

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2003

# CONSERVATIONIST

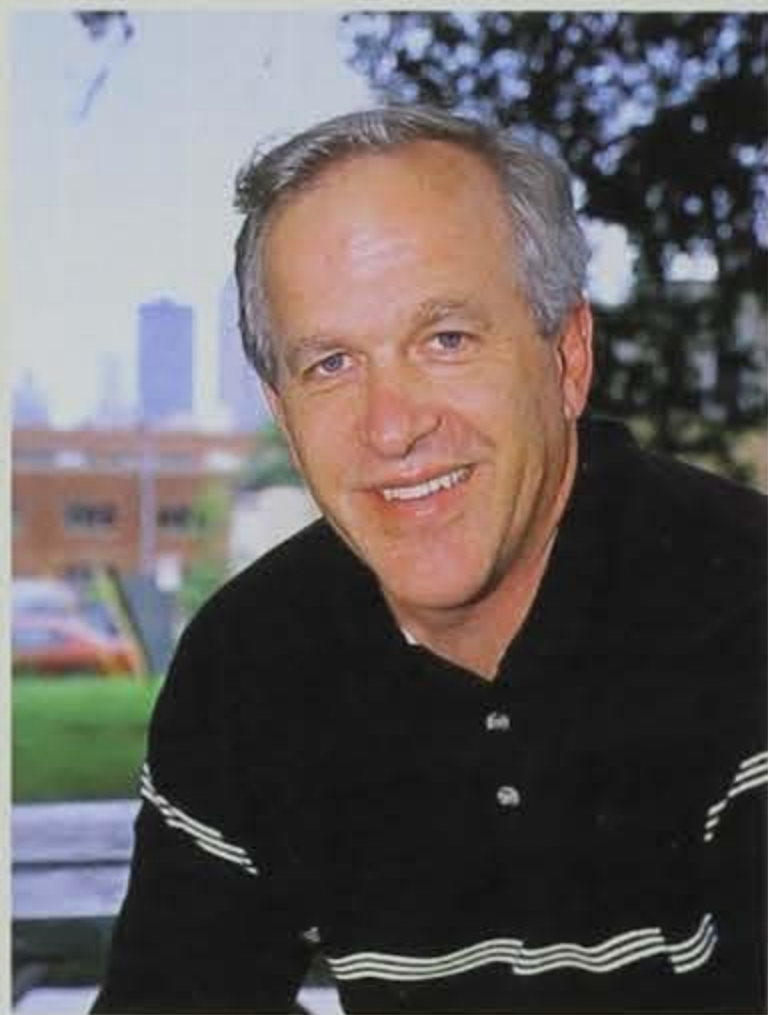
IOWA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES





# FROM THE DIRECTOR



Bob Castelline

## Water Quality Summit: Building a Better Future for Iowa

Governor Vilsack has called for a summit to address water quality issues in Iowa. We are fortunate to have this focused attention on a natural resource concern so critical to our future.

But this process is about so much more than scientific measurements and modeling of various scenarios affecting water quality. It is about a discussion of the very future of the state of Iowa environmentally, economically and socially. It's about who we are and who we want to be.

Already there is discussion within economic development circles about the direction Iowa is heading. While agriculture will always be a critically important ingredient in the state's economic pie, it will likely continue to become a smaller slice — at least in terms of the number of people

directly engaged in production agriculture. The population has already become more urban and many rural areas continue to suffer economically.

Yet there are some interesting trends beginning to evolve. A recent report on land prices indicates that values on farmland in southern Iowa have increased by as much as 20 percent, but not because of agriculture. The boost is a result of people willing to invest significant money for recreational pursuits.

I recently attended a conference where the concept of a "new economy" was discussed. The premise of this concept is that the number of highly educated, highly paid people who are not tied to a specific area for their careers is growing. In other words, these people can live anywhere to do their work.

Why can't this type of growth occur in Iowa? I believe we can attract these types of people. Iowa has what I call "front porch appeal." It's a place where children receive a first-class education in a clean, safe environment and parents can actually spend more time with their children rather than stuck in traffic. The opportunity to expand outdoor recreational opportunities continues to grow and the solution to water quality challenges go hand-in-hand with meeting their demand.

By now, many of you are probably wondering what all of this has to do with water. The upcoming Water Summit is about

improving water quality, but also about how we can build a roadmap to a better future for our state by recognizing the importance of protecting and improving our natural resources.

In his Condition of the State address last winter, Gov. Tom Vilsack laid out an ambitious plan of eliminating all impaired waters in the state by 2010. The governor has taken a wise step toward improving the future of Iowa by recognizing the importance of having a clean environment. The task of attracting and retaining talented workers in Iowa becomes that much more difficult when there is a perception that our water quality is poor.

The Governor's Water Summit will begin a long overdue dialogue on what can be done to improve water quality in Iowa. There will be some that try to portray this effort as the environment versus agriculture or the environment against economic development. I can assure you it is not.

This is really the beginning of a process of how all of us contribute to water quality problems and how all of us can be part of the solution. It's also about how we can all benefit by improving water quality for ourselves and for future generations.

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*Director's Message*

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FRONT COVER: WHITETAIL DEER AT  
SUNSET BY ROGER A. HILL

BACK COVER: LEDGES STATE PARK,  
BOONE COUNTY BY TY SMEDES



Roger A. Hill

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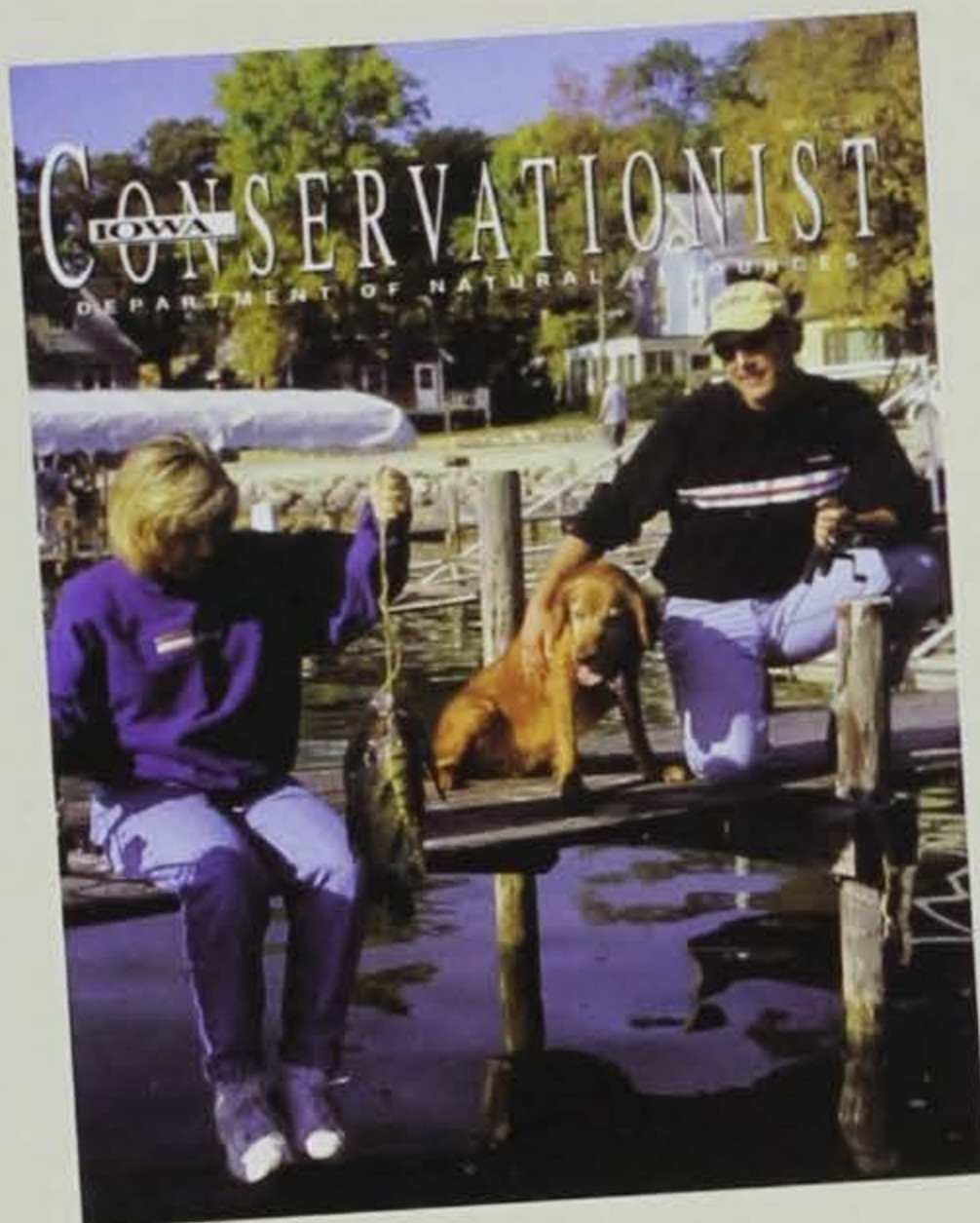
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DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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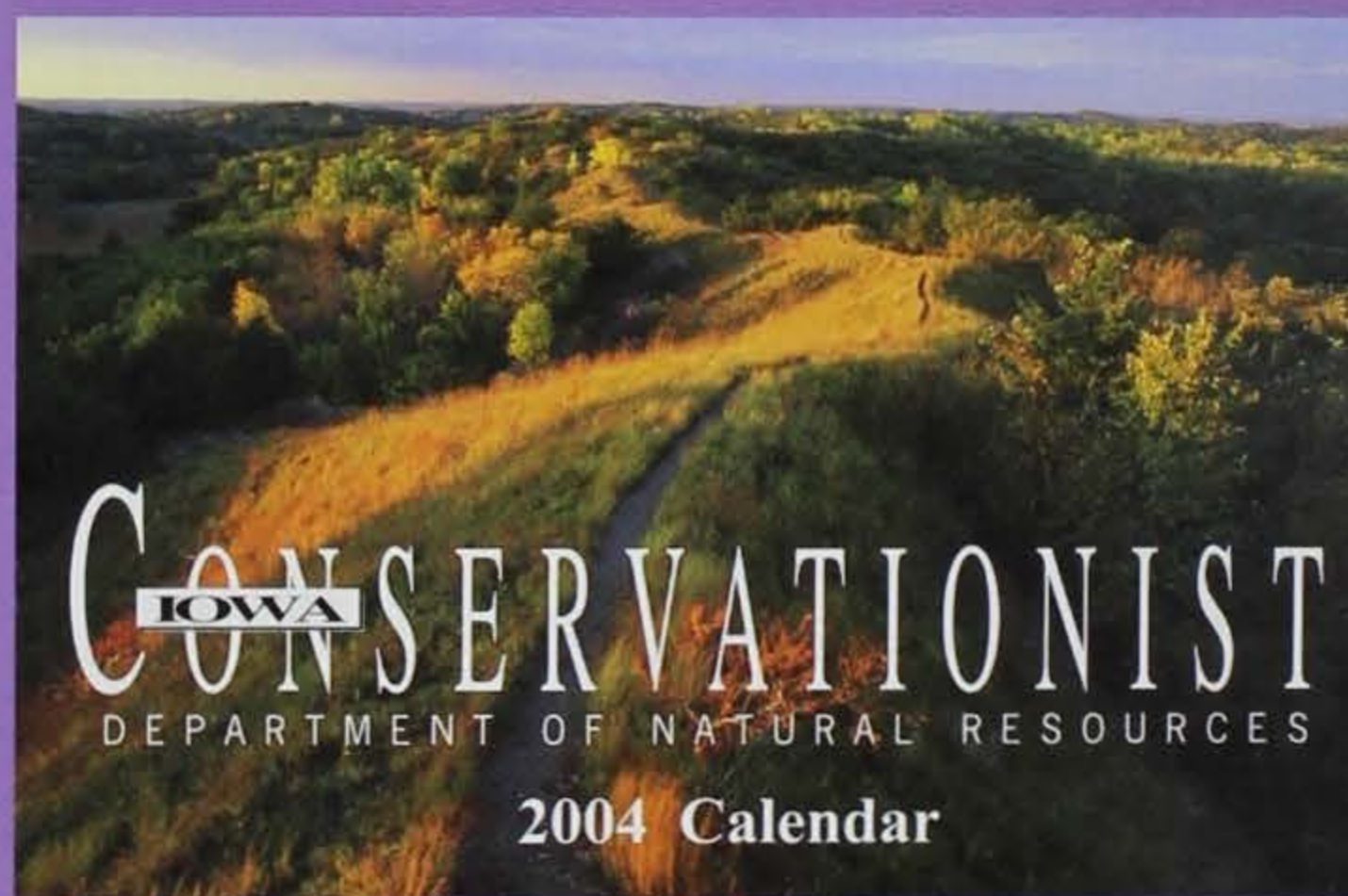
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Just in time for the holidays, our 2004 calendar (January/February issue) features photos from four notable Iowa outdoor photographers. New subscriptions ordered before Dec. 10 will begin with this calendar issue. Calendars may be purchased separately for \$3 each. Order yours today . . . **Iowa Conservationist**, 502 E. 9th St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034.



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## Director's Message

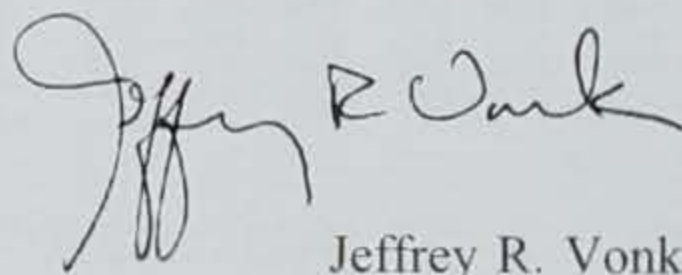
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While we're on the topic of economic development and the environment, I would be completely remiss if I failed to highlight the Iowa Pollution Prevention Intern Program coordinated by the DNR.

This program, which matches college students with Iowa companies to help reduce pollution in industrial settings, has recently received two national honors for leadership and innovation in protecting the environment. Through the work of the interns in this program, companies have saved more than \$5.4 million with an average of \$98,000 per

participating company. The program has also conserved 354 million gallons of water, decreased energy use by 11 million kWh, reduced solid waste by 16,600 tons, decreased hazardous waste by 42,380 gallons and reduced air emissions by 192 tons.

And, perhaps most important of all, the program has helped retain some of the brilliant young minds who came up with these solutions, here in Iowa.



Jeffrey R. Vonk

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September/October 2003  
Volume 62, Number 5

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Kevin Baskins, Acting Bureau Chief  
Julie Sparks, Editor  
Alan Foster, Managing Editor  
Lowell Washburn, Writer/Photographer  
Clay Smith, Photographer  
Kati Jurgens, Publications Intern  
Circulation, 515/281-3359 or 281-3887

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*Iowa Conservationist* (ISSN 0021-0471) is published bimonthly by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034. Periodicals postage paid in Des Moines, Iowa and additional mailing offices. **Subscription rates: \$12 for one year, \$18 for two years and \$24 for three years. Prices subject to change without notice.** Include mailing label for renewals and address changes. **POSTMASTER:** Send changes to the *Iowa Conservationist*, Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. Ninth Ave., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034.

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# The Table Is Set

Is Iowa on the verge of having its best all-around hunting season in recent years? The DNR's top wildlife biologists seem to think so.

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By Terry W. Little ♦ Willie Suchy ♦ Todd Bogenschutz ♦  
Guy Zenner ♦ Ron Andrews ♦ Todd Gosselink ♦ Photos by Roger A. Hill

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## 2003 HUNTING FORECAST

By Terry Little  
Wildlife Research Supervisor

Let's cut to the chase — this year has the makings of being one of Iowa's best hunting seasons in recent memory.

Pheasant numbers are up everywhere, and quail numbers have improved in southern Iowa. Duck and goose numbers look good — better than early expectations. Deer numbers are at an all-time high — too high in some places or for some people — and wild turkey and furbearer populations remain strong statewide. As we all know, this in itself does not guarantee all hunters will have a great season, just that the most critical factor is in place — abundant wildlife populations.

This year will present some unique hunting opportunities and challenges for Iowa nimrods, particularly for deer hunters. In spite of record harvests the past several years, deer numbers continue to increase and extra cooperation is needed from hunters if the trend is to be reversed. But rather than me belaboring these points, let's let the DNR's wildlife population experts tell the story.

## DEER HUNTING

By Willie Suchy  
Deer Biologist

The 2003 deer season is a historic one for Iowa's deer management program. This season marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of modern deer hunting in

Iowa. In that time, deer hunting and deer management have undergone numerous changes. One thing, however, has remained constant — the number of deer that are acceptable to Iowans is a source of great disagreement. For some people, one deer is too many. For others, there are never enough. Finding and maintaining an acceptable balance has been, and always will be, the primary challenge to Iowa's deer management program.

In some areas of the state, deer numbers are at an all-time high. At issue is the number of does in the population, not so much the number of deer in general. Reducing the herd requires, first and foremost, decreasing the number of female deer in the herd. Thus, the DNR has set a goal of harvesting 25 percent more does than last year, and deer hunting regulations have been eased to do just that. As always, hunters will play the lead role in determining how successful this initiative will be. (To learn how antlerless license quotas are set, see Suchy's companion article, *Why More Does?* on pages 16-19).

For starters, the number of antlerless licenses available has doubled, and more hunters are eligible for them. Every hunter will have the option of purchasing up to six antlerless-only licenses in addition to two statewide any-deer licenses (one firearm and one bow). Landowners and tenants can obtain three addi-

tional antlerless-only licenses for their farm.

License buying restrictions have also been eased this year. For the first time, hunters who purchase an any-deer license for the early muzzleloader or first shotgun seasons may also obtain one antlerless-only license for that season. The special antlerless-only January late season has been extended to all counties, meaning every hunter has the option of hunting again in January. Although it is unlikely every hunter will take full advantage of the antlerless licenses available to them, it



is critical to the management of Iowa's deer herd that enough hunters use these licenses to reduce the number of female deer.

If hunters want the deer hunting tradition to remain intact, they need to make a conscious decision to manage their harvest. That means obtaining at least one antlerless license, and making every effort to fill it. It means passing on the small, yearling bucks, and filling





their any-deer tag with an older, more mature buck, or maybe another doe if they can use the meat.

Obtaining an antlerless-only tag and an any-deer tag gives the hunter the option of taking a tender doe for the dinner table, and holding out for a mature buck for the wall. The best part is, following these recommendations will help ensure quality hunting on your land for the future. Taking only does or a nice buck reduces the deer herd; harvesting the older, mature bucks makes room for the younger bucks to take their place in following years.

An exception to this might be warranted for young or first-time hunters. Giving them the option of taking any deer creates experience and builds confidence in their hunting skills. You might be surprised, however, by how many of these young hunters will adopt the same rules as everyone else.

The bonus January season is another opportunity to take more does. Landowners are offered another free antlerless tag for this season. This is a

prime time for landowners who feel they have too many deer to organize another hunting group. Party hunting is legal during this season, just as it is in the shotgun seasons, and all legal weapons may be used.

It is important to remember, although antlerless licenses are available in every county, not all areas in

every county need extra hunting pressure. Public hunting areas do not have excessively high deer populations and thus, antlerless licenses should be used on private land where landowner are having problems with deer.

