

September / October 2008

# IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

IN THIS ISSUE:

**ON THE HUNT FOR RARE BATS**

*BIOLOGISTS WORK THE NIGHT SHIFT IN VAN BUREN COUNTY*



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# IOWA OUTDOORS

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We strive to open the door to the beauty and uniqueness of Iowa's natural resources, inspire people to get outside and experience Iowa and to motivate outdoor-minded citizens to understand and care for our natural resources.

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## Thoughts on Nature's Wrath

This past year—again—our state has been brutally reminded of the power of wind and water. So many are personally affected, and recovery will be long in rebuilding our infrastructure, homes and businesses, and spirit. Yet I am confident we will.

While touring Iowa City and Cedar Rapids as floodwaters just began to recede, I heard the comment, "Man, nature can be mean." Although I empathize with the person's losses, I could not agree with his statement. Nature is what it is, and cannot be "good" or "bad." In the words of author Seth Norman,

*"Eventually, most of us figure out that it's people, not nature, who create morality, values, ethics—and even the idea itself that nature is worth preserving.*

*We choose to be shepherds or stewards, or we don't.*

*We live wisely—preserving water and air*

*and everything else intrinsic to the equations we're only beginning to understand—or we won't, in which case Nature will fill the vacuum we leave. She is exquisite, and utterly indifferent."*

After our immediate attention to public health and safety issues, protecting against loss of life and destruction of property, our thoughts turn toward recovery. Work continues on rebuilding our homes, our roads and bridges, our economy, our agricultural lands and our natural assets. And hopefully, we are embarking on paths that lead to sustainability.

One of the key considerations is not only how we reduce future flooding, it is how we avoid the magnitude of flood damages in the future. They are called "floodplains" for a reason; they flood. The frequency and magnitude of flooding has been increasing dramatically in the last 15 years, a trend most scientists and climatologists believe will continue and perhaps accelerate.

So what is the best way to plan for the next one? "Nature herself has met many of the problems that now beset us, and she has usually solved them in her own successful way. Where man has been intelligent enough to observe and to emulate Nature he, too, is often rewarded with success," wrote Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring*.

I believe in this philosophy. We need to embrace our rivers, not try to rein them in. How high we build levees may not be the appropriate question. Perhaps we should ask the question of where we put the levees, right next to the river or farther up the floodplain elevation, allowing the river room to expand and contract, or if we need to build more levees at all. Proactive planning with the thought that floods will again occur, regardless of our control techniques, could greatly decrease costs in human suffering, economic loss and environmental devastation.

We have good examples of this, as Davenport and Rock Island, Ill. have done after recent floods, by establishing parks, riverwalks and other nonrestrictive uses next to the river. Even with future floods, most of their human endeavors will be protected, and in the meantime, they enjoy a wonderfully accessible and useful riverfront. We have the knowledge of how to develop our riverfronts in this fashion, and we have the resources. Let's commit ourselves to this type of sustainable, fiscally responsible and nature-friendly view of our rivers.



*Richard Leopold*

RICHARD LEOPOLD, Director of the Iowa DNR

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BY MICK KLEMESRUD PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

#### ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Justin Wadle of Des Moines casts for trout on Little Paint Creek in northeast Iowa's Yellow River Forest. Staff photographer Clay Smith captured the image for our Lost in Iowa outdoor travel department. *Read more on page 16.* "The mid-November weather was overcast, spitting sleet and snow, but even in the bleakest times, it is a beautiful place," says Smith. "It was cold, but everyone was having a good time outdoors."

#### ABOUT THE COVER

Staff photographer Clay Smith worked the night shift to collect images while field biologists captured hundreds of bats, hoping to find endangered Indiana bats. Researchers place temporary green iridescent dye to help distinguish if the bat was previously captured. Upset, the bat bares its sharp, miniscule teeth used to consume large quantities of insects nightly. Beneficial and relatively harmless, bats are often feared by many people based on superstition and inaccurate information. *Read more on page 24.* Clay took photos over three nights, using a tripod and long exposure to shoot the barn and show star trails and a flash for the bat image.

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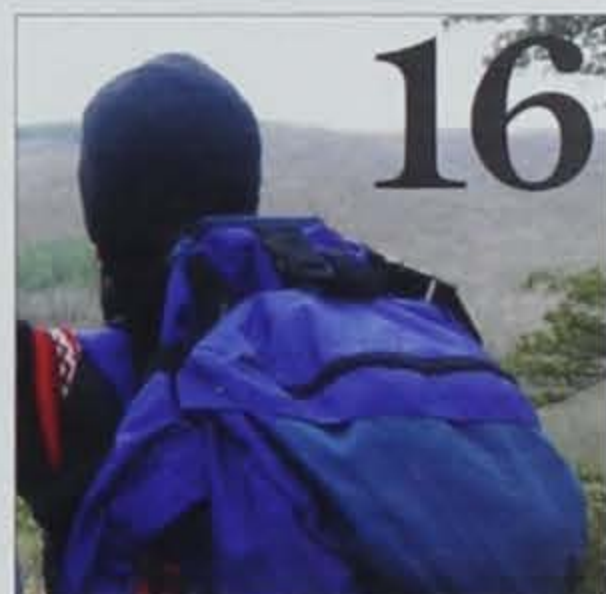
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ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS  
FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



# Families Can Help Restore Bluebirds

Their sweet  
calls and  
shimmering  
beauty are  
worth the  
effort

The greatest spectacle in an Iowa birder's season is arguable, but listen to Jaclyn Hill of Ellsworth talk, and it's easy to tell what hers is. Mention bluebirds and her voice raises a pitch and the words flow like the bird's *tu'wheet-tudu* call itself. The undisputed queen of bluebirds believes if other Iowans take time to learn more about this bird, they'll discover a fascinating, educational activity that will bring young and old together.

Bluebird numbers reached critical status in the mid-1900s due to habitat destruction, pesticide use and nest predation from non-native house sparrows and European starlings. But populations are recovering, thanks to growing interest in their protection. Most notable are bird lovers' commitments to providing bluebird nest trails and monitoring their use.

**HABITAT**

Establishing a bluebird trail can be fun and rewarding. Habitat is the most important factor in establishing a

trail, says Hill, who has garnered numerous awards for her bluebird conservation work and founded and edits the Iowa Bluebird Directory. Open rural country with sparse ground cover is best. Grass must be mowed weekly to aid in finding food. Avoid pesticide use. Suitable perch sites, like a high wire or tree branch, should also be available to facilitate foraging. If bluebirds do not find suitable habitat, they probably will not use your boxes, Hill says.

PHOTOS BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM



### BLUEBIRD TIPS AND TIDBITS

- Usually nest in late March or early April.
- Often have two broods per season, with three possible.
- Regularly lay four to five light blue eggs, but up to seven. Some eggs may be white.
- The incubation period is 12 to 14 days.
- Young birds remain in the nest 18 to 21 days before fledging.
- Bluebird nests are cup-shaped, usually made of 100 percent woven grass.
- House sparrow nests are a thick collection of grass, weeds and junk and can fill the entire house.
- Remove a house sparrow nest immediately.
- It may take several seasons for bluebirds to locate and select your nest boxes, but patience is rewarded when you find your first resident.
- Remove bluebird nests and clean out boxes after nesting is complete for the season. Remember, two or three broods may be raised. Wait several weeks after the last brood has left to ensure it will not be used again. Prop box open, so mice don't use the house, which can halt future nestings.

### PREDATOR CONTROL

Predator control is also critical, and Hill goes to great lengths to protect her birds. Avoid brushy and heavily wooded areas—habitat of competing birds that pierce bluebird eggs with their beaks or destroy chicks. Steer clear of farmsteads and feedlots where the house sparrow, also called the English sparrow, thrives. Mount nest boxes on PVC conduit pipe—never wood—to deter predators.

