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# KANSAS

## *Wildlife & Parks Magazine*

**Perry State Park**  
*Home to one of Kansas' top  
equestrian campgrounds*

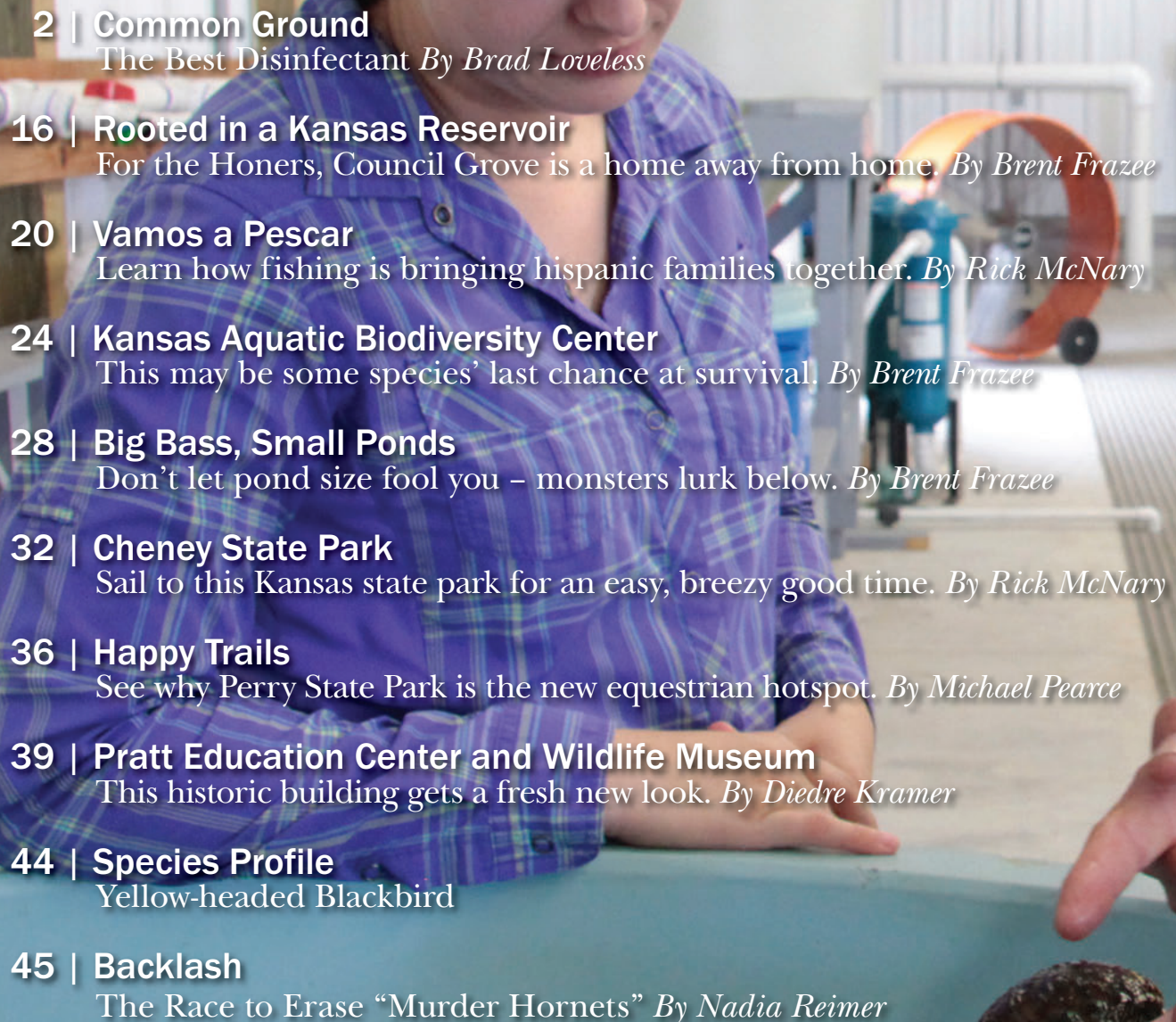
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***Let's Go Fishing!***  
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**The Farm Pond Frenzy**  
Big bass, small ponds  
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**KANSAS**  
*Wildlife & Parks Magazine*





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## MAGAZINE STAFF

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**FRONT COVER** Nearly 40 miles of equestrian trails wind through Perry State Park. Michael Pearce photo.

**INSIDE COVER** Kansas' Aquatic Biodiversity Center has a unique mission. KDWPT photo.

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

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## The Best Disinfectant

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In my less-than-a-year with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), I've been educated about many things. The tenacity and resilience of our Parks employees in the face of record flooding. The threat of chronic wasting disease to the state's beautiful, ecologically and economically valuable deer populations. The ingenuity and wisdom of our employees scattered across Kansas when faced with obstacles and resource limitations. And the abundant sunlight infused into our decision-making processes.

Sunlight in decision-making? Where does that fit into wildlife, parks and tourism? Well, it turns out that thoughtful people long before me knew that our agency would do its best work when we are accountable to our customers – the public. And they knew that the best decisions – and regulations – would come from a process involving the public (you) and an appointed board of environmentally-engaged citizens (KWPT Commission).

These entities were exercised mightily over the better part of 2019 as we considered making changes to our turkey harvest regulations. In discussions with the seven member commission that began three years ago, our staff biologists – concerned at the multi-year reduction in harvest, hunter success and turkey population – recommended doing away with the fall season when either hens or toms can be taken, and a reduction in the spring harvest of toms or jakes from two to one in some areas. In 2016, 2017 and 2018, these discussions resulted in no changes to the regulations. In 2019 they did.


For our department to change a regulation in parks, fishing, or hunting, it is discussed at a minimum of three of our commission meetings and approved by a majority of our commissioners. That is the department's process, which exceeds the minimum state legal requirement of one public meeting for regulatory changes, and it can take six months or more. Each of the seven commission meetings we have every year must be advertised and the regulations to be voted on are published at least 60 days prior to the meetings. Meetings are moved around the state to be more accessible and are streamed live online for those who can't travel. The turkey regula-

tions were on our agendas in four of our 2019 commission meetings and four each in 2016-18, so these proposed changes were advertised, presented by our staff experts, discussed by the commission and public at least 16 times!

I forgot to describe another important group, the Kansas Turkey Technical Committee. This group is made up of KDWPT wildlife biologists, public land managers and law enforcement, as well as National Wild Turkey Federation representatives. Prior to and during conversations with our commission, the technical committee was busy reviewing data, and discussing the potential scientific, economic and hunter-related impacts related to these proposed changes.

At our November 14 meeting in Scott City, the technical committee's findings were presented and discussed by the staff, commission and public one more time. The commission voted, starting in fall 2020, to reduce the length of the fall season from 110 days to 41 days and to reduce spring harvest to one bird in northeast, southcentral and southeast Kansas (Units 3, 5 and 6) starting spring 2020.

It was a very long painstaking process, but it resulted in a decision made better by inputs from so many interested and informed stakeholders. Importantly, it pushed our staff to do their best work, invited public input at every turn, and was beautifully transparent.

Louis Brandeis, Associate Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, was one of the court's most influential justices, standing for freedom of speech, the individual's right to privacy and corporate accountability. He said, "Sunlight is said to be the best disinfectant." That is, decisions made in an open, public, inclusive way are best. By this standard, changes to Kansas parks, fish and wildlife regulations are especially clean, and we believe all in Kansas that walk, crawl, float, swim or fly benefit greatly from it. 



## KDWPT, Humboldt High School Provide Safe Haven For Birds

Through a unique partnership, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) and Humboldt High School have successfully created a safe haven for area birds that would have otherwise been displaced. Two years ago, Humboldt High School had a large colony of chimney swift birds that had nested and roosted in the school's abandoned boiler chimney. Because the school had plans of eventually demolishing the old structure, Humboldt High School staff knew it was essential that an alternative roost site be built for the birds - a colony that, at one point, had grown to nearly a thousand birds. Enter KDWPT's nongame donation program, Chickadee Checkoff.

Thanks to Chickadee Checkoff, Wildlife Integration LLC and B&W Trailer Hitches, Humboldt High School was able to construct a combined habitat improvement and educational wildlife display on school grounds. The display consists of a chimney swift roost tower and a bat house, providing much-needed shelter for both winged species. Interpretative



For more on Chickadee Checkoff, visit [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com)

signage was also placed near the roost tower, providing students, teachers and school visitors with educational information about the display and live nest site.

Just last year, several dozen chimney swifts were observed roosting at night in the newly built tower, and evidence of new nests were also discovered.

"This is a prime example of the importance of partnerships and non-game programs like Chickadee Checkoff," said Daren Riedle, KDWPT wildlife diversity coordinator. "It's really cool to see pro-

jects like this, because everybody wins."

Through tax-deductible donations to KDWPT's Chickadee Checkoff program, individuals can support Kansas' nongame species. Chickadee Checkoff donations fund nongame wildlife research, habitat enhancements/restorations, and educational projects like the chimney swift roost tower at Humboldt High School.

Consider making a contribution to Chickadee Checkoff this tax season by marking the Chickadee Checkoff box on your state income tax form (line 36 on K40 form); there is no minimum or incremental requirement. Donations can also be mailed directly to KDWPT by addressing the donation to Chickadee Checkoff, c/o KDWPT 512 SE 25th Ave, Pratt, KS 67124.

Private donations are crucial to managing Kansas' nongame species since Chickadee Checkoff dollars are matched by federal funds. Contributions have been steadily decreasing in recent years, making the need for Kansans to mark the Chickadee Checkoff box this year more critical than ever.

By "checking the chickadee," you're taking an active part in managing and conserving Kansas' diverse wildlife for future generations.

## KWEC, Shafer Gallery Win National Award

The Kansas Wetlands Education Center (KWEC) and Barton Community College's Shafer Gallery have been awarded the National Association of Interpretation (NAI) Region Six 2019 Outstanding Special Event Award. Recognition was in celebration of the center's collaborative art events "Frogs: Sounding the Future" in 2016 and "The Connected World: Biodiversity in the Art of Carel Pieter Brest van Kempen" in 2019.

The special event award is given for events of exceptional interpretive quality. Nominated events had to meet NAI's principles of interpretation, which include "A mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource."

Events were judged for their originality, creativity, clarity, consistent theme or message and the ability to reach target audiences, as well as appropriateness for the site.

"The judges said, 'This is how interpretation should be done,'" Pam Martin, KDWPT education specialist at KWEC, said. "The cooperative effort actually began in 2011 resulting in four shows/events focused on the flora and fauna of Cheyenne Bottoms. We're so appreciative of Dave Barnes (Shafer Gallery Director) for being open to trying something beyond the ordinary scope of an art gallery. Not only did the two organizations partner to showcase the plight and marvels of local wildlife, but additional partners also donated time and energy, providing artistic and immersive experiences for diverse audiences."

For more information, contact Barnes at (620) 792-9342 or [barnesd@bartonccc.edu](mailto:barnesd@bartonccc.edu), or Martin at (620) or [pam.martin@ks.gov](mailto:pam.martin@ks.gov) (877) 243-9268.



Pam Martin (center), KDWPT education specialist at KWEC, accepts the Special Event Award on Feb. 26, from NAI Region 6 Awards Committee Chair Lauren Marshall (left) and NAI Region 6 Board Director Jay Schneider (right).

Joe Vinduska, Barton Community College



# BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

## The Well-rounded Robin

The American robin is probably one of our most familiar songbird species, with many choosing to share our space. They will nest in our landscapes, under the eaves of our homes and in the trees in our yards; and, they'll forage for food along our sidewalks and driveways, oblivious to our activities. We often see hundreds, if not thousands, of robins in Kansas in winter that have migrated here, but we also enjoy the ones that stay to nest. I often get asked what my favorite species of bird is. After some thought, I usually come up with something like the short-eared owl or sandhill crane. But to be honest, I also really like our robins!

Even though American robins are very common and not particularly fancy, they are part of a group of birds called thrushes that are known for their complicated and beautiful songs. We get several species that migrate through Kansas, including the gray-cheeked, veery and hermit thrush, to the more abundant Swainson's thrush. The varied thrush of the west coast sometimes wanders into Kansas, but it's rare. The

two thrush species that nest in Kansas are the American robin and the wood thrush. Wood thrushes resemble young robins, with a heavily-spotted breast and brownish back, and they have a beautiful flute-like series of calls and songs. They are residents of heavily wooded areas in the eastern part of the state, making them sort of a "ghost of the forest" when compared to how easily seen the robin is. Once you hear them singing from a territory deep in the woods, it's unforgettable.

My decision to write about robins was inspired by hearing several of them singing outside my apartment in Pratt on a 20 degree morning in late February. You wouldn't think birds would have much interest in singing when it's so cold, but they are ruled by hormones, day length, and the desire to start establishing pair bonds, defend territories, breed and ultimately raise their young.

Though, they will not begin actual nesting for a month or more - the singing starts early in the season. Their song is also a complicated series of

flute-like notes, and even

though we hear it regularly and often-times disregard it, it's fun to take the time to give it a close listen. To me, they are the true harbingers of spring and I always look forward to hearing them.

Robins nest in all of the continental United States and most provinces of Canada. Population estimates for this species are over 300 million individuals, so they are not in trouble over their range as many other species are, but robins are susceptible locally to poisoning associated with use of lawn chemicals and pesticides.

Spring is a great time to get outside and birdwatch for the abundant migrants that come through Kansas and the other birds that will stay to nest, including robins.

For more on songbirds and other neat bird species in Kansas, as well as opportunities to network with other birders, visit [www.ksbirds.org](http://www.ksbirds.org).







# LAW MATTERS

## A Chapter 32 Offense

with Colonel Ott

Let's take some time to discuss a law in Chapter 32 of Kansas Law - the illegal display of coyote carcasses.

