with an 8x40 binocular, 8 refers to the power of magnification and will make objects appear 8 times closer than they actually are. The higher the magnification, the larger the object will appear. However, extreme magnifications are difficult to hold steady. The 40 refers to the objective lens diameter in millimeters. The larger the objective lens, the more light the tube can gather. If we divide the objective lens size by the magnification, we obtain what we call the exit pupil. This describes the bundle of light reaching the eye. Increase the magnification and the exit pupil goes down, unless the objective lens size increases. Increase the size of the objective lens

and the binocular gets bulkier and heavier to carry. Life is always a compromise. An exit pupil of 5 is adequate for most field situations. More light than an eye can use is not much value. But sufficient exit pupil accounts for why we can actually see better in low-light conditions with a quality binocular because the exit pupil gathers more available light than the naked eye can in fading light.

An important function of a binocular is to show detail that we won't see otherwise. Simply magnifying an object is of little value if what was obscure doesn't become clear. Just seeing a deer as bigger won't help if we can't see if it has antlers or not. Resolution is a measure of the degree of detail reaching the eye.



In the 1930s, an optical engineer found that adding a layer of magnesium fluoride to a glass lens dramatically increased the amount of light transmitted by decreasing the amount of light reflected. Today's quality lenses are coated with multiple layers of rare earth compounds to enhance light transmission. Quality lenses are not tinted as this blocks light transmission and limits available light to the eye. The outer lenses of quality binoculars are also coated with anti-scratch materials to protect the lenses during use in the field.

The best optics cost a lot more than second best, though casual users may not be able to tell the difference. However, a quality binocular should last many years, so when buying a binocular, look at a variety of options and select one that satisfies your needs. In the end, it's all how you look at it.

Learn more at:

- www.alpenoptics.com
- www.burrisoptics.com
- www.bushnell.com
- www.leupold.com
- www.nikonsportoptics.com
- www.vortexoptics.com
- www.zeiss.com/us/sports-optics

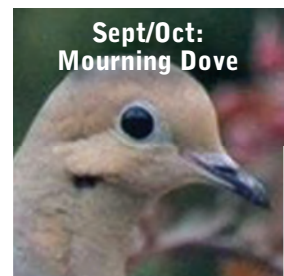
WHAT AM I? ID Challenge

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



Clues:

1. I share a name with a country.
2. There are skeins of us in the sky and gaggles of us on the ground.
3. I can "honk," but I'm not a car.



>>> Answer on Page 13

Fish Squeezer

with Tommie Berger

Passing On My Passion For Fishing

I was born in 1949 and I grew up in a family with two sisters. Dad liked to fish, so I was indoctrinated at a fairly early age.

My first recollection of fishing was at one of the few farm ponds in Brown County back in the early 1950s with Dad and couple of uncles fishing for catfish. I remember Uncle Frank catching bass on a lure he called a Mepps. And all the little fish in the ponds were called perch.

When I got big enough to fish, it was mostly in the Wolf River for catfish and carp. On rainy days when Dad and my uncles couldn't farm, we might drive out west to the Blue River at Marysville to fish for carp. We even hosted neighborhood fish fries with fried carp as the main course.

When I was in the sixth grade, we moved south to Leavenworth County where Stranger Creek became our favorite catfish and carp stream. There were three farm ponds on the place we rented and there I got my first taste of crappie, bluegill, and bass fishing. I was in Seventh Heaven because the ponds were an easy walk or bicycle ride from the house. My passion for fishing was on fire. It was then I began planning to be a game warden. (At that time, I thought everyone who worked for Fish and Game was a game warden.)

High school was a blur and I landed at Kansas State University (KSU). I learned a lot at KSU, especially that you don't call all sunfish "perch" and crawdads are crayfish. Somehow I managed to get a dual degree in fisheries and wildlife biology.

After a two-year stint in the Army, I started my fisheries biologist career thanks to the new SASNAK program, (Surging Ahead for Skippers, Anglers and Nimrods in Kansas) which was an ambitious five-year plan designed by Kansas Fish and Game Commission staff to increase game and fish harvest. Many new fish and wildlife biologists were hired when SASNAK was implemented. In August 1973, I became the fisheries biologist in the Manhattan district and it was there I got my first taste of teaching kids to fish. Five years later, I was transferred to Dodge City and there were kids out there who wanted to learn to fish, too. I spent a lot



of time teaching fishing clinics, recreational fishing classes, 4-H fishing classes, and coordinating Boy and Girl Scout fishing outings.

I was involved in the Kansas Wildlife Federation's Outdoor Adventure Camp and Hunting, Fishing, and Furharvesting School back then, too. Later, I worked with Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) and Women in the Outdoors events. I thoroughly enjoyed passing on my passion for fishing.

I continued to be involved in aquatic education after I transferred to the Wilson district. By then, some of the kids I had worked with earlier in my career had gone on to become fisheries or wildlife biologists and many were passionate anglers.

I still love to teach fishing. At the most recent BOW workshop, two of the ladies caught the biggest fish of their lives. One of those ladies was so excited she exclaimed, "This is the most exciting day of my life!"

I've been retired six years now and still teach fishing whenever I get a chance. My passion is still strong and the notes and comments I get from my students make me believe I've made a difference in some lives. Not a bad legacy for a Kansas country boy.

EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

with Marc Murrell

The Good Old Days of Goose Hunting Are Now

As goose numbers have steadily increased over the past 30 years, so has the popularity of goose hunting. This is particularly true around urban areas where geese winter, roosting in town and flying to nearby fields to feed. With this added hunting pressure, hunters are having to up their game in order to fool the educated eyes of these black and white bombers and their speckle-bellied cousins.

Here are a few tips to help increase your odds for a successful goose hunt this year.

CONCEALMENT

Hiding used to entail laying on the ground underneath a magnum goose shell decoy with your head resting on a standard-sized goose shell in the middle of a decoy spread. However, today's layout ground blinds are a safer and convenient option, as they come in many shapes, sizes and prices. Most have straps on the sides to allow hunters to place corn stalks or other ground material from the field to match their surroundings providing ultimate camouflage. Shell pockets inside, flagging holes on the sides and added cushions make layout blinds comfortable for hours of hunting. Ground blinds cut the wind dramatically on a cold winter day, too.

DECOYS

Shell decoys used to be the norm, but as hunting pressure continues to increase, decoy selection has become more critical. Full body decoys, many with flocked heads and bodies, will attract wary geese. And the motto "the more the merrier" absolutely applies; Big decoy spreads can be an advantage.

But full-body decoys are bulky and expensive. Hauling more than a couple dozen requires a cargo trailer. A compromise would be using a dozen or two full-bodies mixed with shells to give a spread overall bulk AND visual appeal. It's a good idea to place most of the realistic full-body decoys downwind of your blind as those are the ones first seen on a flock's approach.

CALLING

Calling is less important when you set up in a field in the EXACT location where geese were feeding the day before. However, skillful calling may bring geese closer for better shots. You don't have to be a world-class goose caller to kill geese, either. A few simple honks to get their attention and murmurs or clucks to finish may be all that is needed. Obviously, the more you sound like a goose, the more successful you'll be, so practice, practice, practice.

GAUGE AND SHOT SIZE

Old timers might tell you a 10-gauge shotgun is necessary for big geese, but most of today's 12 gauges shoot 3.5-inch shells, which are easier to find, generally cheaper, and kick

less than a 10 gauge. However, through testing, you may learn your gun patterns better with a 2.75-inch or 3-inch shell. Being efficient is more about putting a dense shot pattern in the right place.

Steel shot is the most economical version of non-toxic shot and lethality studies show that BBB- or BB-sized shot are most effective. If you're willing to spend more, bismuth and tungsten have densities closer to lead and you can use smaller shot sizes with more pellets per load. Find what works best for you.

Now go out and have a good, old day of goose hunting!

The last couple months of the calendar are a good time to hit your favorite goose hunting field, pond or wetland. The daily bag limit is 6 Canada geese (season Oct. 28-29, 2017 and Nov. 8, 2017-Feb. 18, 2018) and 2 white-fronted geese (season Oct. 28-Dec. 31, 2017 and Jan. 27-Feb. 18, 2018). Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.





By this time of year, if your deep freezer looks anything like ours, you've probably found yourself at one point saying the tired phrase I repeat each time I pull that handle, "I really need to cook that deer meat." I've probably said it ten times this year, but seeing as I almost always opt for some other meat entirely, I don't even believe myself anymore when I say "I'll thaw that out tomorrow." I guess it's a feel-good, check-off-that-box thing I mutter, thinking somehow I'll get partial credit from the Freezer Gods for at least acknowledging the meat is there and needs cooked.

It isn't due to me disliking deer meat, it's due to a lack of energy and creativity after a long day at work. My husband and I love grilled, peppery deer steaks, we're happy to fill our plates with deer fajitas, and deer jerky disappears in our house faster than I can make it, but even our favorite venison recipes, much like us, get fatigued.

I hate the thought of that meat just sitting there, and I'm trying to start a new tradition of implementing New Years resolutions before the actual New Year arrives, so I've tasked myself with finding 25 new ways to cook venison. Thanks to the handy phone app Pinterest, mission completed.

The next time you're beat, but you've got just enough energy to "lid it and leave it," reference my list of 25 Crock

Pot meals you can substitute for deer meat. They are sure to save you time at the store, energy at home, and free up some of that freezer space for the next deer. Consider this your Venison Crock Pot Countdown to Christmas.

Things to keep in mind when substituting beef for venison

-Beef has, on average, about six times more fat than venison. For recipes that depend on the natural fattiness of beef, consider mixing your venison with an alternate source of fat, or doing a mix of beef/venison.

-Venison can taste gamey, depending on how well it was cared for in the field and how it is cooked. You can draw some of the blood out of your deer meat by soaking it in a salt water bath, and by thoroughly rinsing your meat prior to cooking.

-Venison cooks fast and tastes better when not overcooked, so consider cutting your cook time down or starting your dish later in the day.

25 Crock Pot Meals You Can Substitute For Deer Meat

- *Beef and Broccoli*
- *Beef Tips in Gravy*
- *Cheeseburger Soup*
- *Barbacoa Tacos*
- *Salisbury Steak*
- *Ziti*
- *Sloppy Joes*
- *French Dip Sandwiches*
- *Stuffed Pepper Soup*
- *Gyro Wraps*
- *Philly Cheesesteak Sandwiches*
- *Pulled BBQ Beef Sandwiches*
- *Beef and Noodles*
- *Shepherd's Pie*
- *Beef and Potato Au Gratin*
- *Mongolian Beef*
- *Tamale Pie*
- *Lasagna Soup*
- *Beef Barley Soup*
- *Stuffed Cabbage Rolls*
- *Frito Chili Pie*
- *Taco Soup*
- *Beef Bourguignon*
- *Beef Curry*
- *Swedish Meatballs*

Park View

with Kathy Pritchett

Fall into Winter



Linda Lanterman, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) Parks Division director, has been elected president of the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) for the year that began in September 2017. With 25 years of experience working for KDWP, Lanterman is well-qualified to lead NASPD with a goal of helping state parks around the nation provide lasting memories for visitors. Her work with NASPD will also bring notice to the Kansas state park system.

As I write this article, it's the first day of fall, and the meteorologist says to expect temperatures in the 90s. Yet there are signs that the calendar, not the weatherman, will soon prevail. Some leaves have started changing, monarch butterflies abound, and gardens are yielding their last fruit. Kids are back in school. Days are growing shorter. The

patterns of shade I relied on in summer to cool my car at lunch have shifted. In summer, I have to wear sunglasses all the way from my driveway to the office door. In winter, there is only a shaft of sunlight about a foot wide to traverse. Fewer bugs find my windshield. The seasons are changing.

As the seasons change, so do use patterns at Kansas state parks. While beaches may be full for those last few warm fall weekends, mid-week is generally quieter. Special events, such as trail rides, car shows, fall festivals, cross country meets and others that need to avoid summer heat, occur this time of year. Check out the events calendar at www.ksoutdoors.com, our social media pages and local news for updates.

Hunters often rely on state park cabins or campsites as base camps because of the convenience and comfort

they provide after a long day in a freezing marsh or tree stand. Though cabins can be reserved up to a year in advance, reservations are unnecessary for campsites from October through April. Except for special event days, good spots are usually available on a first-come, first-served basis. Remember when reserving cabins: linens are not provided, so you will have to bring your own toiletries, towels and bedding, including pillows.