### LOCATION

Proper monitoring and spacing of nest boxes increases chances for successful bluebird trails. Mount boxes so the entrance is five to six feet above ground. Face boxes away from prevailing winds, ideally toward a tree or shrub within 100 feet of the box. This provides easy access for young birds leaving the nest. Boxes should be spaced at least 100 to 150 yards apart. Some experts recommend placing boxes in pairs about 25 feet apart, with each pair 100 to 150 yards apart. Make sure boxes are in place by March 1 for these blue marvels who enjoy early nesting.

### MONITORING

Hill and other bird pros agree that monitoring nest boxes and reporting findings is critical to the bluebird's future. It's also rewarding, as it makes for fun family walks and teaches children the basics of keeping records. If you don't have time to monitor, it might not be wise to start a trail. Check boxes at least weekly throughout the nesting season, but not after nestlings are 12 to 14 days old so fledglings aren't prompted to leave the box too soon.

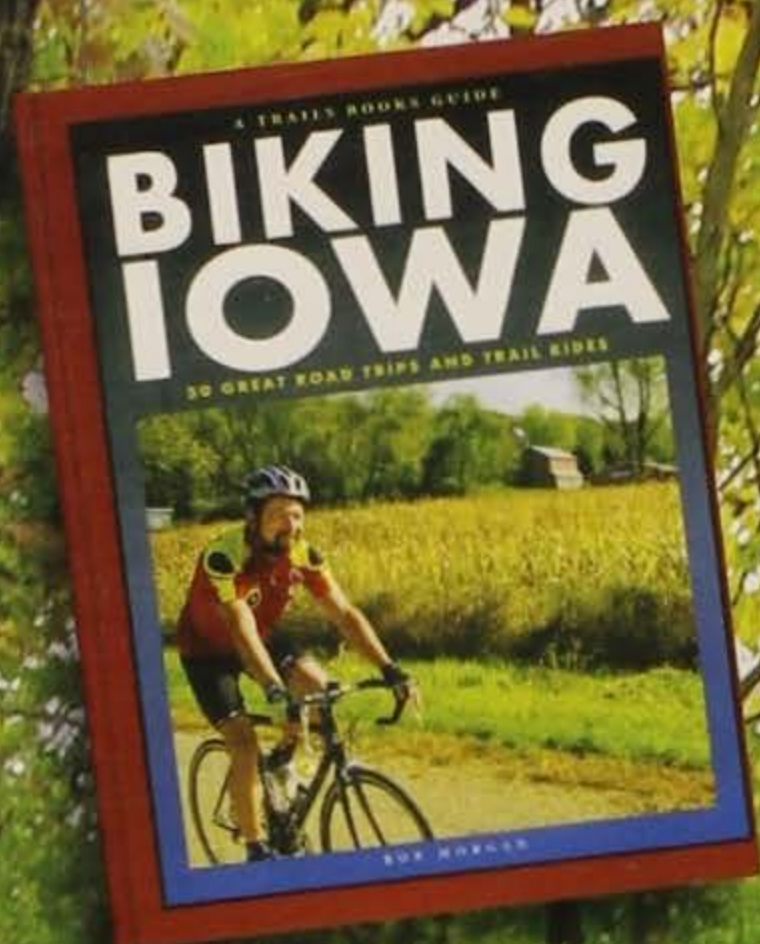
### GET INVOLVED

*Protect Iowa bluebirds by reporting nesting success and failures. Box plans, trail location tips and simple-to-complete monitoring forms are available at [www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/files/bbird.html](http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/files/bbird.html). Instructions for returning the simple information are on the forms. Return data by Nov. 1 for inclusion in the directory.*



**TOGETHER ~ HALF A DAY ON \$50**

BY BRIAN BUTTON



The Guidebook, *Biking Iowa: 50 Great Road Trips and Trail Rides* by Bob Morgan of Cedar Falls



# Top Rides for Autumn Splendor

*Take 9,000 miles of public roads, add more than 1,000 miles of multi-use trails, throw in some eye-popping fall color and you've got a cyclist's paradise. With cool, humid-free days great for rides, the first two weeks of October typically offer peak colors and make Iowa a biker destination.*

## Northeast Iowa

This corner of the state is not only tops for fall color, its limestone bluffs and deep valleys ooze with regional character. For cyclists, the area's famed hills provide challenging climbs and white-knuckle descents. In fairness, dozens of area roads offer vivid autumn color and great views for riders of all skill levels, so get adventurous and explore the region. Some rides can be strenuous, but the rewards are hilltop views and steep, ear-popping descents.

### DECORAH TO BLUFFTON—MODERATE

"Without a doubt, this is one of the first I'd recommend," says Ben Shockey of Decorah Bicycles. With two good climbs on the Bluffton Road, riders soak in hilltop views of dense woods rich in maple reds and views across tree-studded valleys. Roundtrip is 22 miles. Take Pole Line Road across Highway 52 on the north side of Decorah, following signs to Bluffton on W20. Or choose the gravel road to Bluffton parallel to the highway with its old iron bridges across the Upper Iowa River. "It's a favorite ride up here," he says. Other picks: Gravel roads from Decorah to Dorchester, Highlandville or Satry. "Anytime you head toward those towns you have pretty rides."

### 50-MILE CLAYTON COUNTY LOOPS—STRENUOUS

Loops are great for long rides, or ridden as short segments. Ryan Tenge of Elkader expects to put 12,000 miles on his bike this year and knows area rides by heart. From Elkader, take X3C blacktop, on the River Bluffs Scenic Byway, to Garber (13 miles), then C7X for a steep descent into Guttenberg (12 miles) and C43 to Osterdock to stop for a fish taco at the general store. Head south on X47 and rejoin X3C back to Elkader and grab something cold at Fennelly's Irish Pub.

A second 50-mile loop from Elkader via Volga, Wadena, Elgin and Clermont offers "one of my favorite loops for fall foliage and bluff views," says Tenge. The descent into Volga overlooks a huge valley, forests and pastures. A big drop into Elgin offers coasters a chance to hit 50 mph, then take a rest for antique shops in Clermont or a side jaunt up the hill to Montauk, the historic Governor Larrabee mansion. The ride home via Gunder offers a 1-pound Gunderburger at the Irish Shanti.

### HERITAGE TRAIL, DUBUQUE COUNTY—EASY

With compact gravel and rest facilities, this flat route is an easy family ride past 450 foot deep valleys, old lead mines, mill towns and rugged woodlands. Mosey down 26 miles of a once bustling railroad line from Dyersville to Dubuque for numerous overlooks of the Little Maquoketa, sheer limestone bluffs, fossil collecting and interpretive sites. West of Epworth, the surrounding terrain flattens with fields and prairie.

[www.dubuquecounty.com/HeritageTrail.cfm](http://www.dubuquecounty.com/HeritageTrail.cfm)

### GREAT RIVER ROAD—EASY TO STRENUOUS

"Iowa has 28 towns along the length of the Mississippi River," says Mark Wyatt of the Iowa Bicycle Coalition. He's ridden the entire Mississippi River Trail from New

Albin to Keokuk. "These are wonderful river towns used to welcoming visitors for many years," he says. Wyatt touts the fantastic sections around Pikes Peak State Park in Clayton County and Balltown in Dubuque County. "It is very hilly." A calorie-burning 12 percent grade near Balltown makes for challenging climbs or exhilarating descents for thrill seekers, and the nice, 6-foot-wide paved shoulders make a beautiful bike ride. Wyatt also rides Keokuk to Montrose on little-used Highway 96. "Montrose has a wonderful riverfront park with picnic areas and a clam shell button museum."