Deer hunting has evolved greatly over the last five decades. If hunters from Iowa's first season in 1953 could

SPECIES	SEASON	SHOOTING HOURS	BAG LIMITS	
			DAILY	POSSESSION
Youth Rooster Pheasant (age 15 or younger)*+	Oct. 18-19	8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	1	2 (after first day)
Rooster Pheasant	Oct. 25 - Jan. 10, 2004		3	12
Bobwhite Quail	Oct. 25 - Jan. 31, 2004		8	16
Gray Partridge	Oct. 11 - Jan. 31, 2004		8	16
Turkey (Gun)*	Oct. 13 - Dec. 5	One-half Hour Before Sunrise to Sunset	One Turkey Per License	One Turkey Per License
Turkey (Bow Only)*	Oct. 1 - Dec. 5 and Dec. 22 - Jan. 10, 2004	One-half Hour Before Sunrise to One-half Hour After Sunset		
Deer (Bow)	Oct. 1 - Dec. 5 and Dec. 22 - Jan. 10, 2004			
Deer (Muzzleloader)	Oct. 11 - Oct. 19* (early) or Dec. 22 - Jan. 10, 2004 (late)			
Deer -- Youth (age 12-15) and Severely Disabled	Sept. 20 - Oct. 5			
Deer (Shotgun)	Dec. 6-10 (first) or Dec. 13-21 (second)	Sunrise to Sunset	3	6
Deer Special Late Season	Jan. 11-19, 2004		10	20
Ruffed Grouse	Oct. 4 - Jan. 31, 2004		2	4
Rabbit (Cottontail)	Sept. 1 - Feb. 28, 2004	None	6	12
Rabbit (Jack)	Oct. 25 - Dec. 1		None	None
Squirrel (Fox and Gray)	Sept. 1 - Jan. 31, 2004	None	None	None
Groundhog	June. 15 - Oct. 31			
Crow	Oct. 15 - Nov. 30 and Jan. 14 - March 31, 2004			
Pigeon**	Oct. 1 - March 31, 2004	None	None	None
Coyote	Continuous Open Season			
Raccoon and Opossum	Nov. 1 - Jan. 31, 2004	None	None	None
Fox (Red and Gray)	Nov. 1 - Jan. 31, 2004			

\* Residents Only.

\*\* Within 100 yards of buildings and bridges, pigeons may be taken year round.

+ See regulations for complete requirements





hunt today, they would no doubt be quite surprised at the number of deer and deer hunters in the field. Still, the tradition of deer hunting in Iowa lives on, much like it has for decades. Hunters can help keep that tradition alive by making a conscious decision to take an extra doe. Doing so will keep deer populations in check. Letting the smaller yearling bucks live another year will do nothing but improve Iowa's deer herd for future hunting enjoyment.

## UPLAND GAME HUNTING

By Todd Bogenschutz  
Upland Game Biologist

Hunters who hung up their shotguns the past few years on the heels of declining upland game bird populations may want to reconsider. This year is shaping up to be an excellent season for pheasant, partridge, quail and rabbit hunting in Iowa.

Improved habitat conditions and cooperation from Mother Nature led to good survival and reproduction of most upland game the last two years. Increased habitat through USDA conservation programs (Continuous

CRP and Farmable Wetlands programs), and two consecutive years of mild winters and favorable spring weather during nesting periods has led to a miraculous and speedy recovery, especially for ring-necked pheasants.

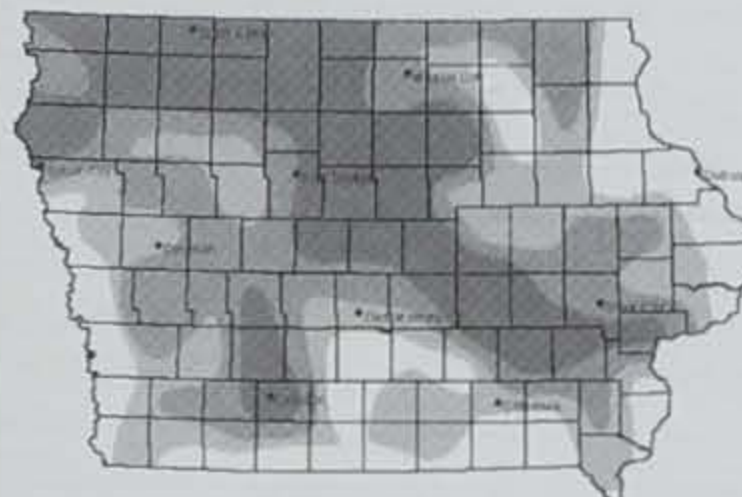
The winter of 2000-01 was devastating to Iowa's upland game bird populations. The number of birds counted on the DNR's annual August Roadside Survey the following summer were the lowest ever recorded. Statewide, pheasants counts that year averaged a dismal 14 birds per 30-mile roadside route (slightly more than 200 routes are run each year.) Compare that to the long-term average of 46 pheasants per route and . . . well . . . you get the picture.

But with just one favorable winter and nesting season behind them, the pheasant population started to rebound last year — to an average of 32 birds per route. Counts from this year's survey indicate Iowa will average about 46 birds per route statewide — a better than 200 percent increase in pheasant numbers and right at the long-term average. The numbers represent the highest pheasant count the DNR has recorded in a decade.

In spite of the good overall statewide outlook, things are not

## Upland Game Distribution Maps

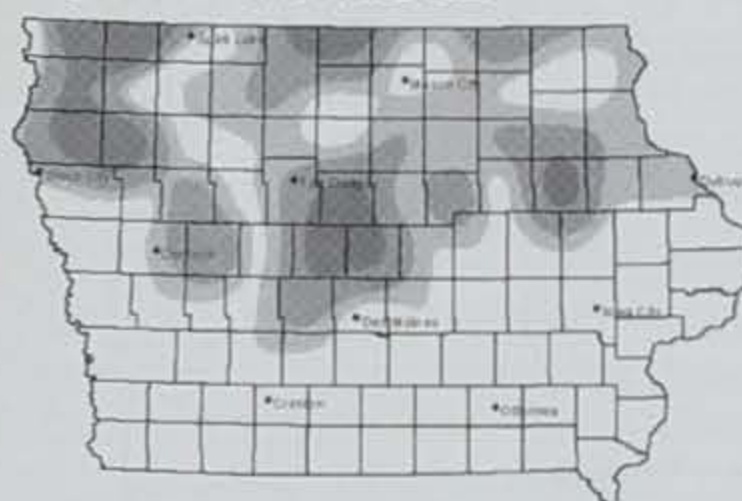
### PHEASANT



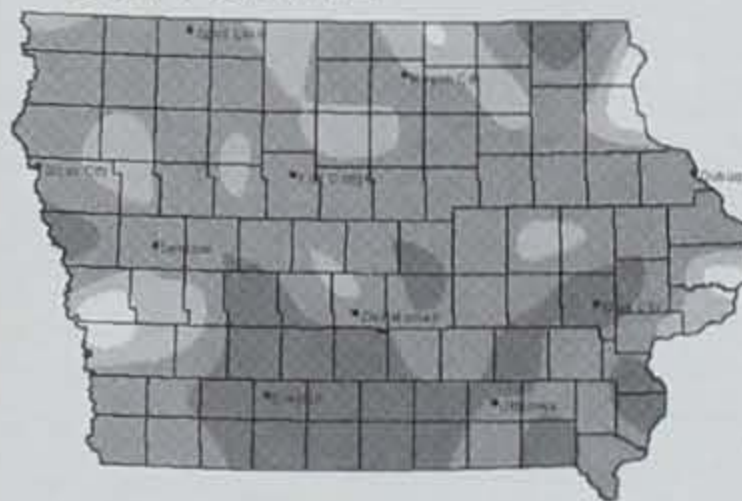
### QUAIL



### GRAY PARTRIDGE



### COTTONTAIL



- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| ■ Excellent | Counts represent generalized game abundance. There can be areas of low game abundance in regions with "high" counts and vice versa. |
| ■ Good      |   |
| ■ Fair      |   |
| □ Poor      |   |



equally rosy everywhere. As is with selling or buying real estate, location makes a big difference. The highest numbers of pheasants were reported from the northwest, north-central and central regions (an average of 60 to 80 pheasants per route, well above the long-term average.) Populations in west-central and east-central Iowa had counts about half as high as the best areas, and the southern third of the state had counts about a third as high.

The bright side is populations increased everywhere. It's amazing how fast Mother Nature can replenish wildlife populations if conditions are right. The down side is southern Iowa's brood stock was so low following the winter of 2000-01 it will take another year or more of good weather to bring numbers up to desirable levels.

The last year pheasant counts were this high in Iowa was in 1994. That year hunters harvested more than 1.4 million roosters. After very poor seasons the past two years (a record low take of 470,000 roosters in 2001 and 730,000 last year), most Iowa nimrods would be satisfied with a season that reached 1 million birds. Anything above that will be pure gravy.

Bobwhite quail and cottontail rabbits have also made impressive

one bird per route. Following the winter of 2000, however, that number dropped to only one quail for every fourth route. This year slightly less than one quail per route was reported — a 135 percent increase over last year and at the average for the last decade. Better quail numbers are reported from southwest and south-central Iowa, but hunters need to be aware that populations still remain well below the numbers seen in the 1960s and 1970s.



## Help Preserve Iowa's Habitat Join PHEASANTS FOREVER

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Photo by Roger Hill

recoveries from the all-time lows recorded in 2001. This year rabbit numbers have doubled to nine per survey route compared to four in 2001. The survey routes indicate numbers are up statewide, however the highest counts are in the southern third of Iowa.

Quail are restricted, mostly, to the southern third of Iowa, so their statewide numbers are much lower on the survey. Over the last 10 years, quail counts have averaged slightly less than

## WATERFOWL HUNTING

By Guy Zenner  
Waterfowl Biologist

In sharp contrast to 2002, ducks returning to the Prairie Pothole Region of North America found fair to excellent wetland habitat conditions across most of the region, even in parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan



where drought has plagued the area most of the past decade. Ducks took advantage of these conditions and settled on the prairies in excellent numbers.

The number of ducks surveyed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service increased 16 percent from 2002 and rebounded to the level they were at in 2001. Mallard numbers are at 7.9 million, compared to 7.5 million last year. The number of blue-winged

mallards, bluewings, greenwings and gadwalls bodes well for Iowa waterfowlers, since they comprise the majority of the ducks harvested in Iowa. The improved wetland habitat conditions in Canada remained that way throughout most of the summer, suggesting better-than-average numbers of birds will be produced in that region.

In Iowa, the rains that arrived the first week of May were too late to

consequently, will be spotty this year.

Overall, the number of Canada geese in the state this spring increased from 2002, but because production was poor in some areas, the fall flight from Iowa will be similar to 2002. Canada goose numbers still remain below historic levels in northwest Iowa, but the improvements in goose populations in other parts of the state should give many Iowans a fair opportunity to



Ty Simedes

	NORTH ZONE	SOUTH ZONE
Ducks, Mergansers and Coots (excluding pintails and canvasbacks)	Sept. 20-24 Oct. 11 - Dec. 4	Sept. 20-22 Oct. 18 - Dec. 13
Pintails	Sept. 20-24 Oct. 11 - Nov. 4	Sept. 20-22 Oct. 18 - Nov. 13
Canvasbacks	Oct. 18 - Nov. 16	Oct. 25 - Nov. 23
Canada geese and brant	Sept. 27 - Dec. 5	Sept. 27 - Oct. 19 Nov. 8 - Dec. 24
<b>SPECIAL SEPTEMBER CANADA GOOSE SEASON</b>		
Canada geese	Sept. 1-15 (Only in designated zones around Des Moines and Cedar Rapids/Iowa City. For zone maps, go to <a href="http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/">www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/</a> )	
<b>STATEWIDE</b>		
White-fronted geese	Sept. 27 - Dec. 21	
Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days	Oct. 4-5	
Light Geese (white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese)	Sept. 27, 2003 - Jan. 11, 2004	
Light Geese Spring Conservation Order (white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese)	Jan. 12 - April 15, 2004 (Additional Regulations May Apply)	
Woodcock	Oct. 4 - Nov. 17	
Snipe	Sept. 6 - Nov. 30	
Rail (Sora and Virginia)	Sept. 6 - Nov. 14	

teal pairs increased 31 percent from 2002. Gadwall, wigeon, green-winged teal, pintail and shoveler numbers also improved from 2002, although only pintails and shovelers were statistically higher than last year. Fewer ducks were surveyed in the lake states of Minnesota and Wisconsin, but many of these birds likely moved out onto the prairies of Canada to take advantage of the improved wetland habitats.

The improved numbers of

attract outstanding numbers of breeding ducks. Those that did stay, however, apparently had good success, as witnessed by the number of broods observed during July on many northern Iowa wetlands.

The early May downpours were not, however, particularly good for Canada goose production in Iowa. Many geese nesting on floodplain wetlands along Iowa's rivers lost their clutches just before hatching. Canada goose production in Iowa,

successfully hunt Canada geese relatively close to home.

The number of migrant Canada geese in northern Manitoba and the Arctic appear to be similar to last year, but the warm spring weather observed in those regions should improve the outlook for production. Fall flights of migrant geese should be similar or slightly better than last year. Just to our north, Minnesota and Manitoba are producing bumper crops of giant Canada geese, many of



which will eventually filter into Iowa once winter settles into the upper Midwest.

With the prospect of waterfowl populations slightly above last year's, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is allowing the same liberal 60-day duck season for states in the Mississippi Flyway as we have enjoyed the past several years. Seasons and daily bag and possession limits are also similar to last year, with a couple of exceptions:

◆ Hunters will be allowed to take one canvasback duck and one pintail a day during separate 30-day seasons that fall within the 60-day framework. The 30-day seasons for canvasbacks and pintails do not coincide, so hunters will have to carefully watch the duck season schedules beginning with the start of the second duck season in both the north and south zones.

◆ The seasons for dark geese (Canada geese, brant and white-fronted geese), which have coincided for many years, have been modified. For 2003, there will be separate seasons for Canada geese and brant, and for white-fronted geese. This will

allow hunters in the south zone to continue taking white fronts during the closed portion of the regular Canada goose season. Since white fronts generally migrate only through extreme western Iowa, relatively few hunters will be affected.

◆ A special early Canada goose season was held in two zones — one around Des Moines and one around Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. The early season was designed to reduce flocks of locally produced giant Canada geese that have been causing safety hazards around airports and sanitary problems at urban lakes, golf courses and business and housing complexes where lagoons have been created for esthetic purposes.

Besides good duck and goose numbers, two other ingredients have to be blended in to make a successful hunting season. Habitat conditions during the migration period are critical. Without adequate habitat, waterfowl will skip over Iowa on their way to better accommodations further south.

The past two years have been abnormally dry, and many wetlands that did not have permanent water

sources dried up. That allowed seed to settle in mucky wetland soils, sprout and grow — an essential part of the wet-dry cycle on the prairies that produces the diverse marshes that attract migrating ducks. Spring and early summer rains restored water levels in most of Iowa's wetlands, and thus, many were in ideal condition.

Unfortunately, late summer has been very dry nearly everywhere, and some of those same wetlands are nearly dry again. Fortunately, there is plenty of time for fall rains to rectify the situation, but waterfowlers would be well-advised to scout conditions before choosing their hunting sites.

The other factor, of course, is weather patterns during the hunting season. Warm, dry weather late into the fall — in most cases — kept ducks north of Iowa until late into the seasons the last two years. When the migration finally peaked, the ducks either came through quickly or moved west of Iowa, rather than across the state in their normal migration routes. We can only hope that things return to normal this year.

All photos pages 12-13 Ty Smedes





## FURBEARER TRAPPING AND HUNTING

By Ron Andrews  
Furbearer Biologist

Little has changed in the past 15 years to alter the outlook for trappers and furbearer hunters. Low interest in both activities, spurred by continued low fur prices, has allowed populations of all furbearers to thrive.

Muskrat numbers have fluctuated over the years depending on wetland conditions. As wetland revegetation occurs, muskrats should quickly rebound to their former numbers. Raccoons, fox, coyote, beaver and other furbearers continue to be abundant and readily available to trappers and hunters alike.

The thing that continues to amaze is the burgeoning populations of river otters and bobcats, and the appearance in Iowa of mountain lions, also known as cougars or puma.

The restoration of the river otter is complete. They currently occupy nearly all river and stream systems in

Iowa, and their numbers should continue to increase. Although they are still protected, their recovery has prompted removal from the state's threatened species list. Research studies are underway to determine the feasibility of holding a limited trapping season in the near future.

Bobcats continue to increase in numbers on their own without any help from the DNR. Nearly two-thirds of Iowa's counties have enough sightings to consider them established, and sightings of bobcats in southwest Iowa are no longer occasion for much fanfare. They may soon be removed from the threatened species list. When that happens, they will have the same protection as any other furbearer that is not hunted or trapped.

A research study was initiated by DNR biologists and Iowa State University staff this summer to learn more about bobcat movements, survival, reproduction and other factors of their biology that will be crucial to the future management of this valuable and attractive animal.

Mountain lions present the DNR with quite a challenge in determining an appropriate response to their recent

appearance here. In spite of the growing public opinion to the contrary, the DNR has never released mountain lions in Iowa. The few that have been documented are either naturally occurring animals moving in from the southwest United States, or captive animals that have either escaped or been intentionally released from private ownership. And despite literally hundreds of lion "sightings," only one wild mountain lion has been confirmed in Iowa – a male lion killed by a car near Harlan in Shelby County last year. DNR personnel sighted one other mountain lion near Mt. Ayr in Ringgold County. Four mountain lion tracks (large catlike tracks) have been documented in scattered places in Iowa.

All the other reports the DNR has investigated have been inconclusive or proven to be other animals. Coyotes, dogs, domestic cats, a badger, and other smaller animals have been identified as the real culprits in these lion sightings. Several dead farm animals attributed to lion kills have, after examination, been reassigned to coyotes, dogs and natural causes. A quick glimpse of



### 2003-2004 TRAPPING SEASON

SPECIES	OPENING	CLOSING
Mink, Muskrat*, Raccoon, Weasel, Striped Skunk, Badger, Opossum, Fox (Red and Gray), Coyote	Nov. 1, 2003	Jan. 31, 2004
Beaver	Nov. 1, 2003	April 15, 2004
Civet Cat (Spotted Skunk), Bobcat and Otter	Continuous Closed Season	
Groundhog	June 15, 2003	Oct. 31, 2003

ALL FURBEARER SEASONS OPEN AT 8 A.M. ON THE OPENING DATE. THERE ARE NO DAILY BAG OR POSSESSION LIMITS  
\*SELECTED AREAS MAY BE ESTABLISHED IN FEBRUARY FOR MUSKRAT TRAPPING ONLY.



an animal in the headlights, a fleeting glance at an animal disappearing into cover at dusk and dawn, unfamiliarity with how large a mountain lion really is, and frankly, overheated imaginations, seem to be the causes for most reports.

