

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks Magazine

FOR HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS | \$3.75 | JULY-AUGUST 2019





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KANSAS
Wildlife & Parks Magazine

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- 2 | Common Ground**
Making the Kansas Connection *By Brad Loveless*
- 18 | The Truth About Snakes**
They're woefully misunderstood but hopefully not for long. *By Daren Riedle*
- 22 | Fish-Fooling Flies**
Fly tyer Jim Keller is both an artist and magician. *By Rick McNary*
- 28 | Road Trip Gone Fishin'**
No reservoir is too far for this traveling angler. *By Brent Frazee*
- 32 | Cross Timbers State Park**
Nestled in a unique ecosystem, this park is rife with history. *By Rick McNary*
- 38 | King Cats of the Kansas River**
Thomas Finch is after river monsters, one fishing trip at a time. *By Michael Pearce*
- 44 | Species Profile**
The Eastern Screech-Owl
- 45 | Backlash**
The People Behind the Pages *By Nadia Reimer*

Contents

FRONT COVER A common garter snake – one of Kansas' many harmless snakes – shows us his tongue. Daren Riedle photo.

INSIDE FRONT COVER The still waters of Cross Timbers State Park, captured by park employee and photographer, Linda Riley.

Contact the editor: nadia.reimer@ks.gov

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

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COMMON GROUND

with Brad Loveless



Making the Kansas Connection

I grew up in the suburbs of Dayton, Ohio and felt well connected – connected in the sense of community. I knew thoroughly the people in my neighborhood, on my paper route and at church and that seemed like an encompassing social network to me. Outside of those circles, people I encountered were politely distant or just distant. As I got older, I experienced Columbus and Ohio State University and realized what a large pond this small fish really was in.

When Mindy and I moved to Lyndon in Osage County to raise our family, I had no inkling that things would be any different. Thankfully, I was wrong. We found people both inside and outside of town to be friendly to the extreme. Whether we met people on the sidewalk or driving down the road, they made eye contact and spoke or waved. All of the other drivers waved at me, so I waved back. Our sense of community was warmed and widened. It's no surprise that many visitors to Kansas note their desire to return is largely to rekindle friendships established during earlier visits.

Recently, some of our fine Parks Division employees and I attended a public meeting in Herrington to discuss the Flint Hills Trail. The Flint Hills Trail Advisory Committee is led by Rep. Dave Baker of Council Grove and Sen. Jeff Longbine of Emporia and is well designed to encourage dialog and good decision-making along the trail. With the passage of Senate Bill 331 in 2018, the Flint Hills Trail (and Little Jerusalem Badlands near Oakley) became Kansas' newest state parks. It then became our responsibility at the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) to wisely develop and manage the 117-mile conversion of railroad right-of-way (ROW) to a hiking and biking trail stretching between Osawatomie and Herrington. Because it has been more than 20 years since trains used some of those rail sections, many landowners with ROWs have gotten used to no activity on those old paths, and some have found them convenient for storage of equipment or hay. Understandably, these landowners are reluctant for change, making our conversations and the Advisory Council's work especially valuable.

As we were enthusiastically welcomed by Herrington's mayor and city manager, informed about exciting new, trail-related economic developments in towns to the east, and updated by landowners along the route and engaged trail users, the manifold benefits of this project were abundantly clear. The Kansas Sunflower Foundation has been a key supporter of these trails and as their program officer, Elizabeth Burger, explained at the gathering, "these trails clearly contribute to healthy Kansans and Kansas communities" – central components of their mission.

During the meeting, some of my favorite conversations were with landowners. Rich Porter is a great and old friend of mine

and the trail crosses his ground near Miller. When talking to a concerned landowner on the yet-to-be developed trail east of Council Grove, I heard Rich say, "I wasn't crazy about the idea of trail development when I first heard about it but then decided, 'This is a positive thing for Kansas and it's going to happen, I might as well work to make it as good as I can... The people I've been working with have been wonderful.'"

Trent McCown, manager of the Flint Hills and Prairie Spirit trails, seldom speaks a paragraph without uttering the phrase, "We want to be a good neighbor." Trent told me the story of a trail neighbor near Garnett. Trent and a coworker had just completed installing "No Trespassing" signs on the fence between the trail and this lady's property when she approached them, asking them to please take the signs down. "I don't mind at all if folks want to come over – I like the visitors," she said.

Gary and Cindy Floyd graciously provided food for the 44 attendees at our meeting. Gary described how he was against the trail at first, but his experience at their property just west of Herrington has since changed their perspective and involvement. Since railroad abandonment, they've had some problems with unauthorized vehicles on the ROW. They decided to get involved with KDWPT to promote responsible development and good decision-making and their insight has been invaluable. With the addition of some gates and vehicle barriers, they've seen positive changes. Reduced misbehavior is "the norm" and this is supported by data from around the U.S. Excluding vehicles and developing these trails for foot and bike access only makes communities safer. Ne'er-do-wells like to work in the shadows; green spaces promote community connections and security.

And speaking of connections and Kansas – that's where I started. As I soon found out when I moved to my rural community, I had little understanding and appreciation of the issues these small towns and hardworking farmers and ranchers face. After 30 years, I've learned quite a bit and have grown to love my town and rural neighbors. As hikers and bikers come from Kansas cities and beyond our borders, I know they'll see and gain appreciation for the places and people that supply their food, fuel and fiber, and the small towns in between the big ones.

And like me, I bet they'll learn to enjoy waving back. 

Klataske Receives Conservation Award



Ron Klataske, Executive Director of Audubon of Kansas, was recently honored with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (WAFWA) President's Award in recognition of his long-time commitment to conservation efforts in Kansas, Nebraska and the central Great Plains.

Brad Loveless, Secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), acting in his capacity as WAFWA president, presented the award to Klataske at the WAFWA Annual Conference in Manhattan, KS on July 15, 2019.

Klataske has led conservation efforts for 50 years as a representative of the National Audubon Society from 1970 to 1998 and Audubon of Kansas beginning in 1999. Klataske's portfolio of successful campaigns includes the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in the Kansas Flint Hills and the designation of a 76-mile portion of the Niobrara River in Nebraska as a National Scenic River. He was a driving force behind the creation of the Konza Prairie Biological Research Station south of Manhattan, the Tallgrass Prairie in Oklahoma, a trail system using the flood control levees along the Kansas River in Lawrence and the linear trail in Manhattan.

Furthermore, he helped stop proposed

dam and diversion projects on Nebraska's Platte and Niobrara rivers. His efforts preserved the migration stopover locations of the sandhill crane. Every year from late February to early April, hundreds of thousands of sandhill cranes stop along the Platte River on their way northward, creating one of the most majestic migration spectacles in the country. Klataske spearheaded the formation of Nebraska's crane festival to celebrate this yearly event. The festival will have its 50th anniversary in March 2020 and educates and inspires thousands of visitors each year.

In announcing the award, Loveless noted that Klataske was well-deserving of WAFWA's President's Award. "Ron is a great partner to KDWPT, and not because we always agree," he said. "We sometimes don't see eye-to-eye, but Ron brings diverse perspectives, visionary ideas and seemingly boundless passion and creativity. We need people like Ron to help us make better decisions. He has created a positive legacy of conservation in the Great Plains and we owe him our gratitude."

Zebra Mussels in Lyon State Fishing Lake

KDWPT staff have confirmed the presence of invasive zebra mussels in Lyon State Fishing Lake in Lyon County. Routine samples collected by KDWPT Aquatic Nuisance Species staff to detect zebra mussels were found to contain zebra mussel larvae (also called veligers). Upon finding the veligers, staff returned to the lake and located an established population of adult zebra mussels. Similar sampling is conducted by KDWPT at more than 100 waterbodies across the state.

The 135-acre lake is located 12 miles north and two miles east of Emporia on Rd 270. Lyon State Fishing Lake is owned and operated by KDWPT. The lake and surrounding wildlife area are popular destinations for fishing, hunting, hiking, and a variety of other outdoor-related activities.

While the zebra mussel population is currently small, there is no known method to completely rid a lake of this invasive species. The zebra mussels were likely introduced by "hitchhiking" with unsuspecting lake-goers. Adults are able to attach to boats or other equipment and the microscopic zebra mussel veligers may be present in any water originating from an infested lake or stream. Densities as high as 1,000 veligers per gallon have been recorded in Kansas waters.

"This is the first new population of zebra mussels found in the state in 18 months, which is the longest period of time between new lake infestations since 2006. While it is unfortunate that zebra mussels have been spread to a new lake, I remain hopeful that these occurrences will be less frequent as more people have become aware of zebra mussels, their impacts, and how to prevent moving them," said Chris Steffen, aquatic nuisance species coordinator for KDWPT.

Lyon State Fishing Lake will be added to the list of ANS-designated waters in Kansas, and notices will be posted at various locations around the waterbody. Live fish may not be transported from ANS-designated waters. The sharp-shelled zebra mussels attach to solid objects, so lake-goers should be careful when handling mussel-encrusted objects and when grabbing an underwater object when they can't see what their hands may be grasping. Visitors should protect their feet when walking on underwater or shoreline rocks.



Zebra mussels are just one of the non-native aquatic species that threaten our waters and native wildlife. After using any body of water, people must remember to follow regulations and precautions that will prevent their spread:

- Clean, drain and dry boats and equipment between uses
- Use wild-caught bait only in the lake or pool where it was caught
- Do not move live fish from waters infested with zebra mussels or other aquatic nuisance species
- Drain livewells and bilges and remove drain plugs from all vessels prior to transport from any Kansas water on a public highway.

For more information about aquatic nuisance species in Kansas, report a possible ANS, or see a list of ANS-designated waters, visit ProtectKSWaters.org.

BIRD BRAIN

Birds of a Feather

with Mike Rader

The excitement of spring migration through Kansas re-energizes most birders, reminding us why we think it is a great pastime. As things slow down for summer, I like to take some time to reflect on how the spring season went, what different birds I was able to observe, various locations I was able to visit and interestingly, what people I have had the chance to bird with.

Some opportunities come by chance or on a whim, where folks do an extended day or weekend out, exploring what the state has to offer.

I was able to take a long day this spring to visit Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira with one of my best friends and birding mentors, Ted Cable. He dropped a note to me asking if I wanted to accompany him in showing three people that were visiting in Manhattan out to the

central Kansas marshes. I was available and jumped at the chance to spend some quality time with him again and meet other birders that are interested in some of my favorite

in Germany for many years, Elizabeth, a German birder that had never been to this part of the U.S., and Amy, a young woman who works for Oklahoma State University

There are usually ample opportunities, with annual Kansas Ornithological Society meetings, birding festivals such as the Wings and Wetlands event in Great Bend or the Kansas Birding Festival at Milford Lake, and other field trips by various Audubon chapters and other local groups.

locations. I met them mid-morning at the Kansas Wetlands Education Center, catching up with them as they were looking at birds in the small marsh behind the building.

The group consisted of Ann Marie, a long-time friend of Ted's that has been living

and was in Manhattan to meet with the staff at Kansas State University on a project. Ann Marie was a seasoned birder, with an extensive species list from time spent here earlier in life and many trips back to the United States. Elizabeth was also a seasoned birder, but most of

the species we were seeing were life birds for her, meaning this was the first time ever seeing them, given that her birdwatching experience was mainly from Europe. Amy was relatively new to birding and had an infectious enthusiasm and joy about her that made it fun for the whole group to be around.

The day was spent looking for whatever we could find, hoping to get a few new birds for Ann Marie and taking the time to let Elizabeth and Amy enjoy the multitude of birds that they had never seen before. This type of birding was fun to revisit for old hands such as Ted and me, obviously having been to the locations hundreds of times before and often rushing to get that next best bird. Ted and I have a relationship where we kid each other a lot, providing entertainment for the group, or mostly for ourselves I suppose.... We made it through the day with lots of laughs and many new birds seen for our guests. I wish I had written down something that Amy said to me when we were saying our goodbyes, so I could quote it, but I didn't. The gist of it was that she marveled at how five people who didn't really know each other well (or at all, as the day began) could have such a great time getting to see fantastic birds in the area, while also finding out more about each one of us. As we parted company, I got an open invitation to bird in Germany if I ever got there and hugs all around. I'd call that a success!





LAW MATTERS

with Colonel Ott

Tenant Deer Permits

As we enter the fall deer seasons, I want to discuss an issue that Kansas game wardens regularly address – permits. Historically, there has been confusion as to who qualifies for tenant deer permits, and Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism law enforcement staff want to ensure that all hunters enjoy deer hunting in Kansas legally.

WHO IS A TENANT?

A tenant is any resident or nonresident who is actively engaged in the agricultural operation of 80 acres or more of Kansas farm or ranch land for the purpose of producing agricultural commodities or livestock and (A) has a substantial financial investment in the production of agricultural commodities or livestock on such farm or ranch land and the potential to realize substantial financial benefit from such production or, (B) is a bona fide manager having an overall responsibility to direct, supervise and conduct such agricultural operation and have the potential to realize substantial benefit from such production in the form of salary, shares of such production or some other economic incentive based upon such production. Evidence of tenancy, if requested, shall be provided to the department and may include, but is not limited to, Natural Resource Conservation Service records, Farm Service Agency records, or written agricultural contract or lease documentation. Land must be located in the unit you are applying for to qualify.

In other words, purchasing a tenant deer permit in Kansas requires the person to be engaged in the agricultural production of a commodity, like raising crops or cattle. That person must have substantial financial interest in the production of the agriculture commodity and have the potential to realize substantial financial benefit from that production.

A manager of the property may also qualify as a tenant, but must have overall responsibility to direct, supervise and conduct the agricultural operation. And they must have the potential to realize substantial financial benefit.

Kansas game wardens commonly investigate issues regarding tenancy and in some cases, these hunters should not have purchased the permit as a tenant and should have purchased a different permit.

Here are some common situations that DO NOT qualify a person for a tenant permit:

- I cut firewood on the property
- I help fix fence on the property
- I help with crop harvest on the property
- I work for the person who farms the property
- I plant the food plots on the property I lease for hunting
- I manage the deer on the property
- I lease the property for hunting
- I manage the property (but the hunter is compensating the landowner/farmer, instead of being compensated by the landowner/farmer)
- The clerk at the store where I purchased my permit said I qualified

If you still have questions about qualifications for a tenant deer permit, please visit ksoutdoors.com, call one of our regional offices or the Pratt Operations Office and ask for law enforcement. Again, we want to help you have successful and legal Kansas deer hunts.

Hope to see you out there, and if you have the time, visit with a Kansas game warden – you just might find we have a lot in common.

KDWPT Employee Killed in ATV Accident

Mark A. Jackson, 48, Milford, died June 25, 2019 at the Milford Wildlife Area when the all-terrain vehicle he was operating overturned and rolled down an embankment, pinning him underneath. Jackson, a seasonal employee of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), was spraying weeds at the time of the accident – one of the many duties he performed to improve his hometown wildlife area.