## Other Iowa Rides

### SOUTHWEST IOWA TACO RIDE—EASY

Hit the crushed limestone Wabash Trace from Council Bluffs to Mineola for the 19-mile roundtrip ride through terraced Loess Hills, woodlands, fields and pasture. Up to a thousand riders journey to the Mineola Steak House for the Thursday night special—a basket of tacos. A tree and shrub line along the way add color. Built on the former Wabash Railroad bed, "It's a gravel trail, but fairly flat," says Wyatt. "People show up after work to hit the Wabash—there is no set time," he says. Find the trailhead in Council Bluffs at the corner of U.S. 275 and East South Omaha Bridge Road, south of Iowa's School for the Deaf.

### EAST CENTRAL FALL HARVEST—EASY

Watch the fascinating Amish harvest with horses pulling harvesters, steel wheel tractors and old style farming at its best. Ride southwest from Iowa City's Napoleon Park at S. Gilbert Street on W66, then take paved F62 to Frytown and W38 to Wellman for a 52-mile loop.

## CYCLING RESOURCES

- *The guidebook, Biking Iowa: 50 Great Road Trips and Trail Rides* by Bob Morgan of Cedar Falls is a must with its detailed maps, stops along the way and insights on trailside nature and history. 136 pages, \$19.95. Order at [www.trailsbooks.com](http://www.trailsbooks.com)
- [www.bikeiowa.com](http://www.bikeiowa.com) offers group ride information, maps, trail links and discussion boards, with links to bike shops and bike clubs.
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- [www.oneotarivercycles.com/routes](http://www.oneotarivercycles.com/routes) offers Decorah area maps, distances and vertical profiles.
- [www.iowabikes.com](http://www.iowabikes.com), the Iowa DOT site to order free bike maps, existing and planned trails and biking safety.
- [www.inhf.org/iowatrails](http://www.inhf.org/iowatrails), find 43 trail maps, facts and local links.

## TOGETHER ~ OUTDOOR FIT



America has come a long way the last 250 years. Back then, hunting involved muskets or bows, printing used moveable type, planting involved horses, fires were fought with buckets and flooding was fought with sand bags. Now we have hundreds of patents on fire fighting equipment, electronic communication, air conditioned tractors with satellite-guided planting programs, GPS and sonar devices for hunting and fishing, and we fight floods with sandbags. What is wrong with this picture?

I spend a lot of time ranting about labor-saving devices. Like the day I first saw the ad for the motorized cooler. That device eliminates the need to walk between the car and the picnic table in the park. I wonder, just how lazy can we get? I know our crusade to create labor-saving devices has gone too far...but in the sandbag instance it hasn't gone anywhere and it should.

I grew up in Waterloo. As a teen, I often joined city workers, the National Guard and other citizens to deal with spring floods. It was an adventure and as regular as prom. As an adult I stacked bags dropped from helicopters at the Des Moines Water Works in '93. During the "Flood of '08" I stacked bags as well, all the while thinking there has to be a better way.

So now Iowa is dealing with compromised or lost homes, crops, businesses, parks and trails. I know our focus in 2008 needs to be on this recovery, but we need to also look ahead. It is time for Iowa to plan for the Flood of 2020 and beyond. Which brings me back to the sandbag.

Newer synthetic bags are less porous than burlap, but our technology is hundreds of years old! It is time we create new weapons. Maybe it will look like a large Lego that two workers can lift or use those long silage tubes you see around the Iowa countryside. When I first started thinking of this I thought storage might be an issue...but with proper engineering the tool could have dual uses and then it could be everywhere.

Enroute to a sandbag site last June I saw a cargo container being lifted into place. Imagine interlocking shipping containers or dumpsters filled with sand or other substance thus creating a thick and heavy 8-foot wall in minutes. I could see a competition held at Iowa State University in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers to test such devices. The benefit for our environment and health could be enormous. We should still redesign our communities to concede flood plains to greenways, parks and trails and reinforce existing levees. But it is time to relegate the sandbag to a minor role.

I often advocate that Iowa become a leader in reengineering physical activity into our routine. In this one case I wish to suggest that Iowa lead the charge to eliminate one backbreaking routine and establish a method of fighting rising waters that could save Iowa billions.

*Tim Lane is the fitness consultant with the Iowa Department of Public Health. A marathoner, former director of the National Ski Patrol, climber and volleyball coach, he has cycled across America once and Iowa 25 times. He's a regular on RAGBRAI. Tim also helped design and promotes Lighten Up Iowa.*

## But Why?

Helping adults answer children's nature questions

BY A. JAY WINTER

*A. Jay Winter educates up to 20,000 Iowa children each year as the DNR's training specialist at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center.*

### Why do leaves change color?

- PAM, AGE 7

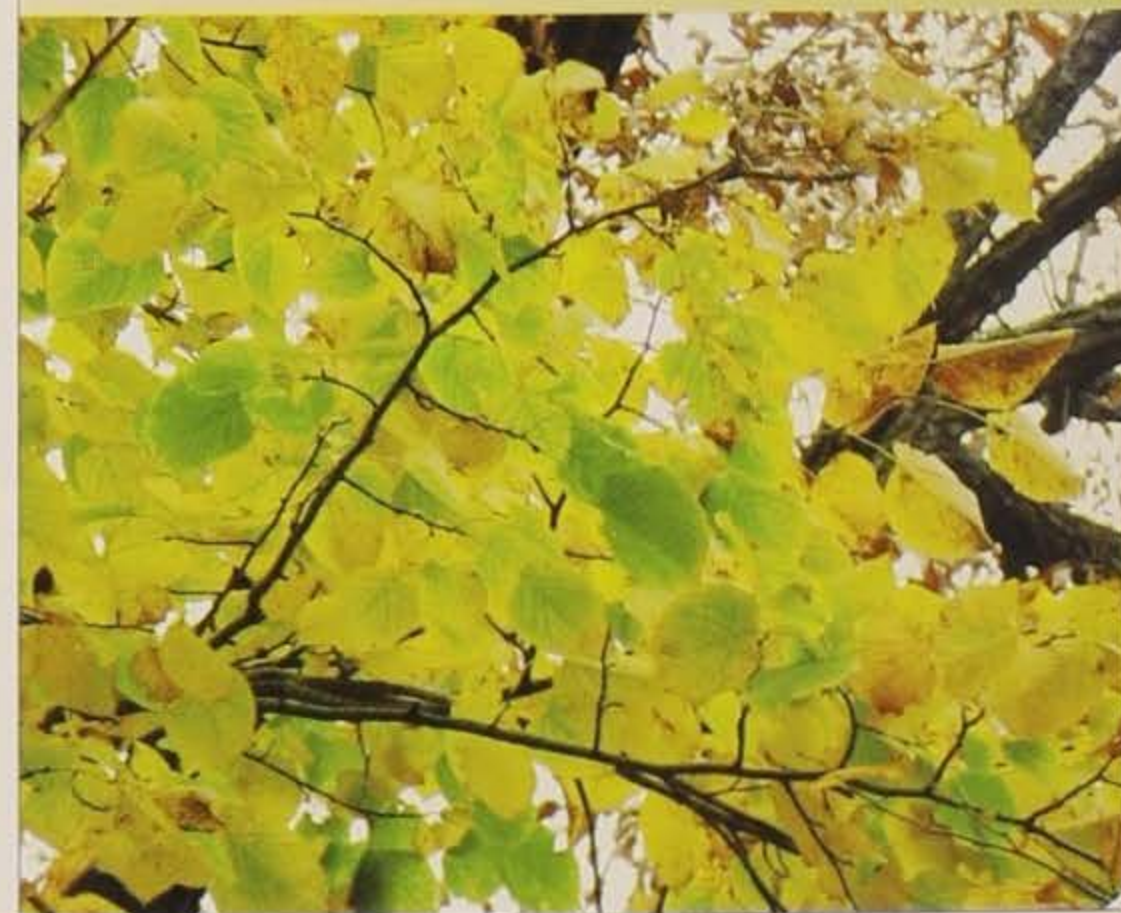
There is much speculation and folklore associated with the spectacular colors Iowans enjoy every fall in our hardwood forests. Some believe the change is caused by warm days followed by cool nights. Others feel it is due to the changing length of days, while others cite soil acidity and tree location. Some say elves paint the forests.