It's amazing that with 170,000 deer hunters in the field in November and December and 60,000 turkey hunters out in April and

## FALL TURKEY HUNTING

By Todd Gosselink  
Wild Turkey Biologist

Like furbearers, nothing much has changed in the past several years for wild turkeys or turkey hunters. Wild turkeys now occupy nearly all available habitat in Iowa, numbers



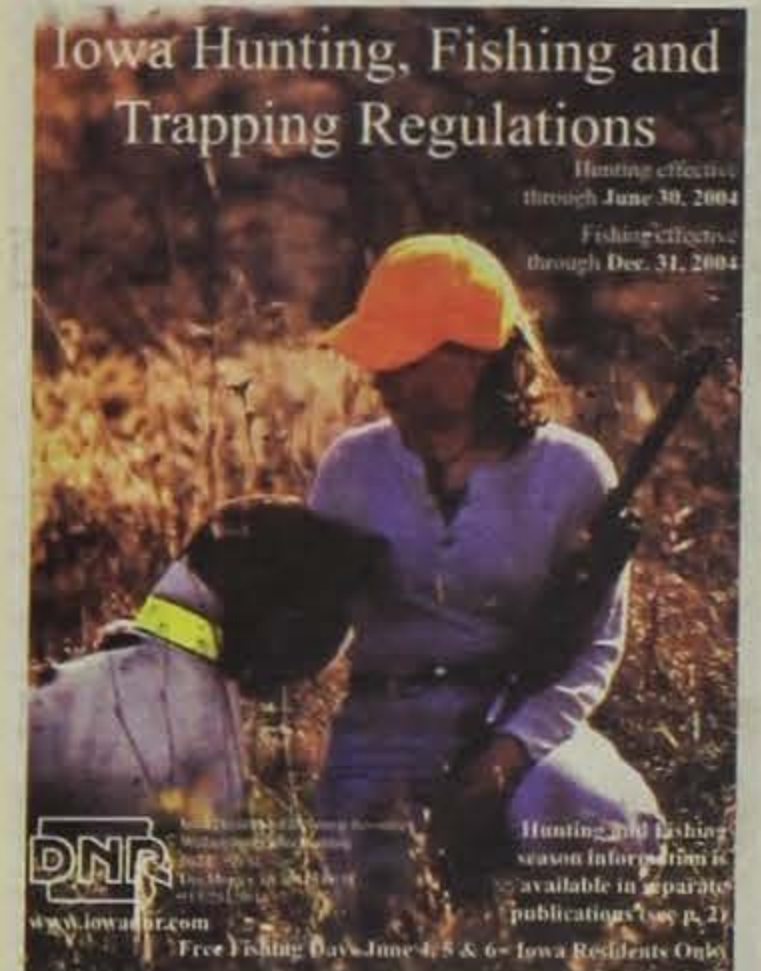
May, and with the large number of mountain lion "sightings," no one has shot a lion, taken a clear picture of one or had an unquestioned sighting with witnesses to verify their story. Nevertheless, the DNR will continue investigating the sightings as they are reported. Unless legislative action dictates otherwise, mountain lions are not currently protected in Iowa.

remain good everywhere and hunting opportunity in the fall has exceeded the demand in most of the state. Early returns from the summer brood survey look promising, indicating that turkey flocks will be abundant again this fall, meaning there will be plenty of birds next spring too.

With good turkey numbers across the state, there have been some complaints that the turkey population is too high and the birds are destroying crops. These complaints have

been relatively few compared to those regarding other wildlife damage and have frequently turned out to be unjustified. (See Gosselink's accompanying article, *A Bum Rap* on pages 20-23). With plenty of turkeys available and some concern about having too many, license quotas were increased and more hunters will be in the field this year than last.

The stage is set for a good year for hunters. Only time, weather and our own hunting abilities will determine how the year works out for each of us.



A summary of season dates, bag limits and other hunting information can be found on the DNR's web site at [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com) or in the following booklets available where ever licenses are sold:

*2003 Deer and Fall Turkey Regulations*

*2003 Upland Game, Trapping and Waterfowl Regulations*

*2003 Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Regulations*



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# Why More Does

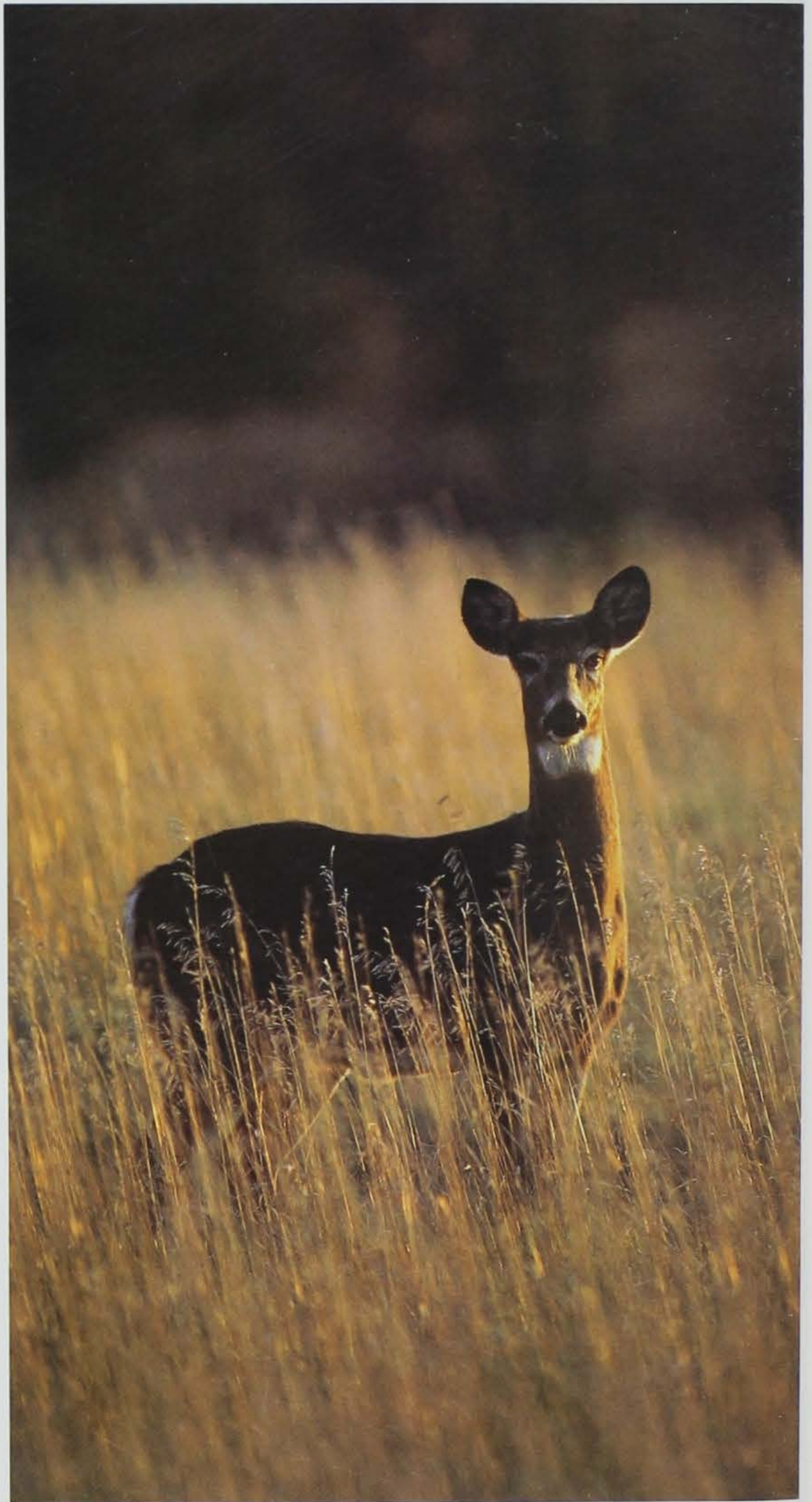
By Willie Suchy

Photo by Roger A. Hill

One of the questions I get asked when hunters see the regulations for this fall is: "How did you come up with the antlerless quota?" My answer varies somewhat depending upon how "in-depth" the questioner wants to get. A complete answer requires talking about what we know (or think we know) about deer biology, deer numbers and hunter harvest. The short answer is: "I'd like to see the number of does in the harvest increase by 25 percent. Killing 25 percent more does should get deer numbers down to the department's goal." The following is my attempt to answer this question more completely.

## Deer Biology

Based on the results of several research projects conducted in different parts of Iowa over the past 30 years we can conclude three things about Iowa's deer. First is deer have high survival rates. Without hunting, roughly 90 percent of the deer alive today would be alive a year from today. There are no real predators (other than humans) that



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live in Iowa today. The few deer that die (unless they are killed during a hunt) usually die due to collisions with motorized vehicles. There are few diseases that limit deer numbers. Periodic losses to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) or bluetongue have been recorded but these diseases do not appear to limit deer numbers. A few fawns are killed by farm equipment, such as hay mowers, or by dogs or coyotes. But that is still not enough to limit deer numbers.

Secondly, deer have high reproductive rates. In fact, deer in Iowa are about as productive as possible for the species. From 60 to 80 percent of the fawns will have fawns themselves their first year. After their first year, most will have twins and about 10 percent of older, mature does have triplets. Again, this makes sense, since Iowa has some of the most productive land on the planet. There is abundant food readily available to deer almost year-round. New plant growth begins in March and lasts until October or November. In the fall, there are acorns, other mast, browse and waste grain from crops that last until new plant growth begins. It is a rare winter in Iowa where deep snow cover (12 inches or more) lasts long enough to stress deer. Droughts of sufficient severity are even more rare. And as long as there is ample food, the deer will continue to do well.

The last important piece of information we know about deer in Iowa is that they are fairly mobile. Although most deer move less than a mile or so away from the area where they were born, some young deer disperse several miles from their mother's core area in the spring. A few have moved surprisingly long distances of more than 100 miles. These deer are able to fill in any areas of good habitat when they are available.

## Deer Numbers

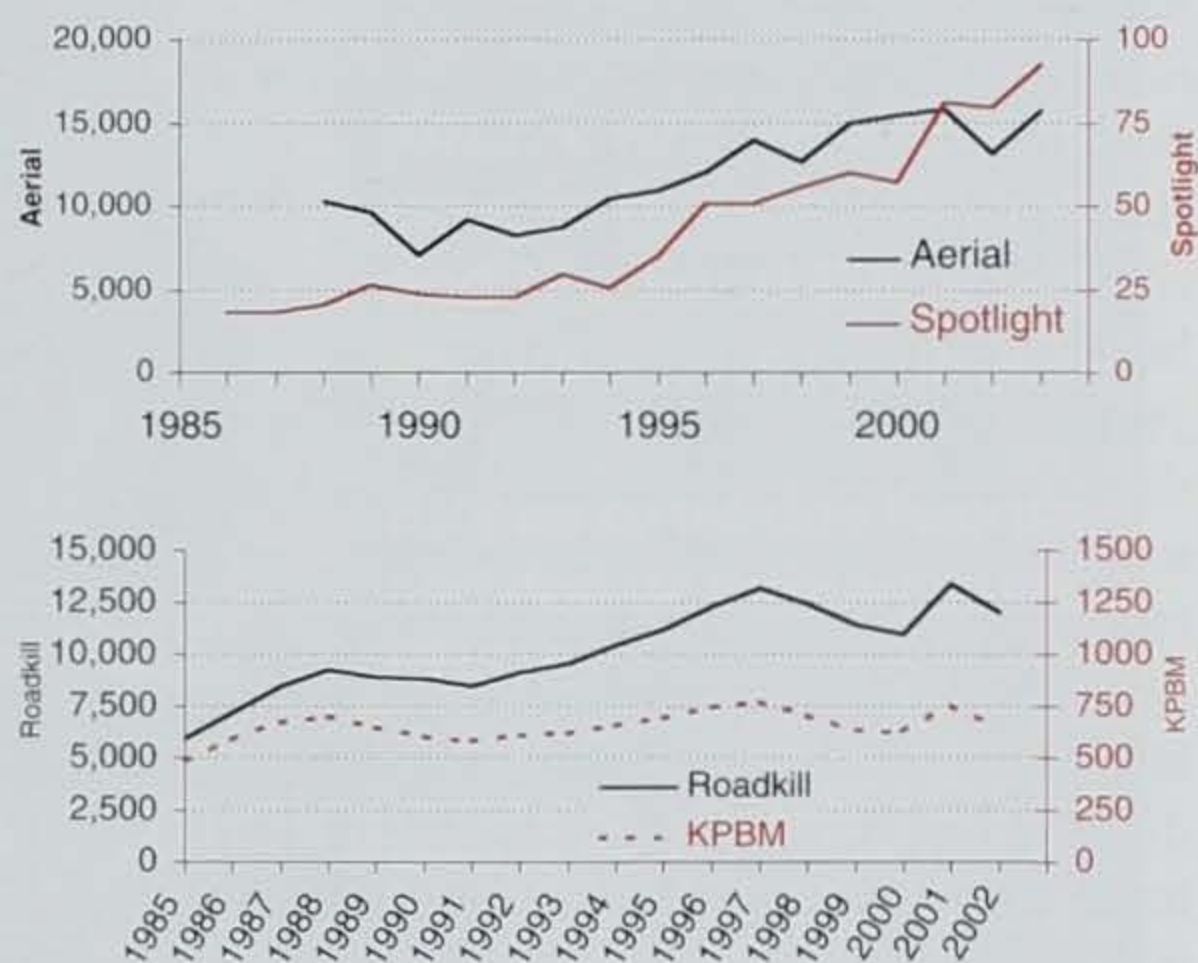
There is no way to accurately count all the deer in the wild. Instead, trends in deer numbers are monitored using aerial and spotlight surveys and by recording the number of deer hit on Iowa's roads (See figure at right.). Each source of information has its own strengths and weaknesses.

The aerial survey is conducted using fixed-wing aircraft in winter after the hunting season is over. Getting good results is dependent upon good sighting conditions. A snowfall of at least 4 inches is needed before observers can be confident that the brown spot they just observed 400 feet below them while traveling at 80 mph was a deer. Or was it a rock, stump, cedar bush or one of many other things that look like deer? Iowa winters are fairly mild and in some years snow cover does not last long enough to get a count, especially in the southern half of the state.

The spotlight survey is conducted prior to "green-up" in April. DNR staff drive prescribed routes at night and count deer using high-intensity spotlights. In some years early leaf-out reduces visibility and fewer deer are seen than expected.

Traffic volume, speed and other variables affect the number of deer killed on Iowa's highways. The number of miles driven in Iowa has increased by more than 40 percent over the last 10 years. Even if deer numbers were the same as they were 10 years ago, we would expect 40 percent more collisions with deer.

Using all three sources of information helps mitigate the problems associated with any one technique. The number of roadkills can even be "adjusted" to account for traffic volume if we look at the number of deer killed per billion miles of traffic.



Looking at the figure above we see that deer numbers appear to have increased during the past three to four years and all three surveys are higher than they were during the last time deer numbers peaked in the late 1980s.

## Harvest Data

Estimates of the number of deer killed during the hunting season are an important part of deer management. Post-season survey forms are mailed out to a random sample of hunters each year. Following last fall's seasons, nine separate postcard surveys were conducted — one each for the youth season, the early and late muzzleloader season, the archery season, the two shotgun seasons, the January antlerless season, one for landowners and one for nonresidents. A total of 50,825 license holders were surveyed and 32,179 usable responses were returned. This is a response rate of 63 percent which is



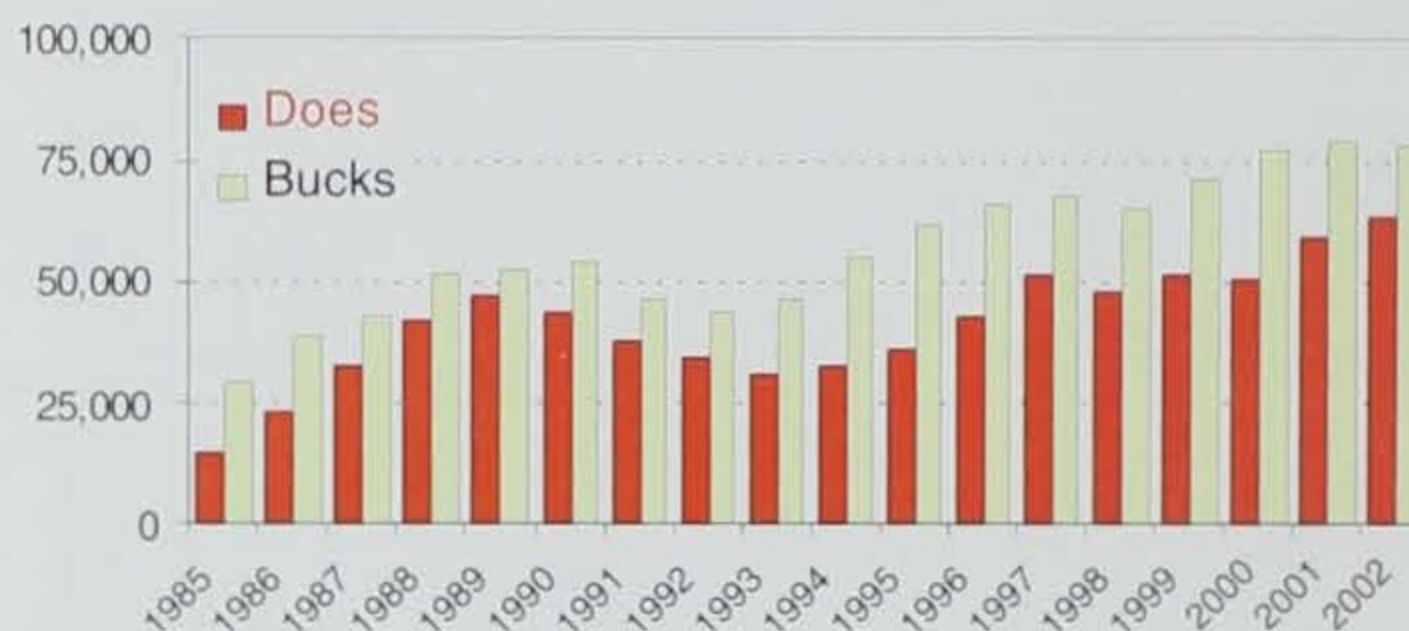
very good for this type of survey. The goal of the survey is to provide doe harvest estimates, with a margin of error of 5 percent for the shotgun season.

Good estimates of the doe harvest are needed since what happens to the does determines how many deer there will be in the population each year. The figure at right shows the estimated number of does and bucks (antlered and button bucks) that hunters reported each year since 1985. If you look at just the past three years, you see the number of bucks killed each year has stayed pretty much the same. The good news is the number of does killed has increased by 25 percent due to changing regulations that allow hunters more antlerless licenses. But is this increased doe kill enough?

### Population Models

A computer model is used to put the pieces of this deer management puzzle together. Input for the model includes the number of male and female deer in the population, age- and sex-specific survival rates, age-specific reproductive rates and the number of deer killed during the harvest. The model begins by calculating the number of fawns that would be produced given the initial number of deer at the start of simulation. Then the model applies the survival rates to determine how many deer would be alive just before the hunting season. Next the number of deer killed during the hunting season are removed and finally the model again applies the survival rates to determine how many deer will be alive at the end of one year. Since the simulation has run through one year, the deer still alive are all moved up one age

class and used as input for the next year. The process can be repeated for any number of years. The statewide simulations currently used begin in 1985 and run through 2003, a period of 18 years.



The output from the model is then compared to the three population surveys (roadkill, spotlight and aerial) to determine how well the model "fits" the observed trends. Fit is measured statistically and then more simulations are done to determine if a higher or lower starting number produces an output that has a better correlation with the surveys.

When the 2002 harvest estimates were placed into the computer model, the simulated numbers increased by about 4 percent this past year. The results correlate very well with the observed changes in the surveys. The simulation has the highest correlation with the spotlight survey. The simulated numbers are also highly correlated with the reported roadkill and the aerial surveys. However, when the reported roadkill is adjusted for traffic volume (kills per billion miles, kpbm) it has the lowest correlation of any. Most of the deviation appears to be in the past 3 or 4 years.