Prior to the law being implemented in 1979, it was a common practice for hunters, ranchers and farmers to display coyote carcasses on fence posts and outside of vehicles. This practice created issues in communities and throughout the state, causing the legislature to enact the law. To this day, it remains illegal to display coyote carcasses in the manner listed in the state statute.

The law states:

### **32-1007. Coyote carcasses.**

(a) It is unlawful for any person to publicly display the carcass of a coyote.

(b) For the purpose of this section, "carcass" means the body of the coyote, either as a part or as a whole, and either with the skin intact or removed. The skin of the coyote, when removed from the animal, shall not be considered a part of the coyote.

(c) The provisions of subsection (a) do not apply to the display of the carcass of a coyote at a fur market or the use of the carcass of a coyote for educational or training purposes.

History: L. 1979, ch. 117, § 1; L. 1989, ch. 118, § 118; July 1.

Kansas game wardens are responsible for the enforcement of Chapter 32 offenses statewide, but the violations can be addressed by other local and state law enforcement officers, as well. There may also be local ordinances that prohibit the display of other types of carcasses, not just coyotes. Please check with your local authorities if you have any doubt on what the law is. You can also reference a complete list of wildlife regulations and statutes by visiting [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com).



Stay safe and remember to use good judgement in the great Kansas outdoors.

## 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 have clusters of white flowers when mature and grow 3-10 feet tall.
2. I live in roadside ditches and along streams.
3. Poison is in my name.

>>> See answer on Page 14.





# Game Warden Profile

**Brad Hageman**



**What's the most memorable investigation you've worked on?**

In 1998, a concerned citizen came forward about a deer shot in Kansas and taken to Nebraska. Rifle deer season was not open in Kansas, so the suspect thought he would take it to Nebraska to claim it legal there. I had two veteran officers help me on the case and get it prosecuted in federal court. The suspect lost his rifle and the deer mount, and paid a large fine.

**If I wasn't a game warden, I would probably be...**

I always wanted to be a pilot; I didn't have good enough eyes to make that happen.

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

My parents influenced me at a very young age. Dad loved to fish and took me as often as he could. I never developed the love of fishing like he did, but I did enjoy being outside exploring. When I got old enough, I would take the rifle and shoot squirrels while Dad was fishing - after June 1, of course!

On one fishing trip to Tuttle Creek, a man came along and checked Dad's fishing license. It was a game warden, Rand Conrad. That was my first memory of a game warden.

Conrad was the first in the agency to influence me, but not the last. I worked at Milford State Park as a seasonal employee and interacted with Steve Stackhouse, Steve Field, Dick Cole and Rick Campbell. When I was a park ranger at Pomona State Park, I got to know Richard Ryan and Johnny Ray. They taught me a lot on how to treat people and give someone a break when they needed one. "Always be fair," is what Johnny would say.

Mom also loved to be outside. She would pack a lunch and take my sister and me to the creek behind the house. She loved to garden, and had numerous flower beds. We always went on walks and bike rides. Summers were spent at Tuttle Puddle, also known as Tuttle Creek State Park. My aunt and uncle had a boat and we made lots of trips to Milford Reservoir and Lake of the Ozarks. Until my mom's dying day, a little fresh air just seemed to make everything better!

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

My favorite area is Keats. There was a small creek named Kitten Creek behind the house; my uncle owned it and east to the next section road. It was a great playground for me. I started hunting squirrels and that led to other game animals. I hunted with friends and family all around Riley County. My cousin and I would pray for hot, dry summers. This would concentrate the mourning doves to ponds in the area.



I will finish my career with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) on June 1, 2020. I have had 31 great years with the agency, with the last 24 years in Coffey County. I have been blessed with a great support from this community. In my interview, I was asked, "Why Coffey County?" My response was, "There is good hunting and fishing, and I think it would be a great place to raise a family." It has been that and more; Jenny

and I have been blessed to spend the last 24 years here.

I started my journey in 1988 at Milford State Park. I was hired there to work summer maintenance. The job included mowing, trash pick-up and bathroom cleaning. In the spring of 1989, I returned to be a park attendant; it consisted of being a summer ranger. In September of 1989, I was selected to be a conservation worker in southeast Kansas. Dick Cole told me, "If the chiggers don't get you, the humidity will."

This was back when we were working under the unit concept. I lived at Neosho State Lake and managed it along with Bourbon State Lake. I also worked on two wildlife areas and one state park. It was a great job because I got to experience many aspects of the agency.

In September of 1991, I accepted the assistant manager position at Pomona State Park and started my law enforcement career. I attended the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center Basic Class 120th in January and February of 1992 - the academy was only eight weeks back then. I stayed at Pomona until July of 1994 and then transferred to Crawford State Park. In June of 1997, I moved to Burlington as a game warden.

Someone asked me a while back if I had any regrets and I honestly can't think of one. I've made many friends along this journey and I would like to thank them all for getting me through it. I will remember all the weekdays, holidays and weekends I've spent with my KDWP family.





# BOAT KANSAS

## Get Your 55 Seconds of Fame *with Chelsea Hofmeier*

Life jacket, life vest, PFD, personal floatation device, float coat. The most important piece of equipment on your boat has many names, but it serves the same general purpose: to keep you afloat in a bad situation.

Every year, thousands of people in the United States mourn the loss of loved ones who could have survived, had their loved one been wearing a life jacket while spending time on the water. Over the last 10 years, 88 percent of water-related fatalities on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) properties were men; 60 percent were between the ages of 20 and 60, and 84 percent were not wearing a life jacket.

It's no secret in the boating education world that wearing a life jacket saves lives; now, the Corps of Engineers Natural Resources Education Foundation and USACE is giving the general boating public a chance to learn and share this powerful knowledge through a video public service announcement (PSA) contest!

The first ever life jacket video contest invites anyone 18 or older nationwide to create a video PSA encouraging adults to wear life jackets. The deadline for submissions is September 1, 2020. Winners will receive a cash prize and the opportunity for national exposure for their winning entries.

With the many different styles of life jackets on the market, your options are endless for shooting a creative PSA. Be a positive example for Kansas boaters and wear your life jacket with pride – no matter what age!

For complete submission guidelines, official rules, FAQs, and resources, visit [LifeJacketVideoContest.com](http://LifeJacketVideoContest.com).

Funding for the Life Jacket Video Contest is provided by a Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund grant that was awarded to The Corps Foundation and is administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.



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### Contest Information:

- Deadline for submissions is September 1, 2020.
- Submissions will only be accepted through the online application found at [LifeJacketVideoContest.com](http://LifeJacketVideoContest.com).
- Anyone within the United States who will be 18 years old or older by September 1, 2020 can enter.
- Entrants may enter individually or as part of a team consisting of no more than four members. All team members must be 18 years old or older.
- Submissions may be a 55-second video or a 25-second video. A winner will be selected in each category. The winner of the 55-second video category will receive a cash prize of \$5,500 and the winner of the 25-second video category will receive a cash prize of \$2,500.
- Winning submissions may be turned into PSAs and distributed nationwide to USACE lake and river projects and their partners for use on social media, websites, television stations, movie theaters, and more!

## Life Jacket Video Contest





# HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

## Sectional Density

In previous articles, I discuss bullet design, and in continuing those conversations, we'll now move on to some quantifiable characteristics - the first being sectional density. Sectional density is a calculation that compares a bullet's weight to the bullet's diameter; the higher the sectional density number, the heavier a bullet is in proportion to its diameter. The sectional density stays the same for all bullets of the same weight in the same caliber, meaning the shape of the bullet does not figure into the calculation.

Shooters consider sectional density to be important because it can have a significant effect on bullet penetration. If our other variables are the same - impact velocity, bullet materials, and bullet design and expansion characteristics - then the higher the sectional density means a deeper penetration of the bullet.

In simple terms, a long skinny bullet of any given weight going at a given speed would penetrate better than a fatter bullet of the same weight going at the same speed because it concentrates the

same basic force in a smaller target area.

For a target shooter, penetration may not be important; the bullet only needs to make a hole in the paper target or "dong" the steel gong. But, penetration is vital for a hunter, because the bullet must travel deep inside an animal to disrupt the life processes of the vital organs, causing a quick and humane death. Sectional density can help hunters select the best bullet for their hunting activity.

The values of calculated sectional densities have been established by hunters for different classes of animals over time. Generally for Class 1, which includes small game, varmint and small predators up to 50 pounds, we want a bullet with a sectional density of up to .180. For Class 2, medium game animals from 51 to 300 pounds such as deer, antelope, sheep, goats and black bears, we want a sectional density of .200 to .240. For Class 3, large game like elk and moose from 301



to 1,000 pounds,, we expect a bullet to have a sectional density of .270 to .280. Class 4 animals - dangerous, thick skinned game over 1,000 lbs. - require a tough bullet with a sectional density of at least .300.

Because all variables are seldom the same, bullet construction plays a huge part in how deeply the bullet is able to penetrate a game animal. A solid, or non-expanding bullet, creates the same size cavity the entire length of the wound channel; it will penetrate the deepest. Any bullet that expands or deforms during penetration will create a larger wound channel by changing the diameter of the bullet. That will change the sectional density according to our original calculation of weight-to-bullet diameter, and if the bullet sheds any weight during expansion and penetration, that too will change the performance.

It is important we consider not just the sectional density of the bullet we will be using, but also the construction materials and expansion characteristics in order to find the bullet that will perform best for the game we will be hunting.

## Noxious Weeds by Stuart Schrag

Good weed or bad weed? It depends on who you're asking. In the agricultural world, most weeds are looked upon unfavorably. But in the wildlife world, many native weeds are highly valuable to a variety of species. There are certain weeds across the state that can have negative effects on both agriculture and wildlife. These are the noxious weeds.

The definition of noxious is "harmful, poisonous, or very unpleasant." Noxious weeds can overtake crop fields and pastures if left unchecked, thus reducing crop and forage production. Currently, 12 weeds are identified as noxious by state statute, which also mandates that landowners and land managers utilize methods to eradicate or control the spread on their property annually. Most private landowners consult with their local county weed director for assistance with chemical and consultation needs.

The Public Lands division at the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) is tasked with conducting habitat management on approximately 316,000 terrestrial acres at our state fishing lakes and wildlife areas. A main component of habitat management in our prairie ecosystems is to promote the annual growth of wildlife-friendly native weeds such as giant ragweed, Illinois bundleflower, Maximilian sunflower, deer vetch, and partridge pea, to name a few. A variety of management techniques are used to accomplish this such as chemical treatments, annual

disking, prescribed burning, grazing and sometimes seeding.

Chemical spraying is the most widely-used technique, but it's not always the most desirable. Only approved herbicides are used and strict adherence to manufacturer label recommendations is the standard, whether it be for terrestrial or aquatic applications. Chemicals are expensive, so mixture and application rates are crucial when it comes to overall effectiveness in eradicating or containing a particular noxious weed.

Other control methods include mowing and disking; however, translocation of seed on equipment is a concern, so thoroughly cleaning equipment before relocating is key.

In recent years, patch-burn grazing has been utilized. These non-traditional burning/grazing techniques are gaining in popularity as it's also showing positive effects on growth performance in cattle, while reducing overall management costs associated with herbicide use.

On average, Public Lands staff apply treatment techniques on 22,000 to 25,000 acres with overall associated costs between \$287,000 to \$335,000 annually. While we'd rather utilize these funds and our time on other aspects of public land management, there will always be noxious weeds to contend with. So, we will continue improving our practices and techniques to control them.

To learn more, consult the Kansas Department of Agriculture website, your county weed director, or talk to your local public lands manager or wildlife biologist.

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## Missouri Evening Primrose | text and photo by Krista Dahlinger

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Large, bright yellow flowers blooming low to the ground on limestone roadsides are the hallmark of Missouri evening primrose - *Oenothera macrocarpa*.

All primrose family flowers have four petals, most blooming bright yellow. The flowers are large and measure up to 6 inches across. They are noted for their remarkably long stigma, which extends out beyond the petals, giving the appearance of a mini propeller with four blades. Four to eight pollen-bearing stamens are located in the center of the flower below the stigma.

Missouri evening primrose flowers open from late afternoon until the next morning. Nighttime blooming is an intentional strategy the plants use; by releasing nectar during the evening, the plants attract big-body moths such as the sphinx moth, which are more capable of picking up and distributing masses of sticky pollen. As the moths move from flower to flower, they distribute pollen to different plants to complete pollination of the flowers. Each flower lasts for just one day, and after pollination, the flowers wilt and turn a reddish orange color.

Growing up to 18 inches high, Missouri evening primrose has long, lance-shaped leaves arranged alternately on the stems. On single plants, the leaves are low and sprawl across the ground; if the plant is mature with many stems in a dense mass, they will reach upward. Leaves are gray-green to silver-green, somewhat thick, and narrow with smooth edges and pointed tips.

Missouri evening primrose is herbaceous - the entire plant

above ground dies off over winter and regrows the following spring. Flowers are not produced until the second year of growth, from May to July. Each plant only lives a couple of years and is replaced by new plants from seed.

Seed pods are large with four wings; they can measure 4 inches long by 3 inches across. As seed pods mature, they turn from green to brown and dry out over winter, splitting open to release seeds the following spring.

Found from Texas to Nebraska, and east to Illinois and Tennessee, the plant occurs primarily on limestone soils and disturbed areas such as roadsides. In Kansas, it's found across the eastern three-quarters of the state on dry limestone soils. It is tolerant of drought.

With bright showy blooms, Missouri evening primrose makes an excellent front-of-the-garden, low growing plant. They easily self-seed and will increase over time in poor, dry soil. Collect dry seed pods in a paper bag after they turn brown in late fall. In the spring, pull pods apart to release seeds and lightly press them into the soil surface in the garden or in a large deep flower pot. Water lightly until seeds germinate. After several sets of leaves emerge, carefully transfer to a protected garden spot. Missouri evening primrose does not require a great deal of care once established. Because it is a low growing plant, make sure it is located away from taller plants that compete for sunlight.





# EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

## The Most Versatile Fish That Swims

with Marc Murrell

If you took a survey of Kansas anglers and asked them to name the tastiest fish that swims, I'd bet I could guess the top answers. And I couldn't argue with any of them based solely on palatability; I'd even throw a rough fish species into the mix when prepared correctly.

But what happens when we consider taste *and* versatility. Well, I'd move one fish species to the top. Here's my Top 5 Kansas fish species, all things considered.

Now, some might argue the order I've used, or that I didn't include other species. But there isn't any species fixed a certain way that isn't palatable, even the "rough" variety. It's like cuts of beef and what you do with them; it's all a personal preference when it comes down to having a favorite. Good news is, there's plenty to choose from in Kansas waters. Go fish!

**#5 Buffalo** Kansas has a couple species of buffalo but they're rarely caught. If you're lucky enough to catch one, don't be too anxious to throw it back. Their meat is much lighter than common carp (which even has a purpose pressure cooked in dips and crab cake-like concoctions) and the rib cages are quite tasty when fried. As a bonus, you'll also have built-in toothpicks as you strain the rib bones!



**#4 Bluegill and Largemouth Bass (TIE)**

If bluegill grew to several pounds or more, they'd be prize fighters. Add to this a hand-sized 'gill being mighty tasty deep fried (my two favorite coatings are Andy's Yellow and Shore Lunch Original) or grilled, and they're a palate pleasing option. Bluegills' downside lies in their overall size and the amount of effort to clean them. I'm not advocating eating bass from waters where anglers enjoy catch-and-release, but there are thousands of Kansas farm ponds that could use a good "thinning of the herd." In many ponds, 20-30 smallish bass (12 inches, give or take) bass can be kept per acre, per year. These torpedo-shaped members of the sunfish family are perfect for filleting and taste good cooked a variety of ways.



**#3 Channel Catfish**

The nod in the Ictalurids family could go to blue catfish, as their meat is lighter with less oil. But channel catfish are raised commercially in the largest numbers and taste delicious cooked several ways – including grilled or fried in fish tacos (my favorite). They're pursued with diligence by masses of anglers from boat and shore. See pages 13 and 43 for delicious catfish recipes.

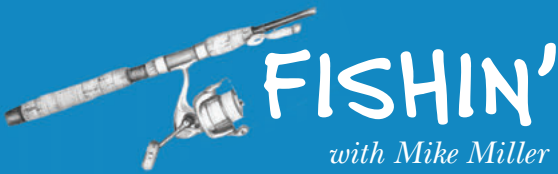
**#2 Crappie (Black/White)**

This "slab," known for the "thump," is a tasty proposition. Die-hard anglers catch plenty in the winter via boats, but many are caught during the spring spawn when bank anglers get to play, too. Their meat is light and pleasant with a taste not overwhelmingly "fishy." They do, however, lack firmness or texture and can get mushy even when grilled, baked or fried.



**#1 Walleye**

This member of the perch family is the real deal; it cooks lights out and is tasty prepared most ways. One of my favorite outdoor meals is grilled walleye with a loaded baked potato and salad. Use a greased grill pan to grill fillets bathed lightly in olive oil and sprinkled with Cavender's Greek Seasoning, turning only once when the fish is 30-40 percent cooked on the first side. Their flesh, or blocks of skeletal muscle tissue called myomeres, are firm and hold up well to this cooking method, as well as deep fried or baked.



# FISHIN'

with Mike Miller

## Fishing for Therapy

I consider fishing to be my stress relief, and that isn't because I'm looking for another good excuse to go fishing. (Who needs an excuse to go fishing?) I've been obsessed with fishing from my earliest memories, but I never considered it beneficial to my mental health until I was in college. With stress of impending project deadlines or mid-term tests weighing on my mind, a quick run out to the Rocky Ford Fishing Area below Tuttle Creek Reservoir was a good mind cleanser for me. A sunny, warm March day, when we weren't really expecting to catch any fish, still provided a welcomed break for several of my buddies and me. I could fish for an hour or two and not think of anything but fishing in that time.

It's still that way for me. I remember when Dad and I first started going to Canada, beginning what turned out to be a 25-year annual tradition, and I would ask him if he'd relaxed and forgot about his issues at work. He'd say he'd only thought about them off and on then ask me about mine. I just laughed and said I couldn't even remember where I worked and that was almost true. Fishing can literally be mind consuming for me and I think that's a good thing. Everyone needs fishing or something like it.

When news of the COVID-19 pandemic broke, fear of the virus and the stress of being laid off, furloughed or out of business hit Kansans hard. Fortunately, Governor Kelly allowed outdoor recreation during the stay-at-home order. And we've seen how much that has meant to Kansans. Our lakes and parks have been busy, and these open spaces have proven ideal for social distancing. Fishing has been the perfect stress reliever.

But it hasn't happened without some sacrifice. Kansas state parks staff, our game wardens, and our Public Lands staff have all worked nonstop during this uncertain time. Their jobs were deemed essential to ensure everyone had safe and enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities. I've always been impressed by the dedication of the department's employees, and this is just one more shining example.



# Writings from a Warden's Daughter

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

## A Tow in Time



A warm, breezy summer day made for comfortable working conditions as Dad spent a weekday morning looking for anglers in and around Tuttle Creek State Park. At noon, he stopped at the state park office to have lunch and visit with park staff and biologists. However, a phone call from the Riley County Police Department advising of a stranded boater on Tuttle Creek Reservoir interrupted his lunch. The call didn't seem urgent and Dad didn't think he'd need any assistance, so he drove ten minutes to the marina where the patrol boat was kept in a slip. When he stepped out of his truck in the marina parking lot, he noticed the wind had picked up noticeably during his lunch break.

Looking out over the lake, he was glad he didn't see any boating activity since the waves were beginning to kick up. His patrol boat was really just a 17-foot ski boat, nothing like the patrol boats used today, so he was grateful for his 15 years of experience working and boating on Tuttle Creek. He knew white caps would become huge rollers as the waves traveled the long, narrow body of water. Motoring with the waves going north, Dad steered the boat three miles up the lake to the last known location of the stranded boat. Scanning the area, Dad spotted a vessel a half-mile north but he couldn't see anyone aboard the small ski boat. However, as he pulled along the starboard side, Dad saw a young boy about 10 years old alone in the boat. The youngster told Dad that his friend and his friend's dad were in the water somewhere. With the boy drifting safely in the boat, Dad's priority became the individuals in the water and he quickly spotted an object about 400 yards behind the ski boat, bobbing up and down with the waves. Turning into the rollers, Dad raced toward the object taking spray over the bow with each crest he went over. There in the middle of the second largest lake in Kansas

was a young boy with his arm crossed, holding onto a partially-buckled life jacket. Circling him once, Dad coached the boy to "grab on and not let go" when he came back around. Timing his approach to arrive at the trough of a wave, Dad amazingly grabbed and pulled the boy in on his first attempt.

The exhausted child pointed down the lake where Dad could barely see the boy's father another 400 yards away, bobbing up and down on a tube. When Dad got closer, he saw the man wasn't wearing a life jacket. Dad quickly maneuvered his boat around and got the man out of the water.

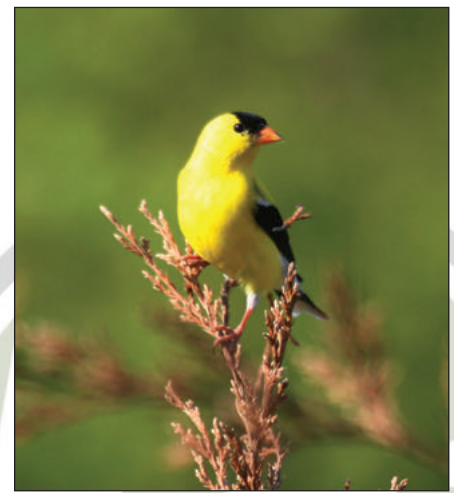
With the father and son both secured in life jackets in his patrol boat, Dad headed back to the drifting ski boat and gathered the other youngster. Then, Dad attached a towline to the disabled craft and began the long, slow ride into the rolling waves. The water conditions were incredibly rough and towing the boat back to the west side of the lake and the Tuttle Cove boat ramp where it had been launched was out of the question. Dad knew of a small, protected cove on the east side that had vehicle access and a sloping gravel bank that allowed small vessels to be launched. Each pounding wave brought water over the bow, keeping the bilge pump running until they made it safely into the cove.

Dad didn't ask about the specific circumstances that led to the father and son ending up in the water. All he knew was that the man was towing his son on the tube and the boat motor failed. From there, it was probably a sad combination of errors or misjudgment. Fortunately, everyone went home safe that afternoon. However, considering the worsening conditions, this incident might have been a tow just in time.





## Outdoor Learning with Tanna Fanshier



Searching for ways to stay engaged while staying safe at home? We're here to help! Try these fun activities to expand your knowledge of Kansas wildlife and outdoor recreation.

### 1) Take our online Crane ID quiz

The most common type of crane in Kansas is the sandhill crane. These birds migrate through Kansas, and sometimes stay to winter. They are part of the Midcontinent population, which is the largest of the nine populations recorded across North America. Sandhill cranes have been hunted in Kansas since 1993, and provide an incredible sight for both hunters and wildlife watchers.

More seldom seen is the federally endangered whooping crane. With a similar size and body shape, this bird can be easily confused with a sandhill crane by the untrained eye. Think you know your cranes? Take the Crane ID quiz underneath the "Education" tab at ksoutdoors.com to test your knowledge.

### 2) Earn your Aquatic Nuisance Certification.

It is everyone's job to "clean, drain, and dry," but do you know why? Take this online quiz to learn more about the threats aquatic nuisance species pose to Kansas waters, and how you can help prevent their spread. The certification course can be found under the "Education" tab on ksoutdoors.com.

### 3) Download the Audubon Bird Guide mobile app.

Did you know the National Audubon Society rates Kansas third nationally for bird species diversity? Download the free Audubon Bird Guide app, and start identifying the birds in your own backyard! Learn more about bird sightings around the state, and plan your next Kansas birding adventure. Visit the "Wildlife Watching" section of ksoutdoors.com by clicking on the "Wildlife and Nature" tab to learn about birding events, news, houses and feeders, and more.

### 4) Follow our nature centers on Facebook.

Hardworking staff and volunteers frequently post new and exciting content featuring virtual facility tours and hikes, nature journaling tips, plant and animal identification, and animal updates. Visit the "Science and Nature Centers" link under the "Education" tab on ksoutdoors.com to learn more. For a complete list of all nature centers and museums in Kansas, visit our sister website, TravelKS.com.

There are so many opportunities to learn about and engage in the Kansas outdoors. Check out ksoutdoors.com and follow us on Facebook to stay up-to-date on events, educational content and updates.

## KDWPT, Kansas Schools Team Up to Teach Hunter Education

When schools resume in the fall, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) will continue to partner with school districts across the state to offer the Hunter Education in Our Schools program. The program is an opportunity for students to learn safety, ethics and responsibility while hunting, among other outdoor skills. All associated materials and trainings for the Hunter Education in Our Schools program are free for participating schools.

In 2019, 467 middle school and high school students successfully passed the course and earned their Kansas hunter education certificate. To date, nearly 60 Kansas schools have incorporated the Hunter Education in Our Schools program into their curriculum.

"This program teaches students fundamental life skills through hands-on activities in classes taught at their school," said Aaron Austin, KDWPT outdoor skills and recruitment coordinator. "It gives the students who might not have an initial interest in hunting, or the available time on the weekend for a hunter education course, the chance to learn those skills with their peers."

While most participating schools are located in rural areas,



approximately 10 percent are considered urban – locations in which Austin would like to see the program expand.

"We've had great feedback from teachers and students, especially from urban school districts," said Austin. "Many of these students likely would not have taken time outside of school hours to

learn about hunting and firearms safety, but thanks to this program, students don't have to choose. Schools are providing that education to them during regular school hours."

In addition to earning their hunter education certificate, students who choose to participate in the Hunter Education in Our Schools program also earn credits in disciplines such as science, civics-government, history and physical education. Following successful completion of the course, students are able to:

- Describe the difference between state-regulated hunting laws and a hunter's ethics
- Demonstrate safe firearm handling skills
- Describe the basic principles of wildlife management
- Identify common game animals, and more

For more information visit ksoutdoors.com or contact KDWPT's Education Section at (620) 672-5911.





## Bigger Isn't Always Better

Catfish are a staple for many Kansas anglers, and for good reason. Pursuing them is fun and easy, and not a tremendous amount of skill is needed to catch them. It can be assumed that nearly every pond, lake or stream in Kansas that has fish to catch has channel catfish in it.

I grew up on a farm with a 13 acre pond just a couple hundred yards from the house. There, I could catch 50 catfish a day if I wanted. I often used chicken livers for bait, but I sometimes had squirrel and rabbit livers leftover from a hunt. We also raised and

butchered pigs, so Dad would often collect the blood and mix it with a pound of brown sugar to create a dense blood bait.

I once made it into local folklore (with my buddies) by catching a channel cat that was 8-10 pounds using the heart of a squirrel we harvested earlier that morning. Most of what was caught in that pond was 10 to 15 inches.

Growing up, we ate a catfish meal three to five times a month, year round; I loved them. Mom would pan fry them whole and my older sister and I would often fight over the crispy tails we likened to potato chips. I also remember Dad rarely kept big fish and instead, opted to only eat the fish that were 10-15 inches. He said the smaller ones were not only easier to clean, but they were better eating.

In my adulthood, I've found what my father said to be true - the smaller fish *are* easier to clean and they *do* taste better. Remember though, some waters in Kansas have minimum length limits that prohibit keeping smaller channels. Be sure to check the current fishing regulations summary before heading out.