Actually the color is *always* there, just masked by chlorophyll—the green compound responsible for the manufacture of foods in plants. Chlorophyll breaks down in sunlight and is constantly replaced. As long as the plant actively grows, enough is produced to keep leaves green.

Changing color is associated with dormancy. Longer nights trigger the production of phytochrome and the onset of dormancy. Chlorophyll production drops, green color fades and bright reds, oranges, purples and yellows always present are unmasked.

Leaf color depends on the pigment present and the leaf sap acidity. When this process starts and how early and brilliant the colors depend on the region of the state and fall weather conditions. Cool nights destroy chlorophyll quickly, but freezing temperatures inhibit production of red pigments. Cloudy days and warmer nights produce less brilliant colors because chlorophyll breaks down more slowly. Wind and rain may cause early leaf drop.

So in this case, everyone is right in part...except for the elf believers.



MYTH



# Most bats have rabies!

The incidence of rabies in wild bat populations is likely less than 1/2 of 1 percent. In a recent Indiana study, none of 259 wild, free-flying big brown bats tested positive for rabies. The picture is different for high-risk bats—those turned in for testing because they are ill, injured or acting strangely. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 6 percent of all high-risk bats and 28 percent of skunks tested nationally were infected with rabies. Skunks are the most likely land-bound rabies carrier. The Iowa Hygienic Lab shows less than 3 percent of bats were positive for rabies out of 469 high-risk bats turned in for testing in 2007.

While people tend to fear rabies, chances of being in a car accident are much higher. Nationwide, an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 people receive the life-saving post-rabies exposure shots each year. Although rabies is a fatal disease, only three Americans per year die from rabies. Contrast that with the fact that every four minutes, someone dies due to a preventable injury. However, people should use caution when faced with any wild mammal or strangely acting domestic mammal and contact their health care

provider, including their veterinarian if bitten or exposed to saliva. National rabies recommendations are more conservative for bats versus other animals, in part as bites can be very small and may not be noticeable. So contact your health provider, if bitten, if someone wakes up with a bat in the room, or if children or incapacitated people are found in a room with a bat. If possible, capture the bat with a net while wearing heavy gloves and submit it for testing. If rabies can't be ruled out by testing, treatment is no longer the painful affair it was 20 years ago, but now involves only six shots in the arm.

People with bats in living areas of their home should check with Bat Conservation International ([www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org)) for removal tips. If exposed, consult the Department of Public Health at (800) 362-2736 or the State Patrol at (515) 323-4360 after hours. For animal testing, call the University of Iowa Hygienic Lab (319) 335-4500 and the Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (515) 294-1950.

## IT'S GONNA BE A LONG WINTER

BY SHELLY CODNER

**THE BANDED WOOLLY BEAR**, a common caterpillar, is the species that, according to legend, can predict the harshness of the upcoming winter. According to this belief, the longer the black at the ends of the body, the more severe the upcoming winter will be.

A scientific study performed in the fall of 1948 by Dr. C. H. Curran, curator of insects at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, perpetuated this belief. Curran collected as many caterpillars as he could in one day at New York's Bear Mountain State Park, determined the average number of reddish-brown segments and forecast the upcoming winter weather via *The New York Herald Tribune*.

His experiment, which he continued over the next eight years, attempted to scientifically prove the woolly bear's meteorological skills. The resulting publicity made the woolly bear the most famous and most recognizable caterpillar in North America.

However, Curran's experimental controls were fuzzy at best. Since that time scientists, including those at Iowa State University's Department of Entomology, dismiss the connection between



MYTH

woolly bears and weather, proving that the width of the bands has more to do with the age of the caterpillar and moisture conditions during its development.

The fact that woolly bear coloring has to do with age and moisture doesn't dampen the Woolly Bear Festivals that communities such as Vermilion, Ohio, Banner Elk, N.C. and Lewisburg, Pa. host annually. Festivities include parades, woolly bear races and "official" declarations of the woolly bear's forecast.

BAT PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH; CATERPILLAR PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER ADLAM

GOT A QUESTION? Send to: [ASKTHEEXPERTS@DNR.IOWA.GOV](mailto:ASKTHEEXPERTS@DNR.IOWA.GOV)