### Setting the Antlerless Quota

Once the best fitting simulation is found the model is used to determine

how many does need to be killed during the upcoming season or seasons to keep the population at the objective. The current goal for the deer program is to maintain a population that is capable of sustaining a harvest of 100-

120 thousand deer annually. The current simulations indicate that deer numbers are 30 to 35 percent above that goal. Obviously this

means that substantially more does need to be killed this fall to bring numbers down. Increasing the doe harvest 25 percent should reduce doe numbers by about 10 percent for next year, bringing the simulated numbers down to the goal in two to three years.

Only time will tell if the quotas achieve the desired results. But as more information is collected, the model will be updated and reevaluated. If pieces of the puzzle (survey or harvest data) no longer fit, then changes will need to be made to the harvest regulations based on this new input. By continuously updating the model and by improving the quality of the harvest and population data, we will get a better picture of the deer management puzzle.

Those of you who made it this far now have the long answer to the question of how the antlerless quotas were set. And those who have asked this question and received the short answer are probably smiling and thinking how lucky you were that day.

*Willie Suchy is the deer biologist for the department in Chariton.*



## Iowa Deer Hunters Asked: REDUCE DEER HERD, FEED NEEDY

The Iowa DNR is asking hunters to shoot more deer, does in particular, to reduce the deer population. With the hope that hunters will shoot more deer than they want for themselves, a program has been set up to get the extra venison to the needy.

Help Us Stop Hunger, or HUSH, was announced in September by the DNR, the Food Bank of Iowa and a number of other partners. DNR Director Jeffrey Vonk said that in this first year, HUSH will be piloted in a 55-county area of central and southeast Iowa. Most of the lockers that process deer in this area are participating, he said. Just look for a locker displaying the poster at right.

"Any deer hunter can take their legally harvested deer, any sex from any season, to one of the participating lockers and fill out a card. It costs the hunter nothing, and the locker gets paid \$50 to process the deer into pure ground venison. The Food Bank of Iowa will arrange for the venison to be picked up and delivered into the system to feed the needy," Vonk explained.

Several Iowa organizations and companies, most of them hunting-related, have donated cash to pay for the venison processing. Additionally, hunters will be given a chance to donate \$5 when they buy their deer permit.

More information about HUSH, a map of participating lockers and deer seasons are available on the DNR web site at [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com).

# Deer Hunters



The DNR needs your help to reduce the deer herd.

Your extra venison is needed by many Iowans and the Food Bank will assure it gets to them.

Buy an extra doe license and donate the carcass to HUSH.

This locker participates in HUSH.

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# A Bum Rap?

*Wild turkeys often get the blame for crop damage. But are they really the culprits?*

by Todd Gosselink and Bill Bunger

In the 1830s when the first settlers crossed the Mississippi River into what is now Iowa, they encountered wild turkeys virtually everywhere they travelled. At the time, oak and hickory forests covered roughly 7 million acres of the state, and the wild turkey thrived in the rich environment.

By the mid-1950s, however, forest cover had been reduced by nearly two-thirds — to around 2.6 million acres — and the turkey population responded. The drastic habitat loss, coupled with uncontrolled harvest, led to the elimination of the Eastern wild turkey from Iowa by the early 1900s.

That would change, however, beginning in the early 1960s when the Iowa DNR and various private conservation groups embarked on an aggressive turkey restoration program. Since that time, wild turkeys have been released at 259 sites across

Iowa, and they now inhabit nearly all remnant timber stands left in the state. In those four decades, the turkey population has grown from zero to an estimated 200,000 birds.

## The Public's View

Now that the turkey's survival in Iowa is assured, population management has become more dependent upon public opinion than scientific management programs. To understand what that "magic number" might be, the DNR surveyed farmers regarding crop damage from deer, turkeys and other wildlife. Based on a 2001 Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service survey, only 12 percent of the those contacted believed their crops had sustained damage from turkeys, and only 16 percent believed turkey populations in Iowa were too high.

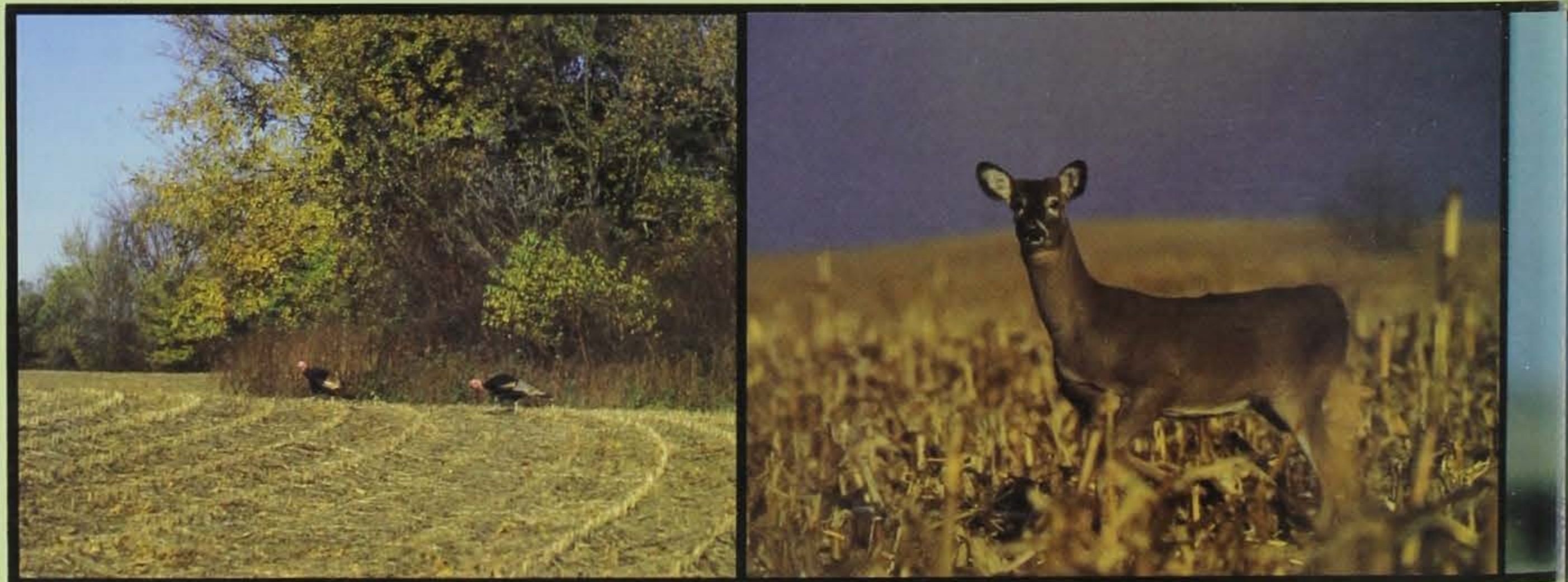
A more detailed mail survey

conducted in the early 1990s by Iowa State University (ISU) and the DNR shed even more light on the subject. The survey focused on turkeys and crop depredation in northeast Iowa which, due to the extensive forest cover there, has one of the highest turkey densities in the state.

In that study, 64 percent of the farmers surveyed believed they had some crop damage. However, more than half (52 percent) reported no economic losses, and only 5 percent believed they sustained damages exceeding \$500. In fact, the majority (56 percent) of all respondents believed turkeys provided some positive return, either through eating insects, hunting or wildlife viewing.

Similar surveys in surrounding states have shown similar results. In southwest Wisconsin, 51 percent of farmers surveyed felt turkeys did not

Photos by Roger A. Hill





cause major damage to crops, and only 3 percent believed they sustained damages exceeding \$500. A 1995 Ohio DNR survey of 1,206 farmers showed more than 75 percent of those who had turkeys on their land felt the birds caused no damage to crops, compared to 13 percent who viewed turkeys as a nuisance.

These surveys indicate there is a perception of crop depredation present, but the majority felt wild turkeys caused no threat to their crops. Still, the fact there are a few farmers who believe turkeys cause substantial crop damage warrants further investigation into what wildlife species may actually be causing the damage.

### Food For Thought

Knowing what turkeys prefer to eat is integral to understanding crop damage in relation to turkeys. Several midwestern states, including Iowa, have examined diets of wild turkeys in agricultural areas. A 1989 study in southwestern Wisconsin examined the contents of more than 100 crops (the pouch in the turkey's neck used to store food

before digestion) taken from birds shot after feeding in crop fields. What researchers found was, during the spring, turkey diets consisted primarily of waste grain (54 percent) and wild plants (27 percent). Waste grain was distinguishable because of its weathered and dirty appearance compared to recently planted seed corn.



Bill Bunger

The study also examined the diets of poults (young turkeys) and hens feeding in corn and soybean fields in late summer. The poults consumed primarily insects (77 percent of diet). Crops examined from poults feeding in oat fields consisted of 87 percent insects.

During the fall, the study examined more than 200 turkey crops and found similar results as in the spring. The three major foods found were corn and wild plant material (39 percent each) and insects (12 percent). More than 90 percent of the corn consumed was waste grain.

In another study, ISU and the DNR looked at wild turkey feeding habits in the spring and early summer by watching turkeys feed in fields. Turkeys were never observed scratching up planted seeds or seedlings or grazing on emerging plants.

The same study also investigated crop damage in the fall by wild turkeys. More than 7,000 ears of corn were examined within five days prior to harvest. Although 2.3 percent of the ears were damaged by wildlife, the

majority was attributed to raccoons knocking down the stalk and turkeys feeding on the fallen corn. The damage was primarily found only in the first five rows of the cornfield. This study concluded turkeys were attracted to crop fields due to the abundant insects, not crops.

In Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, blackbirds, raccoons, deer and squirrels caused far more damage to



ABOVE: Raccoons will knock down corn stalks to get at the ears, and can wipe out large portions of a crop in a given year. LEFT: Research in Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee found blackbirds, raccoons, deer and squirrels caused far more damage than wild turkeys. And although turkeys are often seen feeding in crop fields, typically it is insects they are after.



crops than turkeys. In Ohio, a farmer believed turkeys were eating his soybean plants, so a turkey feeding in the field was shot and the gizzard was examined. The gizzard contained Japanese beetles, waste grain and wild plant seeds.

### Changing Diets And Spatial Movement

Spatial use by wild turkeys varies with different seasons. The size of the area they inhabit at any given time can range from 1,500 acres to as few as 100 depending on food availability and social interactions. During the fall, food is abundant and turkeys feed most heavily on native sources such as acorns and berries.

During the winter, turkeys will flock together in groups of 100 birds or more, mostly based on food abundance. As native foods are depleted, the birds switch to waste grain and will typically feed in one area until the food is depleted. Although the perception is the turkeys are there year-round, research has shown they will move several miles to join winter flocks, and individual flocks may drift up to five miles. During spring, flocks break up and birds move back to their breeding areas prior to the nesting season. In summer, food sources are abundant (primarily insects), and turkeys do not form large flocks.

### Identifying Crop Damage

Turkeys are active during the day, and thus, are conspicuous when feeding in the open. Hence, they are often blamed for crop damage that is actually caused by nocturnal animals such as raccoons, deer and beaver. Turkeys do occasionally feed on growing crops, but damage is minimal.

### Benefits of Wild Turkeys

Restoring wild turkeys has been a mixed blessing for Iowans. Some people enjoy watching wild turkeys on their property, while others may not share that appreciation. Large flocks of turkeys are often perceived to be "up to no good," especially in crop fields. As explained, turkeys are an important consumer of insects and weed seeds. Grasshoppers, long an adversary to the American farmer, are a favorite food of wild turkeys. Wild turkeys that take waste grain from fields over the winter can reduce the amount of unwanted volunteer corn sprouting in a soybean field the next spring.

Turkey hunting provides recreation for Iowans and produces revenue for private and public organizations and local businesses. Since the first season in 1974, Iowa turkey hunters have grown in number from 300 to more than 55,000, producing in excess of \$1 million annually for wildlife management programs. Iowa turkey hunters also spent \$4 million on their sport in 2001 alone, most of it trip-related expenses such as gas, food and lodging.

Next time you see a flock of turkeys or a hen with young feeding in a crop field or pasture, realize the benefits they provide in insect and weed control usually far exceed the modest amount of crop loss. While wild turkeys may not have been the choice for the national symbol as Benjamin Franklin wanted, they are a valuable resource for Iowans.

---

*Todd Gosselink is a wildlife research biologist and Bill Bunger is a wildlife depredation biologist both stationed in Chariton.*

## Identifying The Culprit

Recognizing what animals feed on agriculture crops and when, and the signs they leave behind, will help determine which animals are targeting your crops. Although crop damage is crop damage to a farmer, identifying the actual culprit is essential when selecting the appropriate management action to stop further damage.

### SMALL MAMMALS

**Spring:** Small mammals (mice, ground squirrels, tree squirrels) do most of their crop damage during the germination stage. Damage is usually characterized by small holes (1 to 2 inches in diameter) dug where the seed was planted or next to the seedling, many times leaving the plant intact.

**Fall:** Squirrels will feed on mature corn, eating the germ (seed

Roger A. Hill





bud) from each kernel and leaving the rest as waste. Cobs and scattered kernels below standing corn stalks indicate squirrel damage. The fallen kernels and cobs are often what attracts other wildlife species.

## BIRDS

**Spring:** Crows and blackbirds are the most common bird species responsible for crop damage. Similar to small mammals, crows and black-



Bill Bunger

birds will eat the germinating seed. They will dig around the seedling, often pulling it out of the ground to get at the seed.

**Summer:** During the milk stage of corn, birds will pull away strips of the husk and eat out the pulp of the kernels, leaving a hollow shell. A shredded husk with hollowed out kernels still on the stalk is typical of bird damage.

## RACCOONS

Raccoons typically climb corn stalks during the milk stage and after maturity, often knocking down the entire stalk. Once the cobs are accessible, raccoons will shred the husk, taking a few bites from several cobs. Raccoons can destroy a large

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Deer sometimes graze on young, sprouting plants.

**LEFT:** Pheasants occasionally pull up seedlings to get at the seeds. **BELOW:** Tracks (in this case a raccoon) often give away the culprit. **RIGHT:** Crop damage from raccoons is unmistakable.

portion of a crop and leave extensive areas of a field as waste.

## DEER

**Spring:** Deer will graze on sprouting plants, sometimes pulling them from the ground. Typically deer will eat the new growth portions of the plant, primarily soybean plants.

**Summer:** Deer prefer to eat the corn ears, biting the tips and kernels off emerging corn, which leads to stunting of the developing ears. Cobs with the ends bitten off are characteristic of deer damage. Deer will also pull out new growth of younger



Roger A. Hill

plants, eating the base of the stems.

**Fall:** Deer will also bite off the ends of mature ears, leaving stalks intact.

## WILD TURKEYS

Wild turkeys usually scratch for food. They do not dig or poke holes



Bill Bunger

in the ground. Although turkeys may occasionally eat newly planted seeds if found when scratching, and will sometimes eat shoots or leaves of emerging crops, this feeding behavior is minimal. Typically, turkeys are in crop fields feeding on the insects on the plants and in the soil.

During the fall, turkeys will feed on fallen corn knocked down by other wildlife, wind, hail and insects. They can not reach ears higher than 4 feet above the ground. Turkeys will scratch dust bowls in crop fields, using the loose soil to remove insects and parasites from their feathers. This can cause a shallow depression in the soil, but does not damage crops. During the winter, turkeys can cause substantial damage to silage pits or corn bins, which can be remedied with fencing.

Crops left standing in the field into winter are subject to damage from turkeys, deer, songbirds and many other wild animals.



# Tagging Along On Fisheries Management

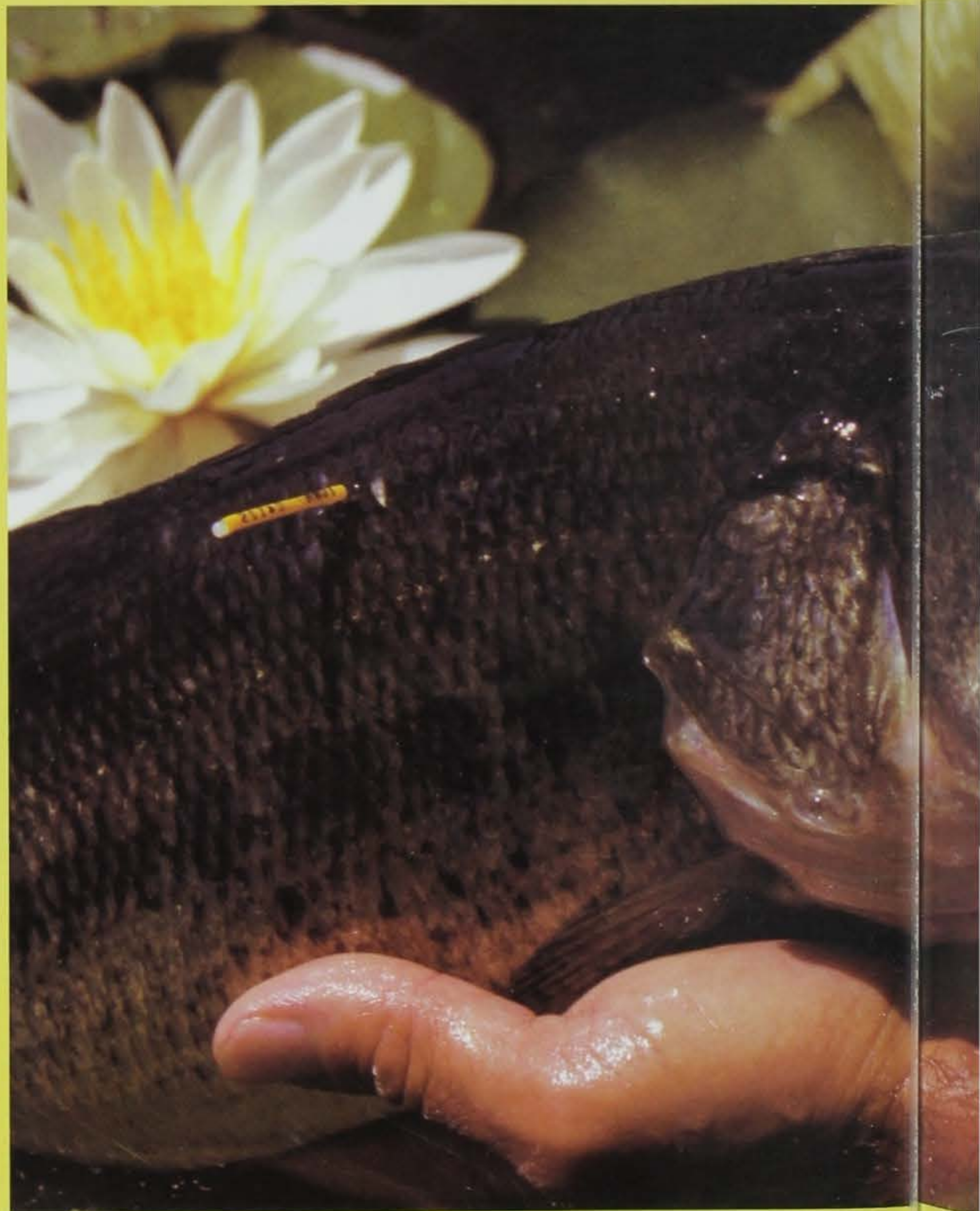
Article by Jim Wahl ♦ Photos by Lowell Washburn

**W**hen I was young kid I caught a walleye on Spirit Lake that carried a Monel jaw tag. The bright silver tag was secured to the upper jaw of the 2-pound fish. Like most anglers who catch a tagged fish, I was extremely excited and proud.