“The KDWPT family lost one of its own in this tragic accident,” said Brad Loveless, KDWPT Secretary. “We offer our most heartfelt condolences to Mark’s family and friends. He will be missed by many.”

Though only with KDWPT a short period of time, Jackson made a favorable impression on his coworkers who describe him as someone who “was always fun to be around” and “had a great outlook on life.”

Jackson enjoyed caring for his family’s horses, riding his motorcycle, and deer hunting. He leaves behind his wife and mother, among other family and friends.

–KDWPT News

Game Warden Profile

Jonathan Rather, *Allen and Neosho counties*

What is the most memorable investigation you've worked on?

One of my first deer hunting cases started by patrolling for deer hunters while listening to a scanner. I began to hear multiple individuals using hand-held radios to illegally communicate the location of deer. It became apparent they were driving around shooting from vehicles, both from the roadway and driving through fields. I set up on a hilltop overlooking an area I thought they may have been. Just then, someone began yelling over the radio to "hurry up" and "drive around the section" to shoot a deer that had gotten away. Right on cue, a pickup came speeding through, windows down, right below where I had set up. Suddenly, the truck veered out of sight, a shot was fired, and the scanner went silent. As I tried to catch up, I could see a dead deer, but the pickup was nowhere to be found. I followed the tracks through the field, only to hear the driver come back over the scanner saying they had crashed. That's when I noticed the rear bumper sticking out above the grass ahead of me. They were so focused on the deer, they forgot to look where they were going.

If I was not a game warden, I would probably be...

I would be interested in becoming a pilot.

In my spare time, I enjoy...

Duck hunting, traditional archery and bowhunting, pan-fishing, stand up paddleboarding, bushcrafting and camping, offroading and restoring my 1978 Jeep CJ7.

What/Who influenced you to become a game warden?

My father was an undeniable influence in my decision to pursue a career as a Kansas game warden. He recently retired from a 33-year career in law enforcement, with the majority of those years spent as a Kansas game warden. A pivotal moment for me was when I was a young boy and my father received a call at home for people needing rescued at a low water dam on the Neosho River. I will never forget the feeling of watching him pull out of the driveway, towing a boat, lights and sirens on, heading out in an attempt to help. I ran down the road as fast as I could, watching until he was out of sight and laid awake that night waiting for him to return safely.



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

I am partial to southeast Kansas. Some of my favorite public wildlife areas include Neosho, Elk City, and Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge in North Central Kansas.

What activities can people enjoy in your area?

The Neosho River Basin provides vast waterfowl, deer, and small game hunting opportunities, as well as good fishing for flathead catfish.

Do you have any special certifications or training?

Defensive Tactics instructor; Swiftwater Rescue Technician; Paddlesports instructor, including stand up paddleboarding and kayaking; Hunter Education; and Boater Education, among others.

What's your most embarrassing moment on duty?

I had been watching some fishermen on the edge of the Neosho River. I attempted to stealthily approach them so that I could watch their activities before making contact. The only path of approach was along a narrow, steep, muddy sliver of ground just wide enough to walk on. I made it close behind them undetected until I suddenly slipped on the bank, falling right into the water. It startled them just as much as it did me, but we all just laughed (and they were legal).

Any advice for someone considering a career as a game warden or in the wildlife management field?

Take the initiative to meet your local game warden, wildlife area managers, biologists, parks staff, etc. If you approach this type of work as just another job, you may live in frustration. If you start out with the mindset of it being a career with a purpose, it can be rewarding.

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

I hope to someday hike the Colorado Trail with my wife.

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

This area is now known for being fairly timbered, but historically it was native tallgrass prairie with timbered creeks and rivers. This corner of the state was primarily Osage Indian territory. Also, Portland Cement production has been and continues to be one of the leading industries here.



BOAT KANSAS

Alcohol and Boating Don't Mix

with Chelsea Hofmeier

With the summer months in full swing, there are plenty of opportunities to get your boat out on the water and have a good time. For many boaters, part of having a good time while boating is quenching their thirst with an ice-cold beer, but before you reach into that cooler, let's chat about the realities of drinking and boating.

What could ruin a beautiful day boating quicker than being pulled over and investigated for a BUI?

Here are some other things to keep in mind when loading up that cooler before heading out on the water. There are many "stressors" that occur while boating that can have an increasingly negative effect on the way your body reacts to alcohol. The sun, heat, vibration of the boat, and dehydration can magnify the side effects of alcohol. These stressors while drinking and boating can cause impaired judgment, reduced balance, and poor coordination - all abilities you need to boat safely. An inebriated captain is not the only one that can be affected. Drunken passengers can easily fall overboard, swim near the propeller, lean over the side, or stand up in small vessels, causing them to capsize.

One successful campaign aimed at counteracting the dangerous habits of drinking and boating is Operation Dry Water (ODW). ODW is a year-round boating under the influence awareness and enforcement campaign in which Kansas actively participates, alongside the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, U.S. Coast Guard, law enforcement agencies and several other partners. While our law enforcement staff work year-round to keep our waters safe, you can always expect to run into them during Kansas' Operation Dry Water "heightened awareness and enforcement weekend." This three-day effort usually takes place around the Fourth of July holiday when boaters are most likely to engage in drinking and boating. To learn more about Operation Dry Water, visit www.operationdrywater.org.

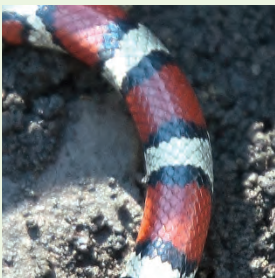
No matter how you decide to spend your time on the water, make sure it's time spent safely. That just might mean leaving your cooler on shore.

The Facts

- **Alcohol use is the leading known contributing factor in fatal recreational boating accidents; In 2016, it accounted for 15% of recreational boating deaths.**
- **In Kansas, no person shall operate or attempt to operate any vessel while under the influence of alcohol to a degree they are incapable of operating safely or have a blood or breath alcohol concentration of .08 percent or greater.**
- **If convicted of boating under the influence, penalties can include fines up to \$500 and imprisonment one year.**

WHAT AM I? ID Challenge

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



Clues:

1. I am lactose intolerant to spite my name.
2. "Red on yellow kills a fellow. Red on black, venom lack."
3. I can grow up to 33 3/4 inches long.

>>> See answer on Page 14

HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

Bullet Basics: Part 1

Through the ages, rifle projectiles have seen significant upgrades and modifications in an effort to make hunting accuracy and performance as proficient as possible. With black powder as the propellant, available patched lead round balls used to be the norm. Accuracy and performance were greatly enhanced as bullet designers incorporated changes. The Minie' ball, named after designer Frenchman Claude E'tienne-Minie', incorporated a hollow base cavity with a conical projectile. This allowed a smaller projectile to be loaded down a partially fouled barrel. When fired, the hollow base would swell out under combustion pressure to seat in the rifling grooves, which increased velocity and accuracy.

With the advent of smokeless powder, new designs were necessary to take advantage of the increased velocities. Rifle bullets continued to use lead as the basic core material; however, there was a need to protect the soft lead with a harder outer material. Copper nickel alloys are the classic materials used today.

Rifle bullets can be separated into two general classifications or types: jacketed or solid. In this article, we will focus on the jacketed bullet. Jacketed bullets, sometimes referred to as "cup and core," are constructed of a lead core with a covering jacket or sleeve made of copper alloy or copper plated soft steel. The lead core is typically pressed into the jacket. There are a number of different designs for jacketed bullets, including: full metal jacket (FMJ), hollow point (HP), soft point (SP) and partition.

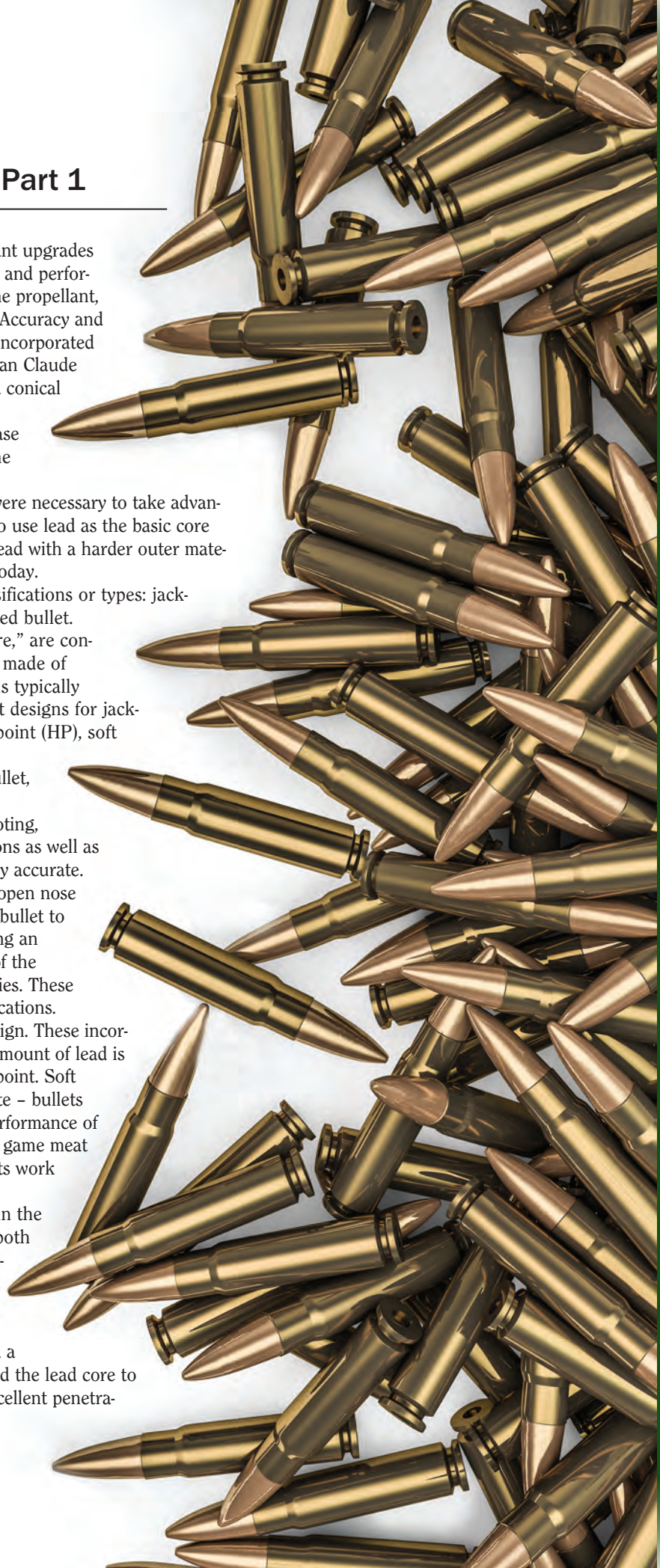
The FMJ design completely covers the nose of the bullet, leaving no exposed lead material. These bullets are non-expanding and penetrate well. They work for target shooting, plinking, small-game hunting and pelt hunting applications as well as some dangerous game hunting. These bullets can be very accurate.

Hollow point bullets contain no core material in the open nose of the projectile. This moves the center of gravity of the bullet to the rear, improving accuracy at medium distances. Having an open space in the nose also allows for rapid expansion of the bullet on thin-skinned targets, especially at lower velocities. These work well for target shooting and varmint hunting applications.

Soft point bullets are the oldest expanding bullet design. These incorporate a metal jacket with a pressed lead core. A small amount of lead is squeezed out the top of the jacket and is shaped into a point. Soft point bullets are the lowest cost – yet still highly accurate – bullets made. Jacket-core separation can reduce the terminal performance of a soft point. While concerns about introducing lead into game meat have caused hunters to reconsider their use, these bullets work well for big game hunting applications.

Partition bullets leave a solid bulkhead of material in the center of the jacket and press lead into the cavities at both ends. This eliminates the concern over jacket-core separation, but does not address the exposed lead in the nose. These bullets are very effective in big game applications.

A subset of jacketed bullets is a specific design called a bonded bullet. Bonded bullets use a heat process to bond the lead core to the jacket material. This provides a tough bullet with excellent penetration for hunting large, tough, thick-skinned animals. Stay tuned for part 2.



Showy Partridge Pea | *by Krista Dahlinger*

Plants with flowers often require assistance for fertilization – the transfer of pollen from the male to the female part of the flower. To gain assistance for pollen transfer, flowers produce sugary nectar, a tasty treat for insects, bats and birds who seek it out as a food source. While these nectar-eaters are sipping away, their bodies pick up pollen and carry it to other flowers they visit. After fertilization, flowers are then able to produce seeds that will grow new plants.

Nectar is produced by plant glands that are located at the base of the flower. In some cases, nectar is also produced by glands located along stems and branches in structures called extrafloral nectaries, meaning “nectar outside of the flower.”

Showy Partridge Pea, *Chamaecrista fasciculata*, is one example of a plant that features extrafloral nectaries along its stems. Ants, wasps, beetles, butterflies and bees are all attracted to the sugary food contained in the extrafloral nectaries.

Extrafloral nectaries likely serve two purposes. First, the presence of ants, wasps and beetles on plant stems discourage herbivores from browsing on the leaves. Secondly, placing additional

nectar sources away from the flower reduces the chance of chewing insects causing damage to the flower when trying to access the nectar; A damaged flower might not be able to produce seeds.

Showy partridge pea plants grow 2- to 4-foot tall, generally with a single main stem and many side branching stems. Leaves are evenly pinnate, meaning they grow in matching pairs across from each other along a side stem. Their leaves also have a long oval shape and will fold flat to the stem if the plant is touched. Flowers are located close to the main stem between side stems. They are about an inch across and colored bright yellow with five petals. Each flower has a small area of contrasting deep red color in the center. Petal shapes are somewhat irregular, and the flower is very showy with deep red stamens. After the flowers fade, familiar



looking green “pea pods” appear and eventually turn brown into winter. Plants can be found throughout Kansas except for the northwest corner of the state, growing where soil structure has been disturbed, along roadsides and in prairies with sandy or rocky soils.

Showy partridge pea is the host plant for gray hairstreak, orange sulphur and sleepy orange butterflies. Their caterpillars have colors similar to the stems for camouflage. The plant’s seeds are also an important food source for upland and song birds, as well as deer that browse on the vegetation.

This showy plant makes an excellent addition to any garden. Seed pods that are dark brown and dry can be collected. The seeds should then be grown in pots for one or two years until the seedlings can be transplanted into garden soil. Showy partridge pea, like most native plants, develops a long sturdy tap root that cannot be dug with success. After a plant becomes established with a sturdy root system, it will begin to flower and produce seeds to establish more plants nearby.