The fall and winter months offer some of the best wildlife and nature viewing of they year. Photography buffs get some spectacular shots. Migratory birds often stop in the parks, allowing avid birders to check more species off their lists. Snow brings out cross country skiers. It's a great time to explore your Kansas state parks! Let's fall into winter.



Hunter Ed For The Non-hunter

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

Early on, an appreciation for wildlife and land was instilled in me by my nature-loving parents. In our home library, we had many books dedicated to wildlife, plant identification and outdoor pursuits. We'd drive around and observe migrating birds, hike the Konza Prairie and look at wildflowers, and for my demonstration speech in high school, I explained how to identify ducks using their wings. (Don't ask me how to do it now). I had family members who enjoyed hunting and taught Hunter Education classes. I was a Girl Scout and participated in lots of outdoor activities. However, despite my upbringing, I was not interested in hunting and couldn't understand why anyone was.

Last spring, alongside my 12-year-old stepson, I completed a Hunter Education course. He's anxious to hunt and supporting him was my primary motivation. We completed the online portion over several evenings, spending quality time together taking turns reading about safety and ethics, then breathing sighs of relief

when we passed the chapter tests. It was through our reading that I discovered something that changed my perception of hunting. We learned that the very wildlife conservation principles used today began with concerned hunters and visionary politicians such as Teddy Roosevelt in the early 1900s. After watching our wildlife populations become decimated by unregulated hunting, commercial hunting and habitat loss, our forefathers established conservation tenets that would eventually become the North American Plan for Wildlife Management. They also established license fees and excise taxes on hunting equipment to pay for wildlife conservation. Today, the individuals hunting wild animals are the same ones investing in maintaining healthy populations and conserving habitat so that everyone, not just hunters, can enjoy them.

Hunter Education provides everyone who cares about wildlife an understanding of wildlife management and how important hunters have been and still are in

maintaining it. It is the ethical hunter who reports crimes against wildlife. It's the safe hunter who knows what lies beyond their shot. It's the conscientious hunter who practices on targets before going afield to ensure a clean kill. It's the dedicated hunter who continues to learn and improve. But it's the educated hunter who does all of the above. When you participate in Hunter Education, you are learning from individuals who appreciate nature, probably more than most.

Hunter Education instructors volunteer their time to help curious, would-be hunters and others start their outdoor journey, whatever that might look like.

My stepson and I completed our Hunter Education field day and passed our tests. While he's been hunting, I have yet to go, and that's okay. Even if I never join him, I'll take comfort in knowing that we both have a foundation of understanding what a privilege it is, what a responsibility it is, and what it means to be an educated hunter.



Pulling Together for Pollinators

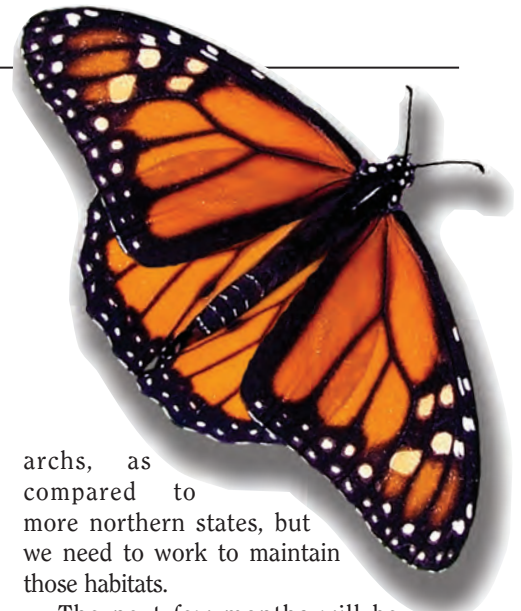
with Daren Riedle

Several weeks ago I was in our backyard with my four year old as he ran around and played. Occasionally he would loop around our large stonecrop plant, causing an explosion of butterflies from the plant and giggles from him. I stopped him so we could take a closer look. The flowers were covered in painted ladies, hairstreaks, and the occasional monarch. The monarchs were quite busy, because just a few days later there were monarch caterpillars in our flower bed. As the caterpillars formed chrysalides, my wife took one into the house so our kids could observe the transformation and emergence of the butterfly. It was a sight watching their excitement when the butterfly finally appeared, spread its wings and flew away. I would encourage you, if you are not familiar, to read up on the migratory patterns of monarch butterflies in central North America. Theirs is the longest migration of any invertebrate in the world.

With the onset of fall, monarchs migrate from the northern U.S. and Canada to the Mariposa Monarca Biosphere Reserve in central Mexico. The first generation leaving the overwin-

tering sights in Mexico typically only make it as far north as Texas and Oklahoma. It is the second and third generations that return to their northern breeding grounds in the upper Midwest and Canada. The individuals returning to Mexico are four generations removed from their descendants that originally began the trip northward. Unfortunately, there has been a steady decrease in the number of overwintering monarchs in Mexico, which is thought to be a result of deforestation there and a decrease in milkweeds and other food plants in the U.S.

Kansas and other Midwestern states are banding together to develop a strategy to better manage for monarchs in the U.S. In June 2017, a Kansas Monarch Summit was held in Topeka to discuss developing a state plan. The participation was unprecedented for a conservation effort of this type in Kansas. Sixty plus attendees representing agriculture and ranching, roads, energy industries, urban groups, and state and federal agencies participated in the summit. It was recognized that Kansas still has a significant amount of healthy rangeland within the migratory pathway of mon-



archs, as compared to more northern states, but we need to work to maintain those habitats.

The next few months will be dedicated to writing a Kansas state plan that not only benefits monarchs, but other pollinators, as well. The need for a diverse suite of pollinators on the landscape was recognized as critically important by all participants for maintaining healthy rangelands. This need has brought a very diverse group of participants together, some of which have opposing ideals, to work towards a common cause. All due to an orange and black butterfly.



Deer Breakfast Sausage

the meat in one- and two-pound packages and freeze. These sizes work well for most recipes, especially when you're experimenting with new recipes or fine-tuning a tested one.

After one particular sausage-making event, my wife and I tried a breakfast sausage recipe with some leftover ground pork and deer. It worked well, was simple, and needed little adjustment from the original recipe

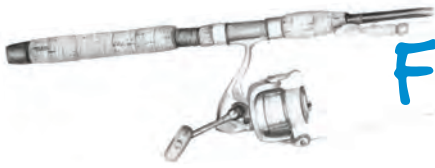
Our annual sausage-making event often includes 8-15 people and spans one full day, well into the next. This recipe will find its way into the breakfast skillet to recharge the troops for the final push on the second day, alongside fried eggs, hashbrowns and biscuits or in biscuits and sausage gravy.

When making sausage, I make large amounts at one time - "Sausage-fest, Sausagepalooza" however you want to describe it - to maximize equipment use and time. Sausages contain various combinations of deer, pork, beef or fat of beef or pork. These other meats and fats help add moisture or fat to otherwise lean venison. We don't always have an idea of what we want to make, but once the grinder is dirty, we usually grind everything we have. We then package

Venison Breakfast Sausage

- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1/4 tsp ground marjoram
- 1 T brown sugar
- 1/8 tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 pinch ground cloves
- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 pound ground venison

In a small bowl, mix together spices and brown sugar. In a separate bowl, mix together pork and venison. Combine seasoning with meat and mix together with your hands. Shape into sausage patties. Cook patties on a skillet over medium-high heat for approximately 5 minutes per side.



FISHIN'

Takin' Care of Winter Things

with Mike Miller

I love winter fishing, but I'm not the diehard I used to be. I go fishing in the winter when temperatures are in the 40s or 50s and there's not much wind. However, there is still important fishing work to be done when it's too cold or too windy to fish.

Winter days are perfect for getting your gear ready for the next trip. If you're like me, you stash rods and tackle boxes in the boat or garage after a trip and don't think much about them until the next fishing trip. Little things that need attention don't get it, and believe me, some of these little tasks can make the difference in how successful your next outing is.

So, here's my list of equipment jobs I need to complete on the next cold, snowy day. And while some of them might seem trivial, they are important and doing them will let me daydream about fishing to come.

Boat maintenance can also keep you busy on several winter days, if you have a heated garage. Winter is a great time to check trailer wheel bearings and tires. Remove the prop and clean any fishing line or weeds that may be wrapped around the shaft. Check the fuel filter and if you have a four-stroke, change the oil and filter.

Preparation is a fun part of fishing and boating and keeps both fresh in your mind while the weather keeps you inside. Do it now and you'll be ready when that warm winter day comes along and you hear the fish are biting.

1. Replace line on reels. I usually remove about half, then refill with new line. And when I replace line this time of year, I'll often look at some new lines that I haven't tried before. It's a good time to.

2. Clean and oil reels, paying special attention to the level-winder, spool and reel handle.

3. Inspect and clean rods. Cleaning the ceramic inserts in the eyelets with a Q-tip could keep a big fish from breaking off next spring. And you'll also notice if an insert has been lost. It's not hard to replace an eyelet.

4. Inventory tackle. Whether you were in a hurry because the fish were biting or it was dark when you got home, lures often get thrown in the wrong boxes or trays. And it seems I'm always buying a new lure, then stashing it away and forgetting it. A complete inventory will let you reorganize lures and find those hidden gems.

5. During tackle inventory, trim knots and fishing line from lures and check and sharpen hooks. It's also the perfect time to poke paint from jighead eyelets, which is never fun in the boat or on the bank.

6. Charge boat batteries and check the cell levels. Always make sure batteries are fully charged after each use and keep them charged through the winter.

7. Winterize your outboard and add stabilizer to the gas. If you store your boat outside, drain and replace the outboard's lower unit grease before the first freeze. Water can seep in the lower unit, and a hard freeze could do damage.

8. Lastly, replace the water-separating filter if your fuel system has one.

“WHAT AM I?” answer: Canada goose





The Way I See It

with Todd Workman

The Secret Agenda of Fido

Dogs are considered to be Man's best friend. They display an unconditional love to their owners that we should all aspire to. Ha!

I have owned many dogs and a couple were even pretty good hunting dogs. Some have been friendly, some have been tough, but they all have one thing in common – they have an agenda. It's important for a dog owner to discover what is really on a dog's mind.

My spoiled Golden Retriever's apparent purpose in life is to sleep, eat and go to the bathroom. But I know he has an agenda. He is a house dog confined to the basement or kitchen and is not allowed in the carpeted areas or the bedrooms when we're away. We thought we could count on his honor and the discipline we instilled in him to respect those rules.

However, one morning while driving down our long driveway to the road, I happened to look in the rear-view mirror and saw Shadow peeking out from behind a curtain. As I watched, his face suddenly withdrew from the window. Curious, I jammed my truck in reverse, backed up the drive and blew through the front door like a suspicious dad trying to catch a couple of lovesick teenagers. I caught the little bugger happily rolling on my good pants in my bedroom. Of course, when I walked in he immediately shot out of the room like he forgot something.

To learn more, I strapped a trail camera to the leg of my dresser in the bedroom, and it revealed that this was a daily ritual. That was his agenda. Now I have to pick up all of my clothes and keep everything off of the floor. Come to think of it, that might be somebody else's agenda.

Some people seem to be completely

blind to their dogs' agendas. A fishing buddy of mine talked lovingly about Tootsie, a Boxer he had when he was a boy. His stories left me flabbergasted.

He told me about Tootsie leading him onto a frozen pond.

"The ice held ole Toots, but I fell through and couldn't get out. I thought I was gonna drown, but ole Toots stayed with me, just wagging his tail, encouraging me to not give up, I guess. When I finally did climb out and was running for home to keep from freezing to death, ole Toots ran along with me, barking and trying to knock me down. He was so happy and he didn't understand I was going to get pneumonia."

After just one more story, I figured out Toots' agenda.

"I was walking Toots around town on a leash but he was pulling me so hard, my arms were getting tired, so I tied the leash around my waist. Just then a cat shot out of nowhere and ole Toots went after it. I bounced down the road behind Toots, through yards and over rose bushes. I was in need of medical attention, but ole Toots wouldn't let anybody near me, growling and barking at anyone who approached. I would have bled to death if they wouldn't have popped him with a tranquilizer gun. Poor ole Toots was just trying to protect me because I was hurt."