At the time I believed only the best fishermen were capable of landing such a prize. It was and still is the only tagged fish I've ever caught, which either dispels my earlier belief or proves, maybe, that I am not as good of an angler as I thought.

Although I haven't caught another tagged fish since that day, I have placed tags in thousands of others. Many have been caught and reported by anglers like myself. I still enjoy receiving calls from people who caught a tagged fish. Most exude the same excitement I did as a 13-year-old.

Why is catching a tagged fish so exciting? In very limited cases, they may carry a reward or prize in conjunction with a fishing tournament. In reality, though, most have no monetary value. More likely, the excitement comes from the satisfaction some anglers get from knowing the information they provide helps biologists better understand and manage the sport they love.





BOTTOM LEFT AND BOTTOM  
RIGHT: Floy tag imbedded in  
largemouth bass.

RIGHT: Clear Lake walleye with  
visual implant tag.



Tagging is an important tool for studying individual fish as well as populations. The studies help identify fish stock to determine if subpopulations exist; migration or movement patterns; and behavior, such as habitat selection and species interaction. They also provide data on abundance; age and growth; mortality, both natural and fishing related; and stocking success of hatchery-reared fish.

There is a wide assortment of tags and marks that can be used for tagging studies. Selecting the appropriate one depends on the objectives of the study. If the sole purpose is to identify fish as a member of a particular group, a simple mark such as a colored stain or fin clip will suffice. However, if you need to identify

individual fish, then the mark must include a number or detailed code.

Biologists need to be careful not to select a tag that might bias the results of a study. For instance, the growth rate of the walleye I caught more than 30 years ago may have been negatively altered due to the tag in its mouth. Therefore, jaw tags are no longer used by the DNR, but Floy tags, VI tags, and PIT tags are. All of those contain specific numbers or



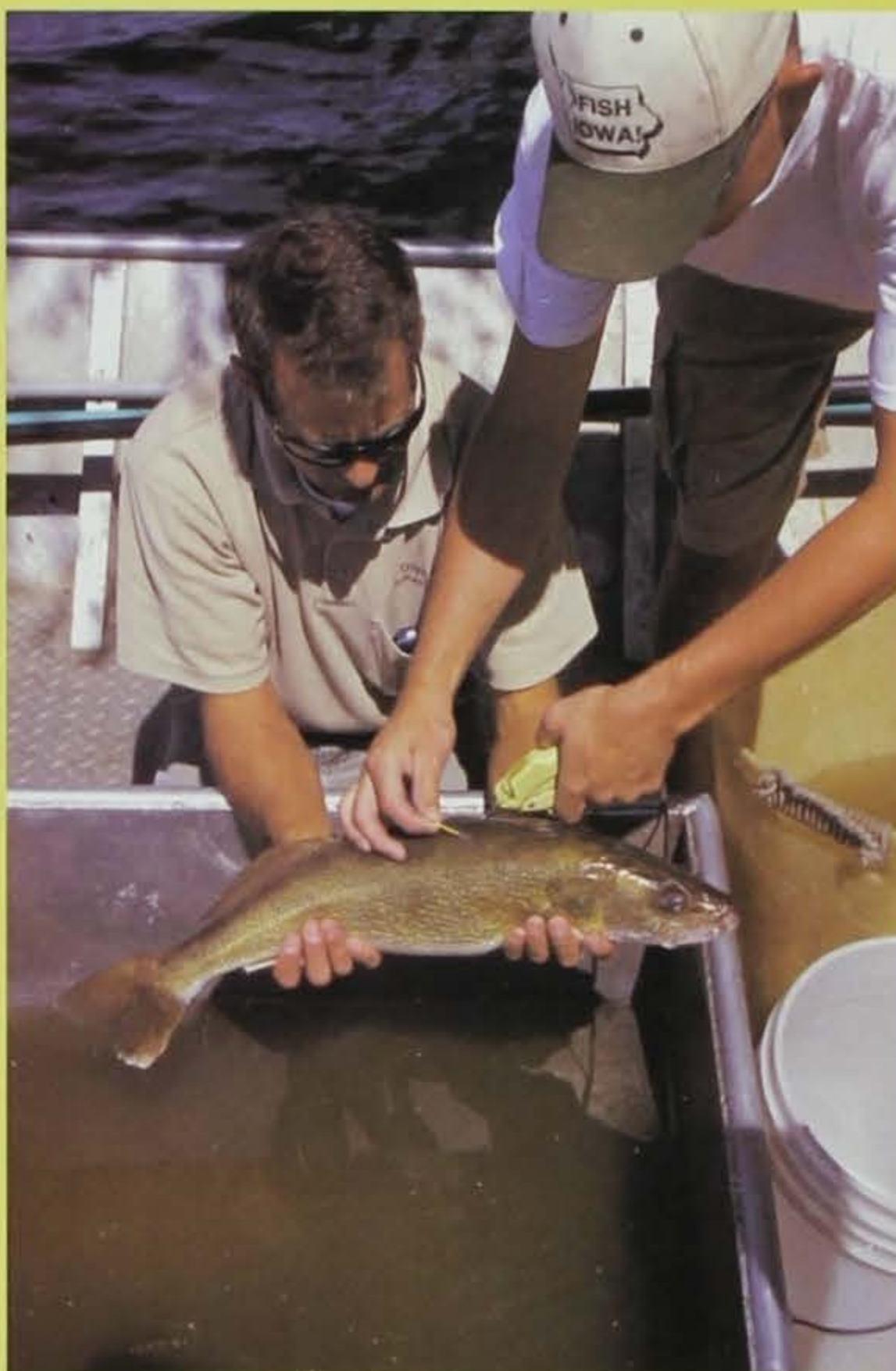
codes, so individual fish can be identified.

Floy tags, also known as dart tags, are readily visible to the angler because they protrude from the body as an external tag. Visual implant, or VI, tags are generally inserted just below the skin. They are visible, but only after close inspection of the fish. A passive integrated transponder, or PIT tag, is an internal tag and can only be detected with a scanner. These are currently being used to mark brood stock muskellunge in the Spirit Lake and Okoboji chain and Clear Lake.

Over the years, information from tagged fish has helped biologists manage fish populations throughout the state. Every tag returned is valuable and provides interesting information, however some tagging stories are particularly fascinating.

Take C14 for example, a female Clear Lake walleye tagged with a visual implant marker in April 1996. From 1996 when the female was first collected during the DNR's annual brood stock collection, to 2002, C14 visited the Clear Lake walleye hatchery six out of seven years, and grew from 26.5 inches to 28 inches in length. During that time, fisheries personnel collected roughly 200,000 eggs annually from her, or 1.2 million over the seven year period. Assuming a hatch rate of 75 percent, C14 has produced 900,000 walleye fry for stocking in the state. This story documents the potential a large female walleye has if anglers practice catch-and-release.

Tag Y04 provides another intriguing look at walleye habits. The 9-year-old, 24-inch male was first collected in April 1993 on East Okoboji Lake. A year later, it was captured again in



LEFT: A walleye is tagged at Clear Lake.

BELOW: Visual Implant fish tags.

BOTTOM: Fisheries biologists implant a PIT tag in a muskie at Clear Lake.





East Okoboji during the spring spawning season. In 1995, however, it chose to spawn in West Okoboji where it was collected twice during April. Two years later, Y04 was captured with a gill net, once again cruising the spawning grounds of East Okoboji. In April 1998, Y04 was back in West Okoboji where it was caught by state fisheries workers and



brought into the Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery — the fifth time in six years. That was Y04's last visit to the hatchery, as it was caught and harvested in May 1998 by a West Okoboji angler. Apparently Y04 was a gregarious sort, spreading his genes throughout both East and West Okoboji lakes.

Tag 208 was a blue Floy tag attached to a 2-pound walleye. The fish was collected on the Winnebago River by an electrofishing boat in June of 1983 and released in Worth County near Fertile. In April 1984 the fish was caught and harvested by an angler in the Shell Rock River near Clarksville. In less than one year, 208 traveled more than 70 miles downstream, through four counties and two river systems. The distance traveled was impressive, but even more remarkable was it successfully passed over four lowhead dams along the way. Most anglers know river fish can make long movements, however few realize the obstacles they encounter.

Tag 49.593 was a largemouth bass tagged and released in Pool 12 of the Upper Mississippi River in September 1988. Shortly after being tagged, the fish moved more than

nine miles up-river to a backwater overwintering site. In early May, 49.593 returned to the same exact stump that it occupied some seven months earlier. In October of that year the 3 1/2-pound bass once again traveled the nine miles back upstream to the same winter site it had used the previous year. The mechanism governing movements and navigation are unknown, but it is obvious this bass "knew" the backwater complex she occupied.

This small sampling from an endless file of tagged fish reports illustrates how valuable, and interesting, the information can be. Regardless of how unique the history, all tag returns assist fisheries biologists in improving angling. If you or a friend catch a tagged fish, record the length, weight, tag color and number, date and location, and whether the fish was released or kept. Report this information to the nearest DNR fisheries station. Who knows, it may have a unique story that only the tag can reveal.

*Jim Wahl is a fisheries management biologist at the Clear Lake office.*

## Leave It To The Biologists

Although tagging and releasing a fish is not an illegal activity for anglers, DNR fisheries biologists prefer sportsmen and sportswomen refrain from tagging their own fish and releasing them in public waters. Because these tags are unknown and unreported to the DNR, they often create confusion over studies being conducted by biologists. Anglers can be most helpful by reporting tags caught while fishing.



# IOWA Beautiful Land

Rarely, if ever, will you find Iowa on a list of scenic destinations. However, many notable, longtime Iowans ask *Why not?* as they share their favorite views from around the state.

“... there are only two kinds of people who don't appreciate the beauty of Iowa — those who have never been here and those who have never been anywhere else.”



Bob Ray remembers once receiving a phone call from a person who grew up in Iowa, but had lived in places like San Francisco, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and other major metropolitan areas who had listened to perceptions people around the country had of his native state.

“This gentleman told me there are only two kinds of people who don't appreciate the beauty of Iowa — those who have never been here and those who have never been anywhere else. I don't think it could be summed up any better than that,” said the former Iowa governor.

Indeed, if Iowa does derive its name from a Native American translation of “beautiful land,” it's a definition Ray is willing to accept. From the majestic bluffs along the Mississippi River in the east to the unique, ruggedly beautiful Loess Hills standing sentry on the state's western border, Iowa's beauty ranges from subtle to breathtaking.

And it can be found everywhere. Ray said it is difficult for him to identify a single spot in the state as a favorite.

“I always tell my wife that we need to start keeping a camera in the car, because we see beautiful scenery everywhere we go in Iowa,” Ray said.

If Iowa has an image problem, Ray said it is because the scenery — much like the people who live here — are often understated.

“You will not go anywhere else in the world and find a land and its people more productive. Many people that left our state

looking for flashier places like California now want to come back. I know I've traveled in every state in the United States and many foreign countries and if there were a better place than Iowa, I'd be there.

“All I know is that when I drive to another state and come back to Iowa, it's like entering an oasis. The green, rolling hills of our countryside . . . there just isn't any place more beautiful.”

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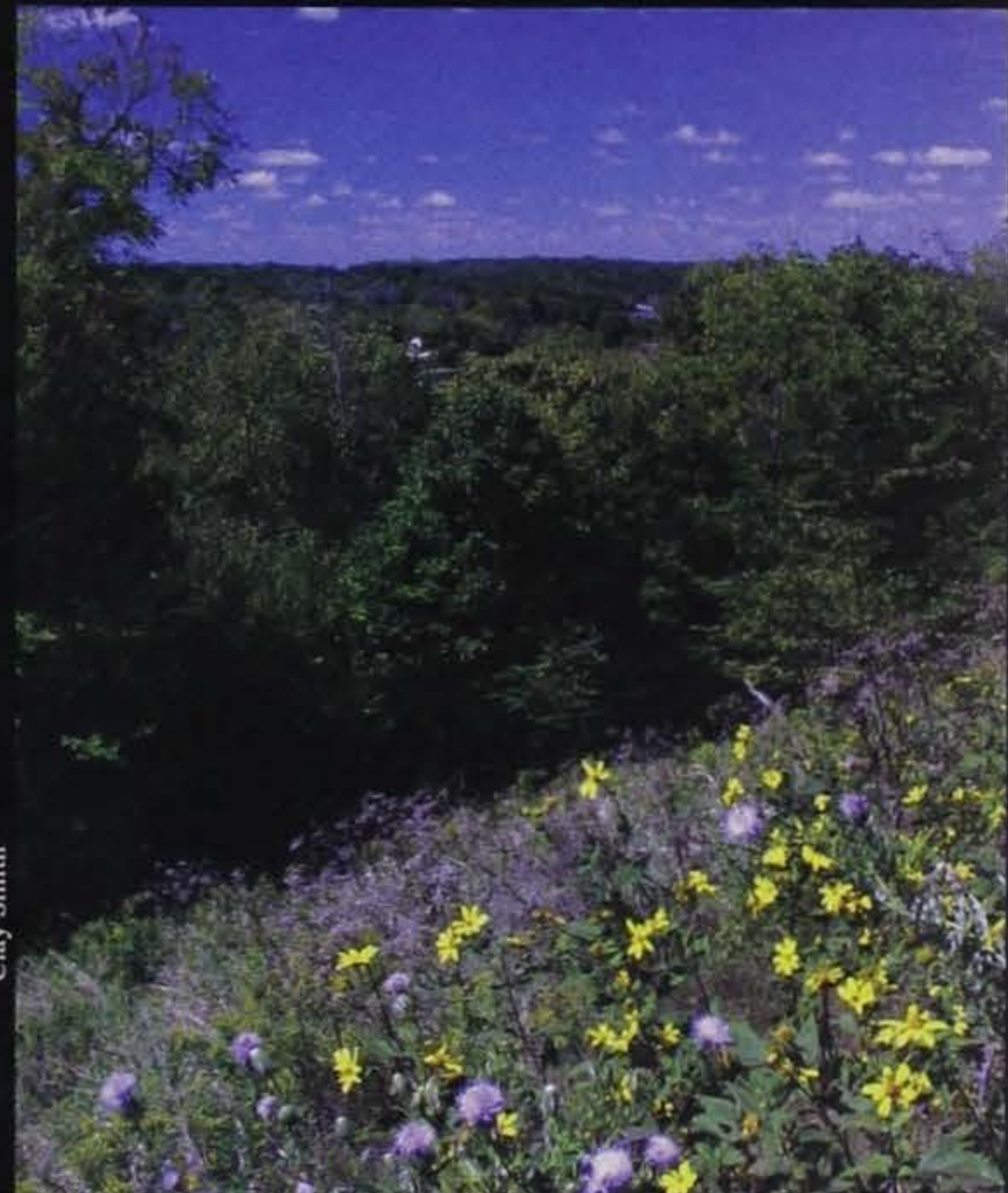
Clay Smith

For me, the most scenic view in Iowa is looking out over the Des Moines River from the top of the hill on J-40 in Van Buren County, just east of Keosauqua. I've driven the route between my hometown, Mt. Pleasant, and my grandparents' farm south of Milton many times in my lifetime. But I'd never seen it from a bicycle until I rode RAGBRAI this year. From the crest of the hill I see the Des Moines River meandering between its tree-lined banks. At the foot of the hill is the red farmhouse where Iowa writer Phil Stong once lived. Near it stands the abandoned Pittsburg General Store, its sign almost erased by time and the elements.

This vista is beautiful to me not just for its balance of natural and human-made features, but because of its familiarity and its association with a way of life I consider Iowan. Behind me a mile or two I can buy fresh chickens from an Amish family. Before me, as I drop down into Keosauqua where my family enjoyed fried chicken Sunday dinners at the Manning Hotel, I'll pass fields of corn and backyards of tomato and zinnia gardens. To me, the scene represents the industry of my ancestors who helped settle this land and become a part of the landscape.



**Christie Vilsack**  
First Lady of Iowa



Clay Smith

My favorite scenic natural area in Iowa is Backbone State Park. I discovered Backbone about 12 years ago while doing diversity training in the Strawberry Point area. The thing I love the most about Backbone is the peaceful atmosphere. Now, whenever I'm in Strawberry Point, I enjoy taking a scenic drive through the park to clear my head of all the stress of today's life. Its large, beautiful area is isolated enough so that when ever I need to get away for awhile, I can just go into the woods and feel completely alone. Backbone State Park has great camping facilities, and there are different levels of recreation available. Whether you are looking for a beautiful park to stay at over the weekend, or simply taking a scenic drive on a Sunday afternoon, Backbone has plenty to offer.



**RuthAnn Gaines**  
East High School teacher, Des Moines  
National Teachers Hall of Fame Inductee  
2003



Nature photography consists of being in the right place at the right time with a knowledge of natural history and experience on how the camera records an image.

My favorite place to photograph is where I live, although this was not always the case.

After my tour of military service ended in 1970, I returned to our family farm in Marshall County. I did not realize it at the time, but it was to become an adventure in discovering Iowa tallgrass prairie.

A small speck of virgin prairie still exists along an old railroad corridor, now long abandoned, but it has been the conversion of farmland to a diverse, dynamic natural system with native species that has provided me with exciting photographic opportunities.

I hope my photographs inspire others to learn about the prairie community, to see its potential for protecting marginal farmland, to utilize it for streamside buffers, and to recognize it as the best wildlife habitat.

**Carl Kurtz**  
nature photographer



Carl Kurtz



Clay Smith

The shelter house at the Elinor Bedell State Park looking out at the lake or shoreline is my favorite spot because of the beautiful view down East Okoboji Lake and the memories it brings back of the naturalness of the area. We used to picnic and fish down in the area before so much of the shoreline was built up.

The area around the shelter is still back to nature and very similar to what it was.

**Berkley Bedell**  
U.S. Congressman  
1974 to 1986,  
founder of Berkley  
(now Pure Fishing)





One of my favorite views in Iowa is in Buchanan County, in eastern Iowa. There you will find one of Iowa's true gems – Lowell Walter's house, Cedar Rock, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Mr. Walter was an avid boater who liked to fish on the Wapsipinicon River. On the property, there is a rock outcropping over a scenic bend on the river. The architect built a small boathouse at this site, directly on the high rock. A short path from the house takes you to the river and the boathouse. When you climb to the top of that rock, you are instantly in the treetops.

The view is amazing. The boathouse is perfectly situated to give you the ideal view up and down the river. From up there, you can see the fish jump, hear a million orioles and warbling vireos, and wave to the people canoeing below. Mr. Wright knew this was the best feature of Cedar Rock – the view of this river bend.

An afternoon trip to Cedar Rock is an easy getaway. And while the house is plenty enough excuse for a visit, I never get over the view from the boathouse.

**Liz Christiansen**  
Deputy  
Director,  
Iowa DNR



Clay Smith



There is a place, trampled with memories. This place, in Burlington, is where my father found his "sense of place" and where his children, too, found a feeling of belonging. Overlooking the Mississippi River is a very old house, perched atop the river bluff, scanning acres of oak openings and broad views. As a boy, my father roamed the marshes and banks along the old river. His boyhood interest in birds and natural history evolved here, laying the groundwork for the field of environmental ethics.

"There are two things that interest me — the relationship of people to each other and the relationship of people to land." This place in Iowa is where Aldo Leopold's statement was nurtured.