Photos: Mary Anne Borge
www.The-Natural-Web.org

EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

Duck Stamps Aren't Just For Duck Hunters

with Marc Murrell

People enjoy collecting a variety of items. While some are unique or generational, others like coins and stamps have been collected for centuries. It's the latter that bridged the wildlife conservation world in 1934 when the Federal Duck Stamp (officially called the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp) was introduced.

While the stamp (\$25) is required of all waterfowl hunters aged 16 and older, stamp collectors also purchase one and many look forward to the day it goes on sale. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has a dedicated "First Day of Sale" when anyone can purchase the stamp, but stamp collectors are often first in line. A detailed ceremony is arranged at various locations across the country and takes place on the last Friday in June.

The 2019-2020 ceremony was held at Jonny Morris'

Bass Pro Shop's headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, on June 28. Jerome Ford, USFWS Assistant Director of Migratory Birds, was the Master of Ceremonies. Other conservation partners of the USFWS on hand included the Missouri Department of Conservation, U.S. Postal Service, Ducks Unlimited and the Amplex Corporation. Dignitaries from each of these organizations were in attendance, as well as several media members, to kick off the event with the ceremonial and traditional first stamp purchased by Margaret Everson, Principal Deputy Director of the USFWS.

This year's winning adult duck stamp was crafted by Minnesota's Scot Storm and depicted a drake wood duck shadowed by an old duck decoy. A unique twist was added to the requirements of this year's contest and each entry had to include a hunting component theme of "Celebrating Our Waterfowl Hunting Heritage." Storm also won the 2004-2005 contest.

Additionally, the 2019-2020 Junior Duck Stamp (\$5) is also purchased at the First Day of Sale. For more than 25 years these funds go to a program that helps connect kids in grades K-12 with the natural world through a unique combination of arts and science. This year's win-

ning junior duck stamp was crafted by Nicole Jeon, a 16-year-old New York resident, and depicted a Harlequin duck. More than 20,000 students nationwide participated in this year's Junior Duck Stamp competition.

Waterfowl hunters who legally must purchase the stamp to hunt as well as stamp collectors have long been the primary supporters of the Federal Duck Stamp program. A collector who has purchased each stamp since the program's inception would have invested about \$600. That collection today is worth well over \$6,000. There is some overlap as many waterfowl hunters save their stamps each year and collect them as well, and some collectors are also waterfowl hunters. Since the sale of the first stamp, more than \$1 billion has been raised for wildlife conservation and conserved more than 6 million acres of wetlands habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

In recent years, other conservation groups and even the general public have been encouraged to purchase the Federal Duck Stamp to do their part in conserving our nation's wetlands, wild places and wildlife. It's a small investment and the least anyone can do as all outdoor enthusiasts, whether a birdwatcher, wildlife photographer or general nature enthusiast, have an impact on and benefit from all of the places purchased and preserved for future generations.

Federal Duck Stamps can be purchased in Kansas at any regional or state park office of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism and many of their license vendors. This year's stamp is valid from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020. They are also available at Kansas post offices.





A New Flavor of Hunter

with Tanna Fanshier

The millennial generation often faces a great deal of scrutiny in today's popular media, but new data suggests that tapping into this unique audience may be the key to preserving our outdoor heritage for generations to come. Millennials now outnumber baby boomers, making up more than a quarter of the nation's current population. And while boomers still represent the largest age class of hunters, millennial participants are challenging the "status quo" by looking at this traditional activity through an untraditional lens. It appears that the best way to reach this powerful group of millennial participants may not be through their phone screens, as many would speculate, but instead, through their stomachs.

With many social media-savvy amateur foodies taking us along on their delicious digital dives, we have seen the emergence of a trendy new hunting culture in which

emerging outdoorsmen and women identify as Locavores. The Locavore movement dissociates from trophy sport hunting, and instead focuses on hunting strictly as a means to obtain locally sourced, organic protein. Locavores often take food prep beyond butter-soaked and bacon-ated, bringing some added gourmet glam to wild game, and attracting newcomers, including many millennials, to the world of hunting and fishing.

Interestingly, this shift in culture could also boast biological benefits. With Locavore hunters focused solely on putting meat on the table, rather than waiting on the perfect rack for their wall, these hunters often aid in a different side of population control, harvesting does and other game less appealing to some hunters.

When asked about the implications of the Locavore movement on future management practices, Jake George, Wildlife Division Director at Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT)

states, "I do think the Locavore movement has the potential to help with big game management... we struggle to get enough hunters in the field who are willing to harvest does."

Echoing Director George's comments, Levi Jaster, Big Game Coordinator with KDWPT also emphasized the importance of having a variety of participants in the field stressing, "it takes all kinds of hunters."

Jaster also points out that so-called "trophy hunters" contribute large amounts of money to wildlife management and conservation, and of course still eat or donate the meat they harvest, even if obtaining that meat is not their focus. Whatever the motivation, as the need to recruit, retain, and reactivate involvement in outdoor recreation continues to increase, sharing our wild resources among various types of hunters will help to create a well-rounded hunting community, and maintain balance in our biological communities as well.



FISHIN' Cast Better, Fish Better

with Mike Miller

When I was a just-out-of-college outdoor writer for a small tabloid newspaper, I had the opportunity to meet well-known fishing television show host, Jimmy Houston. Houston was speaking to a small group in Sedan at the invitation of a local tournament angler. As he spoke about fishing, Houston held a casting rod and reel in his hands, a spinnerbait dangling from the line. The rod was a natural extension of Houston's hands and he waved it as he spoke just as many of us jester with our hands when we talk. Occasionally, he would whip a lightning-fast underhanded cast at an unsuspecting audience member who had looked away for a second. Each time, the spinnerbait stopped just inches from the startled audience member's face while Houston cackled in his trademark laugh. The audience quickly learned not to take their eyes off of him. Later, he put

on a casting exhibition, amazing the crowd by repeatedly dropping the spinnerbait into a Dixie Cup-sized target.

Houston claimed that his underhanded casting technique allowed him to make more casts in a given day, and gave him an advantage over less efficient casters he was competing against because

his lure was in the water more. I had recently decided that I wanted to become a bass angler - not a tournament angler - just a bass angler, so I learned Houston's efficient underhand flip cast and practiced hitting targets. It was fun and challenging, but there is more to it than just making more casts. Being an accurate caster will make you a better angler.

If you can put your lure in the right spot time and time again, and you can land it softly, you'll catch more fish. You'll also snag up less, saving money and time away from fishing lost to retying new lures.

Casting accurately means landing a lure just inches from a submerged log, right next to a floating matt of aquatic vegetation or at the shoreline's edge, where ambush fish like largemouth bass hang out. Learn to put your lure in the strike zone and catch more fish.





Writings From a Warden's Daughter

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

My dad served as a Kansas game warden for more than 35 years. These are his stories.

A Family Affair

In 1987, an executive order merged the Kansas Fish and Game Commission and the Kansas Park and Resources Authority, creating the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Combining the two state agencies required game wardens to pull double duty at times. Dad took care of his game warden assignments in northeast Kansas and fulfilled ranger duties in the state parks, as well.

Just prior to the July 4th weekend, Dad received an anonymous, hand-written complaint from a concerned citizen. The letter alleged that a family in Wabaunsee County had spent at least one day of the long weekend handfishing in Mill Creek just south of Alma. (While handfishing is legal with proper permits during the open season in specified waters today, it was an illegal method of take in 1987.) Dad had received a similar complaint about this same family the previous summer, but his initial investigation came up empty. After receiving the latest complaint, Dad headed to Wabaunsee County on a sweltering July day, hoping for some luck over the holiday weekend. South of Alma, he crossed the railroad maintenance track that paralleled the tracks heading southwest from town. This kept him close to the Middle Branch of Mill Creek, which was the most likely stretch of water for illegal handfishing. About 6 miles from Alma, Dad discovered two pickups parked along the tracks. He tried contacting the local sheriff's office for backup, but he didn't have a radio signal. Unreliable communication channels were a common work hazard at the time, and Dad knew he was on his own.

Stepping out of his patrol truck, he was greeted by a summer temperature of more than 100 degrees. Just 50 yards from the creek, he entered thick brush and made his way upstream through the undergrowth and spider webs until he reached the creek. Moving along the creek bank, Dad maintained the advantage of higher ground. After walking just less than a mile, he heard voices from the creek bottom below, so he waited until the voices grew closer and he could see people.

He watched quietly as six men waded along the streambed, checking for fish in holes and undercuts in the bank. Not far behind, four women pulling coolers and a half-dozen kids wearing life jackets followed. It was a family outing for sure, but the only positive Dad could see was that the kids were wearing life jackets. As the group moved back downstream, Dad leapt to the next point of observation, staying just ahead of them. While he did not witness fish taken from the water, he

noted the men were dragging a couple of gunny sacks he believed carried fish caught by handfishing. When the family reached the point where Dad had initially seen them, he watched them meet in the middle of the stream and head for a cut in the bank leading to their trucks. Dad quickly located the path he thought they would take and decided to let the men pass by him. As he hid in the thick underbrush, Dad's uniform was soaked with sweat while spiders and insects crawled over him. The heat was almost unbearable.

When two of the men passed by, one dragging a gunny sack, Dad came out of hiding. He announced that he was a state game warden and demanded they stand their ground and drop the sack. From behind him, he could see a couple more men making their way up the path. He demanded they also stand their ground as he approached them to locate the remaining men.

Dad warned the group that running was futile since they were surrounded by game wardens.

When he located the last two men, one was frantically throwing fish back toward the creek. Dad shouted at him to stop and advised him that any more thrown fish would result in a charge of obstruction of justice. Although Dad didn't want any more fish to haul back, he couldn't let evidence go. He allowed the women and children to leave in trucks parked where he hadn't seen them earlier. The group was made up of a grandpa, son, son-in-law and three cousins. Dad followed the suspects to their trucks to collect identification. Not wanting to deal with the situation along the tracks, he ordered the men to drive back to Alma

where he would meet them at the south side of the county courthouse.

On the ride to Alma, Dad cranked up the air conditioning for temporary relief from the heat. When he had a radio signal, he contacted the Wabaunsee County Sheriff's Office, advising he was headed their way with six suspects. The sheriff's office offered to send a deputy to assist, but Dad assured them everything was under control.

None of the men argued with Dad when they received their notices to appear for taking 56 pounds of fish by illegal method, although they did have a few questions for him. First, how on earth did he find them? He told them their community turned them in because they were tired of the illegal activity. The second question was, where were the rest of game wardens? Dad managed a laugh and revealed there weren't any. By then it was 3:30 in the afternoon, and Dad had just enough time to hurry home, shower, and put on a clean uniform before his 5 p.m. to midnight shift patrolling Milford State Park.





Sweetest Crappie



In my 40-plus years fishing Kansas' waters, only twice have I been lucky enough to catch the crappie spawn with a lot of success. This spring was one of those times.

One Sunday morning in late March, my son woke, earlier than I was willing, to head to the lake. An hour in, he wasn't having much luck, so I met him there and showed him how to run a jig under a float on the windy side of the lake. For the next 30 minutes, he proceeded to land about 10 crappie. I booked it home to grab my gear and a couple of buckets, and joined him. We then spent the rest of the day hooking 9- to 12-inch crappie.

My son, now 15, is reaching that age where he wants an after school job or to hang with his friends more than his dad. Realizing this, I took advantage of this limited opportunity and made an effort to focus on fishing with him as much as possible. Over the next couple of weeks, we fished after baseball practice, landing 10 to 15 crappie each time. Talk about a feast!

Now, to my astonishment, neither one of my kids had ever remembered eating crappie. I felt like I had failed them in some way. My wife had a roommate in college who kept them filled with crappie fillets during most of the school year, so she appreciated having fillets filling up our freezer now.

Since crappie is some of the best fish you can eat, not much is needed in the way of breading. Most prepared fish

mixes work well with crappie, though I usually stay away from cornmeal-based mixes because the course texture overwhelms the thinner flaky fillets. I often make my own mix simply with all-purpose flour, salt and pepper. I also forego the egg part of the traditional milk and egg wash before flouring to reduce the heaviness of the breading. Cooking them in fresh oil is also best, allowing the crappies' mild flavor to show through.

Below is a recipe I built using a French doughnut mix, which is very powdery and emphasizes the sweet flavor of crappie. The reserved amount of salt adds a savory element that works well to compliment the flavor. The final result was a thin, fluffy breading that didn't interfere with the light texture of the crappie.

As noted in my last column, the county has since drained our local lake to make much-needed repairs to the outlet structure damaged from flooding last fall. This work essentially removed those crappie year classes we were catching. It will be four to five years before the fishing potential will reach the levels seen this season and my son will be a grown, young man. This makes me all the more thankful that I had the opportunity to catch these crappie with him this spring, and to spend time afield with my son. He also gained an appreciation for some fine eats!



SWEETEST CRAPPIE

- 10-12 Crappie fillets
- 1 C Beignet mix
- 1 T Seasoning salt
- 1 T Creole seasoning
- (I prefer Tony Chachere's)

Combine beignet mix, seasoning salt and Creole seasoning in a gallon bag. Place fillets in flour mix and coat evenly. Pour 1/2 inch of oil in the skillet and heat. With wet fingers, grab a pinch of mix and roll into a pea-sized ball. Drop the ball of mix into the pan – if it sizzles and fries, the oil is ready. Place breaded fillets in pan and fry until golden brown on both sides.

Fish Squeezer

with Tommie Berger

Influences on a Career in Fisheries



My first duty station after I was hired with the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission in 1973 was located in Manhattan. I was hired under the new Surging Ahead for Skippers, Nimrods, and Anglers of Kansas (SASNAK) program designed to enhance the department's biologist staff. There was a fisheries biologist placed on every reservoir, as well as other biologists who were given a three to 10 county district based on the amount of small waters those counties contained. My district position initially included Riley, Pottawatomie, Wabaunsee, and Shawnee counties; however, the biologist at Tuttle Creek Reservoir left after a year or two, so I worked there for a while after that.

My supervisor for the first five years was Leo Dowlin. I knew Leo for a couple of years while I worked as a conservation officer at Fort Riley. As luck would have it, he was also on my interview panel for the fish and game job. Leo was a good supervisor who did a great job of showing us what was expected as new fisheries biologists. He was a stickler for fish sampling and management of the data after it was collected, which is considered the bread and butter of a good fisheries biologist. We all learned a lot from Leo!

I have a lot of memories of those first five years. Back then, the work motto was, "Work how ever many hours it takes to get the job done!" I remember one stint in the spring of 1974 when we worked 21 days straight without a day off due to a walleye egg taking operation as well as our own walleye sampling on the reservoirs. That spring, Don Gablehouse and I were sampling walleye on Tuttle Creek Reservoir and nearly sunk a boat on the dam due to windy conditions. The only way we were able to save the boat was by piling riprap rocks on the front of the vessel in order to lift the back end out of the waves. Don was a former Nebraska football player and strong as an ox; all BIG rocks I had trouble lifting were therefore "Gablehouse rocks!"