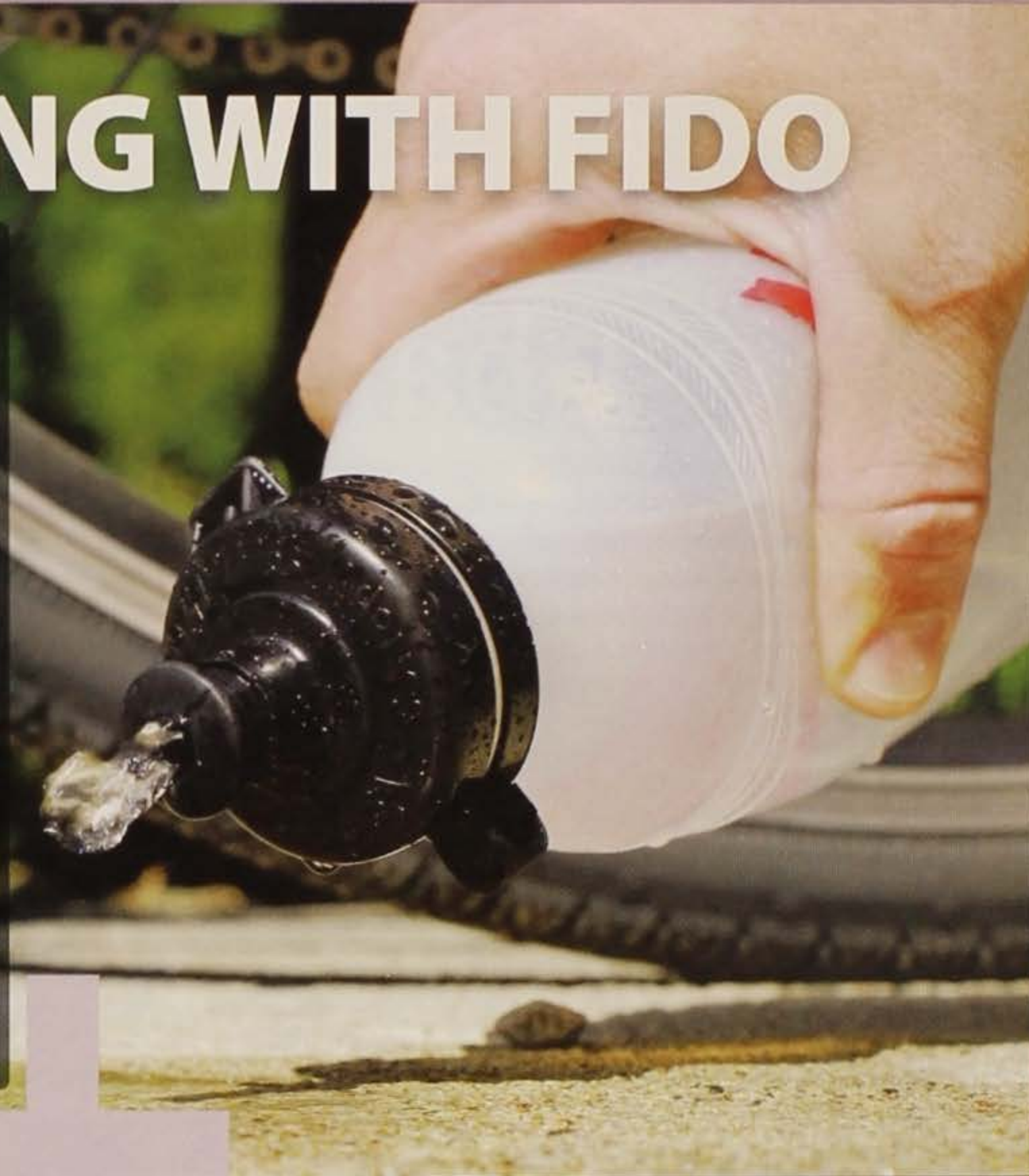
# OUTDOOR SKILLS

## TIPS, TRICKS, HOW-TO AND MUST-KNOWS TO ENHANCE YOUR OUTDOOR FUN

### ≡ SPRINTING WITH FIDO

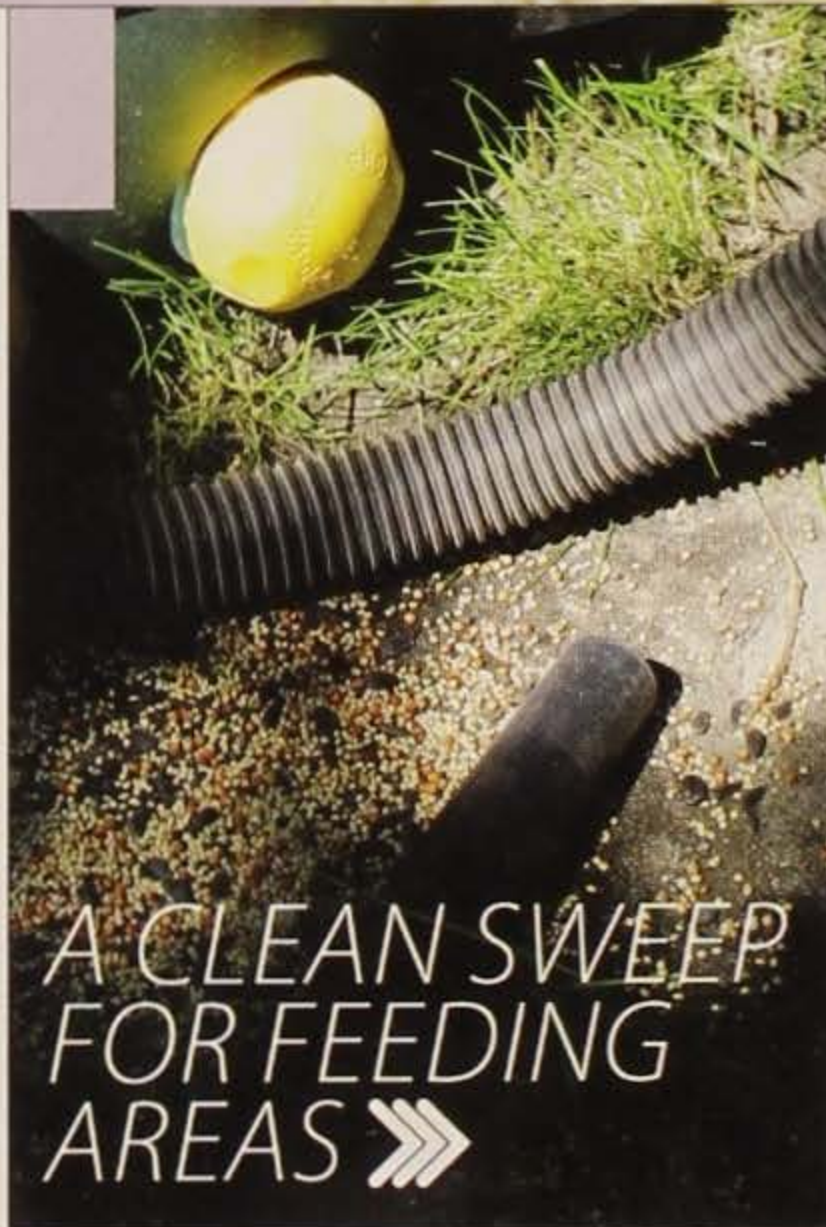
Cyclists on rural roads learn which farmsteads have nice dogs, fat slowpoke dogs, those that give brief chase for fun and the wicked dogs that want a pound of flesh.

Avid cyclists usually power past them, relishing the chase, but "Don't try to outrun them on an uphill," offers Ben Shockey of Decorah Bicycles. "Worst case, get off the bike and keep it between you and the dog." He says that can help a dog calm down by recognizing you are a human. A water bottle spray in their face can deter them, too. "Depending on your skills, on flats or down hills you can try to outrun them." You'll know if you win.



### STAY HYDRATED IN DRY AIR ≡

Autumn hiking, cycling, paddling and trail running can mask sweating. After a hot, humid summer, autumn's dry air can evaporate sweat as quickly as it forms, and you could dehydrate faster than you realize. Take plenty of water to stay hydrated. New generation containers use stainless steel, not plastic, to eliminate the chemical BPA leached from polycarbonate plastic bottles.



### A CLEAN SWEEP FOR FEEDING AREAS ≡

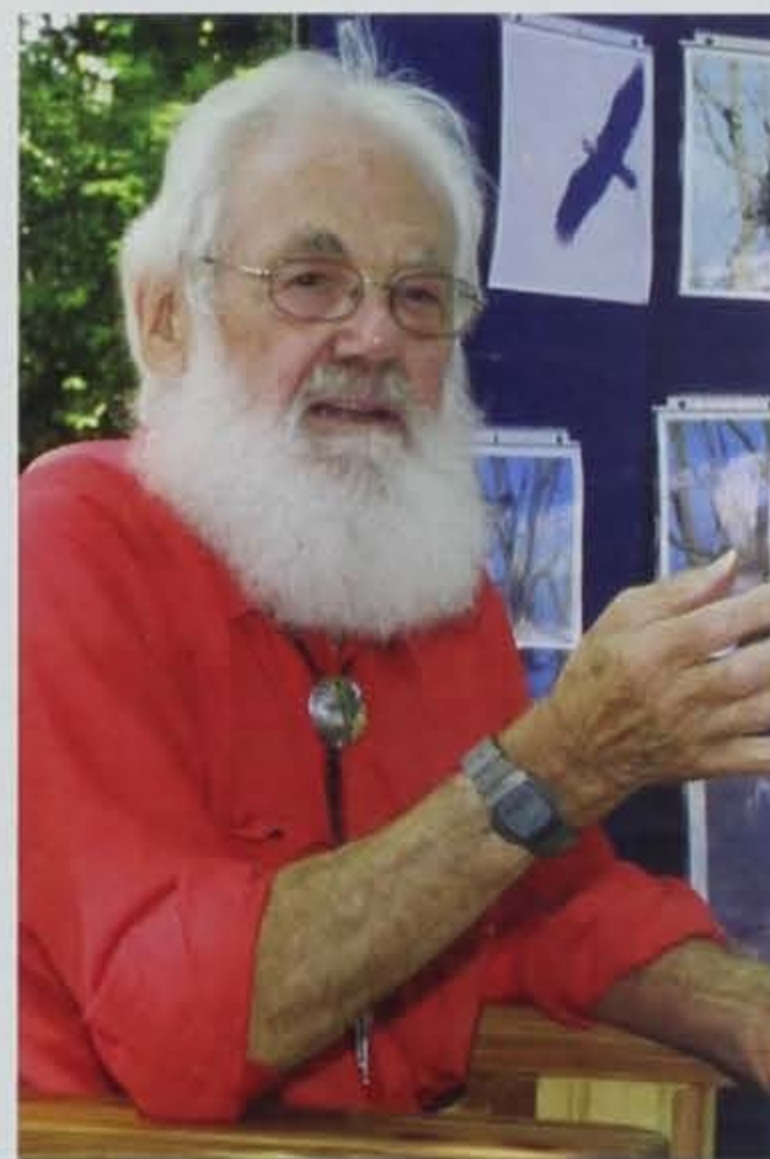
To protect your backyard birds from bacteria and disease from rotting food, shells and droppings on the ground below feeders use an indoor/outdoor shop vacuum to suck up materials in minutes. To sanitize feeders, empty contents and soak feeder in solution of one part bleach to 10 parts water. Rinse, dry and refill.