**Nina Leopold Bradley**  
daughter of Aldo Leopold



Clay Smith







Lowell Washburn



Clay Smith

Pilot Knob State Park is definitely my favorite. It is one of the oldest parks in the state park system with 700 acres of natural habitat. The lakes and ponds in the park support a wide variety of birds and wildlife. In fact, Pilot Knob has a four-acre floating sphagnum bog, the only one of its kind in Iowa. I never fail to see something different on each visit. The park is only 5 minutes from my home and I'm able to enjoy the park during all the different seasons. In the winter, it's great for snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. Spring brings the lush green foliage (and my spring turkey). Campers, hikers, bikers and walkers favor the summer and there's a new five-mile bike trail to enjoy that connects Pilot Knob to Forest City.



My favorite season remains the fall when the waterfowl are migrating and the leaves are turning beautiful colors. The park has never disappointed me on any of my visits.

**Bruce Hertzke**  
Winnebago Industries' Chairman,  
CEO and President



Duncan, an avid hunter and angler, has a favorite scenic area for each activity. While wearing a hunting cap, Duncan favors southwest Iowa's Riverton area. He and eight Des Moines area friends formed the Sundown Hunt Club. They hunt ducks and geese at Riverton and will slip over to the area around Waubonsie State Park to hunt turkeys. "The Riverton area is absolutely beautiful," he said.

With fishing rod in hand, Duncan is a fan of West Okobojo and the Iowa Great Lakes area. Duncan has been fishing the lake since buying a home at Okobojo 20 years ago. He has also hunted giant Canada geese in the area. "Lake Okobojo is a terrific part of Iowa," he said.

**Randy Duncan**  
Runner-up 1958 Heisman Trophy, #1 overall pick in the 1959 NFL draft by the Green Bay Packers



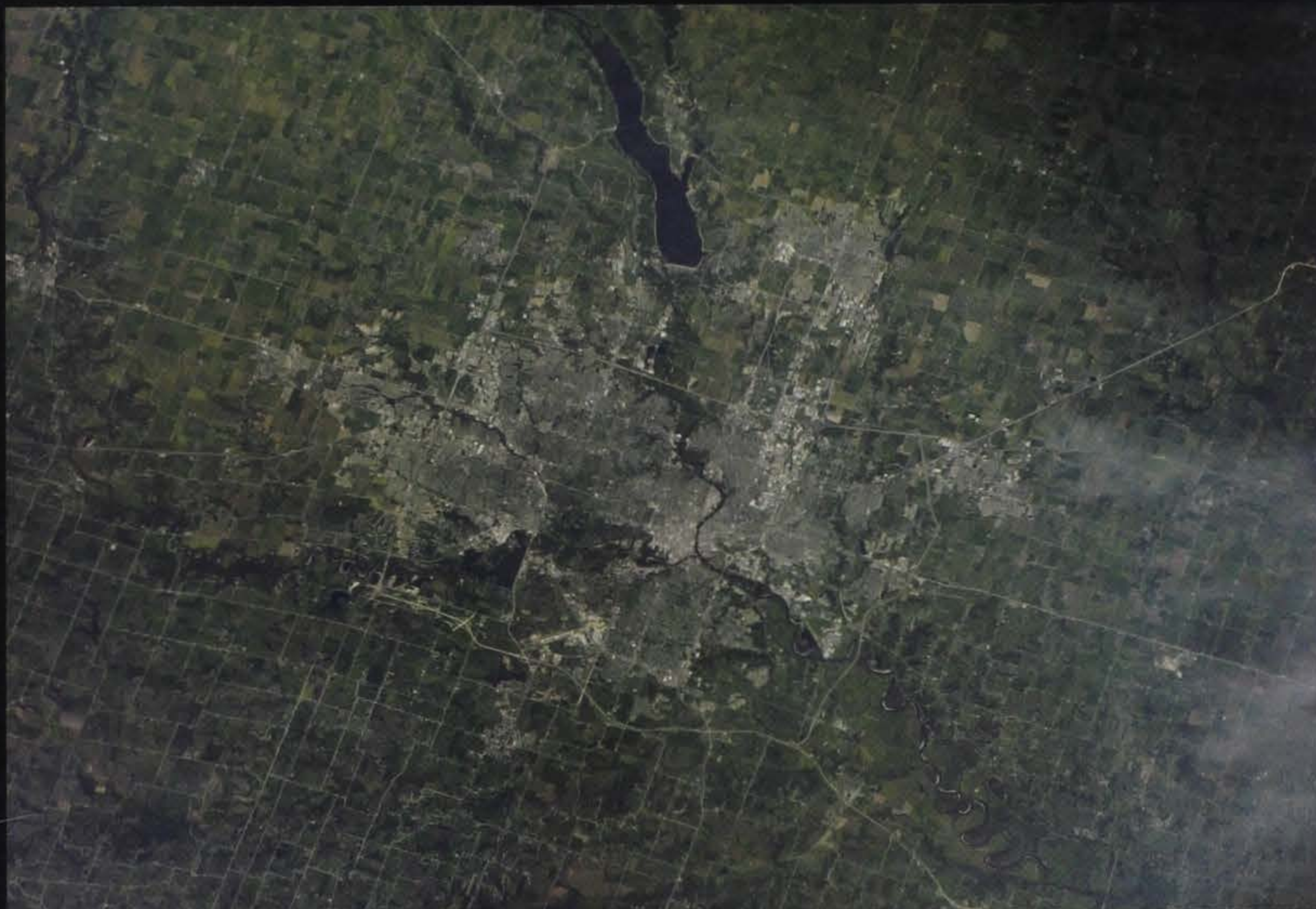


Photo courtesy of NASA

Iowa is my home. Recently I passed a landmark year and I now have lived in Texas longer than I lived in Iowa, but Iowa is still my home. Picking one particular location in Iowa as a favorite is not a straightforward task for me, since I love the country that makes up Iowa. Maybe being raised on a farm is what makes the countryside so special for me — the orderly rows of corn, and the smell of the corn silks in late summer, the soybeans that define the color of green, the pastures with slow-moving cattle grazing on the rolling hills, the gravel roads sectioning off the countryside with cornflowers blooming in the ditches and various bird songs as music for my ears. This is the Iowa that I think of when someone asks me where I'm from. And

the part of Iowa I like to visit whenever I can.

Last year, I had a novel opportunity to view Iowa and the rest of the world from a very different perspective, while orbiting more than 200 miles above the Earth. I lived on the International Space Station for just over 6 months, and when the orbit, the lighting, the weather and my schedule permitted, I would watch as we passed over my home state, in a minute or less, thinking of all my friends and family living below. Rivers demark two of the borders of our state, but the one feature from this orbiting vantage point that was unique to our section of the Midwest, was the regular square pattern that the rural roads sew into a quilt-work of farmland. As the seasons changed

while I was orbiting our planet, I saw the summer greens fade, becoming golden and brown. And although my perspective was dramatically different as the station would fly over Iowa, it always gave me the comfort of feeling home.



**Dr. Peggy Whitson**  
First International Space Station Science Officer

ABOVE: Des Moines area from the International Space Station





Lowell Washburn

Perhaps no face has been more familiar to more Iowans over a longer period of time than has that of Bill Riley. Although the pioneer television broadcaster has been involved in a wide variety of high-profile public activities, Riley is best known as the face of the Iowa State Fair. For 57 years, the Riley Talent Stage has served as a focal point for State Fair excitement.

Although Riley is widely traveled and intimately acquainted with many of Iowa's scenic treasures, his number one favorite spot seems strangely out of character for such an energetic and outgoing personality. The spot is Rock Run — a tiny, scarcely noticed tributary of the Iowa River.

"Rock Run is a very small stream, barely more than a trickle,

that runs through Iowa Falls and flows into the Iowa River," says Riley.

"When I was a youngster, I went there often with my little dog Jerry. We would wander the length of Rock Run. I've always been intrigued with birds and animals, and everything I saw there fascinated me.

I remember the damp aroma that lingered along the stream. Limestone cliffs ran along the side, and there were great clouds of pigeons roosting there. I'd climb up and try to catch the birds in their holes, and sometimes I did.

When I graduated from the eighth grade, the Iowa Falls Rotary held a luncheon to honor us. I was one of the two top students in that class. But when the time came to go, I just disappeared. It didn't matter though

— Mom knew exactly where I'd be. She sent my brother, and he found me and the dog wandering along Rock Run. He made some stern threats and I went to the luncheon. That was my first award."

"Today, when I tell people that I'm a recluse, they laugh. But it's true," says Riley. "What I found at Rock Run was solitude. Back then I would rather be at that stream with my dog Jerry more than anything else. Believe it or not, I'm still that way today."

**Bill Riley**  
"Mr. State Fair,"  
Broadcaster





Growing up in Marion, Lisa Bluder spent a lot of time on her family's sailboat on Lake Macbride. "We would go to Lake Macbride every Sunday."

Bluder spent 10 years coaching the women's team at Drake University in Des Moines. "When I lived in Des Moines, I really enjoyed the bike trails." Since moving to Iowa City in 2000, Bluder and her family take picnics and go hiking at Stone City. She said they also enjoy the natural areas near the

Herbert Hoover National Historic Site in West Branch, and one of Bluder's favorite places is Effigy Mounds in northeast Iowa.

"It's the memories growing up and spending time with my family outdoors that make these places special."



Ken Formanek

**Lisa Bluder**

Head Coach, Iowa Women's Basketball



Clay Smith

Hundreds of thousands of Iowa State Fair goers know her as "The Butter Cow Lady." Over the decades, Norma 'Duffy' Lyons of Toledo has sculpted cows, Elvis, even a Harley-Davidson motorcycle out of butter, becoming an icon at Iowa's summertime classic. Mention the outdoors to her, though, and she goes back in time, to the family farm in Van Buren County.



"We would go walking all over the farm; my Dad (Benton J. Stong), my uncle (Joe Stong) and me. I remember being 9, 10, 11 years old and traveling down to Keosauqua. It was a 400-acre farm where the Chequest Creek goes into the Des Moines River, at Pittsburg, north of Keosauqua. We would walk all over the area. We would hunt squirrels . . . I was the 'bird dog,' for my dad and uncle. We were all fairly good shots."

Then, as now, the major feature of the area was the Des Moines River, rolling slowly through the wooded hills and farm fields of southeast Iowa. The scenes Lyons recalls from the early 1940s and 50s on the family farm are just what tourists look for today, as Van Buren County touts its quiet, wooded beauty.

"[The whole area] was great fun for a kid."

**Norma 'Duffy' Lyons**  
Iowa's Butter Cow Lady





Well, of course, I'm always drawn to the bluffs and scenery of northeast Iowa. But really, my favorite place is right near my home in Indianola — Ahquabi State Park. I go there often with my kayak and paddle around the perimeter. Over the years I've just gotten very attached to the beauty of the shoreline and the rolling hills.

I remember one time in the fall, I was going around the lake and entered one of the smaller coves. A breeze was blowing and the air was filled with yellow leaves fluttering down to the water. The sunlight shining through them gave the whole scene a golden color. It was absolutely beautiful!

**Morgan Halgren**

Host of *Living in Iowa*, Iowa Public Television



Larry Zach is one of Iowa's best-known wildlife artists, and he is probably most famous for his stunning portraits of monster whitetails.

It's not surprising that Zach's most cherished scenic view can only be reached by climbing high into the out-spread arms of an ancient, white oak tree. The spot is, of course, a deer stand.



"I enjoy all aspects of nature, and I suppose I could list hundreds of favorite settings," says Zach. "But I have a special admiration for old trees — especially white oaks. This tree is huge. I'm guessing that it could be in the 300-year class. That means it was already a pretty good tree at the start of the Revolutionary War. That's a lot of history. You have to respect that."

"The view from this tree is just incredible. I can look two miles across a giant valley, and the sunrises and sunsets are spectacular."

"I've shot some deer from this tree, and have missed some really big ones. I took my son there and he shot his first deer with a bow. I don't know for sure how tall this old oak is, but my stand is so high that a lot of guys won't go up there. It's a place where the birds are as likely to fly below you as above you."

**Larry Zach**  
wildlife artist

**ABOVE:** *Big Country Bucks* by Larry Zach

Clay Smith





Standing on a high bluff south of Coon Rapids in November around 4:30 p.m., and watching the pheasants pour into the switchgrass as they go to roost for the night is awesome!

My family had a tradition of getting together for the annual Thanksgiving hunt; something we all looked forward to. When the corn has turned, the crisp November breeze is blowing and Hawkeye football is on WHO radio on Saturday afternoon, my thoughts go to my youth growing up in Iowa. It may be where the tall corn grows, but it's also where the long-tailed birds grow too!



**Wally Hilgenberg**  
All-American and All-Big Ten Iowa Hawkeye football, 4 years with the Detroit Lions and 12 with the Minnesota Vikings

Roger A. Hill



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# Federal Grants Give Wings to Wildlife Diversity Program



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Doug Hunt



**T**he Wildlife Diversity Program (WDP) just might be among the best kept secrets of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. That's due to budget rather than design. This small program actually oversees more varieties of wildlife than does all the rest of the DNR's wildlife bureau that has been historically associated with research and management of traditional "game" species. Anonymity is quickly disappearing, however, with the bureau's emphasis on conserving all of Iowa's 500-some species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Even better, since 2002 the WDP has been receiving federal grants primarily aimed at improving the lot of Iowa's too-frequently-overlooked "nongame" wildlife.

For some 20 years, WDP has struggled along with a small staff, usually averaging four full-time employees, trying to study and provide for the needs of a nearly bewildering array of creatures. The struggle mostly stemmed from a lack of sufficient funding. Management of the state's popular game and sport fisheries has long been supported by the sale of hunting, fishing and fur harvester licenses, and through a system of self-imposed federal manufacturers' fees from the sale of hunting and fishing equipment. Species under auspices of the WDP have managed to subsist chiefly as a side benefit to good management of game and sport fish, and the conscientious efforts of many dedicated wildlife and fisheries managers.

Typical mid-growth oak-hickory forest is a valuable neotropical songbird habitat.

Other means for funding WDP activities have been attempted, some realizing small measures of success, others failing completely. About half of WDP's annual budget currently comes from the so-called "Chickadee Checkoff" through which conservation-minded Iowans can donate a portion of expected tax returns when completing their Iowa Form 1040. Additional funds are received from the sale of an annual nongame support certificate, a small number of publications and other donations or gifts from the public. In recent years tax checkoff income has fallen and the WDP's budget has been supplemented with a small amount of Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund dollars — just enough to keep the program running. Efforts to create national funding by placing a manufacturer's fee on various kinds of outdoor recreation equipment failed in Congress due to industry opposition. Another effort to fund nongame programs nationwide known as the Conservation and Restoration Act (CARA) was on its way to likely congressional passage in 2001 when the September 11 terrorist attacks diverted national attention — and budgets — and the measure died.

A glimmer of hope arose from the ashes of 9-11, however, as Congress promised to annually appropriate money directed to wildlife diversity needs of all states and territories, plus native American tribes. Last year, Iowa began receiving its allocation of annually appropriated funds, which actually were granted beginning with fiscal year

2001. Iowa recently received its third year of appropriations, officially termed "state and tribal wildlife grants" but generally called state wildlife grants, or SWGs.

This money is not granted without some strings attached. FY2001 grants required a 3-to-1 match of federal and state dollars, and subsequent grants have required a dollar-for-dollar match. In a time of tight state government budgets, and an already minuscule WDP budget, it has been difficult to find matching dollars so as not to lose these federal funds. If funds are not obligated to projects by annual deadline dates, remaining unobligated dollars may be redistributed to other states. But as could be expected in Iowa, many traditional and new friends of the DNR arrived to help find much of the necessary match. Some important contributors to date include Des Moines Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever, The Nature Conservancy, plus individual donors. The DNR's Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund, although strapped for funds, also has been tapped to assure completion of some projects.

So what has WDP been spending SWG funds for? A review of projects funded to date is in order, followed by a brief glimpse at some things currently on the drawing board.

First funded with the new federal grants was protection of a 240-acre addition to the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area in Ringgold County. This has provided prime habitat for Iowa's rare greater prairie chicken and several other declining species of

by Douglas C. Harr



grassland birds. The next project preserves 80-acres of mid-growth oak-hickory timber as an addition to

Below: Wildlife Research Biologist Todd Gosselink holds sedated bobcat that has been fitted with a radio tracking collar. Right: Waterfowl, songbirds and bats move freely between three major wildlife areas surrounding the Top of Iowa Wind Farm, near Joice.

Stephens State Forest in Lucas County. The parcel will be assigned to the DNR's forestry bureau, but will be managed with the needs of migrant songbirds and federally endangered Indiana bats in mind.

Because the FY2001 allocation was allowed to be used for "wildlife related education and recreation" projects, monies will be used to reprint the popular *Bats of Iowa* booklet, much in demand and out-of-print for some time now. In Clay County, purchase of an abandoned railroad right-of-way comes close to linking two major tracts of state land,

the Hawk Valley Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Little Sioux River WMA. Old prairie remnants and other grassland here will preserve songbird habitat from loss to plow or pasture.

Beginning with FY2002 appropriations, tighter restrictions were placed on how federal dollars could be used, now directing them at research and management for "species of greatest conservation need." Four important wildlife research projects presently are underway. An obvious natural increase in bobcats seen across much



Matt Purvis



Greg Hanson



of Iowa has raised questions about these rather secretive wild felines. So, the DNR initiated a pilot study to learn more about bobcat movements and survival in Iowa. Some live-captured animals will be fitted with radio telemetry collars and others with Global Positioning System (GPS) collars to compare these two tracking devices. Bobcats are now common enough that the DNR has proposed taking them off the list of threatened wildlife. Information from this research study will be useful to determine a management strategy once this protection has been removed.

Three research projects involving birds are underway across northern Iowa. At the Top of Iowa Wind Farm, near the town of Joice, Iowa State University researchers are



Doug Harr

Approximately 140 acres of grasslands and restorable wetlands were purchased as part of the Larry Wilson Legacy Wetlands project.

## STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS REQUIRE CONSERVATION PLAN

Among conditions placed upon states and tribes agreeing to accept state wildlife grant (SWG) funds is a requirement to produce a "comprehensive wildlife conservation plan" for federal review and approval by Oct. 1, 2005. Should an acceptable plan not be produced, a state could be forced to repay all the grant money received and would be ineligible for future grants.

Iowa DNR presently is in the early stages of work to produce the necessary plan. A small steering committee of DNR staff and non-governmental conservation organizations has outlined what will need to be included in the plan and where

the background information and data might be found. An independent contractor is being hired to synthesize this available data and actually prepare a written summary that will become the plan. Public input is required, and the steering committee is examining the most efficient means for gathering this input, probably through a combination of focus group meetings and a public comment period.

The plan can include all of the state's wildlife, both nongame and game, aquatic and terrestrial, vertebrate and invertebrate, at least as far as knowledge is available. Its chief subject must be Iowa's "species of

conservation concern" (that is, declining or rare wildlife), threats to these animals, and what actions need be taken to stabilize or increase wildlife populations.

Aldo Leopold, the "father of wildlife management," and among America's most important historical conservation figures, prepared the first conservation plan for Iowa back in the 1930s. If the steering committee can meet all its goals, the new Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan just may be the next "Leopold Plan," charting Iowa's wildlife conservation future for decades to come.

-DCH



studying the possible mortality effects of wind energy turbines on songbirds, waterfowl and bats. ISU's Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit is providing the required match for this project, along with another that is investigating habitat use and nest success of grassland birds at Spring Run WMA near Arnolds Park. A third project, with matching funds from ISU's Natural Resource Ecology and Management Department, is conducting a similar study of bird response to prairie restoration at The Nature Conservancy's Broken Kettle Preserve near Sioux City.