Then there were stream surveys. In those early years, we were challenged with sampling all the streams and rivers in our districts. All the regional biologists and their summer aides would get together to work on a certain stream or river. I recall some interesting horror stories about stream surveys, but those are better kept as memories. I do remember how amazed I was to dis-

cover the amount of pounds and number of fish there were in our streams and rivers - way more than I would have ever guessed.

There were also the stilling basin salvages, which involved dewatering the outlet basins of our reservoirs for periodic inspections. We were given the job of removing fish from the basin; often there were thousands of pounds of fish that had to be removed. After the water was pumped low enough, we would seine the fish. Running a seine was a challenge. First we had to remove all the 'stuff' that folks threw in there - newspaper boxes, bicycles, an occasional gun, fishing poles - you name it. Then there were all the hooks, lures, and weights broken off during unlucky fishing adventures. I remember shoveling up buckets of lead weights. Stilling basins were and continue to be interesting places to work. And, I'll never forget the big flathead catfish in the Perry basin that nearly drowned big Don Gablehouse one day.

Leo Dowlin and Don Gablehouse were two fellows who had a big influence on my early career.

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"ITS SONG IS A HIGH-PITCHED 'HOOW-EEEE, HOOW-EEEE. IT DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT A DANCE."

“WHAT AM I?” answer: milk snake



Daren Riedle photo

The spring and summer of 2019 will go down as a wet one, and with all of that rainfall there has been a significant uptick in turtle activity. Box turtles like to move and forage on warm, humid mornings and we have had plenty of those. Female aquatic turtles make nesting movements onto land, and with all of the flooding, they must move farther to find a dry spot to lay eggs. While the summer of 2018 was the season of snake bite calls, the summer of 2019 has been the summer of turtle questions. Lucky for me, I enjoy turtle questions! For this issue, I'd like to address a couple of the more frequently-asked questions I get, particularly as they relate to box turtles.

Questions I'm often asked are, "Do box turtles spend their whole life in one small area?" and "Will moving them kill them?" The answers? Both yes and no. There are two species of box turtles that occur in Kansas; the Three-toed Box Turtle, a woodland dwelling species and the Ornate Box Turtle, which is a more western grassland species. For both species, home ranges (the area that encompasses all of an animal's daily and annual activity) are quite small. Box turtles usually occupy areas 10-20 acres wide. Within these home ranges, they learn locations of critical resources, such as shelters, water, and seasonal variation in food availability. So transloca-

tions, or "moving them," can result in very lost turtles.

Several translocation studies have been conducted using box turtles displaced by development activities. In most cases, translocated turtles moved more and occupied much larger areas than resident turtles. Mortality rates of translocated turtles met and sometimes exceeded 30 percent. The turtles that survived the first year or two eventually settled into their own home range. The problem lies in the increased movements after the initial release, which result in increased mortality from predators, exposure to extreme temperatures, and being hit by vehicles.

The woodland dwelling three-toed box turtle seems to fare a little better when translocated as compared to the ornate box turtle. Dense leaf litter in woodland environments may provide a buffer against extreme hot and cold weather - a buffer not available out

on the plains. Ultimately, moving box turtles outside of their known area can have fatal consequences. The best course of action to take? Always release turtles at the same point of capture.

And if you see a box turtle, or any turtle on the road, you can stop and help them across as long as it is safe for you to do so. Simply move the turtle in the direction it was heading and release it well off the road so it will be least likely to walk back out into traffic. If you cannot safely move the turtle off the road, at least try to not to run it over as long as it is safe for you to move slightly out of the way.

I can happily say I have observed a slight shift in the values of drivers the last few decades. I remember in the 1980s when I would see people run over turtles on purpose. Now, I see more drivers than not trying to avoid turtles. Reducing road mortality, particularly in water turtles, is becoming more critical than ever in high traffic areas. As I mentioned earlier, female water turtles must leave the water to find a dry place to nest. Research has shown in high traffic areas the bulk of road mortality is female turtles, resulting in very male-biased populations - not a very conducive situation for maintaining a population!

FUNGUS THAT CAUSES WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME SPREADING

A survey conducted in March in Rooks County has confirmed the presence of the fungus, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd), known to cause white-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats. Though the fungus was detected, no bats showed signs of white-nose syndrome at the time of the survey. WNS is not known to pose a threat to humans, pets, livestock, or other wildlife and fish.

White-nose Syndrome

White-nose syndrome is a fungal disease that affects hibernating bats. The fungus is spread through bat-to-bat contact, but not all bat species are affected equally. WNS is named for the white fungal growth observed around the nose of infected bats. The fungus can invade the skin of hibernating bats and cause damage to the wings. It triggers hibernating bats to use up fat reserves, forcing them to leave the hibernacula in search of food. This occurs in the middle of winter when outside conditions are harsh and food (insects) is scarce, ultimately leading to death by starvation and/or dehydration. To date, white-nose syndrome has been confirmed in 33 states and seven Canadian provinces. White-nose syndrome was first detected in Kansas in 2018 in Barber, Cherokee, Comanche, Kiowa, and Pratt counties.



Sam Pounds photo

Surveys and Observations

Surveys in Kansas were conducted in 2019 between February 22 and April 18, and samples were tested by the U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wis. Counties surveyed included Barber, Comanche, Crawford, Geary, and Rooks. Sites surveyed in Geary and Crawford counties were negative for Pd; however, negative results do not guarantee the absence of Pd at a location, as small amounts of Pd may evade detection by the diagnostic test. Conversely, survey results confirmed the spread of WNS at sites known to have Pd in Barber and Comanche counties. In these areas, biologists observed an increasing number of symptomatic cave myotis and tri-colored bats, with tri-colored bats most affected.

The fungus and/or WNS have been detected in surrounding states, including Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.

For more information, visit www.whitenosesyndrome.org.

Park View

with Kathy Pritchett

Down, But Not Out

As I write this article, water levels are dropping and more campsites and boat ramps are opening for use. This spring's overabundant rainfall left several of our parks flooded for significant periods of time, primarily over the Memorial Day and Fourth of July holidays. Because the rain was region wide, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had to hold some Kansas reservoirs at historic levels to prevent further flooding downstream. The extended impounding of water impacted our revenue significantly. As Kansas state parks receive no state general funds, managing the necessary repairs with an already tight budget

will be extremely challenging.

However, the sun has come out and water levels are dropping. Though our staff dealt with a lot of cancellations and reschedules, many of our customers took this opportunity to try out different parks and campgrounds. Some have discovered new favorites. All of the parks that had campsites available were full for the Fourth of July holiday. Many of our parks were totally unaffected by any flooding, while it proved beneficial to Cedar Bluff, which has been significantly below conservation pool for many years. Now, it's only 12 feet low! Sebelius Reservoir has also risen to about 4 feet below conservation pool.

The cleanup and repair or replacement of facilities will take some time. Right now, we can't see all of the damage, but experience tells us that campsites and roadways will need resurfaced. Shower houses and restrooms will need to be cleaned and sanitized.

Debris will have to be gathered and disposed of. Our staff is experienced at dealing with flooding; it will be done as quickly as possible, but there is much to do at many of our parks.

On the plus side, the heavier-than-normal rainfall should bring spectacular fall color. Wildflower displays have been outstanding. Wildlife has had abundant forage for the spring and summer and should go into fall well-fed for the winter.

Fall brings new special events, as well as cooler weather and fewer bugs. Lovewell's Fun Day is August 3 while their Campground Christmas begins August 17. Fall River will host their annual Rendezvous September 28. The annual stargazing party at Fall River is postponed until August 15, 2020. Be sure to visit ksoutdoors.com, or contact your state park office, for details on other upcoming events as the year progresses.

Kansas state parks might have been down for a while, but we are not out!



2019 Deadline to enter is Oct. 11!

Photo submissions for the 7th annual “Wild About Kansas” photo contest are being accepted now through Oct. 11, 2019. Divided into five categories, participants can submit photos related to:

- Wildlife** (game and nongame animals, primarily mammals, migratory birds, furbearers, etc.)
- Outdoor Recreation** (people participating in recreational activities outdoors, not hunting or fishing)
- Landscapes** (scenery; wildlife may be present, but should not be the sole focus of the image.)
- Other Species** (insects, reptiles, and amphibians)
- Hunting and Fishing** (hunters and anglers; set-up shots following a hunting or fishing trip. Photos with dead game will be accepted, however, “action” shots, or photos taken during the activity will be given preference.)

RULES

Photographers can submit up to three photos total. Photos must be taken within the state of Kansas and must be the entrant’s original work. The contest is open to both residents and non-residents of Kansas, and there is no age limit.

JUDGING

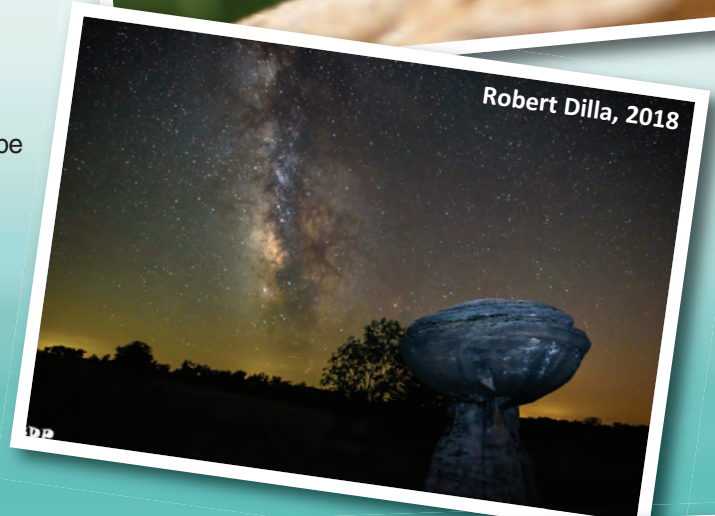
Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and the overall sharpness. Photographs from participants under the age of 18 will be placed in a youth division; all others will compete in the adult division. Winning entries will be featured in the 2020 January/February photo issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*.

HOW TO ENTER

Entries must be submitted no later than **5 p.m. on Oct. 11, 2019**. Photo format should be JPEG or TIFF. All photos must be submitted electronically. Photos that do not meet the minimum file size requirements (1 MB) will NOT be accepted. To enter, visit ksoutdoors.com and click “Publications,” then “2019 Wild About Kansas Photo Contest.”



Danielle Gold, 2018



Robert Dilla, 2018



Jay Stockhaus, 2018

THE TRUTH ABOUT SNAKES

text and photos by Daren Riedle
wildlife diversity coordinator, KDWPT



PLAINS GARTER SNAKE

WE ALL HAVE FEARS AND PHOBIAS - SOME ARE THE RESULT OF A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, OTHERS ARE TAUGHT. I'VE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL TO FOREIGN PLACES WHERE I CAPTURED AND PHOTOGRAPHED SERPENTS SUCH AS COBRAS AND MAMBAS. FLICK A SPIDER ON ME THOUGH, AND YOU WILL PROBABLY GET PUNCHED IN THE FACE. I CAN TRACE THIS PHOBIA BACK TO A FIVE-YEAR-OLD ME SITTING ON THE FRONT STOOP OF OUR HOUSE. A LARGE, CUTE AND FUZZY JUMPING SPIDER HOPPED ONTO MY ARM. I REACHED OUT AND STARTED TO SQUISH IT, WHICH PROMPTED THE SPIDER TO BITE ME. WHILE THE SPIDER ITSELF WAS OF COURSE HARMLESS, THE PUNCTURE WAS STILL PAINFUL, AT LEAST IN MY MEMORY.

Flash forward a couple weeks and I was sitting in the bathroom at school taking care of some business. I happened to look up above my head where a very large spider was crawling out of the air vent. I mean this thing was huge! In hindsight, evidently a large Mexican red knee tarantula had escaped from another classroom and was running amok throughout the school's air vents. Again a completely harmless species, but as an irrational 5-year-old, I decided all eight-legged critters were out to get me. During this same time period, my dad found a hatchling black rat snake in our house, which he allowed me to keep in a jar for one week before we released it. I was enthralled by this creature and loved nothing more than to sit and watch it crawl around its enclosure. Two negative events turned me against spiders, while this one positive event with a snake cemented a love affair that continues to this day.

dispelling some of the myths about snakes that were being reported in other media outlets. With the early summer descending upon us, I am beginning to see snake stories pop up once again - many with fearful headlines about snakes being out and active. As a representative of an agency that promotes our natural resources and outdoor activities, it pains me to see stories that discourage people from venturing outside. So hopefully in the next 1,000 words or so, I can provide a more positive spin on a very important, but often-maligned component of our Kansas fauna.

Shutterstock/594022307

AS I GOT OLDER, I OVERCAME MY FEAR THROUGH EDUCATION.

As I got older, I overcame my fear of spiders through education. The more I learned, the less spiders frightened me. I have even gone as far as keeping tarantulas as pets. Unfortunately, the popular news media tends to capitalize upon our fears as a way to increase views. If there are any other group of organisms that are vilified and feared as much as spiders, it would probably be snakes. About this time last year, I wrote a short column



TIMBER RATTLESNAKE



BULL SNAKE

What good are snakes? Why should I care about snakes? I get asked these questions a lot. There is an ongoing paradigm shift across the United States regarding conservation of fish and wildlife. The focus on single species management is giving way to managing habitats and ecosystems. The Kansas State Wildlife Action Plan places emphasis on Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs), or habitats of critical importance to the state. Now, we are concerned with what ecosystem services a species provides, or what role a species plays in maintaining particular habitat. To me, snakes are important bioassessment tools when trying to answer those questions. Snakes in general tend to have life history traits that make them vulnerable to population declines. These traits include long life spans, high annual survivorship in adults, high site fidelity and high mortality among juveniles. Snakes, with their low metabolism, can also go for longer periods of time without food, making them more capable of surviving short-term resource shortages than mammals with higher energy needs. So when significant changes in snake populations occur, it is probably indicative of a long-term change in the environment.

An example of this is the diminutive red-bellied snake of eastern Kansas. The red-bellied snake is listed as a "Species in Need of Conservation" and occurs within two of our EFAs, the Eastern Deciduous Forest and the Ozark Plateau. What can the red-bellied snake tell us about the health of our eastern forests? Forest soil typically has a rich organic layer that is composed of deep leaf litter that holds in moisture and whose decomposition releases important nutrients into the soil. One of these nutrients, calcium, is important for maintaining the slugs and snails that live in and help breakdown the leaf litter. Slugs and snails also happen to be the primary prey for red-bellied snakes. The absence of

red-bellied snakes then would suggest that something is significantly amiss with the moisture and nutrient composition of the soil. Of course, soil quality is directly related to the overall health of the woodland.