Are you kidding me? Protect? It was plain to me that Toots' agenda was killing off my friend.

My current hunting dog, Deuce, is an English Pointer and the best hunting dog I have ever had. But after stepping in dog dung ten times, I have decided that Deuce is a bonafide crap trapper. She lays crap traps for me with the skill of a master chess player. She studies my movements and then poops where she thinks I will walk; She is

always five moves ahead of me. The only safe place in my yard is on my lawn mower. But getting to it can be an issue.

"You gonna cut the lawn?" my wife asked recently.

"Yep," I replied, scanning the yard.

"Well the lawnmower is over there," she said, pointing, as if I didn't know.

"I know," I said, looking back. "But that dang dog has strategically placed land mines where she thinks I'll walk, so I'm going in from this way."

I should have looked down instead of back at my Detractor. I felt my foot sink down a good three inches – a mega trap. I looked at Deuce and I swear that dog opened her mouth and yelped "Check Mate."

Shutterstock/Andrii Muzyka photo



Walking Plants *by Iralee Barnard*

Winter is a time when plants appear to be at rest, but you might notice them “walking.” Take a good look at the plants along the roadside. They are still beautiful in shape and form and often quite colorful in fall and winter. Upon closer inspection, you will find that even into winter many plants still hold interesting seedpods or fruits. The fruits or pods may still be packed with seeds, and dispersal of these seeds helps plants move or “walk” to new places. This can happen while the plants are dormant, too. Plants are capable of traveling very long distances via their seeds and have intricate mechanisms in place to accomplish this.

Prairie plants have many adaptations that promote seed dispersal. For instance, squirrels, raccoons, birds, and rodents, to name a few, are attracted to the edible fruit of many wild plants, and they spread seeds by collecting, storing, and eating the fruit. Even large seeds like those of wild plum are found in coyote scat.

Another mechanism used by some plants is called abscission. The plant stem is programmed to break away at the base, scattering seeds as they tumble in the wind. Wild alfalfa and prairie turnip are

two examples of abscission.

Some plants, such as prairie wild licorice and cocklebur have barbed hooks on the fruits containing seeds. The hooks catch on the fur of passing animals and thus, seeds can be moved to new locations. Finding ways to stick to fur or clothing is a great tactic for plant seeds, and as it turns out, this same attachment method is very useful to humans. In the 1940s, after a walk in the woods when his dog came home full of burs, a Swiss engineer invented Velcro.

Other plants fire “rockets” to propel their seeds. Jewelweed and wild violets have an explosive mechanism that sends seeds flying many feet away from the parent plant.

As children, all of us picked the fluffy dandelion balls to watch the parachutes fly in the wind. The dandelion benefited from our help, and the wind, to scatter the seeds. Other plant seeds, such as those of milkweeds and wavy-leaf thistle use silky parachutes to fly to their next home.

Fall is the time for seeds. Think about the plants you see and how they may disperse their seeds. Plants have many ways to move great distances.



Iralee Barnard photos





The Fabric of Our Fun

by Dan Witt

Our introduction to the outdoors usually starts when we're kids. A parent or grandparent gives us a fishing pole, a BB or pellet gun and some ground rules. We were driven by excitement for our new gift and were eager to get outdoors so we could join the relative who gave us the gift.

In my high school years in a small Texas town, I usually had a .22 rifle and .410 shotgun in the trunk of my car. It was not uncommon to join classmates after school for a hunt. We were driven by the possibility of getting a limit of doves, quail, rabbits or ducks.

As an adult, my outdoor outings soon evolved to taking a trip to a large reservoir or the ocean to catch fish not found in our local farm ponds. A trip to places where elk and mule deer could be hunted was also on our list. I remember vividly my first mule deer and elk hunts with my father, and most hunters my age have similar memories.

I had one of the earliest Cabela's customer numbers and consumed their catalogs with intensity. I was driven then to get more gear and fishing lures, convinced it would improve my success rates – a concept I now know to be false.

But of all the things I've learned and experienced on my journey to becoming a hunter and angler, meeting like-minded people has been the biggest joy. These friendships expand over the years and become the fabric of our fun. I have been so very fortunate to link up with some game wardens who are tough, efficient and dedicated outdoorsmen. I

have also added some Canadians and Louisiana sportsmen to my list of cherished friends. They have all taught me some very important, and some very useless, things. We have all demonstrated very precise and unique processes for acquiring game and have all failed miserably – usually in plain sight of each other, creating the stories and legends of our lives. We have supported each other in times of illness and tragedy and have relished successes when they occur. We have shared dogs, equipment, food (gumbo made fresh is a delicacy I can't describe), tents and fish camps. We have spent lots of days traveling to other states or countries to pursue our dreams. The pursuit of musk ox in the Territories, kudu and wildebeest in Africa, red fish and trout in the gulf, elk in Colorado and Wyoming, and whitetails in Kansas have welded us together.

I think about these friends daily and we communicate frequently. Our passion for the outdoors is a way of life, and we are either planning our next trip or doing something in the great outdoors that makes us laugh or puts a lump in our throat.

I feel very fortunate to have formed these friendships and to have shared some of my best and worst days with these people. I know I would be much less without them. I hope each of you have had similar experiences with like-minded folks. It is these friendships that drive us to our next trip or expedition. What drives you?



Dan Witt photo



Doug Blex

Kansas House of Representatives

Rep. Doug Blex, R-Independence, has served one year of his first term in the Kansas House, representing District 12. Rep. Blex may or may not fit your idea of what a state politician is, but it's safe to say his path to the legislature is unique among his peers. And Kansans who value our hunting, fishing and trapping traditions and natural resources should be grateful he's there.

Rep. Blex retired after 27 years with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. He spent most of his career managing public lands, eventually supervising staff and management of public lands in the southeast quarter of the state. Before his career with KDWPT, Rep. Blex served in the military in Vietnam and attended Kansas State University to study wildlife biology. He credits the influence of one of his college professors for his interest in politics.

"Dr. Robel was an outstanding advisor and he was set on getting his students involved in current events and being interested in what was going on in local and state politics," Blex remembered. "He instilled in me at an early age that you have more impact on conservation by guiding policy at a regional or state level than you can working on a single area."

Rep. Blex enjoyed his first legislative session because he was able to use his career experience to be a voice for hunting, fishing and trapping and provide input to other legislators on natural resource issues.

"It's a process you only learn by being there," Rep. Blex said, as he described his experience in the legislature. "The one thing I have tried to do is maintain every bit of my integrity. If I say I will do something, I will do everything humanly possible to make sure it can be done. I try not over-promise or over-commit. When it's all said and done, your legacy will probably be the integrity you have with not only your fellow legislators but also the people of Kansas."

When asked about how he was introduced to the outdoors, Rep. Blex began by describing his view from the kitchen window.

"As we're talking, I'm sitting here looking over my deck on the very land I was raised on. I grew up on the creek that runs through this 160 acres, and I had an older brother who was a very good mentor. Dad worked so he didn't have the time but I had a grandpa who loved to fish and he guided me," Rep. Blex said. "I take my grandkids out on that same creek and we turn over rocks; we still fish and hunt squirrels, deer and turkey along that creek."

That statement reminded Rep. Blex how much his Kansas landscape has changed.

"When I was young there were very few raccoons along this creek and no deer or turkey. It was an honor



for me to have been a major player in trapping and transplanting turkeys in our area. Now we have turkeys all over the place, deer, too. I think growing up in a rural lifestyle set the stage for me to love the outdoors and I place a high value of passing on these traditions to my grandchildren. I feel the same way about the legislators I work with," he added. "I mentor them about wildlife matters."

When asked about issues facing our outdoor traditions, Rep. Blex talked about the challenges of convincing people how important hunting, fishing and trapping is in our state and the significant economic impact those traditions have.

The 2018 session will be Rep. Blex's second of a two-year term, and while talking about his future in politics, he admitted that serving requires sacrifice. In addition to the normal 90-day legislative session (2017's lasted more than 100 days), he spoke of the meetings he feels obligated to attend when not in session, taking him away from his cattle, farming chores and time with his 15 grandchildren.

"I need to be accessible to the people in my district," he said while describing some of the Labor Day events he would attend at various communities. "I have a real strong open door policy and I want to represent the will of the people in my district."

As he described how his career with KDWPT helps him as a legislator, Rep. Blex chuckled when describing his claim to fame when, in 1986, he captured the first alligator snapping turtle found in Kansas in more than 100 years. The story made national news.

"Seriously, I believe that working for Wildlife and Parks did a phenomenal job in preparing me to be a legislator," he said. "I was a jack of all trades and master of none, but I had to know a lot about many different things, such as ag leases, road building, people management, public speaking, and law enforcement. I think that gives me an edge in dealing with the diversity and complexity of working in the legislature."

In closing, Rep. Blex said of serving in the legislature, "It is a privilege and an honor and I hope I can leave a legacy my grandchildren will be proud of."



ON-CALL, FIRE AND ALL

by Trent McCown, *manager – Prairie Spirit Trail State Park*

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) staff usually don't come to mind when you think about fire response teams, but many have been trained in wildland firefighting because fire is an important tool to manage prairie on public land. That's why when wild fires broke out in several western Kansas counties last March, KDWPT personnel joined other emergency responders to help protect lives and property.

Initially, KDWPT personnel assisted in evacua-

tions and other public safety activities as the wind-driven fires quickly spread. However, the speed at which the fires moved made firefighting efforts dangerous and difficult, and crews needed all the help they could get. The high winds not only pushed the fires rapidly across the dry landscape, but they blew embers ahead of the main fire, causing spot fires. The flames jumped roads and firebreaks, making firelines difficult to establish and hold. Thick smoke made navigating through the fiery landscape difficult and disorienting.

KDWPT personnel assisted with firefighting activities in many different roles throughout the fire event. Some of our staff worked on the firelines, using agency fire-control equipment to help contain the fires and protect structures, while others continued to work in law enforcement roles. Some of our staff have received specialized training in emergency management and often assist at Emergency Operation Centers at the state or local level, and some serve on the state All Hazards Incident Management Team, supporting local jurisdictions during major events. Those skills proved more than helpful during the fires.



Photo courtesy Courtney Leslie/KS AHIMT

*When wild fires broke out in several western Kansas counties last March, KDWPT personnel joined other emergency responders to help protect **lives and property.***



As the fires spread, resources were stretched thin across the state. Large fires occurred in Reno, Rice, McPherson, Ellsworth, Lincoln, Russell, Rooks, Ness, Ford, Clark and Comanche counties, and there were also smaller fires in other counties throughout the state. Eventually, more than 590,000 acres burned in Kansas. A group of five closely-associated fires that stretched from Oklahoma up into Comanche and Clark counties in Kansas burned an estimated 750,000 acres. One fire, named the Starbuck Fire, in Oklahoma and the Clark County Fire in Kansas, burned an more than 663,000 acres between the two states. It burned approximately 430,000 acres in Clark County alone, about 85 percent of the county. This became the largest fire in Kansas' history.



Firefighting crews were brought in from out of state to help fight the fires, and aircraft were utilized to survey the damage and conduct water drops. Once the firefighters were able to contain the fires, agency personnel assisted in evaluating the damage and helping those who were impacted.

KDWPT had more than 40 full-time personnel involved at the fire response, representing several different divisions. Others filled in where needed to cover duties normally performed by those who were deployed.

These events remind us that KDWPT staff protect not only our state's resources but also the people living in and traveling through our state. We're on-call, fire and all. 🐃



AN ARTIST'S CALL



Text and photos by
Marc Murrell, manager
Great Plains Nature Center

Waterfowl hunting and fine art have a long history. The Federal Duck Stamp contest, which started in 1949, attracts some of the best wildlife artists in the

world, who compete to have their artwork appear on the annual duck stamp. Duck and goose hunters must purchase the stamps, and millions of dollars in revenue protect, conserve and enhance critical waterfowl habitat. And there is the history of hand-made duck and goose

decoys, which were built out of necessity 150 years ago. Today, original hand-made decoys are collectors' items, and the art of carving and painting decoys has evolved to create wooden ducks that are difficult to discern from the real thing. But there is a lesser-known art and medium



associated with waterfowl hunting that is equally eye-catching: the art of hand-carved and painted duck calls. And it just so happens that one of the best call artists in the world lives right here in Kansas – Joe Bucher.