Other landscape protection projects aimed at improving habitat for nongame wildlife include a 74-acre addition to the Waterman Prairie WMA in O'Brien County preserving habitat for river otters, songbird and migratory bald eagles. A similar-sized addition to the Big Sioux River WMA in Lyon County will serve a variety of nongame species and, coincidentally, protect a Native American archeological site. A 240-acre site above Rock Creek State Park in Jasper County will provide rich grassland habitat for songbirds and is being cost-shared through a combination of state lake restoration and Sport Fisheries Restoration funds. A small impoundment will help protect aquatic species and the watershed of Rock Creek Lake.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's regional federal aid office are submitting several new projects for final approval. These include a three-year extension and expansion of the bobcat research project, protection of an important bald eagle winter roost site on the Des Moines River, construction of a native prairie seed production facility to aid in nongame and other wildlife habitat restoration

and assistance with the WDP's efforts to restore magnificent trumpeter swans to Iowa. Future projects currently under consideration include a major addition to another of the DNR's new bird conservation areas and protection of habitat for some increasingly rare varieties of reptiles and amphibians.

It may have been a long time coming but state wildlife grants have finally given wings to Iowa's Wildlife Diversity Program. Congressional action currently underway will likely assure federal funds for fiscal year 2004 but tight federal budgets could still threaten to reduce or eliminate SWGs in the future. In addition, the DNR and its many partners still have struggled to find all necessary matching funds. A bill that passed the Iowa

Senate last spring would increase the purchase price of Iowa's specialty REAP license plates — the popular goldfinch and wild rose license. This proposed increase would be earmarked only to match SWG federal funds (currently all REAP license sales go into a general Resource Enhancement and Protection program account, none of which goes to the WDP). Fate of this bill now rests upon the shoulders of the Iowa House of Representatives when the General Assembly reconvenes next January.

*Douglas C. Harr is the wildlife diversity biologist for the department.*

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**Applications are due by November 10, 2003.** Awards will be announced and presented in January 2004.

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# the Return of the Osprey

Article and photos by  
Lowell Washburn



**Taking Aim** — A male osprey launches an attack on Alliant Energy's Terry Heidebrink (right) and Kirk Smith. The Alliant wildlife enthusiasts went to the top of a 65-foot nest structure located on the Spirit Lake Middle School outdoor classroom to remove the first osprey chick produced in Iowa in more than a century. After receiving a quick health check up and being fitted with numbered leg bands, the young bird was returned to its nest.

It is history in the making. For the first time since pioneer settlement, wild ospreys are successfully nesting in Iowa.

"This is an exciting time. The opportunity to observe nesting ospreys is just something that people don't get to see here," said DNR wildlife technician Tim Waltz to a crowd of more than 100 wildlife enthusiasts gathered at the Spirit Lake Middle School in July. They were witnessing the banding of the first documented osprey chick ever produced in the wild in Iowa.

"We're privileged to have the birds here. The ospreys offer a tremendous educational opportunity, and a lot of people are taking advantage of that," said Waltz.

"This first successful nest didn't just happen. It is the result of a lot of cooperation among a lot of people."

Spirit Lake's osprey saga began two years ago when DNR fisheries technician and birding enthusiast, Ed Thelen accompanied his son Nathan, to a baseball game at the Spirit Lake High School. While sitting in the bleachers, Thelen observed an adult osprey circling above the ball diamond. Even more unusual was that the bird carried a large stick in its talons. Scanning the field, Thelen noticed that three of the diamond's light poles had piles of sticks wedged into the light brackets. The evidence was overwhelming that wild ospreys were attempting to establish a territory in northwest Iowa.

Late that fall, a specialized nest structure was installed a few hundred yards away at the Middle School's outdoor classroom. Taller and more

secure than the light poles, the structure consisted of a 65-foot utility pole equipped with a raccoon barrier on the bottom and a four foot square nesting platform at the top.

"The folks at Alliant Energy were a tremendous help on this project," said Waltz. "They donated and installed the pole, supplied the trucks, everything. Alliant employees have done all the work during their off duty time. It's been great."

The ospreys agreed. When the pair returned in the spring of 2002, they immediately took up residence on the new structure. After constructing a nest on the platform, the pair produced a single egg that failed to hatch.

"Everyone was disappointed by that, but the important thing was the pair was firmly established on the site," said Pat Schlarbaum of the DNR's wildlife diversity program. "The good news is that the ospreys returned again this summer and are now being successful."

By using a spotting scope to read leg band numbers, biologists have been able to identify the female as a bird from Lake Minnetonka in central Minnesota. The female osprey is six years old.

"Although the male is also banded, we have not been able to get a reading on him," said Schlarbaum.

"We do know that males tend to establish territories very near to where they learned to fly, and I think it's safe to speculate that the bird came from Heron Lake in southern Minnesota. That's only about thirty miles north of here, and Heron Lake has been the site of osprey reintroductions."

According to Schlarbaum, osprey



chicks begin testing their wings at about 53 days of age. Young ospreys may attempt catching their own fish within three or four days on the wing, and are totally self-sufficient within three weeks of leaving the nest. Young birds follow their parents south and spend the winter in Central and South America.

It is here that a unique aspect of the species' life history unfolds. As spring starts to invade the northern hemisphere, adult ospreys begin the

long journey to summer nesting areas. Young ospreys, however, stay put where they have spent the winter and do not return north until the following year.

Historically, this migration strategy allowed young ospreys to enjoy greater survival. Today, scientists speculate that much of that advantage may be lost as young birds are exposed to increased levels of pesticides that continue to contaminate South American watersheds. Also, young ospreys are routinely shot by aquaculturists who view the fish-eating birds as competitors.

"Ospreys have a hunting style that is as unique and dynamic as any of our birds of prey," said Schlarbaum.

"They hover, and when they spot a fish they dive right in and go get it.



DNR wildlife technician, Tim Waltz (left) holds on to a young osprey as Alliant Energy's, Terry Heidebrink attaches a numbered metal leg band. More than 100 wildlife enthusiasts turned out to watch the event — the first wild-produced osprey ever banded in the history of the state.



With a cherry picker and volunteers from Alliant Energy, the osprey chick is removed from the nest for banding.





The male osprey brings liner material (grass) for the nest.

When it comes to watchable wildlife it just doesn't get any better. This is a highly desirable wildlife species, and everyone is obviously thrilled to have these birds nesting on the outdoor classroom."

Schlarbaum noted that a second osprey pair established a successful nest last summer at Lake Macbride in Johnson County. That nest, which was about a week behind the Spirit Lake pair, produced three young.

Scientists regard the osprey as a "true biological indicator" bird species. During the 1950s, ospreys were nearly driven to extinction when DDT contamination fouled North America's waterways. Because of their tragic connection to pesticide poisoning, ospreys (along with peregrine falcons and bald eagles) served as "canaries in the mine shaft" while alerting humans to the dangers that accompany the unregulated use of highly persistent pesticides.

"Hopefully this is just the beginning for Iowa ospreys," said Thelen.

"Maybe someday their comeback will be as successful as what we're currently seeing with bald eagles."



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# Lake Geode State Park



Tim Kemmis



Clay Smith

## A Southeast Iowa Gem

Article by Ulf G. König and  
Sarah Franklin-Tharp

When people hear the word geode, most think of the sparkling crystal-filled stone that is Iowa's state rock. Maybe that's what park founders had in mind when they envisioned a lake nestled in a rugged southeast Iowa valley. Because if you visit Lake Geode on a crisp, clear afternoon when the shore is lined with the reds, yellows and oranges of autumn, and the sun's rays are dancing on the deep blue water, you can see why the comparison to a sparkling "geode" might make sense.

A look back in history, however, will show "geode" was not the chosen name when the park was founded in 1937. In fact, it wasn't even the second choice. Lake Geode was originally known as Flint Hills State Park, and later, Danville State Park, before the current name was finally adopted. The name really seems to have originated from the numerous deposits of geodes in the area.



LOWER LEFT: Lake Geode, nestled in the wooded hills of southeast Iowa, is known for its quality bluegill fishing.

LEFT: Geode State Park earned its name for the rich deposits of the crystal-filled stone found in the area.

RIGHT: Young kids get an education on furbearers during a program presented by one of the DNR's seasonal naturalists.

Although choosing a name for the park may appear to have been convoluted, developing the area was not. In its first 10 years, the park expanded from a small 33-acre woodland with one picnic shelter and a park office to a sprawling 1,640-acre woodland filled with oak and hickory trees and deep ravines.

In 1950, the valley was excavated and widened, and the largest creek in the park was dammed. With that, 186-acre Lake Geode was born. At the same time, roads and facilities

were developed and the park soon became a premiere recreational destination for southeast Iowans. Today, Geode still serves southeast Iowa and visitors from many other locales with its camping facilities and various other attractions and activities. Many are surprised — after driving through miles of flat agricultural land — to find the thick, cool wooded hills of Geode at the end of their drive.

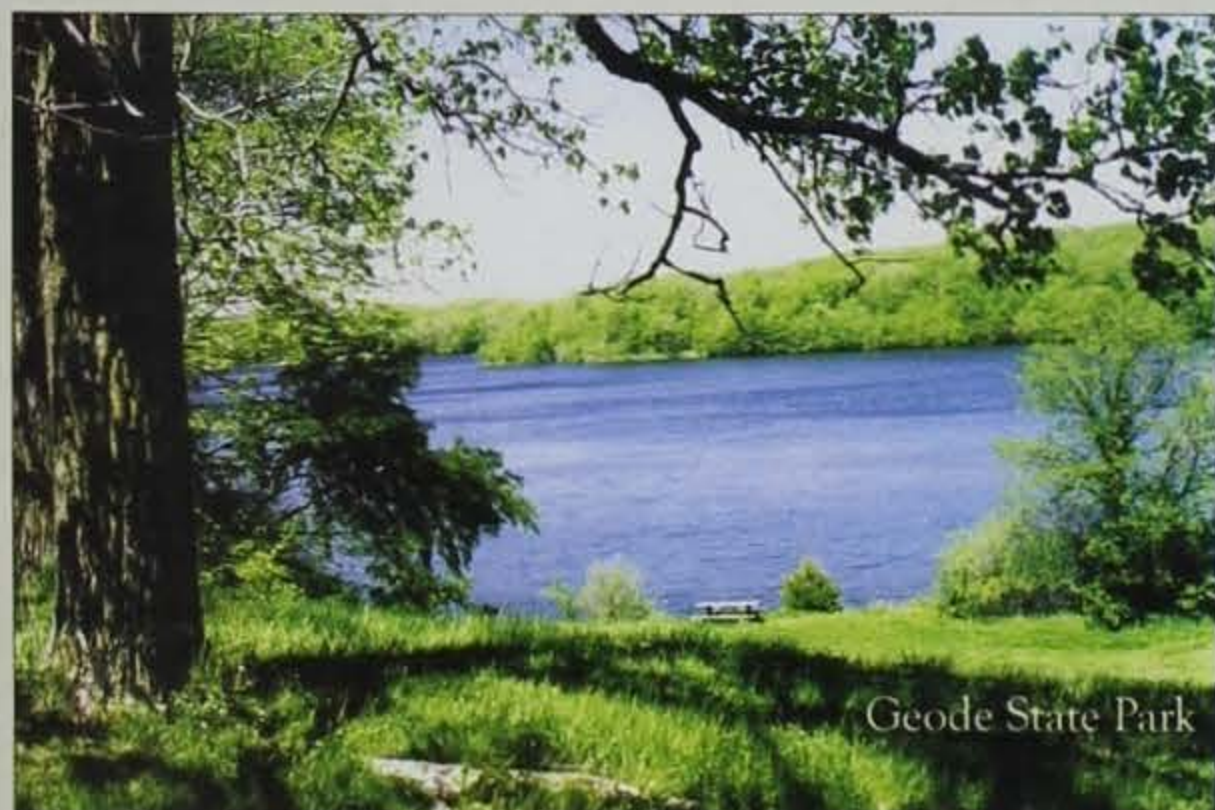
Geode's 186-site campground is located on a plateau in the center of the park. Nearly half (96) of the sites are electrical. There are also two shower and rest room buildings, including one that is just a year old. Many of the tent campsites rest under a canopy of trees, creating a shady "woody" feel to the nonelectric sites.

The park's trails provide hiking, mountain biking,



Clay Smith

snowmobiling and cross country skiing opportunities. Those who use the trails, though, may want to pack a lunch, because the main trail around the lake is a hilly, winding eight-mile jaunt. It has become popular for mountain biking due to its challenging nature. Many people who come and discover the trails become regulars, whether on bike or by foot. Anytime of year you will be able to observe natural beauty and wildlife along these trails. From a hunting cooper's hawk, to the howl of a coyote, to the seemingly magical appearance of a spring morel, there is always something to see or hear.



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# PARKS PROFILE

There are plenty of activities for everyone at Geode State Park, including a playground where kids can kick up their heels and parents can take a break.

For those looking for a more relaxing experience, a day on the beach might just be the answer. Located on the northeast shore of the lake, the beach is typically busy from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Concessions are available on site, as well as rest room facilities. The concession area offers boat rental, bait, camping supplies and park information.

An old bathhouse still stands on the beach, however it is currently closed to the public. That may change. The Friends of Geode support group is currently raising funds to restore the bathhouse to a modern open shelter and lodge facility. The friends group was recently reformed after some years of inactivity, hoping several park improvements can be brought about through their



Clay Smith

voice and fund-raising efforts.

For the angler, Lake Geode is known for its bluegill fishing. There are also good populations of largemouth bass, crappie, channel catfish and redear sunfish. Much of the reason for the good fishing can be traced back to a 1981 renovation project initiated in response to a growing population of nuisance gizzard shad. The lake was drained, the gizzard shad were removed, fish habitat was added and the lake was restocked with game fish.

Boaters can access the lake via two ramps on the east side.

Shoreline anglers have plenty of access throughout the park. Both boat ramps are currently undergoing renovation, and three silt-retention ponds are being built in the watershed to help boost water clarity and quality in the lake. Future plans also call for the construction of five rental cabins in an existing picnic area, overlooking the lake on the southeast side of the park.

Throughout the winding roads and thick timber, Geode offers beautiful scenic picnic areas to relax and enjoy the outdoors. Four open picnic shelters — one a historic stone structure with a unique fireplace — serve all occasions and can be reserved at the park office.

Several notable Iowa landmarks exist within the park. A small pioneer cemetery, located near the west entrance of the park, contains grave markers dating back as early as the 1830s. Just off the trail from the east entrance, hikers

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will find an area once known by Native Americans as "Bald Eagle Mound." The flat, mesa-like top of the mound was said to have been used by the Sauk and Fox tribes for racing ponies.

Geode offers a little bit of something for everyone and is

within a 25-mile radius of Burlington, Ft. Madison and Mt. Pleasant. Whether you're in Mt. Pleasant for Old Thresher's Reunion or visiting historic Burlington and Ft. Madison, it's always worth making the short drive to Geode to enjoy the spar-

ling beauty of this southeast Iowa gem.

*Ulf G. Konig is the park manager and Sarah Franklin-Tharp is the park ranger at Geode State Park.*

## LAKE GEODE AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** The 1,640-acre park is located in the southeast corner of Henry County, near Denmark and Danville. Burlington is 10 miles east and New London is six miles north.

**FISHING:** Prime attraction is an 186-acre lake built in 1950. It is well-known for its largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie, channel catfish, bullhead, redear sunfish and tiger muskie fishing.

**CAMPING:** There are 186 campsites, 96 with electricity. Two modern rest rooms available, along with a sewer dump station. There are two camp pads and a rest room that are accessible to the mobility impaired.

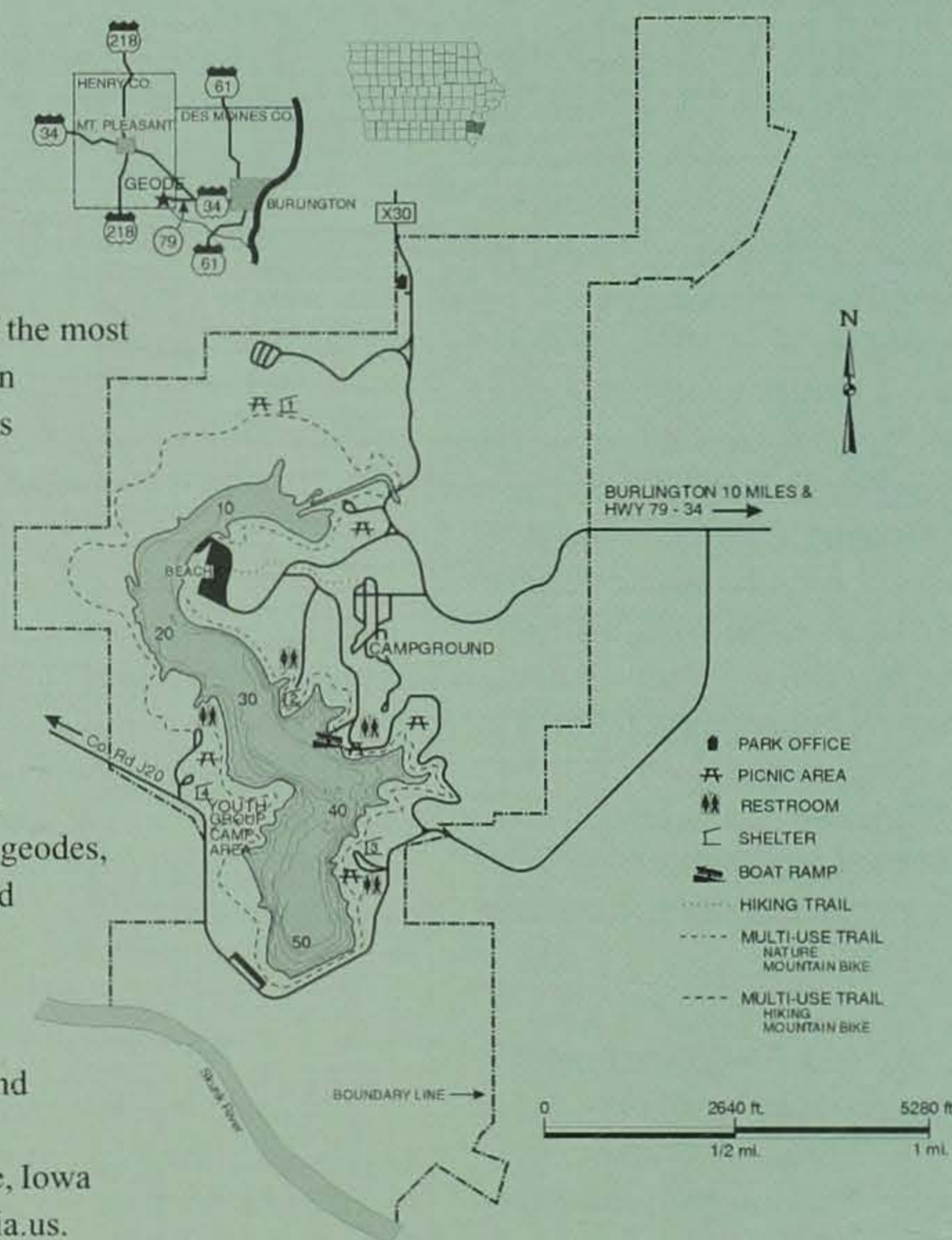
**TRAILS:** Several trails will challenge the typical hiker. The main trail winds along the lake from the north end to the dam. A portion of the trail has been developed as a nature trail; a printed brochure identifies points of interest. Another trail begins at the dam on the west side of the lake and ends at picnic shelter number one.