Snakes, particularly larger species, typically occupy the mid-point in a food web. Rat snakes, bullsnakes, copperheads and all rattlesnakes are major players when it comes to rodent control. These snakes in turn become food for other species, such as hawks and owls. Within my lifetime, we have seen a huge uptick in white-tailed deer populations, and with it their associated parasites. Lyme disease is a bacterial pathogen that is carried by the black-legged or deer tick. While the deer tick is closely associated with deer, the tick does not actually contract the disease from deer; The deer itself is just a food source for the female ticks. The female tick gorges on its host, typically a deer or other large mammal, and lays eggs. The eggs hatch and the larval ticks feed on small mammals, such as rodents. The rodents are a carrier of the bacteria that causes Lyme disease, which is where the ticks become infected. Maintaining natural forms of rodent control, such as snakes, keep diseases such as Lyme from becoming more prevalent than they already are.

In addition to benefits to human health by controlling vectors for disease, snakes also improve human health in a much more direct manner. Snake venoms are cocktails of molecular compounds that are responsible for specific tasks. One compound may lower blood pressure; another thins the blood,



RED-BELLIED SNAKE

while a third may block receptors in nerve cells. In combination, these cocktails can be devastating. But when isolated, they are life saving. Recent drugs derived from snake venoms include Captopril, a commonly prescribed drug to treat abnormally high blood pressure. Eptifibatid and Tirofiban were also derived from snake venoms to treat heart conditions, such as angina. While not a snake, Gila Monster venom was used to develop the type 2 diabetes medication Byetta. Scientists view animal venoms as a pharmacopeia of new drugs and they continue to work to unravel mysteries contained within those chemical cocktails. Most exciting to me, having recently lost my mother and grandmother to cancer, is the research being done using snake venom as a cancer treatment. Some components of snake venom attack cells, and research is in progress to try and isolated those cell-killing mechanisms to cancer cells. The thought is those actions would isolate and stop the spread of cancerous tumors in the body.



PRAIRIE RATTLESNAKE

space, they will go out of their way to avoid you. If you happen to meet a snake up close, back away as slowly and calmly as possible. As hard as it may be to not jump around and make a commotion, all the extra movement may scare the snake more. Remember, the snake is probably as surprised as you are. And don't take off running; you are more likely to hurt yourself by tripping and falling than getting bit by a snake. While you may want to escape quickly, the chances of a snake attacking or chasing you are very little. I have been around thousands of snakes on three continents and have yet to be chased, though a snake might crawl towards you in certain circumstances. If a snake is cornered and the only way to escape is to go by you, then the may try to quickly crawl by. Or if you are standing between the snake and its shelter, the snake may try to zip by you as well. If you have a fear of snakes, this can be very disconcerting. Remember, by giving a snake some space, you give it room to escape. 🐍

RAT SNAKES, BULLSNAKES, COPPERHEADS AND ALL RATTLESNAKES ARE MAJOR PLAYERS WHEN IT COMES TO RODENT CONTROL.

While snakes are an integral part of our ecosystem and beneficial to human health in many ways, I can understand why not everybody would want them in their yard or around their house, especially if you have young children. The easiest way to prevent snakes from entering your yard is to reduce and remove available resources. Clean up any debris such as woodpiles, and old metal or wood lying around. Keep your shrubs and low-lying bushes trimmed up. Not only do shrubs and debris provide shelter for snakes, they also provide shelter for their primary prey – rodents. Make sure food and water sources for rodents are also cleaned up and stored away. And as most of you already know, always watch where you put your hands and feet! Oh, and don't buy into the snake repellent hype, it is just a way to lighten your wallet. There is no scientific evidence that commercial snake repellents work.

What should you do if you encounter a snake, particularly a venomous one? In most cases, nothing. Just walk around it at a safe distance. Snakes typically only react out of fear and given enough

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SNAKES. THERE ARE SOME GREAT RESOURCES ABOUT KANSAS' SNAKES AVAILABLE. GO TO A PROGRAM OFFERED AT A STATE PARK, NATURE CENTER, OR ZOO. YOU MIGHT WANT TO PICK UP A COPY OF AMPHIBIANS, REPTILES, AND TURTLES IN KANSAS BY COLLINS, COLLINS, AND TAGGART. OR CHECK OUT THE KANSAS HERPETOFAUNAL ATLAS, WHICH BE FOUND AT: [HTTP://WEBAPPS.FHSU.EDU/KSHERP/DEFAULT.ASPX](http://webapps.fhsu.edu/ksherp/default.aspx). WITH A LITTLE EDUCATION, SEEING A SNAKE IN THE WILD CAN GO FROM A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE TO A VERY POSITIVE WILDLIFE VIEWING EXPERIENCE.

FISH ~ FOOLING FLIES

by Rick McNary
outdoor writer and photographer



WHAT IS YOUR REACTION WHEN AN INSECT LANDS ON YOU? DO YOU SWAT IT? TAKE A PICTURE OF IT?

DID YOU KNOW THERE IS AN ENTIRE ART, AND INDUSTRY, DEDICATED TO CREATING REPLICAS OF INSECTS BY USING A COLLECTION OF FURS, FEATHERS, HOOKS AND THREAD TO CREATE LIFE-LIKE IMITATIONS JUST TO FOOL A FISH?

WELCOME TO THE ART OF FLY TYING AND MEET ONE OF THE BEST IN KANSAS, JIM KELLER. KELLER, A RETIRED PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT, HAS TURNED HIS PASSION FOR FLY FISHING AND TYING HIS OWN FLIES INTO UNIQUE WAYS OF REPURPOSING HIS RETIREMENT. IN ADDITION TO TAKING HIS ART TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE SPORT BY BECOMING A SILVER-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL FLY FISHERS CERTIFIED FLY TIER, HE ALSO USES HIS ART TO GROW THE SPORT AS WELL AS GIVING BACK IN A UNIQUE WAY TO VETERANS.

"I grew up in Colorado," Keller says. "Dad was an avid outdoorsman who loved to hunt and fish. In those days, I played basketball on Friday and Saturday, and then we'd load up Sunday morning headed somewhere fishing or hunting. I grew up fishing a 100-mile stretch of the Arkansas River which is one of the best, blue-ribbon trout waters in the world."

Like many in the sport of fly fishing, Jim began tying his own flies.

"I taught myself and my love for tying is producing a fly that is a variation off the masters and seeing my creation catch a fish. Also, I enjoy the opportunity to continually learn new techniques and to share them with others"

The sport of fly fishing is a billion-dollar-a-year industry and has grown steadily over the past decade. If you walk into either of the dedicated fly fishing stores in Kansas such as Ark River Anglers of Wichita or K & K Fly Fishers in Overland Park, the amount of fly-tying supplies hanging on the walls and in bins is staggering.

Although you can purchase mass produced flies which fall apart quickly, fly fishing purist are careful to select, or make,

hand-crafted flies because of their detail and quality.

For those who love the sport, flies are not just bait and a means to an end of catching fish; rather, each fly carries with it a history of its original creator as well as its own entomology. The very nature of fly fishing requires the angler to learn about the life cycle of both aquatic and terrestrial insects.





Left: Tools of the trade.

Home isn't the only place Keller ties flies – he even has a streamside fly tying kit to immediately tie an imitation of the active insects in the water.



If you were to come upon a group of anglers putting their waders on to go fly fishing, most likely they will be talking about aquatic insects and which one seems to be working on that stretch of water and at what time of the day.

If you ever have the pleasure of fishing with Keller, you will notice him dip a little net into the stream occasionally, then lift it up and carefully study the contents. He is determining what type, and size, of insect forms are active in the water. He even has a streamside fly tying kit to immediately tie an imitation of the active insects.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

To appreciate the art of fly tying, it helps to understand what sets fly fishing apart from conventional fishing; the weight of the lure. Conventional angling, which you might have been introduced to as a child with a Zebco 202, uses the weight of the lure to pull the line off the reel as the cast is made toward a target.

However, that dynamic doesn't work with fly fishing because the lures – or flies – are sometimes so tiny that a dozen of them will fit on a 50-cent-piece. Therefore, since the weight of the lure is not enough, fly fishing uses a heavy line so the angler is casting the line, not the lure. The art of fly fishing requires additional casting skill to deliver the fly to the target.

TYING FOR TROUT

Trout live in cold water and are finicky eaters. Aquatic insects in their various life-stages make up a large portion of their diet. Although trout do eat other fish, worms and even mice, they primarily feast on insects.

One such aquatic insect, and perhaps the most popular, is the Mayfly. Although the life cycle of a Mayfly is 12 months, they only live above the water's surface for 24 hours. During that time, the female drops her eggs into the water where they float down to the stream or lakebed and the cycle starts over.

As the Mayfly goes through four stages from an egg to a nymph to a dun and finally a spinner with wings, a fly tier's goal is to create an imitation of one of those stages. The stage where the Mayfly grows wings and flies off the water is called the hatch. The flies that are tied to mimic the stages of the insect below the surface are called wet flies, whereas the flies that mimic the flies once they reach the surface to fly away are called dry flies.

For most fly fishing anglers, the most sought after moment of fly fishing is standing in the frigid water of a trout stream when the cloud-like hatch occurs. At those times, having a dry fly that matches the hatch produces the equivalent joy of hitting a grand slam in baseball.

Although dry fly





Keller is, at heart, a teacher and teachers love to learn. His love for learning then disseminating that knowledge to others caused him to pursue the path of becoming a Certified Fly Tier by the International Fly Fishers organization.

Keller is one of only two in Kansas and one of only 102 in the nation that are certified.

fishing is considered the most enjoyable, most trout are caught using the subsurface imitations of the nymph form.

WARM WATER FISH

A scholarship to play basketball at Fort Hays, then a teaching job in Kansas which followed, resulted in Jim spending his professional life in Kansas, a state with waters too warm for trout to live year-round.

"When I moved to Kansas, I had to change the format because the fish varieties were more different and plentiful. Instead of trout, I had to learn how to fish for bass, bluegill, crappie, pan fish, wipers and stripers so it gave me a good diversity in types of flies."

Fly fishing for pan fish, especially bluegill is often



recommended to learn how to fly fish. Especially during the months of April and May, bluegills are close to the bank and within easy casting range.

Unlike the finicky eating habits of trout, bass are aggressive and will eat almost anything. Sitting on a float-tube on a Kansas farm pond and watching a five-pound bass explode up out of the water on a Deer Hair Popper is joy worth pursuing.

LEARNING NEW TECHNIQUES

Keller is, at heart, a teacher and teachers love to learn. His love for learning then disseminating that knowledge to others caused him to pursue the path of becoming a Certified Fly Tier by the International Fly Fishers organization. Keller is one of only two in Kansas and one of only 102 in the nation that are certified.

"There are three levels of certification: bronze, silver and gold. Each level has a certain type of fly you tie complete with specification of hook size, material and thread type. The challenge is to tie three identical flies of each of type. For example, in the bronze level, I was required to tie three exact replicas of a Grey Goose Midge Emerger, Orange Partridge Soft Hackle, Dry Pheasant Tail Variant, Woolly Buzzer, Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear Nymph plus two of my choice - Renegade & Deer Hair Caddis - both dry flies."

"I send the flies to expert fly tiers to inspect. If they don't like them, they send them back to tie again. Fortunately, they didn't have to do that with my flies."



FLATLAND FLY FISHING CLUB

Keller is actively involved in the Flatland Fly Fishing Club that meets at the Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita. This active club meets monthly for informational meetings, but also offers a variety of ways they engage the public.

"Since retiring six years ago I have had time to be active in the club. I am the Newsletter Editor and feature a Tyer's Corner each month, as well as articles on numerous fishing outings. In addition, we have had a club trip to Ontario the past three years and I am active with the club's involvement in youth programs through the Nature Center, cleanups and stocking at the Slough at Sedgwick Park and other outings to Roaring River and Bennett Springs."

"I've been working with beginning and intermediate tiers for years. I work with a couple of high school boys as well as my 8-year-old granddaughter, Elise, whose first statement upon visiting is, 'Hi! Can we go down and tie a fly?' It is great to see the sparkle in her eye when she ties a fly. It's a nice bonding activity for us."

PROJECT HEALING WATERS

Keller loves to share his passion and knowledge of the sport and art with others.

"The opportunity to share with others goes back to my days as a high school journalism teacher. I get real satisfaction from seeing others learn new things."

One such outlet is Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, a nonprofit whose mission is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military service personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing and associated activities including education and outings.

"Project Healing Waters is a national organization and I've been tying flies for them for the last four years," Keller says. "I tie 20 dozen



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The very nature of fly fishing requires the angler to learn about the life cycle of both aquatic and terrestrial insects.



flies and give a dozen to each of the anglers. This has been very rewarding because I get notes back from them and it really gives me a boost to do that. Our club is starting a chapter here in Kansas."

THE APPEAL

Keller is a reminder of what attracts more and more people to the sport of fly fishing and the art of fly tying; the opportunity to experience nature in a new way by learning about the fascinating ecosystem of what lies below and above the surface of a stream.

As you listen to Keller or watch him expertly craft another stunning creation on his vise, you begin to understand where the sparkle in his eye comes from; each fly is a story. He is not simply tying an imitation of an insect; rather, each fly has a history of why that fly was worthy of his time to re-create. In addition to a history, that fly will provide a new story, either for himself or for a disabled vet.

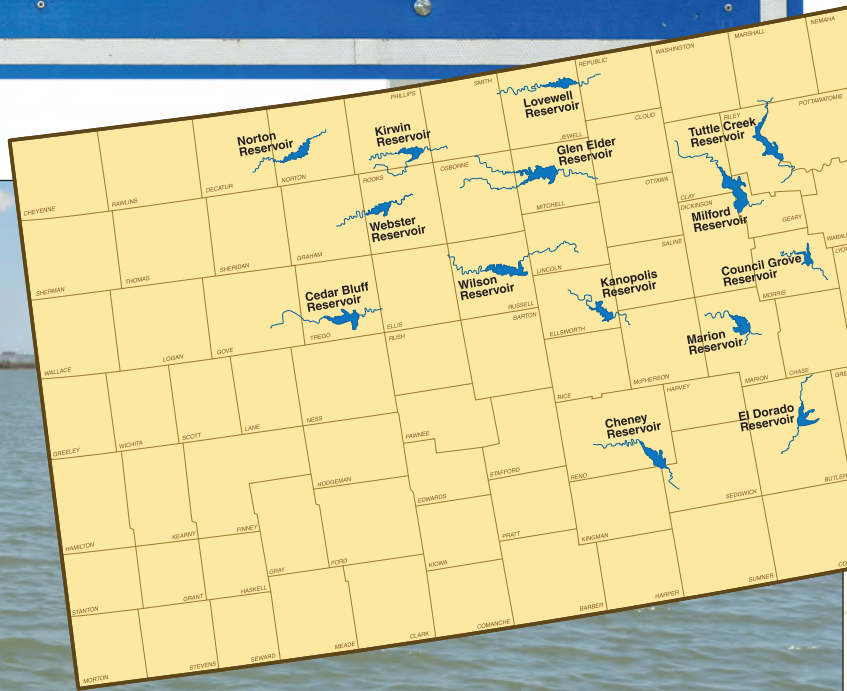
For Keller, tying flies is not simply about imitating an insect to fool a fish. Rather, it's about turning art and science into idyllic moments of exhilaration that become stories shared around campfires and memories revisited often and fondly.