## LIFELONG LEADER FOR NATURE

**BILL HORINE, HUXLEY**

**Lifelong conservation work continues for 93-year-old Iowan**

Bill Horine is a man of a million stories. At 93, he's still adding to the collection. Horine has backed away from a hungry Alaskan brown bear standing just 20 feet away. He's patiently watched bald eagles pluck mallards out of open water. He was instrumental in creating the Story County Conservation Board in the 1950s and brought the outdoors into central Iowa living rooms for 14 years on KCCI-TV. "If there's anyone who fits 'living legacy,' it's Bill Horine," says Pat Schlarbaum, a DNR wildlife technician. "He's a giant in outdoor activities and still current." Today, the outdoors enthusiast gives presentations about bald eagles, writes for magazines and works with school children to instill a respect for nature. Last year he led a charge in the town of Nevada to secure funding for multi-use trails. "Kids are about two generations away from the out-of-doors, and how are they going to learn about the problems?" says Horine. "It's to make people aware of the out-of-doors and why we have to take care of it and really keep it pristine." A love for the outdoors began on his first hunting trip when he was about 5 years old. That passion grew into a weekly outdoors newspaper column in the early '50s, then radio, TV and beyond—all done in the afternoon after his regular job as a rural mail carrier. Retirement brought even more chances to reach out. "It's in my blood, and the good Lord gave me the talent and ability. As long as I can do anything, I'm going to do it," Horine says. "I'm having just as much fun getting older as I had when I was younger."



## A MORE SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS

**HOLLY MORIARTY, IOWA CITY**

**University of Iowa student takes environmental class assignment to action**

You wouldn't be surprised at how much food college students can eat. But you'd raise an eyebrow at the piles of leftovers that head to the landfill. University of Iowa student Holly Moriarty, working at the Hillcrest dining center on campus, was surprised, too. When it came time to write a feasibility study for an environmental engineering class, she and three other students devised a way to compost those leftovers. After the class ended, Moriarty ran with the idea, working with the Iowa City landfill and the university. Hillcrest dining sent uneaten hamburgers, stale pizza and ignored vegetables to the landfill to be composted—30 tons worth in one year. Months later, the university had high-quality compost to use in flower beds and landscaping. Now, with Moriarty graduated, landfill staff look to expand the project to not only the other campus dining hall, Burge, but to local businesses. "This set the stage to ramp up the program and work with other organizations to keep biodegradable waste out of the landfill," says Jen Jordan, Iowa City's recycling coordinator. "Holly's determination in making sure it actually happened stands out." For her efforts, Moriarty received a waste management award in 2007 from the Iowa Society of Solid Waste Operations. "People can do things in their homes to help the environment," says Moriarty, "but one person can also make a difference in their community."

## PROTECTING THE PRAIRIE

**PAM WHITE, OSKALOOSA**

**Volunteer works to spread prairie seeds across Iowa**

In a way, you could call her Iowa's own Johnny Appleseed. Each fall, Pam White diligently traipses through the tall grasses and flowers at Mahaska County's Lake Hawthorn, bag in tow. She's collecting seeds from bluestem and coneflowers, seeds that will become prairies across the state. A medical technologist by day, White's free time blooms with a devotion to Iowa's prairies. "There's so little of it left. We need to protect it so people that come after us can know what it was like," says White. As part of the Iowa Prairie Network, White collects seed for the DNR, Mahaska County and other projects, like the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge near Prairie City. "Whether it's the education or collecting seed, she's all about getting more prairie out on the landscape and protecting what's there," says the DNR's Bill Johnson, who takes the seeds for use on DNR land or plants them in the state's native plant nursery. White also leads hikes through the prairie at Hawthorn Lake, helps process seeds in the winter at the Neal Smith refuge's seed lab and tends her own acre of prairie at home. She planted the patch seven years ago by "just throwing the seed out there" on a grassy, mowed area. Now, the seed has developed into coneflowers, asters, goldenrod, sunflowers, bluestem and some interesting hybrids. "Things keep coming up and surprising me," she says. Like the Governor's Volunteer Award she received in 2007. "It's nice to be appreciated," she says, "but I do it to help nature and help the prairie."



# LOST IN IOWA ~ ROAD TRIP

BY JENNIFER WILSON PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

At Yellow River State Forest, sisters Jennifer Wilson and Stephanie Wadle of Des Moines hike rugged ascents and descents. RIGHT: A scenic overlook of forested hills. Explore the forest's 8,500 acres, and get rewarded with views of soaring eagles, meandering trout streams and solitude.

## Grown-ups Gone Wild

Take a breather in the wilds of northeast Iowa before the avalanche of holiday obligations.





Take it as a sign when you hit Gunder: Things might get a little woolly on your grown-ups-only escape before the holidays hit.

Fishing, hiking and cabin-lounging in far northeast Iowa seem innocent enough, and so does Gunder—the town looks as if God tossed out a couple Monopoly game houses along County Road B60. But it's a low-slung commercial building hung with the sign "Irish Shanti" that you want to watch for. This is the beginning of your last gasp of carefree fun before you're drifted in by decked halls, granny's hotdish, and more candy-cane-shaped cookies than any human should eat.

Irish Shanti owner Kevin Walsh will probably greet you at the door, and any seasoned traveler will tell you that owner-operated is a good sign. True here, where the gi-normous Gunderburger steals the show, and the show might just be Iowa blues favorite Joe Price onstage. With the house rocking and a stunning array of beers on tap ("The best Guinness in Gunder," brags Walsh from under his floppy fisherman's hat), you're about to check your turkey-roasting, gift-shopping, sibling-fight-neutralizing responsible self at the door and just relax, old school.

"What happens in Gunder, stays in Gunder," says Walsh, whose day job as a hospice nurse means he knows how to take care of people, and urge them to live a little. "Around here, your only job is to have a good time."

#### NO RULES

Walsh should be hired as the welcome wagon for northeast Iowa. As you drive past the final bits of

flat farmland past Gunder, the landscape becomes increasingly shaggy. This is Iowa's driftless area, a complete change from the tame, deep soils across the rest of the state. The last glacier missed this chunk of Iowa, and so the dramatic elevations and limestone outcroppings weren't ground down. A mix of forest covers the region—the fall colors are stunning.