Bucher, 59, has lived in Louisburg, just south of Kansas City, for about 30 years. A lifelong Kansan, he works out of his home and has been hand-carving and painting duck calls for more than four decades. His company, Heritage Calls, is geared toward providing the outdoor enthusiast or collector with call that is a work of art rather than a hunting tool. Heritage Calls, and its dealers, ship calls to countries around the world, including Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and South America.

Bucher's love of all things waterfowl started out innocently enough when he was a young boy.

"My grandfather had a farm in Oklahoma and I'd go down there with my dad to hunt quail when I was 8 years old," Bucher said. "The quail were thick and I

loved to hunt them."

The Buchers decided to try quail hunting at Marais des Cygnes Wildlife Area since it was closer to their home. While Marais des Cygnes did hold quail, it was better known for its marshes and duck hunting.

"I kept seeing guys hunting ducks and decided I wanted to try that and I shot my first duck, a wood duck," Bucher said, gazing at the duck mount still adorning his office wall today. "I was hooked."

While in high school, Bucher wanted to learn to call ducks but didn't have any calls. With plans to purchase a duck call, he visited Dale Largent, who owned Marshland Game Call Company in Overland Park. Largent showed Bucher some of the hand-carved and painted calls he made in his basement. Bucher had an interest in drawing and painting wildlife and immediately thought he might like carving calls, too.

"I was blown away," Bucher said. "I asked Dale if I could try carving one and I started carving for him."

That first call, one of more than 100,000 now, featured a wood duck on the side and is a reminder of where Bucher started and just how far he has come in the specialty carving and collector's world.

Bucher went to Kansas University and initially thought he wanted to be an engineer but the required math classes didn't interest him. He thought about geology before settling on the medical field where he eventually became a dental technician doing prosthetic crowns and bridges.

Bucher continued carving calls while working full-time and was kept busy with both.

"I started selling calls in about 1979 to wildlife galleries," Bucher said. "My calls were one of the top items that Tradewinds' four stores ever sold."

He worked to sell his custom calls to other retailers, too. And over the next couple of decades, his business grew to the point that he decided to give up his "real" job. In 1996 he began focusing exclusively on creating custom calls.

"That was about the time I got into laser engraving on duck calls and I could get them mass-produced," Bucher said. "As far as I knew, I was the only one doing it and I started painting them and thought to myself 'I might really have something.'"

He decided to peddle his wares to Ducks Unlimited. It seemed like an obvious fit but he was rejected because that year's catalog was already full. He left a call there and was asked to submit his line the next year.

"So I went home and Gary Goodpaster from DU called a couple weeks later and talked to my wife and said one of their catalog





vendors dropped out and wondered if I was still interested," Bucher said. "He ordered 200 calls and they sold out almost immediately. They ordered 2,000 more and they sold out in a couple weeks."

Bucher's meticulously-crafted caught on like wildfire.

"I moved from page 64 in the DU catalog to page 8," Bucher laughed. "Whenever you move up, you're doing well."

Business was good and other companies, such as Caterpillar, Inc., Riceland Rice Corporation and John Deere, followed suit with orders for his duck calls, customized with their logos. His calls were being sold far and wide and keeping up with demand was his biggest challenge.

However, after 9/11, his custom duck call business felt the impact this sad catastrophe had on the economy and many retail businesses.

"It went along until about 2008 and then it hit rock bottom," Bucher said. "I'd lost all accounts but one."

But as one door closed, another opened. Bucher admits the business side of his custom duck calls is a daunting task, but help arrived with the advent of social media.

"Custom calls really took off through Facebook and anyone with a \$300 lathe started making calls," Bucher said.

Undeterred, Bucher continued making his calls and decided to enter the Call Collectors of America Competition, sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation. It was a good call, literally, as he won first place three out of the four years he entered.

"I got to meet a lot of interesting people during the competitions as I walked around the exhibition hall," Bucher said. I met Jeff Foxworthy, Will Primos and I talked OU football with Blake Shelton."

Bucher's competitive itch was scratched, but he didn't necessarily enjoy competing against his friends in the business. He admits his biggest competition is within his own mind as he tries to come up with new ideas, themes and designs.

His latest project is the North American Collection with a target of 60 calls featuring all of this continent's duck species, plus a few hybrids and even an extinct duck. Each call will feature a particular duck, as well as a theme. The theme will portray unique topics or well-known facts, celebrity figures or scenery icons

from the heart of that particular duck's native range or flyway.

Each of the calls in this collection will be meticulously and painstakingly hand-crafted from start to finish. Bucher begins by turning out a block of wood, usually walnut as it holds the best edge. He also uses cherry, ebony or purpleheart. He does this in his garage under the watchful eye of Heritage Calls' official mascot, Herbie, his big, extremely-chilled blood hound.

"It takes about an hour to turn one," Bucher says. "The hardest part sometimes is getting the insert to fit correctly."

From there, Bucher sketches a design on the wood with a pencil and begins delicately carving the wood with a small rotary tool. He's got thousands of bits, many from his days of crafting prosthetic crowns and bridges and each is a unique tool in his arsenal. One of the fine bits may turn at 600,000 RPMs, while a coarse bit spins at about 20,000 RPMs.

The work is tedious since he starts from deep in the design and layers his work outward to give the call relief and three dimensions. Once the carving is complete, he paints each call by hand using only the finest European artist's oil paints.



"I really like painting the calls as much as anything," Bucher said. "Each one is an original and each has a unique theme."

Bucher enjoys listening to music while he's working and one of his favorite artists is Charlotte Church. He finds inspiration in her traditional music and says he strives to be as good at his craft as she is at hers. He listens to other artists, too, and has plenty of time to do so. A single call might take him 30 days of a nearly full-time schedule to finish, and some in his North American Collection have taken as long as five to six

months to complete.

His favorite features a pair of mottled ducks with a Cajun, Mardi Gras theme. It's got mind-blowing detail and colors, as do all in that collection, and is truly an incredible work of art. In fact, he was offered \$25,000 for it by a duck call collector. He turned it down as he wants to keep the set complete until it's finished for the entire world to see.

Bucher estimates he's sold anywhere from 100,000-130,000 custom calls over his lifetime. Back when business was good, he was consistently selling 5,000 calls a year to Ducks Unlimited,

Cabela's, Bass Pro Shops and others. Sales peaked at nearly 10,000 calls per year.


Many things have changed since then, but some certainly for the better.

"One of those early calls would sell for \$50, now they're \$500," Bucher said.

Bucher still sells his laser-crafted calls and paints each one individually, as well as working on his own hand-carved and hand-painted custom pieces. Marketing his calls is the biggest challenge. He's pursuing avenues of selling his work through Internet sales and is exploring Amazon and other outlets.

The calls in his North American Collection are incredible, beautiful works of art and no two are alike. To collectors and waterfowl enthusiasts, they're as much a sight to behold as a group of mallards descending into a decoy spread, wings backpedaling and orange landing gear down, ready for the taking. Simply stunning.

Artists, regardless of medium, may only find fame after their death and the value of their work may increase dramatically when they're gone. Bucher isn't sure what's in store for him and his art, but he's content to keep doing what makes him happy, creating masterful, collectable duck calls.

"I like to try to do things no one else does and push myself to be the best and produce some incredible art," Bucher concluded. "It's hard to tell what will happen in the future, but I've got files and books of ideas and I'm always thinking about ways to make my work better." 

For more information, or to order any of Bucher's custom duck calls, visit www.heritagecalls.com.



Jon Blumb photo

RACING AFTER RABBITS

BY JEFF PRENDERGAST, KDWPT SMALL GAME SPECIALIST

IN 2011, my first year working for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, I was patrolling Walk-in Hunting Access (WIHA) areas on opening day of the pheasant and quail seasons and, not surprisingly, was finding very few people. I was stationed in southeast Kansas where quail populations had been in long-term declines and to see someone quail hunting that year would have been the exception rather than the norm. In fact, at 2 p.m. I was excited when I finally found a pair of trucks with dog boxes. I could see orange hats moving toward me through the brush about 100 yards away, so I waited on the road. When I shut off the engine, a distinct sound hit my ears, triggering a flood of childhood memories and a hint of excitement rushed over me. It was the familiar sound of beagle hounds baying as they cut a fresh track. Sure enough, after a short chase and a shotgun blast, eight orange-clad hunters, each with several tri-colored beagles in tow, walked out the field.

After a short visit, I learned the group had traveled nearly 900 miles from southeast Alabama to hunt Kansas at the invitation of a friend. An unfortunate miscommunication had put them in town during the opening weekend of pheasant season and their guide was out west for his annual pheasant hunt. The crew was haphazardly

One of the best things about rabbit hunting is the simplicity: you don't need decoys, calls, high dollar optics, camouflage, blinds or any expensive equipment. If you have a shotgun or a small caliber rifle, you're equipped. While there's nothing quite like hunting rabbits with beagles, you can be successful without them.

working through the area hunting WIHA tracts with limited success. Before parting ways, I pointed them to a nearby wildlife area where I knew there was an abundance of rabbits.

The experience hit home with me because I started out hunting rabbits with beagle hounds. My father was not a hunter, but when I was 10 years old and expressed interest, he took the time to walk in the woods with me, looking for the stray rabbit or squirrel. As my interest out-

grew our .22 caliber adventures, dad found me a true hunting mentor – Uncle Jimmy. Uncle Jimmy was actually my great uncle and had a very flexible work schedule at the time, making him an excellent hunting companion for a young, fiery kid. Uncle Jimmy had three beagles – Poriky, Baby, and Stupid (there's a story behind that name). Following the Missouri deer season, Uncle Jimmy and I would chase rabbits with his hounds every weekend, as long





Beagles can be hunted alone, but they are pack hunters and will perform better alongside other beagles. Some hunters will choose to run big packs of 12 or more dogs, but even just adding a second or third dog will improve your hunts.

as I didn't have a basketball tournament. And we hunted nearly every day of Christmas break. While I tried my hand hunting a few other species, I focused on rabbits during my teenage years.

Through the 2011 hunting season, I saw several other parties chasing rabbits with beagles. However, they were always from faraway places such as Kentucky, Tennessee, and South Carolina. I never saw hunters in a truck with Kansas plates loading up beagles. It is interesting to me that people will travel these great distances to hunt rabbits in Kansas when residents rarely take advantage of the opportunity. In fact, the number of rabbit hunters in Kansas has decreased dramatically over the last 30 years from a high of just over 90,000 to less than 15,000. And the percent of our rabbit hunters who are non-residents has nearly doubled. While the numbers of hunters pursuing other small game species have declined, none have dropped as drastically as rabbit hunters.

This surprises me for several reasons. We have a liberal daily limit of 10 rabbits and a year-round season. Competition for the resource is low, cottontails occur statewide and are abundant across much of the eastern

and central regions where appropriate habitat exists. Conditions in February and March are often perfect for trailing hounds and allow hunters to extend the hunting season beyond January when upland bird seasons end. For individuals who enjoy watching dogs work, the continuous game of cat and mouse played by the rabbits and hounds is entertaining and exciting. Chases create conditions that may be challenging to experienced shooters and they can provide forgiving shooting opportunities for beginners.

Weedy meadows, brushy field edges, and timber with adequate understorey are good areas to find cottontails. Old homesteads with brush piles and junk piles usually hold cottontails, too.

Later in the 2011 season, I ran into the Alabama hunters again and learned they harvested 16 rabbits in 2 hours on the wildlife area I recommended. They made two more trips to Kansas that year, harvesting limits on multiple occasions. I decided then that rabbit hunting was one of Kansas' best-kept secrets, at least with our resident hunters.