Keller's sparkle is contagious. If you don't believe me, just ask Elise then watch her eyes sparkle, just like her Grandpa's. 🐮



ROAD TRIP GONE FISHIN'

text and photos by Brent Frazee
outdoor writer



E-LOWFRANCE RC

At age 71, Larry Milliken set out last year to complete his bucket list. So he packed his old van and headed out on an extended fishing road trip. Nothing exotic, mind you. No mountain streams, oceans, southern bass lakes or mighty rivers. His goal was far simpler: to fish each of the federal reservoirs in his home state, Kansas.

"This is something I had always wanted to do," said Milliken, who lives in Williamsburg. "I've lived in Kansas for all my life, and I knew there was some great fishing right here close to home.

"But I knew there were other reservoirs that I hadn't fished that were also good. I figured I'd better try them before I got too old.

"It was an adventure I had always wanted to take."

Milliken embarked on a

road trip that started in January 2018 and lasted into late May. By the time he was done, he had fished all 24 of Kansas' federal reservoirs, in addition to power plant lake Coffey County.

And he was more convinced than ever that the Sunflower State is a fishing paradise.

"I love Kansas," Milliken said. "It has great fishing, and some of it is right out my backdoor. Why go anywhere else?"

"Why go to Canada, Minnesota or down South? I've been both north and south, but I don't have to go far from home to find great fishing."



To understand Milliken's passion for Kansas, you have to trace his roots. He has spent his entire life on the same parcel of land outside little Williamsburg. He

farmed for much of his life before operating a wholesale business. Today, he and his wife Sandy enjoy retirement in a beautiful house surrounded by green pastures and the solitude of country life.

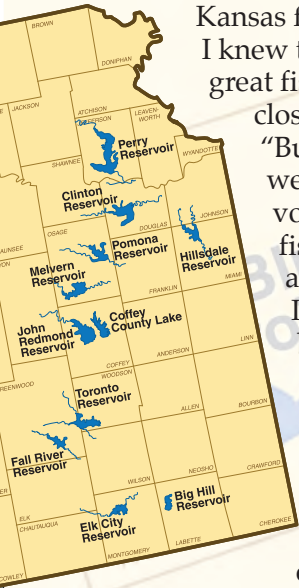
Good fishing isn't far away. Pomona, Melvern and Coffey County reservoirs are only about 30 minutes away. Hillsdale, John Redmond and Clinton reservoir are only slightly farther than that. "I have a lot of choices," Milliken said. "I can't think of a better place to live."

Milliken takes full advantage of those opportunities. He fishes three to four days a week, targeting everything from crappie to catfish to walleyes to white bass. "I like to fish for everything," he said. "I'm a multi-species fisherman. That's what I like about Kansas. It has a good mix of species.

"There's usually something you can get to bite."

Milliken has grown up with

Milliken fishes in the shadows of the Wolf Creek Generating Station in Coffey County – one of his favorite spots.





Milliken holds up a stringer full of channel catfish. The day's haul was taken out of Wolf Creek, also known as Coffey County Lake.

Cygnus River that feeds Melvern," Milliken said, "but it's nothing like we have today."

Milliken went on to become a guide in the 1970s, and was in demand. He remembers guiding for 63 consecutive days before getting a day off. But he eventually tired of that stress.

"It got to the point where people weren't hunting for fish, they were hunting for my red Lund boat," he said. "I was getting followed everywhere I went, and that got old."

Today, Milliken fishes whenever and wherever he wants, often going out alone. He fishes year-round, from the cold of winter to the heat of summer.

"I've loved to fish ever since I was a kid," he said. "I remember how I would sneak a fishing pole out with me when I was old enough to drive a tractor on our farm.

"My dad would come out to check up on me and if he couldn't find me right away, he knew where to look.

"I would be on a pond, fishing."

THE KANSAS TOUR

It came as no surprise to Milliken's friends that he decided to set out to fish each of the Sunflower State's major reservoirs.

"Larry talked about doing this for a couple years and I knew he

wasn't just dreaming," said Mark Thompson, an avid angler who also lives in Williamsburg. "When he sets his mind to something, he's going to do it.

"He has a pure love of fishing. And he's good at it. He's as good a multi-species fisherman as I've seen."

To many, the time of the year when Milliken started his tour seemed a bit odd. He began in early January, a time when most anglers are huddled by the fire inside. But to Milliken it made perfect sense.

He has fished for winter crappie in Kansas for years and knows how good the fishing can be.

"That's one of the best times of the year to catch crappie," he said. "The fish will school along the channels, and if you can find the right spot, you can catch your limit."

That's what happened in early January 2018 when he started his tour at Fall River Reservoir in southeast Kansas. He had only fished the 2,500-acre reservoir once before, but he remembered where he caught fish, went back there and found that the area still attracted crappie. He caught his limit of 50 crappie, some of them 12 inches long or better. And his tour was off to a rousing start.

Shortly thereafter, he did well at John Redmond and the other reservoirs in the area. He fished 18 of the reservoirs on his own, and got along fine. For overnight trips, he slept in the back of his old van and kept costs to a minimum.

"I ate a lot of Beanie Weenies in my van," he said with a laugh.

When it came time to take a road trip to western Kansas, though, his wife insisted that she go along for safety purposes. They stayed in cheap motels and enjoyed fishing reservoirs they

many of the reservoirs. He talks about the days when he was dating his future wife and they would drive into the dry basin of what was to become Pomona Lake before the dam was completed in 1963.

"My wife was a queen candidate for Miss Pomona Lake when we were in high school," Milliken said.

He also watched John Redmond Lake open in 1964, Melvern Lake fill in 1975, and Coffey County Lake open to limited public fishing in 1996.

"Before that, we had some good fishing in the rivers and creeks, like Dragoon Creek that now flows into Pomona and the Marais des

had never seen before. The farthest from their home in Williamsburg was Keith Sebelius Reservoir in western Kansas, a 343-mile journey. The trip wasn't one nonstop marathon. There were frequent returns to home, then off on the road again.

The cold-weather months were dominated by large catches of crappie. Once spring arrived, that changed.

Milliken remembers a trip in May to Tuttle Creek Reservoir when he caught a limit of walleyes while fishing for crappie along the banks.

"I didn't even know Tuttle Creek had walleyes," he said.

He also recalls a trip shortly after that in which he and his wife caught big white bass at Kanopolis Reservoir in the central part of the state.

"We found them along a place where a flat dropped off into the river channel," Milliken said. "We were vertically jigging white curly-tails (jigs) and caught some huge whites. Some of them weighed 2 1/2 to 3 pounds."



LASTING MEMORIES

Milliken made a scrapbook of his journey, filled with photos of his vehicle, trailer and boat parked in front of each state park sign and large fish he caught along the way.

He is grateful for the help he received. When he would check in with state park offices at reservoirs he was unfamiliar with, he got plenty of advice on where to fish, he said.

"When I told people what I was doing, everyone wanted to help out," he said. "The people at the state parks were great."

He found it hard to pinpoint one bad experience other than the blown tires on his boat trailer as he was returning from one of his trips.

He came away from the experience with an even greater appreciation for the way KDWP manages the state's fisheries.

"I think Kansas does an excellent job of managing its fisheries," Milliken said. "I can't say I was disappointed at any of the reservoirs I fished."

So what did he do once he completed his bucket list? Well, he went fishing, of course. Last fall, he caught a personal-best 67-pound flathead catfish at John Redmond Reservoir.

"I was fishing a drop-off where I knew there were old railroad tracks under the water," he said. "I fought that fish for an hour and 15 minutes. That fish drug my boat a quarter of a mile. I just followed it with my trolling motor until it was just exhausted."

That fish went back to the water, as do many of the gamefish Milliken lands.

Even in the midst of the high water this spring, Milliken found ways to get out. He usually ended up at Coffey County, where he caught big channel catfish, wipers and drum.

Meanwhile, he looks back on his road trip with pride. And others such as Thompson celebrate his achievement.

"Larry is such a great guy," Thompson said. "He's always willing to help someone else catch fish. He's very unselfish."

"He tells me, 'I bet there aren't a lot of other people who have fished every one of the Kansas reservoirs,' and I bet he's right." 🐻



(Top) Thanks to his many road trips, Milliken has grown accustomed to catching channel catfish.

(Right) Milliken proudly holds up a freshly-caught walleye.

Shutterstock/102002368

Cross



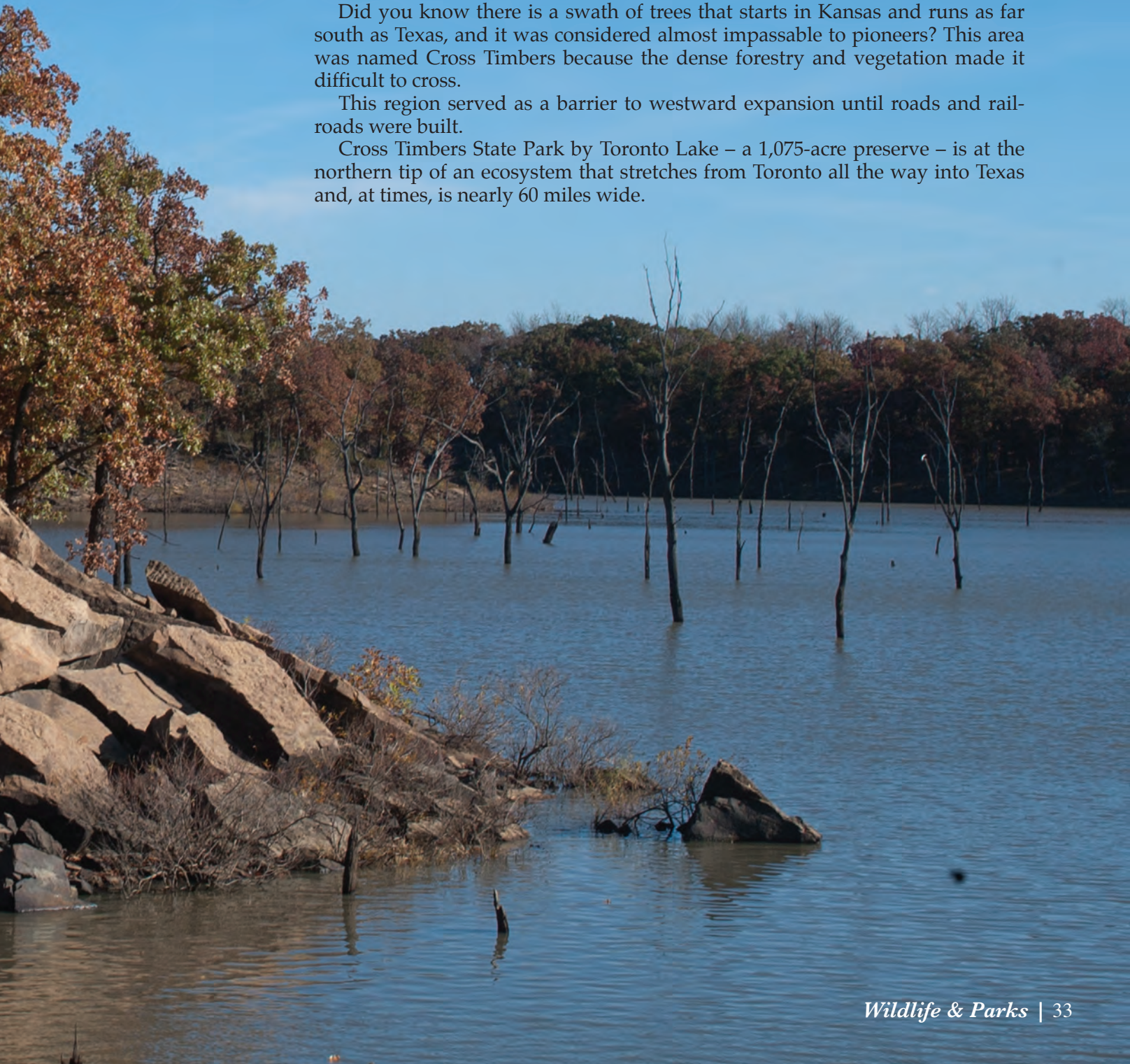
Timbers State Park

by Rick McNary
outdoor writer and photographer

Did you know there is a swath of trees that starts in Kansas and runs as far south as Texas, and it was considered almost impassable to pioneers? This area was named Cross Timbers because the dense forestry and vegetation made it difficult to cross.

This region served as a barrier to westward expansion until roads and railroads were built.

Cross Timbers State Park by Toronto Lake – a 1,075-acre preserve – is at the northern tip of an ecosystem that stretches from Toronto all the way into Texas and, at times, is nearly 60 miles wide.





Pam Paulsen photo

In the 1830s, author Washington Irving dubbed this area the Cast Iron Forest because of its density. Irving's description became the title for Richard Fracaviglia's book, "The Cast Iron Forest: A Natural and Cultural History of the North American Cross Timbers."

Cross Timbers State Park was formerly Toronto State Park.

"The name change to Cross Timbers came through a legislative change in 2001," says Park Manager, Kim Jones. "At the time, Doyle Niemeyer was the Park Manager and he wanted the park's name to be connected to the true wonder of the Cross Timbers ecosystem."

Jones, the park manager since 2009, has been engaged in the park for two decades - some of those as seasonal help before she graduated from college.

"I changed my course of studies after I was involved in my first Earth Day Celebration here," Jones says. "I had so much fun with the kids who came out that day I decided I was going to become a park ranger. Every year, Earth Day

is one of our most popular times and I still enjoy it more than any other."

"I love the history and ecology of this area," Jones says. "Students from the University of Arkansas studied these post oak and black-jack oak trees and found that they ranged from 200 to 400 years old. In fact, along one of the interpretive trails, there is a sign that says that tree was just a sapling when George Washington was the president. Oh, if those trees could talk."

"Cross Timbers is also an historical treasure," Jones says. "The Toronto Lake is the half-way point in what used to be the Osage Indian Reservation so this area is rife with history."

"The park is kind of quiet; it's not known for the party crowd," Jones says. "We have families that have been camping here for more than 40 years. However, there are quite a few folks here on the Fourth of July for our fireworks. There are only 4,000 people in Woodson County but I think most of them come out that evening. It's a great show!"