I raised my kids fishing for catfish and both enjoy it to this day. Although taking a big channel home to show Mom and Sister is exciting, taking a cellphone picture and releasing them works even better. My son, Hunter, would often take pride in catching and releasing a big catfish in the local kid's pond, knowing it might bend the pole of someone else, hooking them on fishing for life.

### Hearty Whole Catfish

- 4 Whole Catfish (1/2 to 3/4-pounds)
- 1 C All-purpose flour
- 1 Tbl. Seasoning Salt
- 2 Tbl. Creole Seasoning (I prefer Tony Chachere's)
- 1 /2 C Yellow mustard
- 1 Tbl. Apple cider vinegar

Mix flour, seasoning salt and creole seasoning in a gallon baggie. In a separate bowl, mix together mustard and vinegar. Dredge or brush mustard mix onto each fish. Place fish in flour mix and coat evenly. Add 1/2-inch oil in skillet and heat. Wetting your fingers, grab flour mix and roll a pea-sized ball, dropping it into the pan. If it fizzes and fries, your oil is ready. Place breaded fish in pan until golden. Repeat on other side. Once the meat flakes away from the backbone, it's ready to eat.





# Park View with Kathy Pritchett

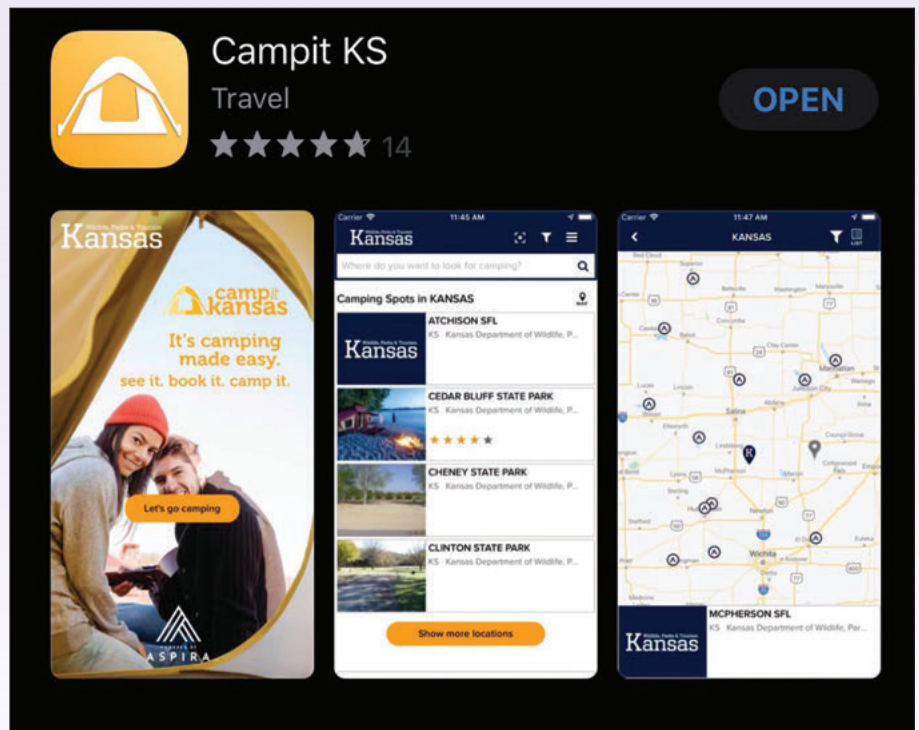
## Mobile Apps Online

Making reservations in a Kansas state park and purchasing licenses just got easier. With two new mobile apps, CampIt KS and HuntFish KS, anyone can view available campsites, reserve them, and even purchase hunting or fishing licenses – all from their mobile device.

On CampIt KS, other important information, such as emergency alerts, directions and contact information are available for each state park. Bringing this app online necessitated changing campsite numbers, so double check before you make your reservation that you are indeed reserving the spot you want.

Hunting and fishing licenses can be stored on mobile devices through HuntFish KS, which also has information about current seasons, limits and regulations. Both apps are available on Apple and Android devices.

In other state park news, fees remain the same with new options introduced last year. If you want to drive a golf cart or UTV on park roads, you can purchase an Unconventional Vehicle Permit at the

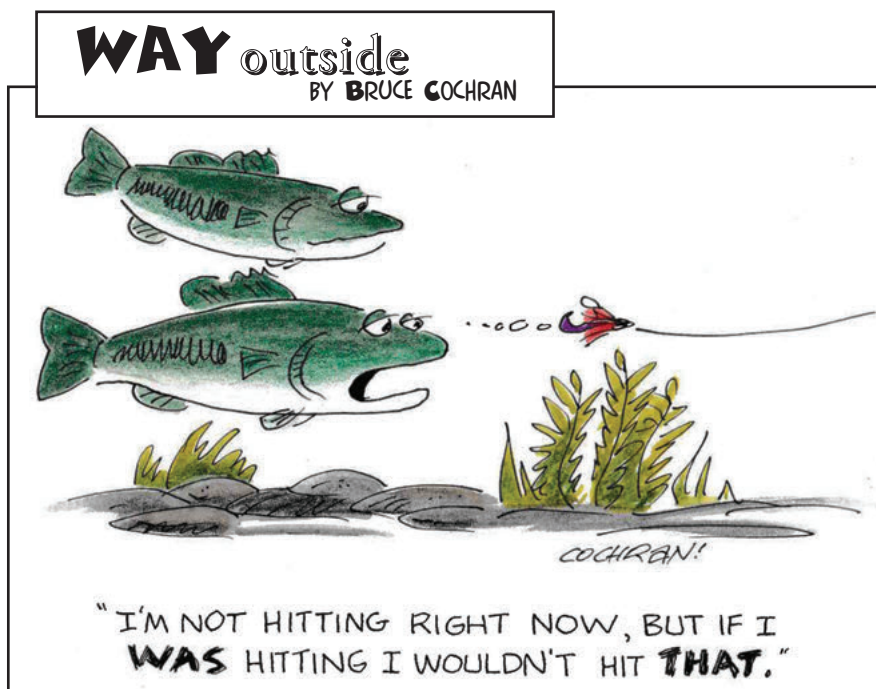


park office for \$52.50. Without this permit, such vehicles are not legal on park roadways. Limited sites are available for seasonal camping in some parks. Campers who rent such sites must have an annual camping permit and pre-pay for a month's utilities in advance. The program is popular for those who consider the park their "home away from home"

for the summer. Stays are limited to no more than six months at a time.

The outdoor recreation season is in full swing now. With any luck at all, it won't be quite as wet as last year; several parks were closed for weeks as water had to be held to prevent further flooding. We are still making infrastructure repairs, so visitors may see some camping loops or roads temporarily closed. However, there was a silver lining to this dark cloud, as we will likely see some buildings replaced with more durable, modern facilities. Please be patient, as your favorite campsite may not look like it did last summer.

Your state park staff, even though they have been hard at work to repair damage, have created some fun, informative and entertaining special events for you. Check your favorite park's Facebook page for upcoming events. June is National Get Outdoors Month, so get out there and make some memories.



..WHAT AM I? answer: Poison hemlock





## Conservation Conversations

### The Beast of Onion Creek

with Daren Riedle

Aside from flattening the curve, I admit there have been other positives that have come from the stay-at-home-orders implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. I've enjoyed working from home and spending a little extra time with my kids. I've also appreciated catching up on some good, trashy fiction. I have a love for all things cryptozoological, or the study of unknown or undiscovered organisms. While reading stories about the Sasquatch-zombie apocalypse, I reminisced on how my first introduction to the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) and its Chickadee Checkoff program was a bit cryptozoological in nature.

The alligator snapping turtle is a large freshwater turtle capable of reaching sizes approaching 300 lbs. They can live up to a century or two and spend most of their life roaming the bottoms of rivers and streams. They are seldom seen, except by those of us who spend a lot of time fishing along those same rivers.

From a very young age, these giant turtles have intrigued me and all I ever wanted was to see one in the wild. Little did I know, this species would define at least half my career as a conservation biologist. I've chased a lot of leads and looked at a lot of pictures and to date, all turtles in Kansas I have looked at were common snapping turtles.

The more widespread and frequently observed common snapping turtle is much smaller, topping out around 30 lbs. Younger individuals, especially, have the three ridges along the back similar to those found on alligator snapping turtles. The most definitive way to distinguish the two species is by the marginal scutes, or the ring of bones along the outside edge of the shell. The common snapping turtle has a single row of marginal scutes, while alligator snapping turtles have a second partial row.

The status of the alligator snapping turtle in Kansas has long been uncertain. There are some old records from the Neosho and Arkansas River drainages in Kansas. The largest was a 132-pound individual captured in Labette County in 1938. The last known living alligator snapping turtle in Kansas was last observed outside my hometown of Independence in 1991. In 1986, former KDWPT employee Doug Blex was driving to work and observed a 55 lb. female alligator snapping turtle crawling across a low water crossing on Onion Creek, south of Independence. A radio transmitter was placed on the turtle's shell to study its movements. Due to various circumstances, the signal was lost, as was the turtle. Then, one evening in May of 1991, three brothers were running limb-lines and discovered the long lost turtle snagged on one of their hooks. They noticed the old transmitter attached to its shell and immediately reported it to Doug Blex. Students from Emporia State University (ESU) attached new transmitters to the turtle and proceeded to follow it for the next two years. This study was funded in part by Chickadee Checkoff. I was a student at Independence Community College at the time and was able to meet up with the ESU students and assist them with the release and tracking of the turtle.

Over the next 29 years, I trapped for alligator snapping turtles in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. I've handled hundreds of alligator snapping turtles but have yet to turn up another individual in Kansas. Sadly, the species has declined drastically throughout its range in the southeastern U.S. due to habitat alteration and commercial collection for food through the mid-to-late twentieth century.

Since the late 1990s, I've worked with a multi-agency group trying to restore alligator snapping turtles to the western edge of their distribution and I hope to write more about our efforts in the future. But as part of those efforts, we continue to sample in Kansas in case there may yet be another alligator snapping turtle living in one of our rivers. We are even now employing more futuristic techniques, such as sampling for trace DNA in the water column.

When I return back to Independence to visit family, I occasionally drive along Onion Creek, and stop and stare into the water. I wonder if the old girl is still crawling around the creek somewhere.



Daren Riedle photo



# ROOTED IN A KANSAS RESERVOIR



text and photos  
by Brent Frazee, freelance outdoor writer

The roots of Dutch Honer's family tree are firmly entrenched in the Kansas outdoors. Dutch and his wife Kay, now in their 80s, have spent much of their lives fishing and camping. And they have passed on that love of the outdoors to three generations of their family.

In an era when hectic lifestyles are so prevalent, the Honers still believe in the power of a campfire and a fishing rod.

"I can't think of anywhere I would rather be on a weekend than fishing and camping with my family," said Dutch, who lives with Kay in Wichita. "It's like a lifestyle for us.

"We have four generations of family out here when we get together. That makes Kay and me proud."

Kids, grandkids, great grandkids – they all love fishing and camping. Their idea of a family reunion is spending a weekend at their adopted home away from home, Council Grove Reservoir in eastern Kansas.

"At one time, our family would take up a whole cove when we got together," Kay said. "We had 25

family members out here.

"We would go fishing in the morning, and then take the kids waterskiing after that. We don't have a crowd like that these days.

"But we still come back. Life just wouldn't be the same without our time at Council Grove."

Dutch Honer lands a channel catfish at Council Grove Reservoir as his great grandson Cade handles the net.





## A LONG-LIVED FAMILY TREE

From the start, there was nothing ordinary about Dutch and Kay's relationship.

"My family moved into Kay's neighborhood when I was 9," Dutch said. "I remember throwing snowballs at her to keep her on her side of the road.

"But we eventually became friends. We had a lot in common. We both loved to spend time in the outdoors."

Kay laughs when she recalls that she was only 17 when they got married. On June 30, she and Dutch will celebrate their 64th wedding anniversary.

A love of the outdoors has played a big role in that rich life, Kay will tell you.

LITTLE DID THEY KNOW WHEN THEY STARTED FISHING AND CAMPING TOGETHER YEARS AGO, THEY WERE ESTABLISHING A MULTI-GENERATIONAL LEGACY.

Little did they know when they started fishing and camping together years ago, they were establishing a multi-generational legacy.

One son, four grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren, in addition to other relatives and friends, fill the campground at Council Grove when they get together.

The Honers had another son, but he passed away in 2001 years after being disabled in a car accident. He, too, loved Council Grove Reservoir, and his parents took him back even after he was bound to a wheelchair.

As a memorial to their son, the Honers planted a tree at Council Grove years ago.

"That tree is 30 feet tall now," Kay said. "We visit that spot when we're back, and it's like Christopher (their late son) is with us."

## HOW THE SEED WAS PLANTED

The Honers' passion for the outdoors actually can be traced to a generation before Dutch.

His family originally lived in a small Kentucky town on the banks of the Mississippi River, but in the midst of the Great Depression, Dutch's dad moved his family to Kansas so that he could work

in a lawn care service.

Dutch and his family immediately took to the wide-open spaces and fishing and hunting opportunities they found in their new surroundings.

"My mom loved to fish from the bank on the



Dutch Honer (right) and his grandson celebrated after Honer reeled in a channel catfish.

Little Arkansas River with a cane pole," Dutch said. "She would always spit on the hook for luck.

"It must have worked," said Honer. "We caught a lot of fish. But it wasn't only for fun. We went fishing to put food on the table."

When Dutch met Kay, she started tagging along on his fishing and camping trips and developed a love for the outdoors, too.

"I hadn't done much in the outdoors until I met Dutch," said Kay. "But once he showed me what it was all about, I took to it right away."