Far northeast Iowa has been largely left alone by development, and as a result it's teeming with life. The Mississippi Flyway hosts all manner of birds during migration, including pelicans in fall and pileated woodpeckers year round. It's a mushroom hunter's paradise, and cool weather brings Shaggy Manes and chanterelles. Rumors fly occasionally about bears and cougars, but no one has proof.

A person could hike forever in the remote glory of Yellow River State Forest, with a 25-mile trail system and free backcountry campsites. And it's your pre-vacation vacation, so you really should.

Jack McSweeney was the state forester here from 1962 to 1990. If you see his short, thick body lumbering along one of its trails in a red-checked flannel



Kevin Walsh

## LOST IN IOWA



### DNR FISH BIOLOGIST BILL KALISHEK'S GUIDE TO FEARLESS TROUT FISHING IN NORTHEAST IOWA

- Fish the days that are overcast and gray when using spin fishing gear. Trout seem to be less wary of lures at this time.
- However, if fly fishing, target midday on sunny and bright days. In cooler fall temperatures, bright warm days can stimulate an insect hatch.
- Streams are stocked with 10-12 inch trout weekly through October, so plenty of fish are available. But wander downstream of the areas that are stocked and you will find wilder fish and fewer anglers.
- Be careful where you walk. In October and November, brown and brook trout are laying their eggs in nests called redds, areas of cleaned gravel on the stream bottom. Avoid stepping in or directly above these nests.
- Remember, according to Iowa music legend Greg Brown, "the good fishermen are the ones who have fun."

shirt, jeans and beat-up boots, you're seeing the man who largely put this forest together, section by section, farm plot by steep ravine, to its current 5,000 acres.

"There's something nice about people coming to the area now," says McSweeney. "The topography is the feature that brings people in."

The state hasn't always understood this draw. For years, officials have tried to carve major tourist attractions from rivers, streams and deep woods. McSweeney remembers back in the '60s, when officials wanted to build a major golf course or landing strip where the forest is now.

"The basic concept when I was first here was multiple use and recreation," he says.

He mentions one of the goofier failed ventures—when the state imported Rio Grande turkeys to lure hunters.

Jack McSweeney



"Those turkeys eventually just moved on into Wisconsin and Minnesota," says McSweeney. His friends in neighboring states still thank him for those turkeys, from time to time.

McSweeney just kept doing his job, reclaiming old farm fields and highly erodible property, converting it back to forests. Today, he says the No. 1

activity is pleasure cruising. As people drive, they can see another failed tourism effort themselves—a Fire Tower mandated by the federal government decades ago, but never used. "It really never was a hell of a good idea," he says.

As it was then, it is now: The appeal here is the land, and the old-school vibe of northeast Iowa. "There were no rules in Allamakee County. No paved roads," chuckles McSweeney. There are a few rules these days—aren't there always rules?—but none of them state you can't kick back in the woods before the Yuletide season volcano blows.

Drive into Yellow River State Forest, and just like that you're enfolded in the gnarly, tangled arms of Mother Nature. Park overlooks are the kind of money shots that'll take your breath away, with cedar trees growing out of sheer rock and pretty little creeks veining the landscape below.

From way above the forest, you can see the popular horse trails, and Little Paint Creek, where you might pull out a brown trout for dinner.

### FISH STORIES

Bill Kalishek is the DNR's regional fish biologist in northeast Iowa, which means he finds out what's in the water, and pretties it up for the fish. Of course, he's got to fish a little, too. (*see sidebar, above*)

"We try to make it really natural, like we didn't do anything at all," he says, a tall and bespectacled Bohemian. Then he laughs. "Of course, then people don't really know you did anything."


But you'll know, when you cast a line from the banks of the beautifully groomed creek that runs through Little Paint

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Justin Wadle of Des Moines casts for trout on Big Paint and Little Paint creeks, named for figures painted by American Indians on a high, limestone bluff in the area.





A red cedar grows from the rocks along a trail overlook. Yellow River's backpacking trails were featured in an article in the April 1996 edition of *Outside* magazine entitled "America's Top 50 Hikes—The Finest in Every State." Iowa's best was the Backpack Trail at Yellow River State Forest. There are more than 25 miles of trails in the Paint Creek Unit alone, with two backpacker camp areas.

## LOST IN IOWA



Howard and Donna Bright, left, own The Natural Gait near Yellow River State Forest. The location beckon visitors with sprawling views, cozy spaces and cabins perched high above the Yellow River. RIGHT: Justin and Stephanie Wadle of Des Moines enjoy a morning cup of coffee from their cabin at The Natural Gait.



### TRAVEL NOTES

- The Irish Shanti. 17455 Gunder Road, Gunder. [www.thegunderburger.com](http://www.thegunderburger.com); 563-864-9289.
- Yellow River State Forest. 729 State Forest Road, Harpers Ferry. 563-586-2254.
- Bucks-N-Bulls. 402 W Chestnut St., Harpers Ferry. [www.bucksnbulls.net](http://www.bucksnbulls.net); 563-586-2117.
- Bigfoot Canoe Rental. Canoes, kayaks and tubes for the Yellow River, near the Natural Gait. 419 Bigfoot Road, Monona. [www.bigfootcanoerental.com](http://www.bigfootcanoerental.com) 563-539-4272.
- The Natural Gait. 1878 Old Mission Drive, Harpers Ferry. Cabins \$125-\$150 in low season (Nov. 1-April 1). [www.naturalgaitresort.com](http://www.naturalgaitresort.com); 877-776-2208.
- Marquette Guide Service. Former Effigy Mounds interpretive guide Tim Mason is a guide for trout fishing on spring-fed streams and kayak fishing on the Mississippi River. He takes customized, small groups or individuals fishing, with insight into archeology, area history and natural resources, and emphasis on ornithology and local ethnology. His dad started the service in 1954, and Tim follows in his footsteps. Call for rates and reservations. 563-880-4107; [bloodyrun@alpine.com](mailto:bloodyrun@alpine.com).



Campground. The trout are biting well into a carefree crisp cold fall day, as the windscares bare the limbs of sycamore, hackberry, cottonwood and boxelder trees.

"It's like coming to a whole different world up here," says Kalishek.

The best way to hook a trout is to move upstream onshore or in the shallow water. Drift your bait past any rapids—anything from salmon eggs to Power Bait to small spoons, jigs and corn have worked for experienced anglers.

The familiar tug on your line means lunch, and you can spread out around a fire ring in the campground, or clean the fish and head to the Bucks-n-Bulls bar in nearby Harpers Ferry, a red naugahyde joint decorated with moose and deer mounts, and Canada goose decoys rigged up as lights. If you ask Linda behind the bar real nice, she might fry up your fillets if she's not busy. It's kind of a backcountry appetizer to the spectacular cheeseburger pizza (with pickles).

And that kind of eating just can't be beat, Iowa or anywhere.

#### CABIN FEVER

If the camping in Yellow River State Forest is too chilly—because for the last time until New Year's, it really is all about you this weekend—the nearby Natural Gait resort is your place.

Owners Howard and Donna Bright bought a chunk of land along the Yellow River more than 20 years ago. "For the Woodland people, this was holy land," Bright says simply, spreading his hands to indicate the forested ridgeline where most of his cabins sit, and the clear trout stream below, where a fishing line looks big as baling wire.

Standing on nearly 400 acres, the resort is horse-friendly,

like most of this area, and includes the Brights' wildflower seed company, the Ion Exchange. The cabins aren't the light version found in most resorts, either. Their thick timbers, wood-burning stoves and reclaimed lumber and barn pieces are as comfortable as they are beautiful, jutting from a lovely landscape in a way that begs for steaming coffee on the porch, or a rowdy round of cards at night.

If you stay at their Ion Inn, the original lodging next to the Brights' house, you can wake up, cross the gravel road and start fishing first thing in the morning.