With apologies to those who have had Kansas rabbit hunting to themselves to this point, I'm here to let the secret out with a few tips for anyone new to rabbit hunting. One of the best things about rabbit hunting is the simplicity: you don't need decoys, calls, high dollar optics, camouflage, blinds or any expensive equipment. If you have a shotgun or a small caliber



Jon Blumb photos



When the dogs jump a rabbit, find a high vantage point and wait. Rabbits have small home ranges and are reluctant to leave the safety of the area. You can follow the race by listening to the beagles bay, and excitement grows as the sounds get louder.

rifle, you're equipped. And while there's nothing quite like hunting rabbits with beagles, you can be successful without them. You don't need to be quiet or stealthy. In fact, noise can help flush your quarry; although, periodically pausing can be unsettling to rabbits just like it is with many other game species. Weedy meadows, brushy field edges, and timber with adequate understory are good areas to find cottontails. Old homesteads with brush piles and junk piles usually hold cottontails, too. Once jumped, rabbits will often go a short distance and pause offering a good shot opportunity.

If you are hunting with dogs there are a few additional things to keep in mind. Beagles can be hunted alone, but they are pack hunters and will perform better alongside other beagles. Some

hunters will choose to run big packs of 12 or more dogs, but even just adding a second or third dog will improve your hunts. When the dogs jump a rabbit, find a high vantage point and wait. Rabbits have small home ranges and are reluctant to leave the safety of the area. You can follow the race by listening to the beagles bay, and excitement grows as the sounds get louder. As long as the dogs can stay on the track, the rabbit will run a circle, continually going back through the area and providing multiple shooting opportunities. Rabbits run ahead of the dogs so if you are watching the dogs, you will often miss your opportunity as the rabbit is dodging through the underbrush.

In addition to the ease and excitement of the hunt, rabbits make excellent table fare, earning them the nickname

"bush chicken." A quick web search will reveal delicious recipes for wild rabbit.

Unfortunately, it's been several years since I have been on a real rabbit hunt. When I came to Kansas for school, I discovered turkey hunting, pheasant hunting, duck hunting and have even done a little trapping. Each additional activity has cut into my time budgeted for recreation and I've gotten away from some of the things I truly enjoy. I've made many new friends since coming to the state but no rabbit hunters, yet. I guess it's harder to be excited about rabbit hunting without others to share the passion with. My hunting dog these days is a solid-colored puddle mutt, and while my kennel won't currently allow for expansion, I guarantee a couple of loud mouth hounds are in my future. I can hardly wait. 🐾



text & photos by

Snowshoeing in Kansas

Rich McHenry





Looking for a new outdoor adventure in Kansas this winter?

Strap on a pair of snowshoes and go for a hike! Float on top of fresh-fallen snow and discover the hidden beauty of our land seldom seen by others. Other than the soft fluffing of your snowshoes in the fresh powder, the only other sounds you'll hear are birds and snow falling gently from the trees. If you like hiking in peace and quiet, there is no better way than snowshoeing.

Unlike neighboring states where snow is more abundant, Kansans typically don't need anything more than a sled to enjoy snow. Winter activities such as snowmobiling, downhill skiing, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are uncommon activities for those who call Kansas home. We're more likely to retreat to the warmth of the fireplace or travel to neighboring states to play in the snow.

However, enjoying Kansas' trails when we do get snow is inexpensive and provides opportunities to leave the fireplace and explore. In addition to being a healthy outdoor activity, snowshoeing

provides a unique glimpse of scenery and wildlife rarely experienced any other way. And animals easily spooked in other seasons such as deer, coyotes and foxes may be more curious than afraid of a person on snowshoes.

The History of the Snowshoe

Native Americans were first to use the most common type of snowshoe, a teardrop shaped wooden frame lashed with rawhide webbing and leather bindings. This mode of transportation was likely the difference between life-and-death for those who could not travel far enough each winter to escape the snow.

Basic Parts of a Snowshoe

There are four basic parts to a modern snowshoe: frame, decking, bindings and traction. The price of a snowshoe is based on the materials it's made of and the sophistication of use. An entry-level model is sufficient for most Kansas snowshoeing.

Frames and Decking – Today's snowshoe frames are largely made from aluminum or carbon fiber. Decking is now often crafted with nylon or Hypalon rubber, making your snowshoes light and responsive.

Bindings – There are two types of bindings: fixed and rotating. If you simply want to take off on a flat trail, then a fixed binding is all you need. However, if you traipse through more rugged terrain, a more sophisticated rotating binding works best.

Traction systems – On flat terrain, not much is needed in way of traction. However, more aggressive hiking in rugged terrain, especially up and down hills, requires a snowshoe with gripping power.

Types of Snowshoes

Snowshoes work on the concept of weight displacement often referred to as flotation. Rather than walking in snow with a relatively small surface area on the sole of a boot, snowshoes are built to distribute your weight and keep you on top of the snow. Matching the size of the shoe with your body weight is an important factor in purchasing your first set.

There are three basic types of snowshoes:

Flat Terrain: This snowshoe is designed for level surfaces and is best for a beginner. Often less expensive than others, they have easy-to-use bindings.

Rolling Terrain: If you intend to snowshoe in

rolling terrain, then you need snowshoes with better bindings and decks. These bindings have more aggressive crampons, or grips, as well as sturdier construction.

Mountainous Terrain: For areas that require more technical skills, snowshoes designed for both ascending and descending rugged terrain are best. The noticeable difference is both in the binding and the traction system.

For runners wanting a new experience of trail running with snowshoes, rugged terrain snowshoes are favored.

How to Snowshoe

If you've ever tried walking in snow 2 feet deep with a pair of boots on, you understand how strenuous, and even dangerous, that can be. Each foot blindly plummets to the bottom of the snow reaching for something solid. Snowshoes float you on top of the surface.

Choose a flat trail for your first snowshoeing expedition to help you familiarize yourself with the dynamics. Your legs will be further apart than your normal gait because of the width of the snowshoes.

Hiking or ski poles are extremely helpful, but not essential. If you already have a set of hiking poles, they will work fine. However, ski poles have a wider base to provide more support. Poles help you maintain balance and, should you tumble, help you stand back up.

The first time you come to a hill, especially if you're wearing snowshoes designed for flat terrain, you might find it difficult to go up or down. The solution is to traverse – rather than climbing the hill straight on, turn sideways and use the snowshoe closest to the hill to form a little shelf that is stable and flat. This takes some time, but, in essence, you're building stair-steps that let you climb sideways.

Safety

Once you strap on a pair of snowshoes, remember that you'll go where others won't, so rescue is more difficult. Here are some basic rules divided into "must-haves" and "kind-of-handly:"

Must-Haves

- Dress in layers since the longer you spend on the trail, the warmer you become. Wear a warm pair of boots, and

gaiters are handy to keep the snow out. I prefer wool for its warmth, flexibility and quietness, and it continues to insulate even when wet. Note: Nylon ski bibs are warm, but they are noisy.

- Never hike alone. Let others know where you are hiking and when you plan to return.
- A whistle is one of the handiest emergency devices you can carry. Three whistle blasts in a row is the universal S.O.S. distress signal.

Kind-of-handly

- Bring a fire-starting kit. It's winter, it's cold and it's fun to find a quiet place and build a little fire. It also comes in handy if you or a companion are injured and need to remain stationary while another goes for help.
- I never go hiking without a multi-tool with the little saw blade.
- Carry water in a hydration system or water bottle and make sure it's insulated so it doesn't freeze.
- A jetboil is a handy and light apparatus that will turn snow into hot chocolate or coffee.
- Carry some trail bars. Snowshoeing requires a lot of energy.

Where to Snowshoe

Kansas has trails that range from easy to difficult, so even experienced snowshoers you can find a challenge. Rail trails are perfect for beginning snowshoers because of the easy grade, width that will accommodate two or three people abreast and lack of obstructions.

For ideas of where to go, including challenging trails, visit the Kansas Trails Council website at www.kansastrailsouncil.org, and the Get Outdoors Kansas website at www.getoutdoorskansas.org.

Photography Tricks

You will experience the beauty of Kansas untarnished and will want to capture those images. However, if you've ever tried to take a photo of snow, it's not easy. You see a pure white scene but the photo turns out gray. The reason is that your camera is factory-set to a color called a gray-scale. I won't get too technical, but you're camera is set to translate pure white into 18 percent gray.

Therefore, the trick is to set your camera to over-expose. You





might have to dig out the manual to figure out how to do this, but it's usually pretty simple. If you're using a smartphone, just tap on the screen and alter the exposure by sliding your brightness button to lighten the scene.

Family Fun

Snowshoeing is an excellent way for families to have fun in the snow. Whether you carry the wee ones in child backpack or buy a pair of snowshoes just their size, the opportunity to explore nature on top of the snow provides teachable moments and memories for a lifetime.

Snowshoeing with Dogs

Few winter scenes are as enjoyable as a dog frolicking in the snow. If you want to snowshoe with dogs, here are a few ideas for you and your pet:

- Consult a veterinarian first. Winter activity requires more exertion than normal, so make sure your pet is healthy enough to venture out.
- Check the rules for the trail. Even though it's winter, the rules for dogs on a trail are year-round and leashes are often required.
- Pack a bowl and extra water. Like you, your pet is going to require hydration.

- Check their paws regularly. Snow packed in their paws can quickly turn to ice and this can be painful for a dog. When in doubt, clean them out.
- Stash towels in your vehicle. Like humans, dogs are susceptible to hypothermia. When you get done with your hike, you can use those towels to dry off your sidekick and make them a cozy bed to rest on for the drive home.

Winter is Waiting to Wow You

As a photographer, I often grab my camera gear and head outside, believing that Nature is waiting to stun me with her beauty; all I have to do is look for it. She is willing to share her elegance, but only to those who deliberately seek it.

Kansas is waiting to show off for you like you've never seen, or heard, before. Strap on a set of snowshoes and rediscover why you fell in love with the Sunflower State to begin with.

Let it snow! 🐾



Bruce Cooper – head gamekeeper of Glenprosen Estate near Kirriemuir, Scotland – at work on red deer stag trophies.

HOW TO MAKE A *European Deer Mount*

text and photos by Jon Blumb, *freelance writer and photographer*

Have you ever wondered what to do with the antlers of a buck you've taken? Maybe they're not that big or you already have enough deer mounts, but you still want to preserve them. Really, every deer is a trophy. And just like the venison meat itself, nothing should go to waste.

Like most whitetail hunters, you respect the deer and appreciate the hunting season long after it is closed. Preserving these trophies is a way that you can savor the hunt and respect the deer.

It's not difficult to make a handsome "European" (skull with antlers) mount, and you probably already have the necessary components on hand. If you have done any processing of your own venison, this isn't very different. It can wait until after the meat has been cut, wrapped and frozen, but don't put it off too long – the sooner you can get to work on this, the easier it is to remove the skin and cartilage from the skull.

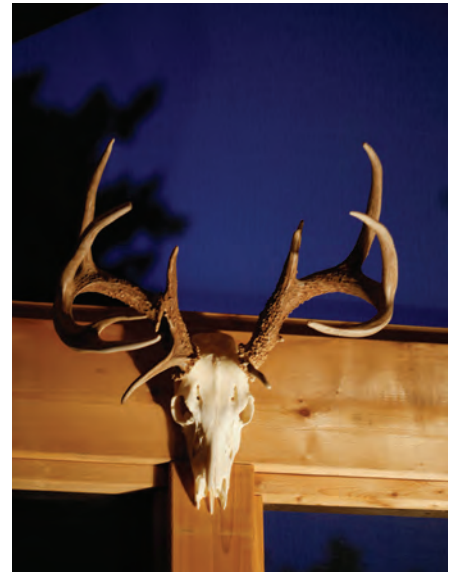
While this technique gets its name from Europe, it's used in countries all over the world. Bruce Cooper, head gamekeeper of Glenprosen Estate, by Kirriemuir, Scotland, taught me the process. In

Scotland, the gamekeepers who guide deerstalkers work evenings to keep current with the cleaning of the trophies, because each client may shoot a red deer stag every day in the field.

After dinner, it is typical for a gamekeeper to excuse himself from the house and work in the game larder. On the weekend before the clients depart, gamekeepers usually deliver as many as five trophies, or "heads," to the client. Naturally, the gamekeepers look forward to receiving a traditional cash tip upon delivery.

As long as the outdoor temperature is cool, you can store the head and antlers outside or in an outbuilding, without freezing, until you're ready. It will keep best in a paper bag, which isn't airtight. Keep it out of reach of pets and scavengers. If the weather dips below freezing, it is a good idea to defrost the head before beginning work.