In their younger days, the Honers "roughed it," camping in a tent and cooking their meals over an open fire while they fished for catfish on the Arkansas River. When they weren't fishing or camping, Dutch and some of the boys were following one of their English pointers through the Flint Hills in search of quail.

"I remember old Bruiser, one of our dogs," Dutch said. "At six weeks old, he could whip every other dog in the kennel.

"He was special. He could really find those quail."



Three generations of Dutch Honer's family were in the boat when he fished for channel catfish at Council Grove Reservoir. Dutch (center) was accompanied by his grandson Sean (left) and his great grandsons Cade (right) and Casten.

In 1976, the family discovered Council Grove Reservoir, and they immediately fell in love. They would fish for channel catfish in the morning, then boat or take the kids waterskiing in the afternoon.

They became regulars, camping and fishing at Council Grove almost every weekend.

"We love the Flint Hills, and we think Council Grove is the prettiest lake you'll find," Dutch said. "It doesn't get the crowds that some lakes do, but it has some great fishing. It has a lot of channel cats, and some big ones."

## A WEEKEND IN THE LIFE

On a hot August weekend last year, the campground at Council Grove Marina was practically deserted and there were few vehicles and trailers in the parking lot at the

boat ramp.

But the Honer family was out, ignoring the conditions that kept many families inside.

Dutch, his grandson Sean and his great grandsons Cade, 13, and Casten, 9, were on the water in the middle of the day, drifting for big channel catfish.

They started the trip in a cove, where Cade threw a net time and time with the precision of an

"ONE TIME, I HOOKED A CATFISH BUT IT TOOK MY ROD AND REEL INTO THE LAKE BEFORE I COULD REEL IT IN," DUTCH SAID. "A WEEK LATER, MY WIFE KAY WAS FISHING WITH ME AND SHE SNAGGED SOMETHING... IT WAS MY ROD AND REEL."



adult to collect the fresh shad they would use as bait. Minutes later, they were drifting on the main lake and telling fish stories between bites.

"One time, I hooked a catfish but it took my rod and reel into the lake before I could reel it in," Dutch said. "A week later, my wife Kay was fishing with me and she snagged something.

"She pulled it in and it was my rod and reel, with a 4-pound catfish still attached to the hook."

Nodding in his kids' direction, Sean told stories of fishing with his grandfather when he was their age.

"It was probably three in the morning and I was complaining about not getting any sleep," Sean said. "I was dozing off when I got this big bite.

**DUTCH, A RETIRED MACHINIST, STILL RELISHES HIS TIME IN THE OUTDOORS. HE AND KAY LIVE ON A PRIVATE LAKE IN WICHITA, AND DUTCH IS OUT FISHING ALMOST EVERY CHANCE HE GETS. BUT IT'S THE TRIPS BACK TO COUNCIL GROVE RESERVOIR THAT HE LOOKS FORWARD TO MOST.**

"I fought that fish for a while, and it turned out to be a 10-pound channel cat."

There's little doubt that Dutch and Sean have passed down their love of fishing to their boys, especially Cade. He fishes constantly, whether it be on the Neosho River or farm ponds.

"I want to have a guide service when I grow up," Cade said.

The Honers got plenty of bites the night before, catching 20 channel cats – the biggest 12 pounds – as they drifted near the river channel. They kept some and released the others.

The bite wasn't as hot as the weather the next day, but the family still caught a few. And as usual, Dutch had big-fish honors for the day.

"After fishing here for so long, we know where the channel cats are going to be," Dutch said. "It's just a matter of getting them to hit."

## A TOUGH OLD ANGLER

The ravages of old age have taken a toll on Dutch.

He's had Parkinson's disease since 2000 and his balance has been affected. He also is on long-term care for a form of lung cancer that saps his energy.

But he doesn't let that hold him back. Consider how he celebrated his 81st birthday.

"I went ziplining from a platform that was 40 feet high," he said. "It was a little scary, but I'm glad I did it."



Dutch Honer is out fishing almost every chance he gets. The trips to Council Grove Reservoir are the ones he looks forward to the most.

Dutch, a retired machinist, still relishes his time in the outdoors. He and Kay live on a private lake in Wichita, and Dutch is out fishing almost every chance he gets.

But it's the trips back to Council Grove Reservoir that he looks forward to most. Though his health won't allow him to return as often as he once did, he and Kay still round up the family for several camping and fishing trips each spring and summer.

"We just love it here," Dutch said. "The people running the marina are so nice and they've done a great job fixing the place up.

"We know everyone around here; they're like family." 🐻



# Vamos a Pescar!



"The look on the face of a child and the reaction of their family is priceless," Sanchez says. "For most of them, it is the first time they've ever gone fishing. These kids have never held a fishing pole and have never been exposed to any kind of outdoor sport. The best part of this event is that I go back and speak with families after it is over and they talk about how they go fishing now on a regular basis and how they're still trying to figure out what kind of fish they are catching."

Events like Vamos a Pescar are the result of concerted efforts of numerous organizations trying to get more people to enjoy the outdoors. With growing concern in our society about the way technology can disconnect people from each other and their own families, these types of outings are done with deliberate intent to get people outside to spend quality family time together in the outdoors.

text and photos by  
Rick McNary, freelance writer and photographer

*For Sally Sanchez of Emporia, the joy of watching a child catch their first fish and proudly showing it to their family is the best part of the annual **Vamos a Pescar Family Camp**.*

*Spanish for "Let's Go Fishing," this event is a powerful way to unite families to each other and other families in the Hispanic community – all while enjoying time spent fishing.*







## USD 253 Migrant Education Program

Patricia Saenz-Reyes is the Migrant Education Program director for Emporia's USD 253.

"The migrant families who do work in our local processing plants are very mobile," Reyes says. "They seldom stay longer than six months and it's hard on the young people. Partnering with Phil helps bring families together and give them a sense of pride in their community.

"Many Hispanics are used to fishing, but the basics are different. Where they fish, they might not have regulations or worry about safety; even the equipment they use is very different. It's a joy to watch the families go through the learning process together so the children and their guardians have something to share in common."

One of the most interesting cultural exchanges that Reyes has witnessed involves the picnic at the end of the event.

"Phil wanted to serve a picnic and have a fish fry," Reyes says. "But deep frying fish is not the way Hispanics typically eat their fish. I suggested we do fish tacos and Phil had never had one. So we did both! Phil now loves fish tacos and our Hispanic friends enjoy a good fish fry!"

## The George H.W. Bush Vamos a Pescar Education Foundation

The concept of Vamos a Pescar originated with President George H.W. Bush who began a foundation with the same name. The purpose is to support local and state initiatives for multicultural families, especially Hispanics, to increase participation in fishing, boating and conservation.

Although only 12 families participate in the event, many more attend because of family size. Kids, parents, grandparents and even great grandparents all attend to learn a new family activity.

There are four primary organizations behind the Vamos a Pescar event in Emporia: Hispanics of Today and Tomorrow (HOTT); USD 253 Migrant Education Program; George H.W. Bush Vamos a Pescar Education Foundation; and Fishing's Future.

## Hispanics of Today and Tomorrow

Sanchez is the executive director for HOTT, whose primary mission is to preserve the Hispanic heritage for future generations, strengthen the bridges of communication and understanding among all diverse cultures, ensure Hispanic participation in the mainstream, bridge the community and work together to help the Hispanic community.

"When Phil Taunton of Fishing's Futures first approached us about doing an event like this, we immediately jumped at the chance," Sanchez says. "Emporia has a large Hispanic population and we recognized that this was a great way to bring the community

together. We choose 12 families for each camp, but those families include mom, dad, the kids, grandma and grandpa and even great grandparents. Our intent is to provide them a true family activity that is fun and educational.

"We work with Phil and all of his connections to make sure each of the kids are given a new fishing pole and tackle box. Many of our families have never fished or don't have the financial resources to buy the necessary equipment.

"We decided to do the event each year during Hispanic Heritage month," Sanchez added. "We choose a date between September 15 and October 15, and then reserve a spot at Camp Alexander, east of Emporia. Although we only select 12 families, there are sometimes more than 100 people who attend because of their family size. What is so cool is that, at the end, we have a fish fry and cook hamburgers and hotdogs. The families bring side dishes and it becomes one great big family event. People are very happy when they leave."



The foundation offers grants to various nonprofits and state agencies around the nation to empower them to be the boots on the ground within their programs. One of the first organizations granted money was Fishing's Future, an organization founded to use angling education as a way to strengthen families.

The Vamos a Pescar event in Emporia uses Fishing's Future's curriculum to fulfill the mission of President Bush's foundation. And, the curriculum was voted the number one aquatic education program in America by the Aquatic Resources Education Association (AREA).

### *The Origin of Fishing's Future*

Fishing's Future is a national nonprofit based in Texas founded by school teacher Shane Wilson.

"I started working with troubled youth in south Texas at an alternative school and I began asking what the underlying problem was here," Wilson says. "A student ended up in my school as a result of bad decision making on their part but behind that bad decision, in every case, was a lack of parental engagement. These kids were being raised by stressed out single mothers working multiple jobs, or grandparents, and there was no real family unit.

"I was raised in a strong family and started asking what I could do to keep families together," Wilson continues. "I wrote down the two words

Vamos a Pescar unites families to each other and other families in the Hispanic community through fishing.



'families forever' and started playing with them. I removed all the letters except the 'f,' wrote them in lower case and faced them towards each other and discovered they formed a fish. Instead of 'Families Forever,' it became 'Fishing's Future.'

"If we could create a model and base it on angling education, and just that, we could bring families together," added

As part of the event, participants are introduced to fishing equipment such as poles, reels, lures and bait.

Wilson. "Education is the foundation of the next generation and every decision we make is based upon making it educational. Creating anglers is a by-product - the icing on the cake.

"We also have it written in our curriculum that during the family camp, they are told to go give their parents a hug and tell them that you love them. You would be amazed at how many parents thank us for that afterwards."

### *Kansas Chapter of Fishing's Future*

Phil Taunton, host of "What's In Outdoors" radio show on KVOE in Emporia, is a well-known Kansas outdoorsman and part of the Kansas Chapter of Fishing's Future.

"The basic model of a Fishing's Future Family Camp is to host an event for families to spend the day together learning about the various





aspects of fishing, then to actually go fish."

The Fishing's Future curriculum is used by numerous state wildlife and parks agencies as well as public school systems to teach various elements of science and conservation.

"At our Family Camp, there are five different stations," Taunton says. "First are rules and regulations. For people who are unfamiliar with fishing, it is important that they understand the laws that govern fishing. Next, we have a station on fish identification where they learn the various kinds of fish.

"Then, we introduce them to various kinds of fishing poles, reels, lures and bait and show them how to tie fishing knots. We even have a little game called 'Backyard Bass' where we teach the kids how to cast and retrieve. One of our volunteers will bring their boat so we can teach boating safety."

Woven throughout all of the curriculum are explanations of the conservation ideas behind creel and length limits, how to take care of the environment and the common courtesy that anglers give each other, and the fish.

"I heard about Vamos a Pescar from Kevin Reich, the president of the Kansas state chapter for Fishing's Future," Taunton says. "Kevin had been in Texas for a while and helped Shane start the program there. Kevin invited me to the first one they had in Dodge City a few years back and I knew I wanted to get it in my local community. I knew of the great work the Sally did with HOTT as well as what Patricia was doing in the school system, so I met with them. They

At the end of the event, families gather for a picnic and fish fry.

picked it up and ran with it."

Reich, of Salina, was heavily involved in the Vamos a Pescar initiatives when he lived in Texas.

"I joined Fishing's Future in Texas," Reich says. "When President Bush's foundation offered grants for Vamos a Pescar, I worked with Shane to apply for the grants. It was wildly popular in Texas and the one in Lubbock had more than 6,000 people show up!

"Once I was relocated back to Kansas, I started the second chapter of Fishing's Future here in the state. I worked closely with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism who also used our curriculum. We've used it to teach educators in various schools, as well as the basis to get Hispanic community to bond as a family unit through fishing."

## A Community Effort

If you dig further into the connections between HOTT, USD 253's Migrant Education Program, the Vamos a Pescar Education Foundation and Fishing's Future, it reveals multiple relationships between national, state and local non-profits and government agencies.

It is like a community of communities working together to strengthen the bond of families through outdoor activities. As Taunton often says, "Go outside for a better inside."

If it is true that it takes a village to raise a child, then it must be true that it takes a community to teach it how to fish. 🐻

**For more, contact:**  
**Kevin Reich, KS Fishing's Future Coordinator**  
**(785) 577-6921**  
**kansasangler@gmail.com**







# ***Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center***

by Brent Frazee  
*freelance outdoor writer*

**The Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center, located on the grounds of the Farlington Fish Hatchery, holds hope for imperiled aquatic life in the Sunflower State.**



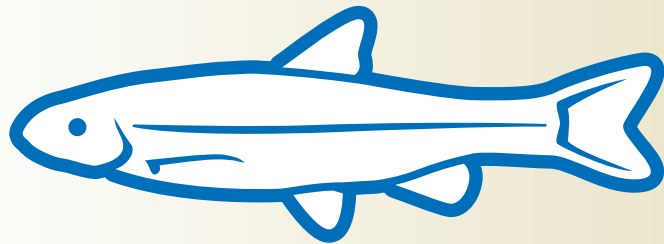
The survival of some aquatic species in Kansas could soon be tied to the work done in a shed-type building at the edge of the Farlington Fish Hatchery.

That building in southeast Kansas, along with an associated pond, houses the Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center (KABC).

Inside, workers toil to mimic conditions found in the wild to give aquatic species such as mussels, minnows, snails and turtles a fighting chance.

The center, managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), opened in 2018 after years of discussion on how the Kansas agency could best help aquatic species with declining populations.