**PICNICKING:** Geode State park is one of the most scenic and popular picnicking destinations in southeast Iowa. Several open picnic shelters are available that may be reserved through the park manager. There is also one picnic site accessible by the mobility impaired.

**BOATING:** Boats with any size motor are allowed at no-wake speed.

**FUN FACTS:** The geode, for which the park is named, brings "rock hounds" to the area in search of the elusive stone. Several geodes, with their mysterious crystal formations and hollow cavities, are on display in the campground. Remember, removing geodes and other natural materials, with the exception of mushrooms, nuts, fruits and berries, from state parks is prohibited.

**CONTACT:** 3249 Racine Avenue, Danville, Iowa 52623; (319) 392-4601; Geode@dnr.state.ia.us.





# CONSERVATION 101

## From Timber To Table: Part 1

Article by A. Jay Winter ♦ Photos by Austin and Alex Winter

Deer hunting in Iowa is undoubtedly some of the best in the nation. It annually draws thousands of hunters to the field, provides hours of recreation and generates millions of dollars for the Iowa economy. In fact, it has been estimated deer hunters spent the equivalent of 1.3 million days hunting deer in Iowa last year, generated \$150 million in revenue for the state and saved their families another \$14 million on grocery bills.

I've done my part supporting the local economy, as my wife can attest. And I have enjoyed countless hours in the field. But some of my greatest pleasures in relation to deer hunting have come at the dinner table. Venison is a healthy part of the dinner table, and tasty one at that — if it is properly prepared. Proper preparation, however, begins in the field, not after it is processed for consumption. To take a deer from the field to the table is not that complicated if you follow a few simple steps.

This two-part series will take a look at what it takes to get a deer from the timber to the table.

### STEP 1

The first thing to remember is what you do before the shot may have as much to do with the quality of the finished product as what you do after. A quick, clean



killing shot is not only ethical, it reduces meat waste and results in a better tasting product. The target area is the heart and lungs, in the middle of the body immediately behind the front shoulders.

### STEP 2

Make sure the deer is dead. Approach from behind and poke it with a stick. Be observant of the eyes or any other signs of life. Once that is confirmed, it is a very good time to take pictures, using natural surroundings for a backdrop.

### STEP 3

The deer must be tagged within 15 minutes of the kill or before it is moved, whichever occurs first. Make sure to write the date of kill



in the appropriate space on the tag. If attaching the tag to the leg, thread it through a small incision between the tendon and the leg bone on the rear leg to make it more secure.

### STEP 4

Observe the deer to determine where the deer was hit, if the bullet/



UPPER LEFT: The proper equipment makes any job easier and more efficient.

LOWER LEFT: When opening the abdominal cavity (Step 7), guide the knife with your fingers to avoid cutting too deep.

BELOW: Enlisting the help of a friend or family member makes the task easier and more enjoyable.



arrow is still inside the deer (if the arrow is still inside the deer proceed with caution) and if the deer should be moved to facilitate easier field dressing (i.e. off of a hill, out of the brush, etc.).

### STEP 5

Wearing gloves (either latex, or better yet, latex over long plastic gloves) is a good idea when handling or dressing any animal. First cut around the anus, with your knife angled toward the outside of the pelvic cavity.

### STEP 6

Cut the trachea immediately in front of the front legs. This will allow you to remove it and the organs from the upper chest cavity more easily (in step 10).

### STEP 7

Next, open the abdominal cavity. Straddle the deer between its hindquarters with its legs extended upward. Make a small

incision in the deer underside, just above the hind legs, making sure not to cut too deep and rupture any of the organs. Insert your pointer and index fingers in the incision and allow your knife to lay (blade up) between your fingers until you reach the rib cage.

### STEP 8

To open the rib cage, locate the soft spot (cartilage) where the ribs meet the sternum. Place the knife's edge facing toward the deer's head, point down and handle firmly in hand, and cut through the cartilage toward the neck. If you follow this method, a small pocket knife will do the job.

### STEP 9

The last thing to cut free is the diaphragm, a muscular membrane in the middle of the cavity. Cut the membrane next to the outside of the abdominal wall all the way around the cavity.

### STEP 10

Reach inside the abdominal cavity in front of the hind legs, to pull the intestine, etc. through the pelvic cavity.

### STEP 11

Lay the deer on its side and remove all the internal organs.

### STEP 12

Dragging the deer and loading it in a vehicle is best done with the help of a friend. But if you are alone, a rope will no doubt make the process easier.

Good luck in the field this fall. Hopefully these steps will help you whether you are a veteran of the deer woods or beginner giving the sport a try for the first time.

*A. Jay Winter is a training officer for the department at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center near Guthrie Center.*







attention-holding phenomenon of trading cards and bring it into the classroom.

On the opposite page is a who's-who list of some of the most wanted pollutants in Iowa and across the United States. These air pollutants can spend months in the air and travel great distances from where they were released, creating a potential health and environmental hazard. You can learn how to identify these air quality rogues and what to do if you spot them. Read

more about Black Lung Benny, Backyard Haze Harry, Granny Olga Ozone, Otto the Oxman and Lead Foot Louie.

Teachers can obtain the whole cast of Rogues Gallery Environmental Collector Cards for classroom use. These fun cards show five of the most common pollutants. The reverse side provides a description of each — the causes, sources and how kids and parents can reduce emissions.

For an added challenge, let the kids test their word search skills on the puzzle below. Each word can be found somewhere on the back of the trading cards.

*Brian Button is an air quality information specialist with the department in Des Moines. Alan Foster is the managing editor of the Iowa Conservationist.*

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# CONSERVATION UPDATE

## Iowa Becomes Active Member of Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact

Penalties for fish and game violations just got tougher thanks to agreement between 18 member states of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.

Although Iowa has been a part of the compact for nearly two years, it just recently became an active participant. As an active member, Iowa becomes part of a network of state fish and wildlife agencies sharing violator information and taking reciprocal license suspension or revocation action when applicable.

"Basically, that means if your hunting license is suspended in Iowa, for example, it most likely is suspended in Colorado. If your fishing license is revoked in Minnesota, it's probably revoked in Iowa," said Steve Dermand, who oversees Iowa's participation. "Simply put, if you can't legally hunt or fish in one of the

member states, chances are you can't legally hunt or fish in any of them."

Currently, Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming are members of the compact. Dermand stressed that more states could be added at any time.

Not only will fish and wildlife violations jeopardize a person's license privileges in IWVC states, failure by the individual to pay court fines or restitution as a result of the charges will also justify suspension and revocation action. In that case, the individual's hunting and fishing privileges may be denied in all IWVC states, and will remain so until the debt is satisfied or the suspension or revocation period has been fully served.

## Be A Fish and Wildlife "Watchdog"

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa Turn In Poachers (TIP) organization encourage all citizens to become "watchdogs" for Iowa's fish and wildlife resources.

In 2002, TIP recorded numerous major wildlife poaching cases, most of which would not have happened without good, timely information from concerned citizens. When you see or hear what you believe is a fish or wildlife crime, call the TIP Hotline at 1-800-532-2020. The phone line is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and callers can remain anonymous. Remember, the information you provide can and does make a difference.



The effort to protect and enhance Iowa's natural resources has found a new home at the Clay County Fair. This 24-foot by 36-foot log cabin was moved Aug. 19 from the Ed and Agnes Sundholm farm, located outside of Albert City. The cabin and the area around it has been named the Sundholm Environmental Education Center. The cabin, built in the early 1950s, was moved in a joint project between the DNR, District 3 County Conservation Boards and the Clay County Fair Association. In addition to now being an annual presence at the fair for the DNR and area county conservation boards, the cabin and grounds will also be used as meeting space for conservation-oriented groups throughout the year.



## NEW AQUATIC INVADERS CAUSING PROBLEMS IN IOWA

### ***Brittle Naiad Confirmed at One Lake; Suspected At Others***

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has confirmed the presence of brittle naiad, an invasive aquatic plant native to Europe, at Yellow Smoke Lake in Crawford County, and suspects its presence at other Iowa lakes.

Brittle naiad has taken over Yellow Smoke, forcing the closure of the boat ramp. Ramps are also closed at Nelson Park in Crawford County, and Crawford Creek Lake and Moorehead Lake, both in Ida County, due to excessive weeds. Brittle naiad is suspected. The DNR also suspects it is in Little Sioux Park in Woodbury County and Casey Lake in Tama County.

Kim Bogenschutz with the DNR's aquatic nuisance species program said brittle naiad is difficult to control because the plant can grow from either the seeds along its stem or from plant fragments that have broken free. How it got into Yellow Smoke is unclear, Bogenschutz said, so she is stressing prevention to boaters and anglers to stop the spread.

The DNR plans to use a systemic herbicide this spring to remove the brittle naiad in Yellow

Smoke. The chemical will be applied when the plant is actively growing so it is absorbed through the stem. It will take 60 to 90 days for all the plants to die. If plants are killed too quickly, the mass of decaying plants will rob the water of oxygen and could cause a fish kill. The chemical costs about \$1,400 per gallon and the treatment at Yellow Smoke will require five gallons.

### **Don't Pick Up Aquatic Hitchhikers**

- ◆ **Thoroughly clean boats, trailers and even fishing nets at the end of a fishing trip.**
- ◆ **Anglers who collect their own bait should use it only in the water it was obtained from.**
- ◆ **Leftover bait should never be released into the lake, river or stream. Bait containers should be emptied into a trash can.**

Brittle naiad is similar to Eurasian watermilfoil. Both plant species spread rapidly and can take over lakes, crowding out more desired aquatic plants. Brittle naiad has spread throughout much of the eastern United States and has been confirmed in Missouri and Illinois lakes.

### ***Silver, Bighead Carp Found In Iowa Rivers***

Silver carp have been found in the Des Moines River at Keosauqua and below the Ottumwa Dam, the Iowa DNR recently confirmed. The presence of this nonnative fish is not

good news and has the potential to harm other more desirable native fish species, such as paddlefish, young game fish and other filter-feeding species, including mussels.

Silver carp is not the only new invader to Iowa rivers; bighead carp are also present. These two species, often used by commercial aquaculture operations in the southern United States to keep catfish ponds clean, are in the

Mississippi River and finding their way into Iowa's interior streams.

Silver carp are prolific reproducers and can be found in large numbers below dams. They are continuously silver in color, deep-bodied, have very small scales with eyes sitting

low on their head. They tend to leap out of the water when in the area of a moving boat.

Mark Flammang, DNR fisheries biologist at Lake Rathbun, said he collected the first samples of silver carp at the end of June from the Des Moines River at Keosauqua.

Bighead carp are silver with black blotches on their backs, deep-bodied with eyes low on the head and small scales. Bighead carp in excess of 50 pounds are common. They were first found in Iowa in the Missouri River at Sergeant Bluff in 1988 and are spreading to interior streams.



# CONSERVATION UPDATE

## Iowa Lands A Second Hunt Master Portable Lift

The Iowa DNR has been awarded a grant from the National Shooting Sports Foundation's (NSSF) Hunting Heritage Partnership to provide expanded recreational hunting opportunities to Iowa's physically challenged hunters.

The \$7,000 grant will allow the department to purchase a second Hunt Master, a portable, hydraulic hunting blind. The addition will double the number of hunters served through Iowa's Hunt Master program.

The Hunting Heritage Partnership, established by the

National Shooting Sports Foundation, the trade association for the firearms industry, provides much-needed direct funding to state wildlife agencies to help them with programs that provide opportunities for, and remove barriers to, hunter participation.

"Officials with Iowa's Department of Natural Resources have designed a unique and dynamic recruitment tool and this grant recognizes their successful efforts and helps build on them," said Doug Painter, president of the National Shooting Sports Foundation. "This is exactly the



kind of creative program development that agencies in other states can look to as a model to help preserve our hunting and conservation traditions."

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## ***Volunteering Today For A Better Iowa Tomorrow***

### ***Fayette Scout Troop 31 Leaves Its Mark On The Volga River***

#### **Because It's There**

In 1999, spring rains swelled the Volga River and flooded part of the Volga River State Recreation Area. When the water receded, it left behind an assortment of trash and tires, washed down from upstream. Most residents and visitors to area saw, if nothing else, an unsightly mess. Others saw a potential health concern, especially with the tires serving as a haven for mosquitoes, and potentially, West Nile Virus. Troop 31 of Fayette — a mixture of Webelo and Boy Scouts ranging in age from 8 to 16 — saw a perfect public service opportunity.

The young scouts, led by both troop leaders and parents — including Rodger Post, Tim Nuss, Darwin Vandersee, Steve Greco and Delmar Aller — went to work cleaning up the Big Rock Access to the Volga River. They plucked up tires and gathered trash left behind by the receding flood waters. By the time they were finished, the area was free of debris — most notably some 211 car, truck and tractor tires that dotted the river bank.

Accolades were few for the crew and its daunting task, which started in 2002 and ended this spring. Nor were the scouts paid or prodded for their efforts. Some may question, then, why they took on such a monumental, seemingly thankless task? Ask any of the scouts and they will tell you, "because it's there."

Troop 31 scout members team up to remove a tractor tire from the Big Rock Access to the Volga River.



#### **Upcoming NRC and EPC Meetings**

The dates and locations have been set for the following meetings of the Natural Resource Commission and Environmental Protection Commission of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Agendas are set approximately 10 days prior to the scheduled meeting date. For additional information, contact the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. 9<sup>th</sup> St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034.

#### **Natural Resource Commission:**

- November 13  
Des Moines
- December 11  
Des Moines

#### **Environmental Protection Commission:**

- October 20  
Des Moines
- November 17  
Des Moines
- December 15  
Des Moines



# WARDEN'S DIARY



The call was brief.  
“Is this the game warden?”  
“Yes.”

“I found some kind of injured hawk in the middle of the road. What do I do with it?”

“Where are you? Could you bring it to my house?”

I gave the caller directions and hung up the phone. As I waited for him, I expected to see an injured red-tailed hawk, most likely in pretty bad shape. I see a lot of them, given their habit of running into solid objects.

I answered a knock on the door and a man handed me a big box. I thanked him and brought it inside and opened it. “Whoa, here’s something you don’t see every day,” I thought. It wasn’t a hawk, but it was obviously some kind of falcon, and it was banded. It had a drooping wing and a look that said, “If I could get out of this box and get hold of you, you wouldn’t be so smug.” It was a look I’ve learned to respect with regards to raptors.

Jane Goggin with the falcon at the Minnesota Raptor Center.

## A Long Way From Canada

by Chuck Humeston

I fished out my bird ID book and flipped through the pages. Sure enough, it was a peregrine falcon — a bird Iowa and other states have been working very hard to restore. I didn’t know if it would survive its injuries, but I looked at it and said, “You deserve a chance, my friend.”

The next day I took it to the Iowa State University Veterinary Hospital Wildlife Care Clinic. It was Oct. 7, 2002. I filled out some papers, and said, “Good luck, buddy.”

Several months later, I received a picture and letter from the University of Minnesota Raptor Center. Later, a letter arrived from Sharon Selch, an adviser at the ISU Wildlife Care Clinic. I’ll let her (paraphrased) letter take over the story from here.

### The Letter

“I called Bob Andersen, who is instrumental in the peregrine release program in northeast Iowa. Bob found it was banded as a nestling west of Hudson Bay as reported by the Canadian Wildlife Service. This is a tundra peregrine falcon migrating south when it was injured in Iowa.

“Determination hit me hard to either drive this bird to the Minnesota Raptor Center myself or to make some kind of arrangements,” she wrote. “I contacted Bruce Ehresman of the DNR to accomplish this. Lori Arent at the Raptor Center gave me the exact steps. The bird remained at ISU for four days to stabilize for transport. I personally drove the bird to the Des Moines Airport, and it left on Northwest Airlines.”

Dr. Julie Ponder repaired and





pinned the fractured wing. Physical therapy followed under the care of the Raptor Center staff, followed by flight exercise. The total stay was 28 weeks.

"The bird was scheduled for release at the end of April," Selch continued in her letter. "Jane Goggin, technician at the Raptor Center as well as a woman who made a substantial financial contribution for the bird's care, accompanied the bird to the release site. The peregrine flew perfectly over the Mississippi River heading north in an awesome sight to behold."

### Links Of The Chain

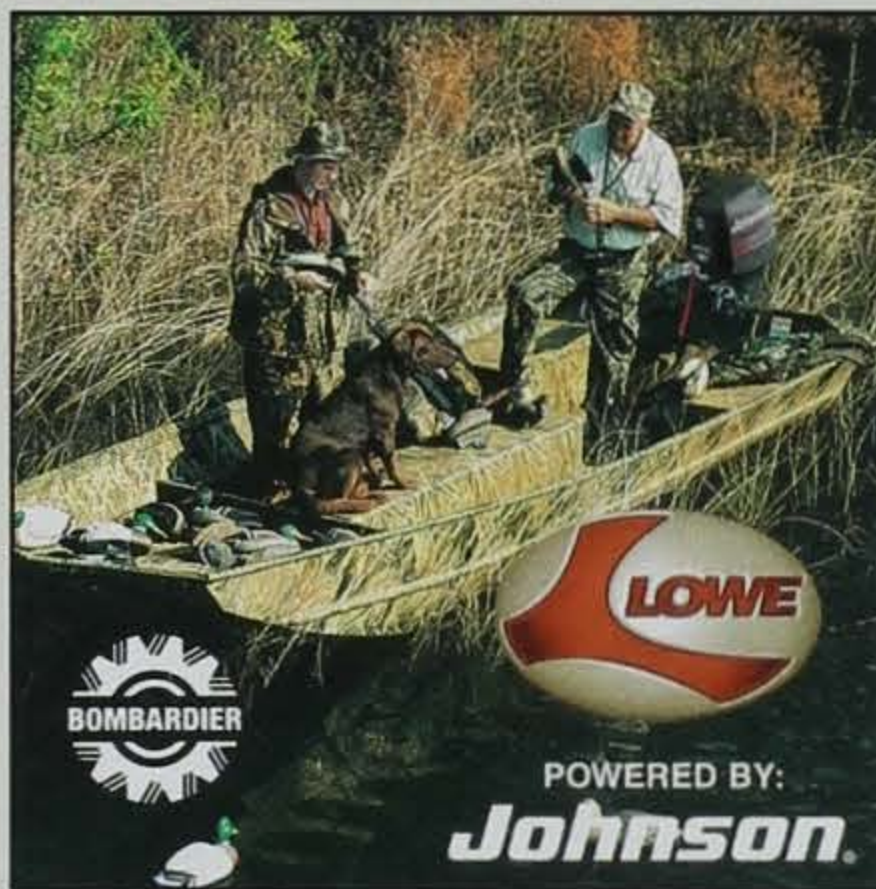
I read Sharon's letter and smiled. There are

some who would say, "Why go to all the trouble?" At the same time, I often find myself asking, "Does anyone care anymore at all?"

I never got the name of the guy who found the falcon on the road, but obviously it was some guy who did care. He started the whole chain of events. I felt good at having played a minor part in the saga. Sharon summed it up in

her letter better than I ever could.

"In the links of the chain we all have a responsibility, and are placed well for the benefit of this raptor and other wildlife from before the beginning of its life to the day of release. The question for all of us is will we take the responsibility and FLY with it. One missing link can determine the overall outcome."



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