Make sure you have the necessary tools in place before starting. Tools you'll need include a skinning knife, a flexible fillet knife, and saw. A carpenter's wood saw works well. Bow saws tend to be too flexible to stay on the desired angle. You also need a bucket for the boiling water. A fish or turkey boiler, a camp fireplace, or even on an open wood fire can provide adequate heat to boil the water. Rubber or latex gloves are also recommended.



INSTRUCTIONS

First, skin the skull as well as possible, removing the eyes and any flesh you can.

Cut above the line of teeth but below the eye socket with the saw. You need to estimate the angle of the cut in advance, and brace the skull while you cut. It helps to have someone stabilize the head while you saw. If you see the angle drifting off your desired path, you can always stop when the blade reaches the center, then begin again from the opposite side. Once you have the rear of the skull trimmed, remove as much membrane as possible. Keep in mind, as you boil, you can go back and remove more.

Immerse the skull in hot water that has just a few drops of dishwashing detergent added. Make

sure you have a dependable heat source and plenty of fuel. You can use any size bucket, but a tapered bucket that holds about 3 gallons will be more efficient than a 5 gallon bucket. There is no set time for boiling. It could take 3 hours or 5 hours, depending on the age and size of the deer, and your fire.

Place the head so water doesn't bubble up onto the antlers. If it does, the boiled part will become lighter and will not match. Top up the water as needed. If you add hot tap water, the water will resume boiling sooner. You may need to use a clamp to adjust the depth of the skull in the water. You can also put a brick or rocks in the bucket to help balance the skull.

Use a wire brush to scrub off cartilage and meat every so often.

Pick boiled tissue out of recesses with a fillet knife or any long, skinny object such as a wire hanger or needle nose pliers.

Trim remaining cartilage, fat, and skin away.

Clean skin, hair, and cartilage from the base of each antler. A toothbrush helps to get between the small bumps without scrubbing any color off.

Scrape any remaining tissue off of the skull. Return to the boiling water and repeat as needed. If you boil the skull too long, the cartilage that holds the fine plates of the nose together will dissolve and the nose will become weakened, so it is impor-

tant not to overdo the boiling.

Drain when you're satisfied with the results. If the nose plates boiled away or become detached, that's normal. I like to leave them as they are. If it doesn't look right, or you just don't like it, you can trim the nose off horizontally, but usually they look best in their natural, long state.

Rinse the skull with clean hot water. This is a good time to inspect and scrape away any remaining flesh. You can also use this time to pluck out some of the fine bones from the nasal cavity.

Next, bleach the skull in a tray. For this first step of bleaching, put the skull in a plastic tray or shoebox and pour hydrogen peroxide over it. Turn it over, and repeat, pouring the peroxide into the cavities on the back side. You can use the dilute type bought in the grocery and drug stores, or the stronger paste type sold by beauty supply companies.

Use a brush to swab peroxide into cavities and small spaces to ensure a thorough bleaching. Let the skull sit overnight or as long as convenient. You should begin to see the color lightening.

At next available light, bleach the skull in the sun with fresh peroxide, brushed or sprayed on. Saturate the bone thoroughly and leave it in a place where it can get full sun. Repeat this process until the skull reaches a desired level of white.

Dry in fresh air; There's no need to rinse the peroxide off.

Once completely dry, add a hanger loop of wire through holes in the bone. If no holes are available, you can drill holes where you want the wire. Ironworkers' tie wire is easy to work with, but it can rust. Aluminum or copper wire are rust-free alternatives.

Label the skull with the date, place, and any other info about your hunt that you'd like to

remember. Your finished trophy is ready to hang and admire.

TIPS FROM THE GAMEKEEPER

While his techniques differ slightly from the methods described, Cooper offers this advice:

What is the most important part of the process?

"Making a good cut. I always use as a new as possible wood saw to cut the skull."

How do you make the best cut?

"I always remove the bottom jaw, including tongue, before I fully skin and cut.


"I run a knife below the eye socket on each side and line them up with a cut around the back of the skull. You don't want to cut teeth but want to leave the upper palate of the mouth intact."

What mistakes can be avoided?

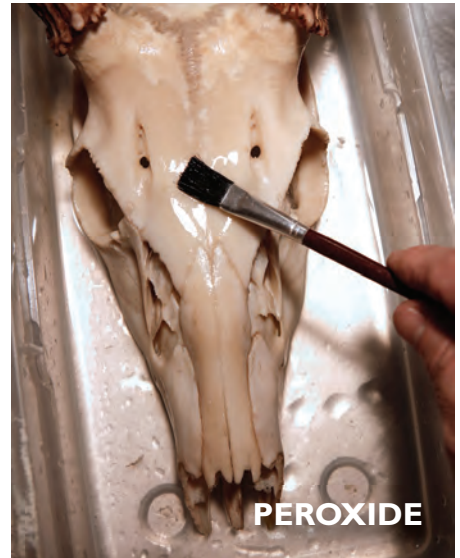
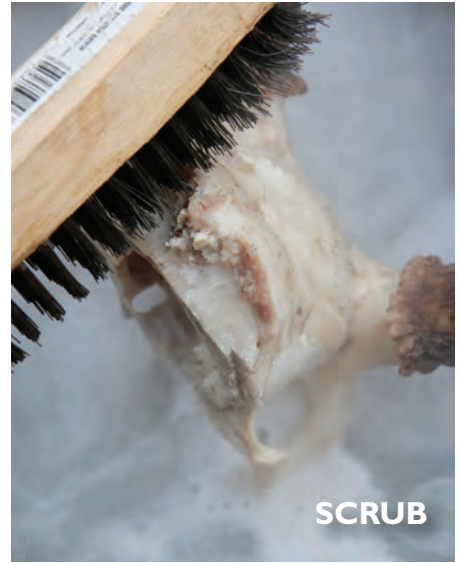
"Don't put too much water in the boiler, as you only want to boil the skull and not the antler. Don't use a sharp knife to clean the skull. One with no point is best. And I would say, don't return skull to water unless you've replaced the water, the used water will stain the skull."

What further advice can you give?

"Leave the nostrils and a small amount of skin on the nose. This makes for easy cleaning. I also leave skin at the base of the antler... if cooking, it's perfect – one slice of the knife and the whole area is perfectly clean.

"Long nose pliers are essential for the back of the nose. Power washer at the ready (for skull only) and good cream peroxide (from a hair salon wholesaler.)" 

A VISUAL GUIDE TO MAKING A **EUROPEAN DEER MOUNT**



2017 UPLAND BIRD



The 2017 Upland Bird Hunting Forecast examines breeding populations and reproductive success of pheasants, quail, and prairie chickens because those two factors most impact fall populations. Breeding population data were gathered during spring crow counts for pheasants, whistle counts for quail and lek counts for prairie chickens. Data for reproductive success were collected during late-summer roadside surveys for pheasants and quail. Reproductive success of prairie chickens is more difficult to monitor because they generally do not associate with roads like pheasants and quail.

Habitat conditions were good to excellent across much of Kansas for upland bird production this year. Heavy precipitation occurred across the state through spring and regular rainfall continued throughout the summer, producing lush vegetation and excellent cover for nesting and raising chicks throughout much of the state. However, weather was a limiting factor to nest success this year, as well. The western 1/3 of the state received a heavy spring snowstorm on April 30-May 1, when up to 20 inches of snow accumulated. This storm caused mortality in adult quail over

the southwestern portion of the state and occurred during peak laying for pheasants. Fortunately, temperatures rose and snow melted quickly, preventing major losses of adult pheasants. There were hail events severe enough to cause mortality, but these storms impacted relatively small, localized areas and are negligible to regional and statewide opportunities. Overall, good cover and habitat conditions appear to have mitigated poor weather, thereby maintaining stable bird numbers for this fall. Winter habitat will remain good with abundant cover available for birds.

STATEWIDE SUMMARIES

PHEASANT hunting in Kansas should be fair to good this year. Excellent conditions in 2016, combined with high overwinter survival, led to another increase in the pheasant crow survey this year and returned the index to the pre-drought average. This included stable or increasing crow surveys across all four regions in the primary pheasant range. Heavy spring precipitation created excellent habitat for the 2017

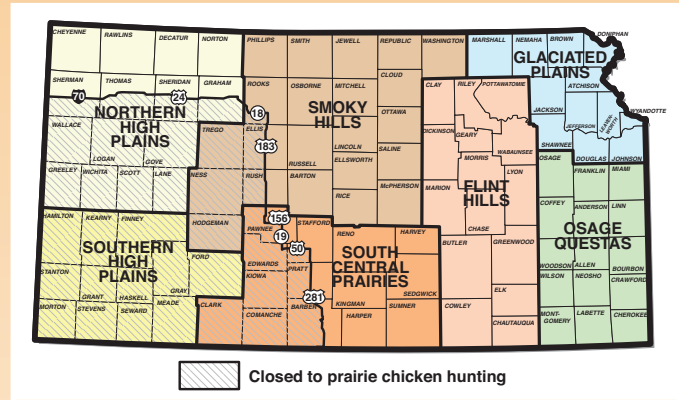
HUNTING FORECAST

nesting season. However, the late snowstorm in western Kansas impacted nest success on initial attempts in a large area. Cool and wet spring weather caused wheat harvest to be delayed and progress slowly, which typically benefits pheasant production. Given good conditions for re-nesting, early losses were overcome, resulting in statewide roadside counts similar to those in 2016. Given this information, we expect hunters to see similar numbers of birds. While the 2016 pheasant harvest was low, the average daily bag was above average, which suggests an above-average harvest could have occurred if there had been greater hunter participation. Kansas continues to maintain one of the best pheasant populations in the country and this fall's harvest will again be among the leading states. The best areas this year will likely be in the northern half of the Kansas pheasant range.

QUAIL hunting in Kansas should be good to locally great in 2017. Precipitation over the past five years has increased both the quality and quantity of habitat, allowing for a modern quail boom. The bobwhite whistle survey in 2017 was the highest recorded since the survey began 20 years ago. Nesting conditions were again good across most of the state in 2017, although some regions experienced more extreme conditions. Roadside surveys showed only a slight decrease compared to 2016. Quail harvest was low in 2016, but hunter success was high and suggested Kansas could have supported a much greater harvest. With similar roadside survey results, success should remain high for Kansas hunters this year. Kansas maintains one of the best quail populations and the fall harvest will again be among the best in the country. While densities in the eastern-most regions are not as high, all regional indices remain above their respective long-term averages.

Opportunities should remain good throughout the state, with the best opportunities found in the central regions of the state.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN lek counts were down slightly this year, but hunting opportunities should be good throughout the Greater Prairie Chicken Hunting Unit. The best opportunities this fall will be in the Smoky Hills Region, where populations have been increasing.



REGIONAL FORECASTS

Northern High Plains

PHEASANT hunting in the region should remain fair to good. This region maintained the highest regional pheasant index on the roadside survey this year, despite slight declines from 2016, and there was a moderate increase in spring crowing pheasants. Production was slightly lower than last year due to late snowfall and excessive summer rainfall. Average daily bag was relatively good last year and



hunters should have similar success this year. Highest densities will be found in the northeastern portion and southern tier of counties in the region.

QUAIL hunting is limited in this region and they are predominantly taken opportunistically by pheasant hunters. The best areas are in the eastern counties where adequate woody cover is present. While densities on the summer roadside survey increased this year, this region is the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range and they remain the lowest regional densities in the state.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN populations have expanded in both numbers and range within the region over the past 20 years. Best prairie chicken hunting will be found in the northeastern portion of the region (within the Greater Prairie Chicken Unit) in native prairie and nearby CRP grasslands.

Smoky Hills

PHEASANT hunting should be good throughout most of this region. The Smoky Hills spring crow survey saw large increases, followed by large increases in the summer roadside counts. Spring precipitation created good nesting conditions again this year and the region maintained relatively high production. Hunter success rates were lower than other regions last year, but should improve with increased densities this year. Roadside counts were good throughout the region but were best in the northern portion.