Park Offerings

The 4,600-acre Toronto Wildlife Area, a mixture of forests, grasslands, farmlands and marshes, is adjacent to the 2,800-acre Toronto Reservoir.



The 4,600-acre Toronto Wildlife Area, a mixture of forests, grasslands, farmlands and marshes, is adjacent to the 2,800-acre Toronto Reservoir.



Pam Paulsen photo

Fishing

The reservoir is known for excellent fishing. Numerous brush piles are placed to provide habitat for bluegill, sunfish, crappie and catfish.

"Toronto hides some real giants," Joe Bragg of Kansas Crappie Club says. "There's something about those southeast Kansas lakes like Toronto that grow the crappie big. Even the bluegills grow big there."



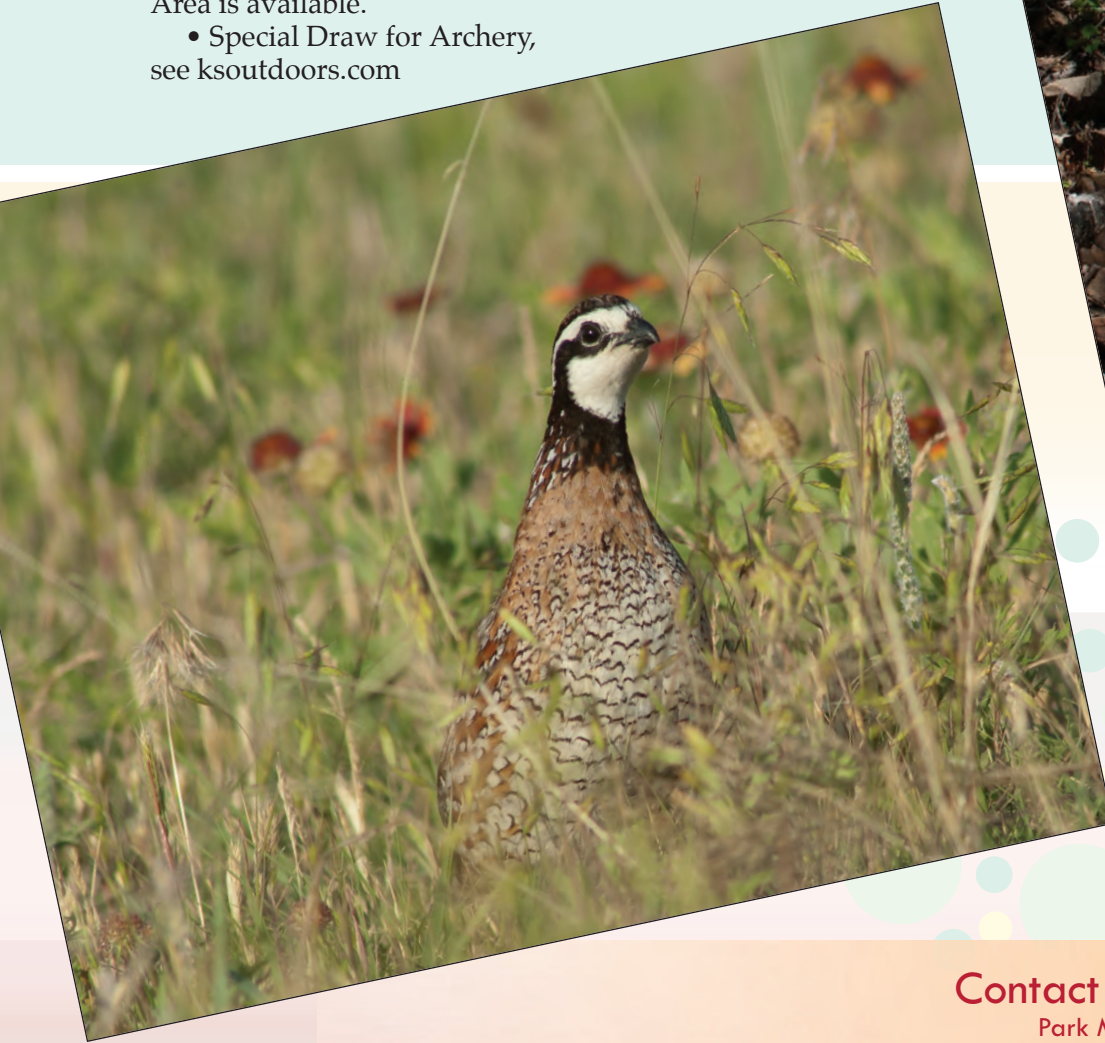
Hunting

The Toronto Wildlife Area is open to public hunting on both land and water. Various game and non-game animals are to be found in this area such as white-tailed deer, turkey, bobwhite quail, squirrel, waterfowl, rabbits and furbearers.

- Special Handicap Hunt Area is available.
- Special Draw for Archery, see ksoutdoors.com

Wildlife Viewing

Marshes have been constructed to attract migratory waterfowl. In addition, these areas are excellent for viewing non-game shore birds. Currently, 35 bald eagles winter in the area.



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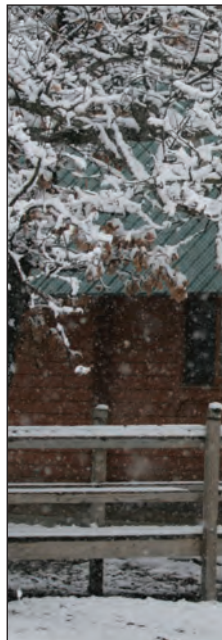
Contact Information

Park Manager: Kim Jones
 Administrative Specialist: Linda Riley
 144 Hwy 105, Toronto, KS 66777
 (Area Office) (620) 637-2213
 (Regional Office) (620) 431-0380
 Email: KDWPT.CrossTimbersSP@ks.gov

Website: <https://ksoutdoors.com/State-Parks/Locations/Cross-Timbers>
 Facebook: Cross Timbers State Park - Kansas Wildlife, Parks & Tourism

Directions

Cross Timbers is 12 miles west of Yates Center, south of highway 54 on highway 105.



Trails

All trails are open for walking, hiking and backpacking although backcountry camping is allowed only on certain loops of the Chautauqua Hills Trail. Permits can be obtained for backcountry camping at the park office.

All trails, with the exception of the Ancient Trees Trail, are open to other non-motorized uses like jogging and mountain biking. However, during high lake levels, some of the trails may be impassable. Biking is prohibited when the trail is so wet that damage will occur.


- Oak Ridge Trail: An easy half-mile loop on the southwest side of the lake, it is a good introduction of the forest of the region.
- Ancient Trees Trail: This is an

interpretative trail with signs that estimate the age of the trees as well as place them in context of history. In the Toronto Point area, this trail introduces the hiker to the types of trees that dominate this ecosystem that stretches down to central Texas.

- Blackjack Trail: This one-mile loop is in the Holiday Hill area and is open to biking in dry weather. As the name suggests, it is a great way to see blackjack oaks, one of two dominant trees in this forest.

- Blue Water Kayak Trail: This is a water trail that has maps and signs to guide paddlers on a mile-long journey through Mann's Cove on the northeast side of the lake. The Park has kayaks available for free use during certain times of the weekend and seasons.

- Overlook Trail: This 1.25 mile loop is on the southeast side of the lake in Woodson Cove. It is open to hiking and biking and begins with a scenic overview of the lake, then courses through various outcroppings and ravines.

- Chautauqua Hills Trail: There are four loops, which offer hikers a total of 11 miles of trail around the Toronto Point area. The Chautauqua Hills is a sliver of sandstone that averages 10 miles in width and is part of the Cross Timbers ecological system. The sandstone provides ideal conditions for the blackjack and post-oak trees in which to grow. Backcountry camping is allowed on some parts of these trails with a special permit. 

Camping

- Modern Cabins - 4
- Backcountry - by permit only on some segments of Chautauqua Hills Trail
- Primitive - 89
- Standard - 8
- Standard w/electric & water - 50
- Standard full hookups - 19

To reserve sites, either call the park office or go to this website: www.reserveamerica.com



Activities

- 1st Day Hike - New Years Day each year
- Earth Day – Celebrated on a Saturday close to April 22
- National Trails Day – free park entrance (June 1, 2019)
- Fireworks at the Lake as part of the Toronto Days celebration (7/6/2019)
- Black Friday – free park entrance (November 29, 2019)

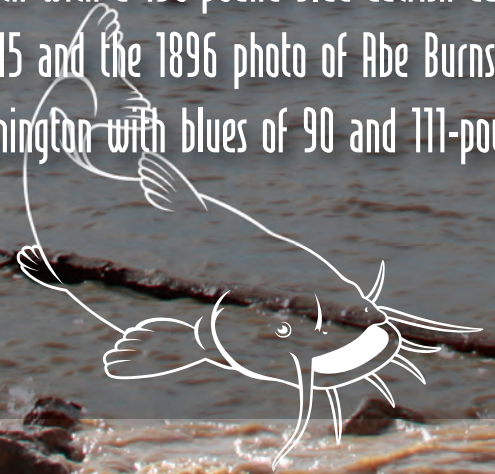
King Cats of the Kansas River

by Michael Pearce

outdoor content manager, KDWPT

As a boy in the early 1980s, Thomas Finch listened to old anglers tell tales of behemoth catfish in the Kansas River, many decades before.

He stared at the legendary photos of angler Doug Smith with a 150-pound blue catfish caught in 1915 and the 1896 photo of Abe Burns and Jake Washington with blues of 90 and 111-pounds.





Now 44, Finch is still staring at photos of huge catfish from the river near his Lawrence home. But these are color photos and of Finch or a friend holding fish that would have made those old-timers smile.

"My best flathead (on rod and reel) is 88 pounds. I've had my hands on 90-pound blue cat. My goal is triple-digits, 100 pounds, from the Kaw (more common name for the Kansas River)," said Finch. "Fifty-pound fish can happen more often than not. I've caught dozens that size."

Finch thinks far bigger fish may come from the Kansas River.

"I really think the next

world-record flathead can come from the Kaw, (current record is 123 pounds), he said. "In my lifetime there could be a blue catfish pushing 150. They've existed once, surely they can again."

Kansas River Monsters Past

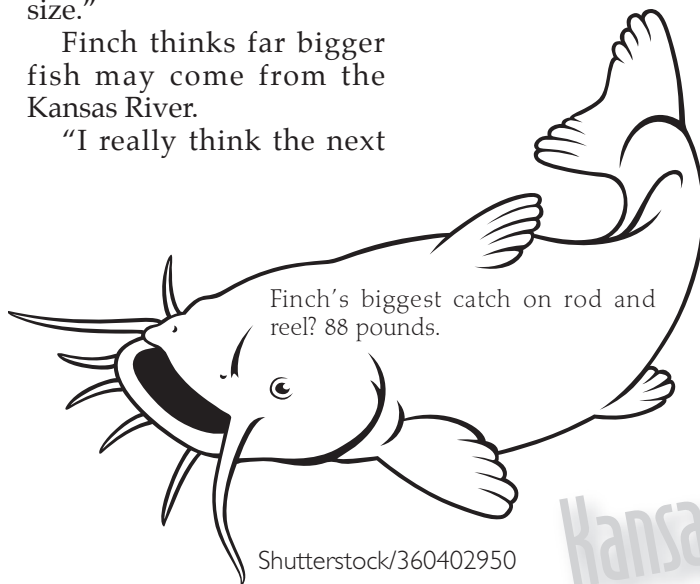
Barbara Higgins-Dover, director of Kansas Riverkings Museum in Lawrence, said the Kansas River, once wide and deep enough for barges and steamships, provided plenty of fish dinners when Lawrence was founded in

the 1850s. It's production of fish the size of livestock became legendary after the Bowersock Dam was built in the 1870s to provide power and a grain mill. Fish headed up stream became stockpiled at the dam.

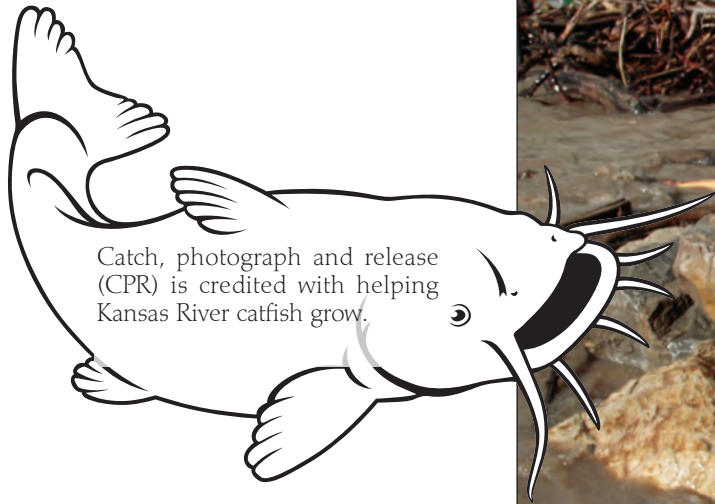
There are unproven stories of catfish up to 200 pounds caught at the Bowersock Dam. Doug Smith's 150-pounder, caught in 1915, is the best known.

Much of Higgins-Dover's museum is dedicated to the commercial fishery that flourished in Lawrence when the dam was completed. Ex-slaves Burns and Washington were well-known commercial anglers who relied heavily on huge hoop nets to trap their catch.

Washington eventually was killed after strapping an over-sized hook to a wrist and diving into the Kansas River below the



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Catch, photograph and release (CPR) is credited with helping Kansas River catfish grow.



Bowersock Dam. Finch said Washington's body was found downstream the next day, still hooked onto the big blue cat that had drowned him.

The days of gargantuan catfish in the Kansas River seemed endless, especially with the nearby mighty Missouri River, and its huge numbers of large fish not far away. The 50 miles to the Bowersock from the Missouri was nothing for fish with tail fins the size of tennis rackets.

But even the "Mighty Mo" could only take so many decades of being over-harvested by commercial fishing. Often done ille-

gally, commercial take in the Kansas River greatly decreased populations, too. Eventually both legal and illegal netting for catfish was stopped in both rivers.

Populations, especially blue catfish, rebounded quickly, at a time Finch thinks growing conditions began to greatly improve.

"There's so much for them to eat in the Kaw these days," he said. "When I was a kid, you could walk the banks with a throw net and not catch much. Seems you hardly saw shad. Now, there are a lot of them and they get pretty big."