Buoyed by its success in helping Kansas gamefish populations through its hatchery system, KDWPT put plans into action to restore populations of lesser-known species that are no less important to the state's overall stream biodiversity.



Ever heard of a fatmucket mussel? Didn't think so. But that mollusk, categorized as a Species In Need of Conservation, is one of the first the KABC to help.

"Mussels are important because they are a big indicator of stream health – kind of like the canary in the mine," said Dan Mosier II, KABC manager.

"When they are present in large numbers, they help filter stream water.

"Fifty years ago, our streams were much clearer than they are today because there were hundreds, maybe thousands, more mussels than there are today."

Mosier has no grandiose dreams of ever restoring the mussel population to the point it once was. But he believes the Biodiversity Center can give Mother Nature a strong helping hand.

"The fatmucket is not on our state threatened or endangered lists," Mosier said. "But its population has steadily declined over the years.

"We want to do something now so that it doesn't ever end up on the federal list. We want to be ahead of the game."



## A rescue plan

The KABC wasn't designed as a research center. Its purpose is to serve as a mass propagation site to supplement populations in distress.

It consists of a pond, a laboratory, tanks that imitate natural streams and aerated aquariums.

The fatmucket is just one example of a species the facility hopes to help—a starting point.

"The fatmucket occurs in the drainage the hatchery is located in, so we had locally available brood stock," Mosier said.

Mosier and his staff also plan to work with the plains minnow, a species found primarily in south-central Kansas, and the cylindrical papershell mussel, found in the northwest part of the state.

"We have a list of seven or eight species we plan to pursue this year," Mosier said.

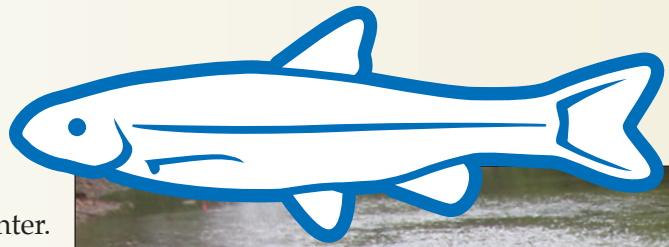
All of those species are in decline largely because of habitat changes, drought cycles, changes in water clarity, and in some cases, pollution.

"If we can show at a state level that we are making efforts to propagate these species to supplement populations and to clean up a stream so that they have a better chance of surviving, then that's evidence to suggest not listing them at a federal level," added Mosier.

## Background

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment provided much of the funding to get the center off the ground.

Funds gained from the agency's Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration pro-



A research crew scoured a Kansas stream in search of freshwater mussels.

gram – which penalizes companies or individuals that have damaged natural resources through chemical spills, oil discharges, etc. – played a key role.

Farlington was chosen as a site for the new center because of its unique position.

"The six counties of extreme southeast Kansas have the greatest diversity of aquatic life in the state," Mosier said. "It has a lot of streams, a lot of water, and that makes for ideal habitat.

And management at KDWPT is optimistic about the possibilities.

"In many cases, propagation projects can play a part in bringing these species back," said Doug Nygren, KDWPT Fisheries Division Director. "We think we can make a difference."

Several aquatic species with declining populations are housed in the Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center.








are very specific about the host fish species they require. It has to be relatively small and not one that's old or has been infected before."

Water conditions also play a part. If there is too much water or it is too turbid, the spawning process suffers.

Staff at the KABC will attempt to simulate ideal conditions and raise the mussels to juvenile sizes, when they will be released back into streams.

Similarly, they will spawn minnows, darters and chubs in a controlled setting and will release them back into streams where populations are dwindling.

For some of the freshwater mussels, there is plenty of time to develop methods that will work. Some mussels can live to be more than 100 years old, Miller said. But species such as the plains minnow live to only 2 or 3 years of age, making propagation efforts all the more urgent.

"Once they disappear, there's no way of getting them back," he said. "The plan is to give some of these species a boost before it's too late." 

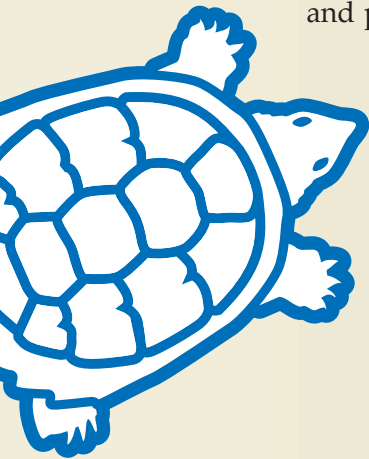
## Putting the plan into action

Producing large numbers of mussels in a controlled setting means imitating a fascinating spawning process in the wild.

In Kansas streams, the gravid females will release a lure – an extension of its tissue that looks like a small fish – to attract specific types of fish. When those fish approach, she will release the fertilized eggs or larvae she is carrying and they attach to the host fish's gill filaments or fins. They will remain there until they develop into the juvenile stage; then, they fall off and are free-living.

"That's the only way those mussels can disperse and pioneer to uninhabited areas—by hitchhiking on those fish hosts," said Edwin Miller, threatened and endangered species coordinator for the KDWPT. "But there is a unique bottleneck they go through for the next generation to occur.

"A lot of the mussels



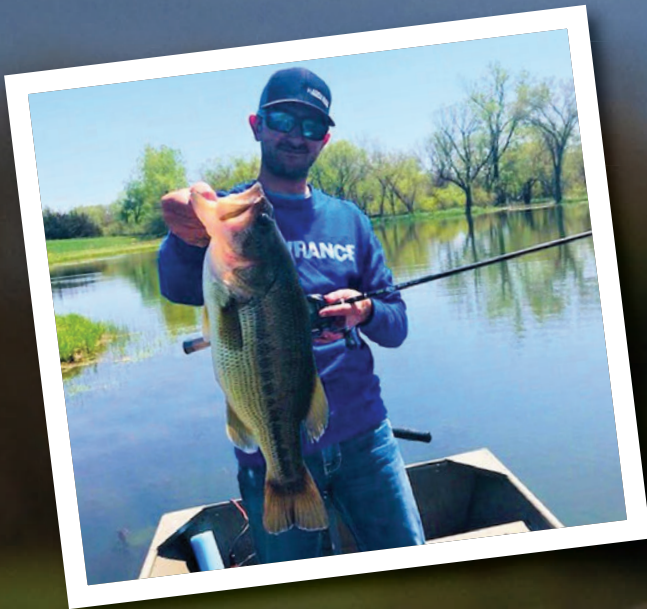
The Kansas Aquatic Biodiversity Center hopes to help several species of freshwater mussels through repopulation programs.





# BIG BASS, SMALL PONDS

by Brent Frazee  
*freelance outdoor writer*



T.J. Catania is on a mission to catch a Kansas state-record bass. And he knows where he can find it – in a farm pond.

Each spring, Catania and his girlfriend, Kaitlyn Addie, embark on a quest to catch the biggest bass the Sunflower State has to offer. That entails driving down dusty gravel roads, through cattle gates and along rutted paths at the edge of fields.

You won't find their favorite fishing spots on the map. But as obscure as they are, those private farm ponds can produce Kansas' best bass fishing.

Catania can relate a tale of one fishing trip as proof.

"I was fishing one pond that had a lot of vegetation in it and I was bringing a (topwater plastic frog) over little pockets of open water," said Catania, 29, who lives in Bonner Springs. "I paused it and twitched it a little and I saw this bass making a wake as it swam toward my lure.

"It hit so hard that my frog went flying into the air when it missed it. I reeled it in and cast back to the exact same spot and that bass just engulfed it.

"It wasn't a real exciting fight. The fish was covered in weeds by the time I got it in, but I knew it was big."

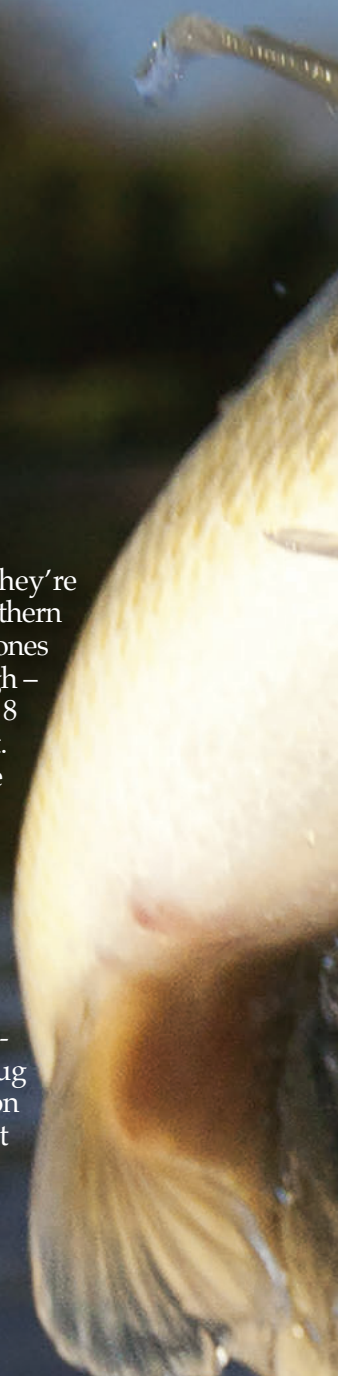
How big? Catania's scales showed it weighed 10.1

pounds, a true Kansas giant.

Such fish are rare in Kansas; they're near the top of potential for the northern strain of largemouth bass. Bigger ones have been caught in the state, though – the state record weighed 11.8 pounds, caught in a private strip pit.

And fisheries officials with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) say other trophy largemouths – many in the 5- to 8-pound range – live in relative obscurity on Kansas farms.

"More Master Angler largemouth bass (23 inches and longer) are caught in farm ponds than anywhere else in the state," said Doug Nygren, KDWPT Fisheries Division Director. "They're just excellent places to target big bass, especially during the spring."







Shutterstock/1788882640



## SPRING MAGIC

So why do Catania and other serious bass anglers flock to farm ponds before many reservoir anglers even get their tackle out of storage? Let us count the ways.

- In Spring, water temperatures warm much faster in small bodies of water than in large reservoirs.
- Farm ponds are easier to fish in the spring before they become choked with weeds.
- Bass often are more vulnerable in spring because they become active as the water warms, and they haven't seen many lures for several months.
- Bass often weigh more in the spring, when they feed voraciously in advance of the spawn and females carry the extra weight of eggs.
- Because most Kansas farm ponds are private, they don't get much fishing pressure.

Kansas has more than 100,000 farm ponds, ranging in size from one-half acre to 50 acres or more, according to KDWPT.

And, they're not all created equal. For example, the shallow cattle ponds without much cover often have stunted fish, murky water and little in the way of big-bass potential. But the ponds that are in balance can be hidden jewels.

That often entails a watershed that produces little inflow of sediment, a mix of shallow flats for the bass to spawn and feed and depths of at least 12 feet for them to survive the extremes of winter and summer, good cover such as weeds, rocks and wood, and plentiful forage.

Mix those ingredients and you have a pond that can produce big bass.

## THE QUEST FOR A TROPHY

Thomas Heinen of Topeka is another trophy angler who has dreams of catching a Kansas state-record bass.

He has caught and released bass as big as 7 pounds, but he has watched bigger ones get away.

"I fish this one pond where the landowner told me he once caught a bass that could have been the state record," said Heinen, 20, of Topeka. "He weighed it on a hand-held scale but didn't have it verified by game wardens. He didn't want to kill it, so he let it go.

"I believe him. I've had some huge bass on at his pond. I had one right up to the bank and it flipped at the last minute and got away. I would have loved to weigh that fish."

Not all the big ones get away, though. Heinen has caught dozens of bass weighing 5 pounds and more in farm ponds in northeast Kansas.

No, this isn't just some young guy telling fish stories. He can show you his cellphone and flip through dozens of photos of him holding trophy bass. When it comes to bass fishing, he is advanced for his age.

Fishing in tournaments on reservoirs, Heinen has done

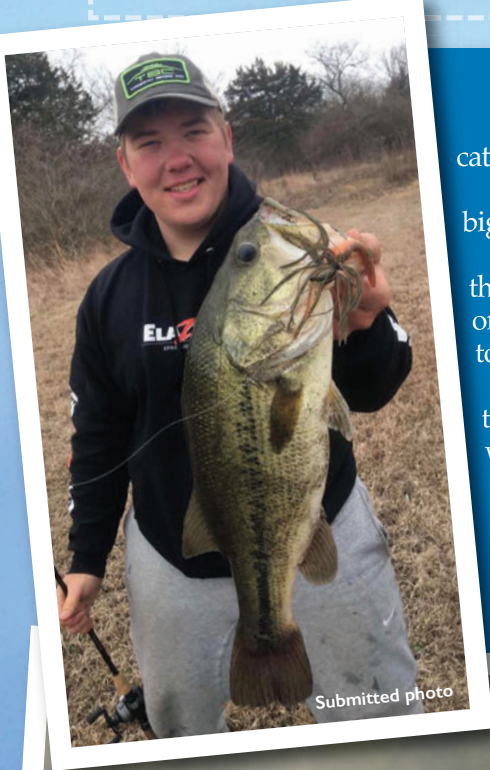
well enough to qualify as a member of the Kansas BASS Nation team, which includes only 20 anglers. He already has sponsors and has his sights set on becoming a pro.

He is well-acquainted with many of Kansas' large reservoirs and knows where to catch bass there. But when he is searching for a giant, he heads to a farm pond.

"Every pond is different," he said. "Some of them might have a lot of 2-pound fish, but not many big ones.

"You learn what they're like by fishing them for a while. You just know which ones have the potential of producing a giant."

Kansas farm ponds can offer opportunities to catch big bass in a scenic setting.





## HOW TO CATCH A BIG ONE

Fishing Kansas farm ponds produces some unique challenges. Because many of them are shallow and have abundant aquatic vegetation, bottom-bouncing lures often are difficult to fish. Catania starts his search in the spring by shallow-diving square bill crankbaits along banks in front of him.