QUAIL hunting in northcentral Kansas can be spotty; however, this year should be more consistent across the region within appropriate habitat. The spring whistle survey increased by 40 percent this year, and the roadside survey also increased, so quail hunting should be good. The Smoky Hills had the highest regional roadside index for quail in 2017. Although the easternmost counties had lower counts, densities were relatively good across the region.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN hunting opportunities will be good to great in the region, where surveys recorded some of the highest densities in the state. Greater prairie chickens occur throughout the Smoky Hills where large areas of native rangeland are intermixed with CRP and cropland. Spring lek counts remained fairly stable and production should have been good. The best hunting will be found in the central portion of the region.

Glaciated Plains

PHEASANT hunting opportunities exist only in pockets of habitat in the region, primarily in the northwestern portion or areas managed for upland



birds. Spring crow counts declined and roadside surveys saw large decreases. Pheasant densities across the region are typically low, especially relative to other areas in central and western Kansas.

QUAIL hunters should expect fair to locally good opportunities this year. Bobwhites on the spring whistle count increased slightly, remaining above average. This included a few extraordinarily high counts for the region not observed in many years. Roadside counts indicated a slight decline, likely attributed to heavy summer rainfall events. While urbanization and large-scale succession in the region have deteriorated habitat and caused long-term population declines, carryover birds from 2016 should maintain some opportunity in the area. Opportunities are expected to be down from last year, but better than average. Roadside counts were highest in the northeastern portion of the region.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN hunting is very limited in this region. Greatest opportunity exists in the western edges along the Flint Hills, where some large areas of native rangeland still exist.

Osage Cuestas

PHEASANT hunting in this region is limited as it is outside the primary pheasant range. Pheasants are occasionally found in the northwestern portion of the region in very low densities.

QUAIL hunting will be poor to fair across the region. Roadside surveys were down in 2017, with production in the region being low, likely in response to heavy precipitation. Hunters should expect densities lower than last year, but still better than average.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN occur in the central and northwestern portions of the region, although popu-

lations have declined over the long-term. The best hunting opportunities will be in large blocks of native rangeland along the edge of the Flint Hills region.

Flint Hills

PHEASANT hunting in this region is limited as it is on the eastern edge of pheasant range. Highest densities are typically found on the western edge of the region. The spring crowing counts decreased slightly this year, with the summer roadside survey indicating a slight decrease, as well. Best hunting will be found in the northwest portion of the region.

QUAIL hunting should be good this fall. The index of whistling bobwhites recorded this spring was a record and the highest regional whistling index in 2017. While summer roadside counts were slightly decreased compared to 2016, hunting is expected to be similar to last year. Quail densities will be limited in the core of the Flint Hills, where large-scale annual burning and chemical control of shrubs has removed key components of quail habitat. The southern half of the region recorded the highest roadside indices this year.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN hunting opportunities will likely be similar to last year throughout the region. 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. However, since the early 1980s, inadequate range burning frequencies have gradually degraded habitat quality, and prairie chicken numbers have declined as a result. Spring lek surveys were stable this year.



Southcentral Prairies

PHEASANT hunting should fair to good this year. The spring pheasant crow survey indicated a 27 percent increase from 2016, and the summer roadside survey was relatively stable for the region. Based on roadside surveys, opportunities are expected to remain similar to slightly decreased from last year. The highest pheasant densities will be in the northwestern portion of the region.

QUAIL hunting should remain good throughout the region. The spring whistle survey was slightly increased, but was followed by a decline on the summer roadside survey. The region had the second highest regional roadside index in 2017. The intermixing of quality cover provides more consistent opportunities compared to other regions. The highest roadside counts were recorded in the northern and eastern portions, but hunting should be good throughout the region.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN within the open unit occur in very low densities in the northeastern portion of the region. The western part of this region is within the closed unit.

Southern High Plains

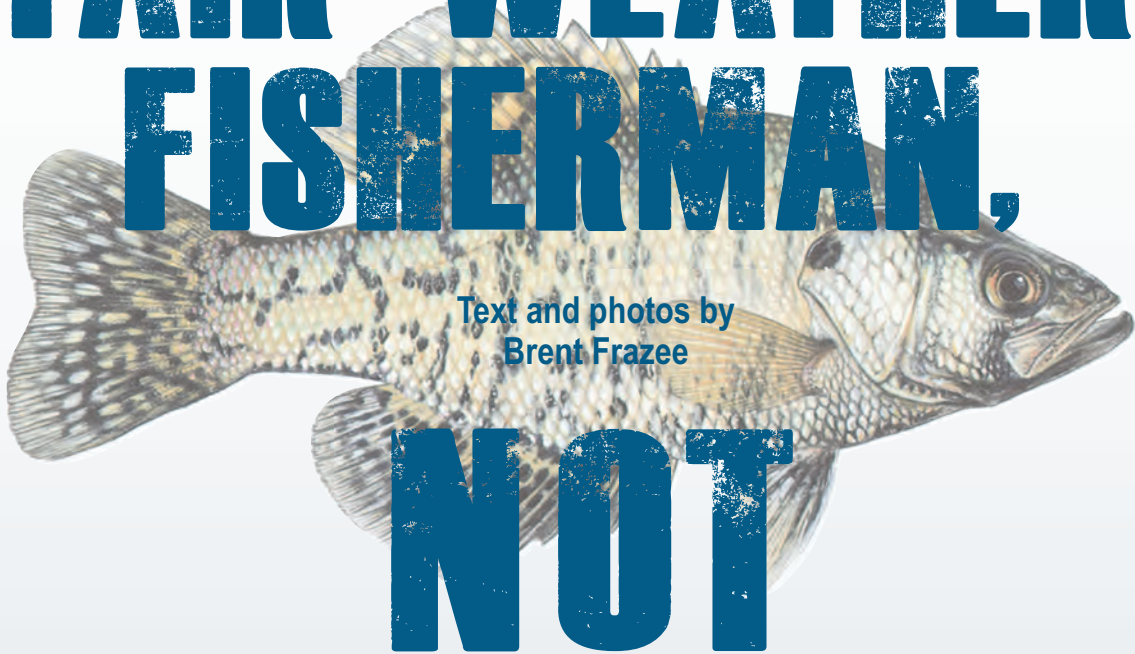
PHEASANT hunting will be fair to good this year, but birds will not be as abundant as last year. The regional pheasant crow index increased again this year to near all-time highs. However, the roadside surveys showed significant declines, most likely attributed to the early spring snowfall's impact on nesting hens. The highest densities will be in the eastern half of the region where snowfall wasn't as extreme.

QUAIL hunting will remain good in the region but hunters should expect lower densities compared to the past few years. Whistle counts were only half of 2016 counts, following adult mortality from the snowstorm. Despite major losses, the spring surveys remained above the long-term average. Roadside surveys were down from last year, but not significantly. The highest densities will be found in the eastern portion of the region where snowfall was lighter and along riparian corridors or other areas where woody cover is available.

Scaled quail are also found in this region but made up a smaller proportion of quail observations this year than in 2016.

The region is entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens and prairie chicken hunting is closed in this area. 🐾

FAIR-WEATHER FISHERMAN,



Text and photos by
Brent Frazee

Gerald Lauber's fishing season begins about the same time many fishermen are wrapping theirs up. When wind chills dip below freezing, snow starts to fall, and bitter winds sweep across Kansas reservoirs, Lauber knows it's time to go crappie fishing.

Translation: He's no fair-weather fisherman.

Don't believe those old wive's tales about the fish not biting in the cold. Open the lid on the live well in Lauber's boat and you'll see plenty of evidence to the contrary.

"I'll fish other times of the year, but anymore winter is my favorite season to fish for crappies," said Lauber, 65, who lives in Topeka and has been a member of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission for 12 years.

"When the water gets cold, the crappies are pretty predictable. They'll usually relate to the channel where the baitfish are. And they can be bunched up pretty tight.

"You can sit in one place and catch 10, 12 fish."

If you can stand the conditions, that is.

"I've been out on some miserable days," Lauber said with a laugh. "I remember the first time I ever tried winter fishing.

"It was sleeting and it was cold and damp. I wasn't dressed for it, and I was freezing out there.

"I thought, 'What in the world am I doing out here?' But we caught a lot of crappies that day, and I've been at it ever since."

That amounts to 35 years of bone-chilling fishing in northeast Kansas.

Much has changed since that first outing. Winter fishing was still somewhat of a secret back when Lauber got started. Winter clothing wasn't as refined. And there was little help in the way of electronic fish finders.

Today, thousands of fishermen flock to the Kansas reservoirs in December, January and February. They keep warm by piling on layers of refined insulated coats and coveralls and water-proof gloves. Sophisticated electronics help them pinpoint where the crappies are concentrated, and satellite imagery allows them to mark the hot spots they locate and plot a course back to those holes.

But one thing remains the same: Kansas is still a hot spot for crappie fishing once winter arrives.

"People will ask me, 'How can you go fishing in this kind of weather?'" Lauber said. "And I'll tell them," 'Because the fish are biting.'"

BETTER THAN SPRING

So, you think Kansas crappie fishing is good in the spring, when the fish concentrate in the shallows to spawn? Well, you should try it in the winter, Lauber said.

Joseph Tomelleri illustration

“People always say that spring is the time to go crappie fishing,” Lauber said. “And if the weather is stable, it can be great. But anymore, we always seem to get cold fronts rolling through or storms that muddy the water that will interrupt the spawn.

“The crappies will be back and forth on those spawning banks, and it can really affect the fishing.

“Conditions are much more stable in the winter. The fish are much more predictable.”

The best fishing usually takes place when the water temperature drops into the lower 40s or upper 30s. That’s usually sometime in mid December, Lauber said.

When the shad start to use the river and creek channels as travelways, crappie won’t be far behind. The gamefish often relate to the brush along those channels to ambush baitfish swimming by.

Swings or places where the channel follows a twisty course are good places to start. Lauber usually begins his search in 15 to 20 feet of water.

He uses the modern electronics on his boat to locate those spots. Then he uses an old-fashioned flasher unit at the bow to hover over the brush piles and detect movement below. If the flasher signals are consistently broken at varying depths, Lauber knows there are fish, presumably crappie, swimming around in the cover beneath his boat

“In the past, we didn’t have all of this technology,” Lauber said. “We would use landmarks to line up where the brush piles were.

“And we would fish in areas where we knew what the bottom looks like. That’s the advantage of being a little older. Some of us can remember what some of these areas looked like before they were flooded.

“Maybe there was a fence row, some rocky outcroppings, or an old road. Those areas will still hold fish.”

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

Today’s crappie fisherman is much more savvy in the use of fish finding equipment than their predecessors.

Gone, for the most parts, are the days when fishermen would set up on a rocky point, throw out an anchor and guess on the spots where crappie were hanging.

Most boats launched on Kansas reservoirs these days have at least one electronic fish finder mounted over the dashboard or at the bow. Those units are increasingly affordable and easy to use.

That means crappie are slowly running out of hiding places.

“There are very few secret brush piles anymore,” Lauber said. “With the electronics we have today, fishermen will find the brush others put out.”



Lauber does most of his crappie fishing during December, January and February. Why? That’s when the fish are biting!

That’s why it pays to stay on the move and find the one key ingredient – the crappies’ food, said veteran crappie fisherman, Dustin Hobbs of Topeka.

“Some fishermen make the mistake of fishing the same brush every day,” Hobbs said. “Just because they caught them there one day doesn’t mean they will be in there the next.

“I’ll spend up to a few hours just looking for shad and places where the crappie are grouped up. If I don’t see 100 fish on my screen, I won’t drop a line.”

Once Hobbs locates those spots, the fishing can be outstanding.

“If I don’t have a limit (20 at most of the reservoirs Hobbs fishes in northeast Kansas) in the first half hour, I know the fishing is tough,” he said.

Hobbs practices catch and release on some of those fish so he can stay on the water. That can amount to days when he will bring 50 or more crappie into the boat.

He will stay on the water until the reservoirs start to freeze. Even that doesn’t keep him on land, though.

Like Lauber, Hobbs also fishes through the ice for crappie.

If you want to know why Lauber prefers cold weather crappie, just look in his livewell on some chilly December afternoon.

"Years ago, we couldn't wait for the ice to come on," Hobbs said. "We would be out there drilling holes, fishing through the ice.

"Our winters have been too mild for that lately. But that just means you have more time to fish out of a boat."

Lauber and Hobbs both consider themselves lucky to live in the Topeka area. They know they are surrounded by good crappie water.