Huge schools of baitfish dis-

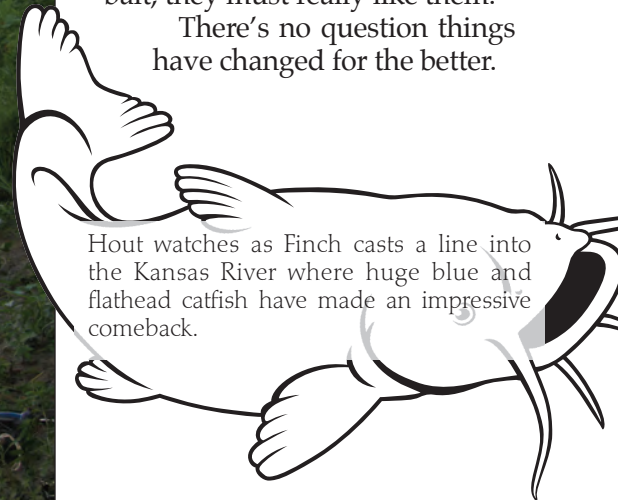
charged from reservoirs upstream, he thinks, have bolstered shad populations.

He also credits another species, one not popular with most, for contributing to huge growth rates for blue and flathead catfish.

Silver carp are rightfully cursed by biologists. They're an invasive species that outcompetes native species for space and food. Finch said they help Kansas River catfish quickly grow to "we're going to need a bigger net" proportions.

"These really big fish can get a meal of five pounds at a time, anytime they want," said Finch. "Judging by the way they hit big chunks of silver carp we use for bait, they must really like them."

There's no question things have changed for the better.



Hout watches as Finch casts a line into the Kansas River where huge blue and flathead catfish have made an impressive comeback.

Kansas River Monsters Present

In 1984, the state-record blue catfish was a 56-pounder caught by Royce Stiffler from the Kansas River that summer near Eudora. Now, such fish hardly raise the eyebrows of serious Kansas River anglers.

Given one summer night two years ago to catch a fish for photos, Finch and friends Josh Hackathorn and Josh Hout caught a fish that equaled Stiffler's old record.

"I'd hoped for something bigger," said Finch, "but this is a pretty nice fish."

Finch sounds like an auctioneer when talking about numbers of fish caught and their weights over the past few years.

There was the time he and his son, Matt, caught a total of 1,200 pounds of blue catfish over one afternoon and evening. The biggest, a 74-pounder.

"It was in the fall and everything was perfect," said Finch. "We just kept catching nice fish. Matt wanted to weigh them all, and he kept track of sizes on his phone. It was relentless."

Another time, he and an angler spent hours catching flatheads from 40 to just over 60 pounds. His personal bests for flatheads are 81, 87 and 88 pounds, all on a rod and reel.

He names anglers who've gone to the Bowersock and caught a half-dozen big blues from 20 to 50 pounds before going to work.

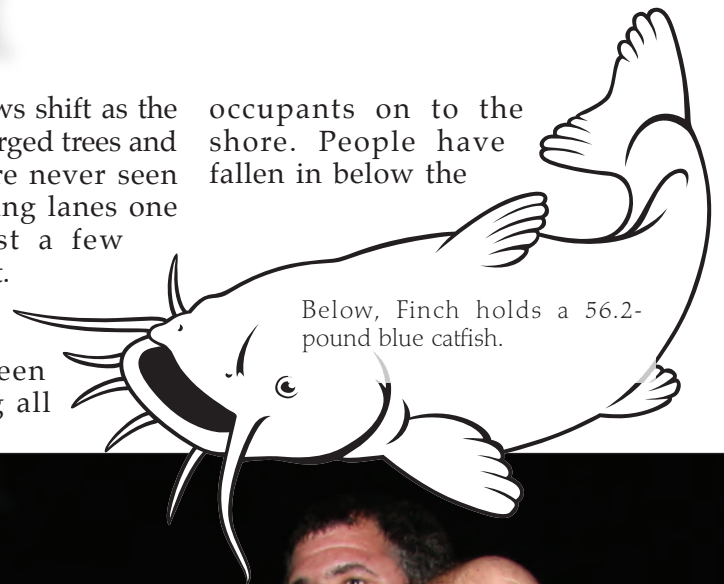
There was the early morning an angler approached with a huge blue he wanted weighed on Finch's digital scales. The fish totaled 90 pounds on the nose.

But plying the Kansas River for fish big enough to swallow a poodle isn't easy angling. The Kansas River holds its dangers. When the river is up, and the fishing often best, there are dangerous undertows. The location

of holes and shallows shift as the water flows. Submerged trees and rocks appear where never seen before. Clear boating lanes one week may be just a few inches deep the next.

Stories abound of speeding boats hitting an unseen sandbar, throwing all

occupants on to the shore. People have fallen in below the



Below, Finch holds a 56.2-pound blue catfish.



Bowersock Dam never to be seen again.

A late afternoon Finch and Hackathorn fished together, they worked their way downstream slowly, noting how a channel had changed this way or that. They carried fishing poles, bait, chairs, coolers, lanterns and hammocks to a spot notched in the jungle-like forest eight feet above the river.

Just getting from launch to first cast took over 90 minutes. Their tackle looked like things you'd see at sea.

Fishing rods seemed long and stout enough for pole vaulting. The reels were bigger than softballs and spooled with line thick enough for weed eaters. Four-inch hooks were buried in a fist-sized chunk of silver carp and cast far out over the river. More than a quarter-pound of lead held the bait in place.

Two hours after dark, the seemingly unbendable pole bent deep after the big fish hit. Hackathorn and friend, Josh Hout, slid down the slimy bank to literally wrestle the fish in the shallows. It took three mud-covered men to bring the writhing fish up the bank to be weighed and photographed.

Next came what Finch thinks is a huge reason such big fish are so common: The fish was carried back down to the river and gently released. It swam off with a splash of a huge tail.

Finch and Hackathorn, another great Kansas River angler, are huge fans of an often-used acronym CPR – Catch, Photograph and Release.

“More people are getting on the CPR bandwagon, and it's making a difference,” said Finch, as he watched a line below the Bowersock Dam in May. “We're all out here looking for our new personal best fish. In this day and age you can catch it and at least get pictures and release it. You have something to show your friends and the fish can get bigger. I know we've caught flat-heads that have been caught before. They had hook scars in their mouths.”

Finch thinks the high release rate comes for several reasons. Many experienced anglers now realize how long it takes such a

fish to grow. It's also much easier for those fishing for the skillet to head to a smaller stream, community lake or reservoir to catch things like crappie, walleye or channel cats.

Hundreds of great fish have already been caught and released to grow even larger. A few get weighed on portable scales. Most are just photographed quickly and allowed to swim off. Some, not even that. Stiffler, who caught the 56-pound state record 35 years ago, caught and released one right at five feet long one night from the Kansas River a few summers ago. There are no photos. The current state record, a fish of 102.8 pounds, caught from the Kansas side of the Missouri River, was a few inches shorter.

Finch said other parts of the Missouri River have produced blue cats up to 130 pounds and some anglers have caught several over 100 pounds. It's just a matter of time before such a fish hangs a west where the Kansas and Missouri rivers meet, and swims to where he fishes on the Kansas River.

Finch hopes to fulfill a personal goal of a “triple-digit” fish this summer. It could happen.

“It's hard to say what the next fish will be. Will it be him (100 pounds or better) or will it be one smaller?” He said. “You never know, but I know they're out there.”



Cats like this are nice, but Finch's ultimate goal? Get his hands on a triple-digit blue cat.

Grandpa Harry

The Woodworking Shop

text and photo by Rick McNary

Harry gingerly touched the freshly sharpened blade of his woodworking plane.

"Well, Chauncey," he smiled at the yellow lab sniffing the wood shavings on the floor. "I'd say that's about sharp enough. Ethan will be here shortly."

He reassembled the plane and sat it on the bench next to Ethan's note; he brushed the sawdust off and read aloud to Chauncey (see right).

Chauncey suddenly bolted out of the shop, a flurry of wood shavings curling in his wake. Tires crunching gravel signaled Ethan's arrival. Soon, two dogs and a boy wrestled in the lawn.

"Hi Grandpa Harry," Ethan leapt to his feet. "I brought something for you."

It was a cedar bluebird house.

"That's mighty fine work, Grandson," Harry smiled.

Ethan kissed his mother goodbye, then raced to the shop with dogs in-tow. Harry trailed behind.

"Wow, Grandpa," Ethan said. "Those are neat tools. Can you teach me how to use them?"

"Oh, sure," Harry chuckled. "But first you need to learn about trees and there's no place better than the state park. When we were in the timber business, Gladys and I helped lay a trail out and mark the trees. We want people to appreciate their majesty."

Presently, the old man, young boy and two dogs tumbled out of the old truck and walked to the trailhead. Ethan read the brass plaque mounted on the wooden sign.

"The Gladys Withers Memorial Trail."

"I didn't know Grandma had her own trail," Ethan exclaimed.

"Yes, we wanted to do things that would live on long after we are gone, like planting trees. We planted thousands of trees as our way of giving the world a better future."

*Dear Grandpa Harry,
I joined the Boy Scouts like
you said and built bluebird
houses for the state park.
The Scoutmaster's wood-
working shop has a lot of old
fashioned tools like yours.
When I come up this summer,
can you teach me how to
work with wood? Someday I
want to build a grandfather
clock like you did.*

*Love,
Ethan*

*P.S. Tell Chauncey I'm
bringing his daughter for him
to play with. I've been training
her like you taught me and
she's really good.*

The old man and the lad spent the afternoon wandering the trail as Harry explained the difference in trees and the characteristics of their wood.

Back in the shop, Ethan browsed the racks of wood.

"Can we build something out of this?" Ethan asked, caressing a dark piece of figured walnut.

"We sure can," Harry replied. That's a piece of walnut from a special tree I called, The Gladys Tree. I proposed to her under that tree and we picnicked under it for years. It got struck by lightning but I salvaged what I could and milled it into lumber."

"But first, I need to teach you how to use the tools," Harry went on. "That piece of wood deserves the respect to use our best tools and skills to bring out its beauty."

Each morning throughout the summer, the sounds of the master craftsman and his apprentice drifted out the shop's windows. Ethan grew more skillful and, when summer was over, had transformed the walnut into an elegant mantel clock.

Then the unwelcome day came for the lad to return home. They both stood in the shop, proudly admiring their handiwork.

"I love my new clock," Ethan said. "I think I'll name it, 'The Gladys Tree Clock.'"

"Oh, how delightful," Harry beamed. "Before you go, I want to give you this saw, hand-plane and mallet. Someday, when I'm gone, all my tools will belong to you."

"Thanks, Grandpa! One day I'll build a grandfather's clock and name it, 'The Grandpa Harry Clock.' Would you like that?"

The old man drew the lad close and kissed him on the head.

Well, Gladys, he thought to himself. It appears we will both live on long after we're gone.



Species Profile

Eastern Screech-Owl

An evening walk brings a new variety of sounds to the ear. One sound you might hear is the call of an Eastern screech-owl. While it's not exactly a screeching sound, the creepy call into the night from a male Eastern screech-owl can help you identify them.

The coloring of the Eastern screech-owl is also something to note. There are multiple color morphs. Gray-morphs are the most common in Kansas while red-morphs are more common throughout the eastern United States. Both have large eyes and faint streaks running up and down their front sides. Their ears look like small cowlick like feather groupings.

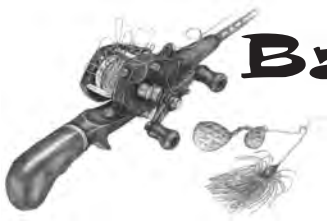
The Eastern screech-owl is an adaptive bird; making its home in rural as well as urban areas throughout Kansas. Using primarily hollowed out trees for nesting, Eastern screech-owls can be found in shelterbelts, city parks, woodlots, near the edges of streams and

orchards. Sometimes they'll move into unoccupied woodpecker holes and nesting boxes.

Between 8 and 9 inches tall, this elusive owl spends its daytime hours avoiding predators such larger owls and hawks. Snakes, raccoons, opossums and other large birds eat the Eastern screech-owl's eggs. Sometimes flocks of songbirds and other angry birds will give away the daytime roosting spot by gathering in front of the Eastern screech-owl and making a ruckus of noise. Feeding at night, the Eastern screech-owl dines on earthworms, insects, smaller birds, rodents and other small mammals.

Eastern screech-owls are monogamous, and mating occurs between March and May. Females lay between two and four eggs, which are incubated for 30 days. Only half of owlets will survive their first year of life, but they can live up to 14 years in the wild.





Backlash

with Nadia Reimer

The People Behind the Pages

If you've made it to the end of this issue, chances are you've gathered by now that I'm *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine's* newest executive editor. I follow in the larger-than-life footsteps of long-time editor, Mike Miller, who dedicated the better part of 30 years to this agency and magazine – efforts that I'm happy to share will continue, albeit in a different capacity. Mike was named our agency's Assistant Secretary of Wildlife, Fisheries and Boating and with that change inevitably comes changes to this magazine. One such change is I'll be taking up residence on this page, "Backlash," but not to worry – we won't lose all that is "Mike." I'm thrilled to announce he will still be regularly contributing to our magazine, providing us all with many more years of tips and tricks to take your fishing to the next level (see page 11).

Now, I could tell you about myself, future plans for the magazine, or about all of the interesting happenings in the natural resource conservation community, but I would be remiss if I didn't take my first opportunity as editor to instead tell you about the incredible people who make this publication possible.


Dustin Teasley, our graphic designer, has been with KDWPT nearly 25 years. If you've ever cracked open a copy of the hunting and furharvesting regulations summary, downloaded a state park brochure, watched a Pass It On trailer driving down the highway, or admired a Chickadee Checkoff poster at your local tax preparer's office – you've seen his work. He's knowledgeable, organized, and above all, dedicated. I admire his growing ability to adapt to the ever-changing environment that is state government, and I appreciate his ability to keep our team laughing amid so much change.

Annie Campbell-Fischer, my right-hand woman, handles the circulation for this publication. You'll know Annie by her sweet-natured voice on the phone when you call to renew your subscription. She's also the talented ghostwriter behind our ever-popular Species Profile, a task she continues to take on with infectious enthusiasm. You'll also

notice her column, *Writings From a Warden's Daughter*, which chronicles the mysterious and real-life experiences of her father, Rick, who served as a KDWPT game warden through Annie's childhood and beyond. Our agency is made better by utility players like Annie.

The latest addition to our crew is Jessica Ward. Jessica now serves as our magazine's associate editor. Following Jessica's interview, Dustin, Annie and I all agreed we had found our missing team member. Annie described Jessica best when she said, "she has a quiet grit about her." The more I work with Jessica, the more I know this to be true. I'm confident her fresh outlook, sharp communication skills, and willingness to dive in deep and work hard will make this publication better than it's ever been. And if we're lucky, we just might make a hunter out of her, too (she already fishes).

On behalf of our agency and this publication, I thank you for your continued support.

Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine has been around for 76 years. If Dustin, Annie, Jessica and myself have any say in it – it will be around for 76 more. 



Left to right: Dustin Teasley, Annie Campbell-Fischer, Nadia Reimer, and Jessica Ward.



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