“Some people make the mistake of walking along a bank, then casting out,” he said. “Well, they’ve already spooked the fish that were feeding shallow along that bank.

“I cast parallel along that bank in front of me and catch a lot of my biggest bass that way.”

Later in the spring, Catania will go to a weightless plastic stick bait and let it flutter down in holes in the vegetation. By summer, he turns to 10-inch plastic worms and works them slowly through the vegetation. He also uses plastic creature baits and topwater lures.

Heinen catches big bass on Chatterbaits, retrieving them slowly over the weeds that are starting to grow. Later, he finds success with Ned rigs, Z-Man plastic Palmetto Bugs, topwater baits and plastic stick baits.

Spinnerbaits or buzzbaits retrieved over the top of emerging vegetation also can be deadly.

Both anglers will use bass jigs tipped with plastic trailers along rocky banks and riprap. They fish out of small boats or kayaks whenever possible, and target shoreline cover such as weed edges, stumps and laydowns. But the beauty of a farm pond is that you can catch big fish from the bank, too.

“I can almost cast across some of the ponds I fish,” Heinen said. “I can cover a lot of water fishing from the bank.”


## NO GUARANTEES

As with most fishing, there are no guarantees. Though farm ponds contain some true trophies, they don’t bite every day. Often, it takes a certain set of conditions for those bass to hit.

I remember talking to a friend who had fished a pond for years without catching a 5-pound bass. One evening as a storm approached, the barometer dropped quickly, and a heavy wind kicked up whitecaps. Using a white spinnerbait, my friend caught and released three bass weighing more than 5 pounds in just 15 minutes.

Some last words of advice: Don’t rely on rumors about a pond’s productivity when deciding where to fish. You might miss out on some great action.

“One landowner told me anglers informed her that her pond was way overstocked and on the brink of stunting,” Catania said. “I decided to fish it anyway and I was shocked by what I found.

“I was there in the spring and I could see all kinds of big bass in one foot of water near the bank. I kept my distance and made a long cast to them with a (plastic) stick bait, and I had one of the best days of fishing I’ve ever had.” 

## CREATING A BIG BASS POND

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism often refers landowners to the booklet, “Producing Fish and Wildlife from Kansas Ponds,” written by fisheries biologists.

- The best ponds have good water clarity, shoreline cover and a diversity of water depths – shallow flats for the bass to feed and spawn, deep water for them to survive the extremes of winter and summer.

- Anglers should release all bass under 15 inches for the first four years after stocking.

- After that time, anglers should harvest 30 to 50 bass, 8 to 12 inches, per acre each year. In addition, five bass, 12 to 15 inches, per acre should be taken.

- In larger ponds, 20 adult gizzard shad per acre can be stocked two years after the bass have been introduced to greatly enhance the food supply.

- Bluegills will serve as the primary prey for small bass, but the shad will be eaten by large bass.

- The biggest caveat to stocking shad: Bass numbers should be strong enough to keep the baitfish population from overpopulating a pond.





Cheney State Park  
16000 NE 50th Cheney, KS 67025  
(316) 542-3664



# CHENEY STATE PARK

by Rick McNary, *freelance writer and photographer*

Like most reservoirs in Kansas, it takes private and public partnerships to maximize the area for public use. Cheney Reservoir was constructed in 1964 for flood control and water supply for Wichita. The water and surrounding land is owned by the federal government, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The City of Wichita contracts with USACE for water usage. And the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) leases the rights to utilize the water and surrounding land for fish and wildlife management, as well as recreational activities. KDWPT funds all state park operations solely on entrance and usage fees,

as well as licenses sold for use.

The park is located on the south side of the lake and divided into two sections; east and west. In all, the area is comprised of 9,537 acres of water, 5,259 acres of wildlife area and 1,913 acres of state park.

In addition to this arrangement between federal and state agencies, other private partnerships - such as businesses that own marinas and nonprofit organizations - provide critical support. Three of these nonprofits, Cheney Lake Association, Ninnescah Sailing Association and Friends of Cheney Lake, play supportive roles for the numerous activities the public is offered.



## SAILING

Cheney Reservoir has more consistent days of wind than almost any other lake in the country. The Ninnescah Sailing Association (NSA), formed immediately after the lake was built in 1965 and named after the Ninnescah River, is considered one of the finest in the nation. Its beautiful facilities, including the clubhouse and boat slips on the west side of the lake, give evidence of the popularity of sailing. This extremely active, and welcoming club, is a nonprofit with open membership.

In addition to their facilities, NSA offers a variety of educational opportunities to learn the joy of sailing. Whether you've never been in a sailboat or are a seasoned sailor, NSA can provide creative ways to enjoy the sport.

Cheney also draws windsurfers, wind kites and parasailers from across the nation, all of whom are relatively assured there will be enough wind for their activities.

## CAMPING

With 223 electrical hookup sites with water and 400 primitive campsites, there is plenty of space to camp at Cheney. Four trailer dump stations are also accessible for use.

Nine modern cabins are located on the west side of the lake, six of which are sleeper cabins. On the east side of the lake near the marina, three new cabins are available. These cabins, all supplied through the efforts of the Friends of Cheney Lake, are open year-round. Reservations can be made online at [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com), at the park office and on KDWPT's new mobile app – CampIt KS.

## FISHING

Channel catfish, white bass, crappie, striped bass, wipers and walleye abound in Cheney's waters. In late March and early April, the dam is a great place to fish for walleye. In April and May, crappie can be found in the brush piles; white bass run up the

river to spawn in May. And catfish are drawn to the fish feeders in June and July.

There is an ongoing effort from the Fisheries division at KDWPT to enhance the habitat and increase the population of another species growing in popularity: blue catfish. A 35-inch length limit is in place at Cheney to ensure that smaller fish can grow into their potential. Fortunately, blue catfish include zebra mussels - one of the most invasive species damaging our lakes - into their diet.

Want to give Cheney a try? Reference KDWPT's fishing reports on [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) and click on the "Fishing" tab.

- **Handicap Access**

The Toadstool Loop Jetty on the west side is handicap accessible for fishing.

- **Zebra Mussels**

Unfortunately, zebra mussels are found in this lake and, in their larvae form - also known as veliger - they are too small



Cheney Reservoir has more consistent days of wind than almost any other lake in the country, making it ideal for sailing.





Three nonprofits - Cheney Lake Association, Ninnescah Sailing Association, and Friends of Cheney Lake - offer numerous activities to the public.

is open to the public on Fridays and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sundays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The law enforcement certified range offers shooting benches, target backers and target tacks for the 100-yard and 25-yard ranges. An ADA bench is provided on each range. Unisex vault toilets are available. Rifles and pistols are allowed on both ranges and shotguns are only allowed if firing slugs.

## BOATING

The marina is on the east side of the lake and offers a variety of services and rentals. There are six boat ramps with 22 launching lanes, four courtesy docks and two fish cleaning stations. 🐊

**For more on Cheney State Park and other state parks across Kansas, visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com).**

to be seen with the naked eye. These veligers can be found in boat live wells, minnow buckets, boat billers, water toys, and anything that else capable of holding even small amounts of water. Please drain all equipment before leaving the lake.

## NATURE TRAILS

Cheney State Park has three nature and hiking trails.

- **Geifer Creek Nature Trail** is a .13-mile-long interpretive trail open year-round for walking and mountain biking.
- **Spring Creek Wildlife Observation Trail** stretches 0.75 miles and is perfect for observing wildlife and nature. Part of the trail is elevated over a wetland and running stream. It is also open year-round for walking and mountain biking.
- **Another combination hiking and mountain bike trail** is 10 miles out and back, all along the west side of the lake.

In addition to the nature trails, there are 29 miles of asphalt roads in the park, making it a popular destination for cyclists.

## DISC GOLF

The Cheney Lake Association installed a regulation 18-hole disc

golf course in 2019. This course is along the west side and, if you play from the back tees, is considered a championship-level course.

## WILDLIFE AREA

Cheney Wildlife Area comprises 5,259 acres and is adjacent to the park. This area provides numerous opportunities for wildlife watching, nature photography and hunting. Inside this area, a refuge has been set aside for migratory waterfowl and is closed to all activities from September 15 through March 15.

## SHOOTING RANGE

The Cheney Shooting Range is northwest of the wildlife area and



KDWPT photo

Boating is a popular activity on the lake. With six boat ramps with 22 launching lanes and four courtesy docks, there are plenty of places to launch.





# Happy

Kathi Rakestraw has horses, a camping trailer large enough for her herd, and a fine pickup with which to pull them. She has horse-camped in several Midwestern and mountain states. But these days, she and friends mostly camp a half-hour from her rural Topeka home at Perry State Park. The park's Wild Horse Equestrian Campground has all they need, and then some.

"The parking, the camping spots with electricity, and the pens are so nice," said Rakestraw. "The trails are great, and they do such a great job of keeping them up."

Perry State Park is one of nine Kansas state parks with equestrian campgrounds. Most have utilities, pens, and nice camper pads.

Recently, the campground has seen many improvements. Several weeks ago, Michelle Campbell, Perry State Park manager, walked the campground's timbered ridge and pointed them out. Among the updates are 16 spacious and shaded campsites with utilities, and two heavy-duty 12-foot by 12-foot pens at each site. The tour included the campground's new bathhouse and shelter house. There was also a large, open area for group-friendly, primitive camping with 24 pens.

Campbell said more are on the way – including a fire ring, a 55-foot round pen and maybe even an obstacle course.

Though she and her small staff work hard, Campbell was quick to credit others for helping to make many of the improvements possible.



# Trails

by Michael Pearce  
*outdoor writer & photographer*

"These volunteers have been so supportive and hard working," said Campbell, who has been at Perry State Park since 2006 and its manager since 2016. "These horse people are pretty special. They'll even help in campgrounds where horses aren't allowed. They're just good people. When we have workdays, it's like we have an entire army show up."

The husband-wife team of Dwayne Burgess and Jo Turner are consistent members of that army.

For years, they ran a western store in Topeka; trail and recre-

ational riders made up a sizable portion of their clientele. Both also visit the primitive equine campgrounds and trails at Perry State Park.

They and a few friends saw a need to make things better. In 2012, they started Friends of Lake Perry Wildhorse Trails. Progress came quickly.

"Our first fundraising ride, I think we had about 100 horses," said Burgess. "People understood the value of the resource at Perry and wanted to see improvements. They wanted to see the trails better maintained and the camp

improved."

The group has been successful enough with fundraising rides to put thousands of dollars for improvements like building the popular, heavy-duty pens that are so appreciated.

"Those are so nice to have there," Rakestraw said of the pens. "Before you had to bring either a portable electric fence or your own panels. These are so nice that we don't have to worry if we want to go someplace else and leave the horses in the pens. In the summer, we like to ride in the mornings then take our small kayaks down to the lake for the afternoon to stay cool."

Maintaining the nearly 40 miles of equestrian trails on state park and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lands requires a lot of volunteer time. The trails often pass through some of the tallest hardwood forests in Kansas, so just keeping limbs and fallen trees cleaned up is a sizable chore. A variety of trail upgrades are ongoing.

Campbell said the horse trails are largely reserved for equestrians, though a few hikers use

The volunteer group, Friends of the Lake Perry Wildhorse Trails, started in 2012. Since then, they have raised thousands of dollars through fundraising rides to help with park improvements.







The nearly 40 miles of equestrian trails at Perry State Park and surrounding U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lands are largely reserved for equestrians, though a few hikers use the trails to search for morel mushrooms and shed deer antlers.

the trails for activities like searching for morel mushrooms or shed deer antlers.

While mountain biking is not allowed on the trails because they often spook horses, cyclists and hikers have access to dozens of miles of horse-free trails around the lake.

Equestrians are also the only campers allowed to stay at the equine campground.

“We keep it for horse-campers only because they have to have a place with these kinds of facilities,” said Campbell. “They’re not permitted to use our regular campgrounds. This is their only option.”

Campbell said the campground frequently hosts horse-campers traveling through Kansas, including states as far away as Delaware.

“They learn about us and they’re absolutely thrilled that we have a place where they can camp and get their horses out,” said Campbell. “If they’ve been cooped up driving all day, they appreciate places like this.”

Burgess feels every time a person stays at Perry State Park, they’ll leave as great ambassadors for the state’s equestrian offerings. Not only will they possibly come back, others they talk to may come, also.

Burgess said the reputation for Kansas state parks, and their equestrian campgrounds, is good

and finally spreading among America’s horse lovers.

“We travel extensively, and often go to Texas to ride and camp,” said Burgess. “We almost always know we have better riding and facilities close to home. Things like our state parks and trails have always been a ‘best-kept secret.’ We need that to change. We have so much to offer. We’ve got it really good.” 🐮

**For more information on KDWPT’s equestrian-friendly facilities, visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com).**

To learn more about Friends of Lake Perry Wildhorse Trails, visit their Facebook group titled “Let’s Ride-Perry Lake.”