"I have 10 lakes within a half-hour of my house where I can find crappies," Hobbs said. "We have great fisheries not far out of the city."

KANSAS' SUCCESS STORY

Let's face it, Kansas is still overlooked nationally for its crappie fishing. It doesn't have the monstrous fish that states such as Mississippi do. And it doesn't offer the resorts, attractions or lake-area restaurants that attract visitors to other states.

But make no mistake, Kansas has healthy crappie populations. And what's more impressive, large numbers of fish can be found at reservoirs in all parts of the state.

Perry, Clinton, Melvern, Pomona, Tuttle Creek, Hillsdale, Milford, Big Hill, El Dorado... the list goes on.

Part of that can be attributed to Kansas' fertile water, according to Craig Johnson, fisheries biologist for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT).

"We're here in the breadbasket of the United States, and that means we have good, fertile water," Johnson said. "Shad do well in our water, and that leads to very good growth rates among our crappies."

Crappie get hit hard at some reservoirs, particularly in the eastern half of the state, but KDWPT



has protected some of those spots from overharvest by imposing creel and length limits.

"I think we (Wildlife, Parks and Tourism) do a good job of managing the resource," Lauber said. "The crappie populations at some of these reservoirs will cycle, but we have so many reservoirs with fish in them that are always options for the fisherman."

GETTING STARTED: THE BASICS

Granted, winter fishing for crappie isn't as easy as spring fishing. Most of the time, there are few opportunities for bank fishermen in the winter. The prime action takes place on the main lake, usually off the channels. You need a boat, and you need some type of

fish finder. But that doesn't mean you have to draw a lot of money from the bank to afford to be able to do it right.

"You don't have to buy one of the high-dollar units to find fish," Hobbs said. "I know fishermen who use fairly inexpensive units and they still do real well.

"It's more important to know how to read your electronics than to have a new unit that you don't know how to use."

It pays to get a topo map of the reservoir you plan to fish and study it so that you know where the channels – especially the bends and swings in those channels – are located. Then use your electronics to find fish activity.

As for other equipment, Lauber likes to use an ultralight rod with 6- to 8-pound test line. He fishes with a one-quarter-ounce jighead with a Size 4 hook – a jighead he makes. His favorite is a chartreuse head with an orange and chartreuse plastic body.

In the murky Kansas water, that bait is visible and usually attracts plenty of bites.

"Years ago, my comfort zone was a lot smaller than it is now," Lauber said. "But that has changed.

"I'll be out on some pretty nasty days now, but it's OK because the fish are biting." 🐻

Christmas With Grandpa Harry

by Rick McNary

Harry shoveled the snow away from the barn door and, once inside, made his way to the two pairs of wooden snowshoes hanging from a nail. The larger set was his; his wife, Gladys, wore the smaller ones when she was alive.

He lifted the shoes off the wall and laid them on the workbench. A month earlier, he had gone through the routine of weathering the snowshoes by lightly sanding the ash frame then coating both frame and rawhide webbing with varnish. He attached the leather bindings, soft from regular treatments of oil. Sixty years earlier, he and Gladys had given these to each other for Christmas.

Harry was eager for his grandson's arrival; Ethan's latest letter read:

Dear Grandpa Harry,

I shared the jerky at school from the deer we got at Thanksgiving. My friends liked it and they want to go hunting with us next year. I told them about the gun you gave me.

When I come over for Christmas, can we chop down a tree like I saw in the picture of you and Grandma? That would be fun.

Love, Ethan

P.S. I got Chauncey a new dog bed for Christmas.

"Chauncey, old boy," Harry said to the yellow lab curled on the floor, "Looks like you're going to sleep a lot better this winter thanks to Ethan." Chauncey

wagged his tail at the mention of Ethan's name.

Early the next morning, Chauncey's ears perked at the sound of an engine and he bounded out of the cabin to welcome Ethan.

"Grandpa Harry, are we going to take a chainsaw to cut down our tree?" Ethan asked. "The only trees we've ever had were fake."

"Oh, no," chuckled Harry. "I have a special saw for cutting down Christmas trees, one my daddy made when I was a kid. He found a broken saw blade, sharpened the teeth, then bent a small branch from an ash tree to make a bow saw. It's the only saw Gladys and I ever used to cut our tree. It's hanging in the shed; let's go get it."

Ethan raced for the shed with Chauncey giving chase. It seemed that Chauncey's arthritis, like Harry's, disappeared when Ethan was around. Soon they returned with the saw in hand, Ethan gingerly touching the teeth.

"Wow, Grandpa Harry," Ethan said. "Those are sharp! How old did you say this was?"

"Oh, probably 75 years old, but if you take care of things, they'll last a long time."

Ethan watched as Harry slipped his boots in the leather bindings on the snowshoes; he followed suit, lacing up Gladys' pair.

"You follow behind me and pack the trail down," Harry said. "That makes it easier for Chauncey to follow us."

Soon they found the perfect tree and scooped the snow away from the base. Harry explained how to cut through a tree so it didn't bind or split when it fell. He then taught Ethan to tie a rope with a clove hitch around the trunk and they dragged it back to the cabin.

Later that evening, with the amber glow of the fire dancing in the room, Harry rocked in his old chair as Ethan curled up asleep with Chauncey on his new bed. It had been ten years since his cabin had seen a Christmas tree covered with a string of popcorn, old tinsel and a couple of presents.

"Gladys," Harry whispered. "This old cabin hasn't been this full of love since you passed. I discovered today why I kept your snowshoes in such good shape; I know you'd like Ethan wearing them."

Harry retrieved a large package from his closet. Poorly wrapped in paper by an 89-year-old man, it was an obvious set of snowshoes. He propped the package by the tree, then covered the sleeping boy and dog with his afghan. The gift tag read: "To Ethan, From Grandpa Harry, Grandma Gladys and Chauncey."

Harry sat back down, warmed his cold hands around a cup of hot chocolate and softly began to sing with a quavering voice:

"Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright..."

Species Profile: River Otter

Danny Brown photo

Yep, we have otters. North American river otters are found in rivers, lakes, ponds and streams in Kansas. With thick fur and layers of body fat; webbed toes; a long, flat tail for swimming; and nostrils and ears that can seal out water; otters are well-adapted to the aquatic life.

Otters eat mostly fish and crayfish, but they'll dine on frogs, turtles, shellfish, large insects, birds and small mammals, too.

Otters have few natural enemies in Kansas, with bobcats and coyotes topping the list. They are active year-round, day and night, but tend to be more noc-

turnal around humans.

Otters will use dens for giving birth and for shelter during extreme weather. The den sites are often well-hidden and include hollow logs, log jams, piles of driftwood and the dens and lodges of muskrats and beavers. Otters may also den under docks, boathouses and other manmade structures.

River otters are classed as furbearers in Kansas and may be legally trapped during the prescribed trapping season with a two-otter-per-season limit.

To learn more about otters in Kansas, visit ksoutdoors.com.





Backlash

with Mike Miller

You've Got a Friend in Frank O'Brien

How can one man touch the lives of more than 3,000 kids and untold numbers of adults in a positive way over the span of 50 years? But wait, he did it in Kinsley, a town with a population of less than 1,500. And he did it promoting a sport he loves – a sport that's as American as the rural communities most of these 3,000 kids and adults come from. Frank O'Brien accomplished this through trapshooting and the Kinsley Gun Club.

O'Brien, who lives in Lewis, has been the club's secretary since 1968, which means that he and his wife Mary, as well as a changing cast of club members, have been instrumental in keeping the club relevant and its members shooting.

The O'Briens are trapshooters. Mary won the Lady Singles Championship at the Grand American Trap Shoot in 1987. And in O'Brien's shooting heyday, he carried the third highest handicap average in the nation in 1975. Both were inducted into the Kansas Trapshooting Association's (KTA) Hall of Fame in 1998.

You'd be hard pressed to find a Kansas trapshooter who doesn't know O'Brien. Through the years, he's developed shooting-related businesses – C&H Research and O'Brien Sports Shop – and he has provided competitive shooters from all over Kansas with mercury recoil suppressors, shotgun shells, White Flyer targets, and reloading components.

Larry Schmidt, Greensburg, a dedicated shooter who's also in the KTA Hall of Fame, spoke of his history with O'Brien and the club.

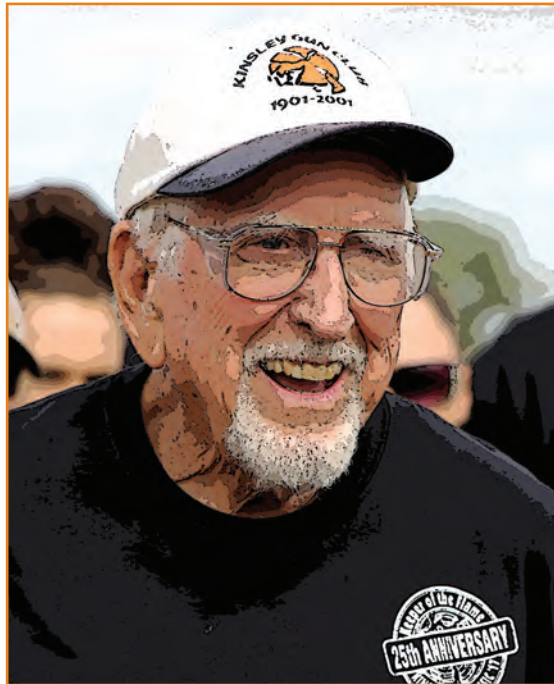
"I've known Frank since 1967, I think," Schmidt said. "I was shooting at Kinsley and we struck up a friendship. We've shot and hunted together a lot over the years.

"Frank's been a driving force in that club. He's an intelligent fellow and he had a vision for that gun club. I think it had just one trap, and we wound up with five traps and started having big registered shoots."

Schmidt mentioned others who were instrumental in the club's development including Clint Little, Herb Wetzels, and the Schaller brothers.

"After we expanded, we were having registered shoots that had 120 to 130 shooters," Schmidt added. "It was quite a thing, really, for a small town like Kinsley."

Larned's Larry Skelton is the club's current president and has taken over running the registered shoots since O'Brien stepped down as secretary last January. However, O'Brien is still involved in the club's youth program.



"The Kinsley Kids Klassic is his baby, you know," Skelton said. "He'll keep doing that program for as long as he's able, I imagine."

The Kinsley Kids Klassic is a competition that draws high school age and younger trapshooters from all over Kansas. The first Klassic was conducted in 1992 when 40 youngsters competed. The goal has always been to provide a safe, fun competition at an affordable price, with prizes, including guns and savings bonds. Each year, O'Brien comes up with a new t-shirt design, and each competitor gets a t-shirt, 100 targets, (50 singles and 50 handicap), lunch and an opportunity to win prizes for a \$25 entry fee.

Since the first Klassic, the event has drawn as many as 200 young-

sters, but averages 150; a number that requires the singles to be shot at the Dodge City Gun Club in the morning, and handicapped targets to be shot at Kinsley in the afternoon. The 2017 event was the 25th anniversary and to celebrate, members presented O'Brien with a plaque to recognize his dedication. On the plaque, the phrase, "Keeper Of The Flame" appeared – the title of an article written by J. Mark Shoup about O'Brien and the Klassic in the July/August 1999 issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*. O'Brien has done just that, according to those who know him best.


Ted Clinesmith, an avid shooter from Claflin, met O'Brien at a Pratt Gun Club trapshoot in 1965. The two have shot and hunted together ever since.

"You can refer to Frank as the Godfather of western Kansas trapshooting," he said with a chuckle, but only half joking. "Because he truly is."

"To carry the trapshooting tradition on to the kids has been very important to that man – very important," Clinesmith added, his voice trailing off in thought.

Gary Brehm, Pratt, another Kansas trapshooting icon and fellow KTA Hall of Famer, reinforced that sentiment.

"I don't know anyone who has done more to promote trapshooting, especially in getting young shooters involved," Brehm said.

Referring to O'Brien as "Keeper of the Flame" was appropriate in 1999, and it's appropriate today. However, the most common word people use to describe O'Brien is "friend," and that is perhaps his most enduring legacy. Because, as he will tell you, you can accomplish anything with the help of your friends. 



Nature. Worth celebrating year-round.

www.nature.org/kansas