# Pratt Education Center and Wildlife Museum

by Diedre Kramer, *Pratt Education Center director*

 KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF  
WILDLIFE, PARKS AND TOURISM

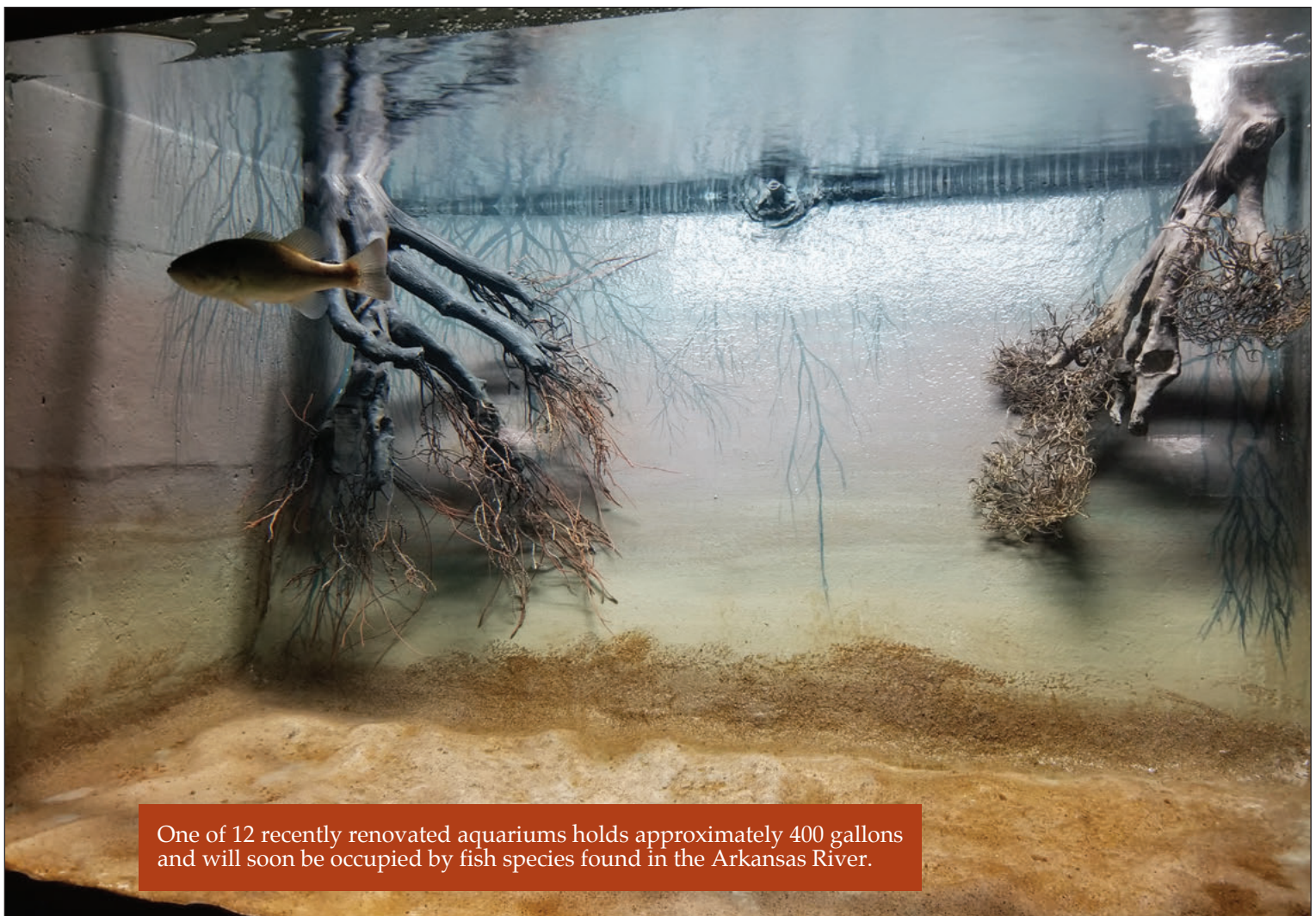
PRATT EDUCATION  
CENTER — AQUARIUMS

The Pratt Education Center and Wildlife Museum offers a great opportunity for visitors to learn about wildlife and plants native to the Sunflower State. There are many displays and exhibits that provide a close encounter with native birds, fish, mammals, amphibians, insects and reptiles – and admission is offered at no charge.

Housed in one of the agency's oldest buildings, the Pratt Education Center and Wildlife Museum

was fully constructed in 1913. Initially, the building was used as a fish culture school for the University of Kansas. Starting in 1915, the building served as the first administrative headquarters for the then Kansas Fish and Game Commission; it was completely converted to an education center in 1966. Due to its rich history, age, and the condition of select displays, plans were made in 2019 to update the building.





One of 12 recently renovated aquariums holds approximately 400 gallons and will soon be occupied by fish species found in the Arkansas River.

Twelve aquariums are currently being renovated to depict eight unique aquatic habitats found in Kansas. Once renovations are complete, visitors will be able to view several fish and freshwater mussel species common in each habitat. Information on the adaptations and unique survival strategies of these animals will be displayed, so visitors can learn about the aquatic ecosystems of Kansas. Other facts about macroinvertebrates (insects), plants, and geographical locations for each habitat will also be included in the interpretive text. Along with the aquariums, fish-loving onlookers can also enjoy two display panels outlining the process of hatching and rearing channel catfish, and the early history of the Pratt Fish Hatchery. Featured below the panels is a working model of the revolutionary hatching trough developed by fisheries biologist Seth Way. This hatching trough, created in Pratt, modernized and increased the success of artificially hatching channel catfish in hatchery systems. It is a method

that is still in use today across the country.

The Pratt Education Center and Wildlife Museum is also home to many living amphibians, reptiles and turtles. These ectothermic, or cold blooded, animals are quite different from mammals. Many of the tanks the reptiles and amphibians are housed in will soon be updated to provide a more accurate depiction of the diverse habitats where these animals can be found in the wild.

For those whose wildlife interests don't include the "creepy and crawly," there are other species on display – like birds! Kansas is located in the Central Flyway and is a critical stopover point for many migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. Some of the more common migratory birds are on display as taxidermy mounts for visitors to enjoy. The Bird Room at the Pratt Education Center also has an excellent display of raptors – a species especially important to Kansas ecosystems because of their ability to keep mice and rat populations under con-





The Education Center's many wildlife mounts showcase common species. This display includes a bobcat hunting a quail with a wild turkey in the background.

eggs of some of their favorite bird species.

In the center's youth learning area, kids can get creative by playing wildlife-based games, coloring, and reading. There are plans to expand this area for more hands-on learning opportunities, and not just for kids! After making the rounds, families can enjoy some outdoor time a nice shaded picnic area, north of the Center. The development of an additional pollinator

trol. A shining example of one such bird is the barn owl – a species that can eat as many as 8,000 rats and mice each year! The Bird Room also contains a very unique display of bird eggs from 128 different species. These eggs were collected in the 1890s and early 1900s. The harvesting of wild bird eggs is now illegal, so this donated collection provides a rare opportunity for visitors to view upclose the




Pictured here is the Center's common snapping turtle – an aquatic species found throughout Kansas' many waterbodies.

A Woodhouse toad resides at the education center and is a favorite among visitors due to this species' charismatic traits.



garden is under way, as well, and will provide an excellent learning opportunity out in the fresh air. Once finished, guests may even witness some native pollinators busy at work!

If you're looking for a unique, wildlife-centered trip, keep the Pratt Education Center and Wildlife Museum in mind.

For a complete list of KDWPT's education centers, visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com). 



# How To Bag Bluegill

by Rob McDonald, *Modern Wildman Blog*

Prolific in most Kansas waters, bluegill fill a critical biological niche as both predator and prey. They're a ton of fun on light tackle, and equally as enjoyable at the dinner table.

## Small Bite Artificials

Small 1/32 ounce jigs are easy for bluegills to strike, and their light weight allows them to drop slower through the water column, keeping them in the strike zone longer.

## Packing Your Tackle Box

A tackle box, bag, pack, or bucket can be critical to keep your gear and bait together on any fishing excursion.

## Fishing License

With the exception of land owners fishing their own private waters, anglers in Kansas between the ages of 16 and 74 must have a valid fishing license.

## Live Bait

Bluegill will readily take a small pinch of night crawler, earth worm, or red wigglers. Other small bits of bait dropped below a slender float that can be productive include maggots, crickets, grasshoppers, and small minnows.

## Angler's Secret

If the bluegill bite seems finicky, try tipping the hook on your jig with a small pinch of worm. Sometimes that little bit of natural bait on your jig will make all the difference.

## Light Tackle

Using light action rods, light line, and small tackle is a fantastic way to enjoy these sporty little fighters. High visibility line can sometimes help anglers detect strikes, especially on the fall portion of your cast when bluegills readily take bait presentations. Think small when it comes to hooks, split shot weights, floats, and swivels, too.

## Handy Items

Forceps or hemostats for removing hooks from a bluegill's small mouth often work better than needle nose pliers. Nail clippers in your tackle box are perfect for clipping light line after tying on a new jig. And, creel baskets are easier on the fish you plan to keep than a stringer, and keeping your catch alive longer before cleaning them.





Michael Pearce photo

by Michael Pearce  
outdoor writer & photographer

# Kettle Style Catfish

Fried catfish is as much of a Kansas summertime tradition as homegrown tomatoes and corn-on-the-cob. Catfish swim about everywhere from jump-across creeks to our largest reservoirs and rivers.

It also seems the hotter the weather, the hotter the catfish bite.

Here's a recipe that's faster and less mess than frying. It's also a healthier alternative since the fish is baked. But don't assume that because it's healthier that it's light on flavor. Crispy, kettle-cooked chips – especially if they're jalapeno, add a layer of crunch and zest that will have you coming back for seconds.

## What You Need:

- 1-2 lb. Catfish fillets, trimmed of yellow fat
- 2 C. Jalapeño kettle-style potato chips, finely crushed
- 2 Eggs, beaten
- 1 Tbl. Milk
- Cooking spray

## How To Make It:

*Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cut fillets into 5-inch pieces. Mix beaten eggs and milk. Submerge fillets in egg mixture and let soak for a few seconds. Press fillets into finely-crushed potato chips, coating both sides. Place fillets one inch apart in a baking dish coated with cooking spray. Bake, uncovered, until fish flakes easily – about 12-15 minutes, depending on thickness. Enjoy!*





# Species Profile:

## Yellow-headed Blackbird

You'll likely hear a yellow-headed blackbird before you see it. While the sounds they emit aren't lovely, trilling or chirping, they do sing a distinguishable raspy, screeching hum followed by short bursts of clacking.

Just as their name implies, male yellow-headed blackbirds have black bodies and bright yellow heads; they also wear large white markings on their wings. Females are dark brown with a muted yellow breast and face.

Yellow-headed blackbirds build their nests in vegetation and over deep water. Females may start several nests before deciding which one to use. A clutch will incubate for 11-13 days and contain three to five eggs.

This showy bird feeds on a variety of insects including grasshoppers, flies and ants. They also eat grains and seeds. If you're lucky, you might see a yellow-headed blackbird getting a snack from your backyard bird feeder!

Populations of the yellow-headed blackbird are considered stable over their range. Potential threats to them include possible breeding habitat loss, as well as herbicides and pesticides used in farming practices to treat grain or kill insects.



Judd Patterson photo





# Backlash

with Nadia Reimer

## The Race To Erase “Murder Hornets”



### The Hornet At-A-Glance

**Species:** *Vespa mandarinia*

**Common name:** Asian giant hornet or “Murder hornet”

**Size:** 1.5 to 2-inches long

**Country of origin:** Asia

**Most recently spotted:** Canada, Pacific Northwest (Washington)

**Primary threat:** Feeds on honeybees

The world’s largest hornet has recently found its way to the US for the first time, causing much alarm in the bee-keeping and honeybee-enthusiast community. Though how the Asian giant hornet arrived here is currently unknown, fear of these invasive wasps – recently dubbed by popular media as “murder hornets” – isn’t unwarranted. The 2-inch long Asian giant hornet, *Vespa mandarinia*, has an appetite for a hugely beneficial, and relatively helpless, species: honeybees. The Asian giant hornet’s “MO” isn’t pretty either, as these hummingbird-sized wasps kill honeybees by decapitation. Reports indicate that when just a few of these giant hornets work together, they can make relatively quick work of killing off an entire honeybee colony in what’s known as a “slaughter phase.”

So, what’s a species like the honeybee to do when it meets a never-seen-before predator? The reality is there isn’t much they can do, and that’s why staff at agencies like the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), and the beekeeping community are acting quickly to prevent further spread of the Asian giant hornet in the US and Canada.

On a quick search, it appears current efforts to control the species include:

- **Reporting** – WSDA, among other entities, has created a response website where individuals can report potential sightings of the invasive species.
- **Protection of Honeybee Queens** – Washington beekeepers

are working with the WSDA to set up “sap traps” in an effort to quickly capture and protect honeybee queens that will soon be emerging from overwintering. They’ll seek the carbohydrates found in sap to gain the energy necessary to carry out their important work. If beekeepers can safely secure the queens, Washington’s honeybee species may stand a fighting chance.

· **Baiting/Trapping of Hornet Queens** – According to the USDA’s “New Pest Response Guidelines” for *V. mandarinia*, capturing and killing Asian giant hornet queens can significantly reduce overall populations. In that document, best practices indicate this can effectively be done through constructing specialized homemade traps baited with sugar, alcohol and vinegar, as the Asian giant hornet is attracted to fermentation-like odors.

· **Chemical Control** – Lastly, according to the USDA’s response guidelines, eradicating the nests of Asian giant hornets via chemical sprays may also be an effective tool for controlling the wasp’s spread, should the situation necessitate such tools.

The race to erase the Asian giant hornet is on. Time will tell if the actions of our Pacific northwest friends prove fruitful, but if there’s one thing we know all too well in today’s day and COVID-age, it’s the importance of quick reporting and quick action. From my research, it appears the right folks are doing just that. Now, it’s up to nature what happens next. 🐝

### Quick Facts

According to the New York Times, Asian giant hornets are responsible for upwards of 50 deaths per year in Japan alone.

- Unlike other species equipped with stingers, the Asian giant hornet is capable of stinging its prey repeatedly.
- The Asian giant hornet’s stinger is longer than that of a honeybee, and their venom is more toxic.
- According to the WSDA, once giant hornets have conquered a honeybee hive, they then defend the hive as their own, taking the brood to feed their own young.





CampIt KS



HuntFish KS