"A lot of the time, when man comes in, he destroys the very thing he came to see," Howard Bright says. "That didn't happen around here."

A typical fall morning at Natural Gait unfolds atop a high ridge, in a cabin overlooking farmland and streambeds. The sky will turn pink, and then purple, and so on, until a full electric blue illuminates the bright beauty of fall.

This is the kind of day that'll convince you how important it is to get grounded in the land before you have to entertain all those relatives at Thanksgiving, and then, seemingly minutes later, at Christmas.

Get out there, if only to hunker down in a cabin, its chinks lined by thick rope so the drafts can't diminish the efforts of a thick, popping fire in the stove.

Have a good time with your friends. Dip into the treasure chest of nature that Allamakee County offers.

Take home a few trout, and cook them up just for yourself with chanterelles on the side. Eat the whole mess of it by yourself, right before the relatives show up.

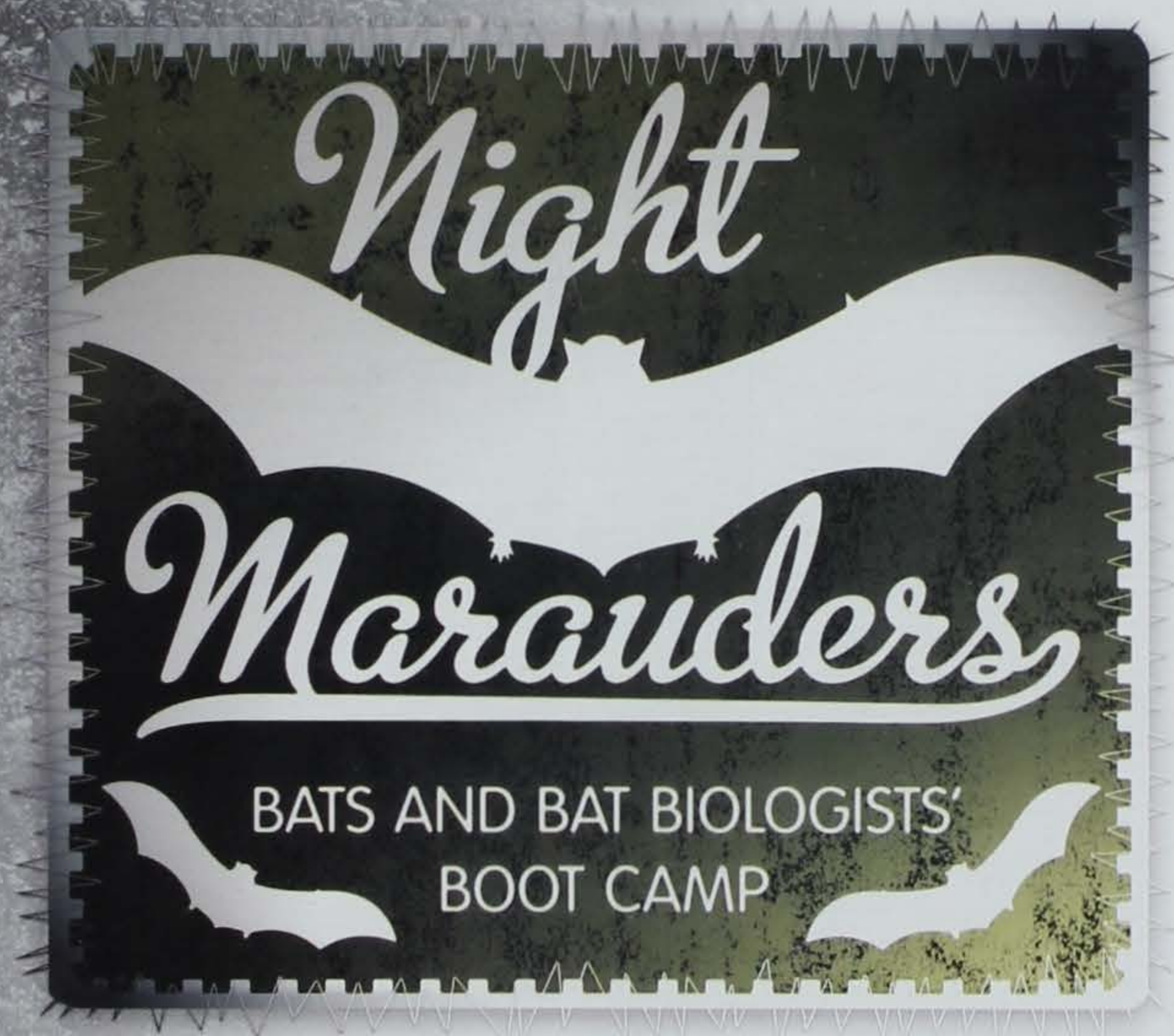
Then take a deep breath, and have an old-fashioned Iowa happy holiday. 🍂

Researcher Russ Benedict examines a bat caught during a four-year study that will unlock clues to an endangered species' summer habitat. Benedict and DNR Zoologist Daryl Howell must wait until female bats give birth in late June or early July to locate, capture and tag bats—a labor-intensive project.

The study began in 2005, when the team surveyed 50 barns and 30 concrete bridges in south central Iowa for signs of occupation—primarily bat scat or evening flights—to determine if the areas are important roost sites.







Visions of haunted houses and vampires.  
Shivers of trepidation.  
It's those feelings that have led many bat species  
to the brink of extinction.

BY KAREN GRIMES PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

#### A NIGHT OF NETTING

**A**t best, people respond to bats with indifference, often with fear or disgust. A few respond with active malice. Not many recognize that bats contribute greatly to people's comfort level and their food supply. And not many people set out to save bats by trapping them on a midsummer's night.

THE NIGHT OF JULY 16, 2007, is a typical, hot summer night for bat netting. The location is the Des Moines River valley near Selma in Van Buren County. Remnants of oak savannahs dot the hilly uplands and banks of the river. Cornfields fill the broad river valley. Dusty cars line the gravel road as team members spill out and walk along a short lane. The team's target is a dilapidated gray barn, more holes and rust than roof and siding.

At 6:15 p.m., the eastern sky turns that dark purple, periwinkle blue that precedes a summer thunderstorm. To

the west, a hazy aqua sky hints at a normal summer night. Good. They can trap bats tonight.

Crawling over a gate, the air is permeated with the pungent aroma that only cattle leave behind.

The barn is anything but impressive. Its framework remains, but most of the upper siding is gone. The team's mission is to close off all the holes in the barn. Higher up, they will cover the holes with tarps to keep the bats in. Lower down, they will use nets to catch the bats as they try to leave the barn to forage or enter the barn to rest.

The team's target is a small, harmless mammal that has more in common with people than birds. Covered in soft, glossy fur, she bears her young alive and nurses them. Warm-blooded, the Indiana bat weighs less than 8 grams or one-third of an ounce—the weight of three pennies.

At 3.5 inches long, it can easily fit in the palm of a hand, although it has a much bigger presence with wings



unfurled to a full 10 inches.

Team leaders are Russ Benedict, long-time bat enthusiast and Central College professor, and Daryl Howell, DNR zoologist. This is the third year of the quest for the summer homes of the Indiana Bat, *Myotis sodalis*. Their hope is to discover where female Indianas set up maternity roosts and what role abandoned barns and small bridges play in their feeding and reproductive lives.

The team's mission is to add to the small body of knowledge about the bat's summer habitat. Tonight's adventure will tell whether this barn is a maternity roost or simply a handy spot to nap between meals.

The Indiana bat is Iowa's only federally and state-endangered mammal. Named for the state of its discovery, its population has plummeted, down by about 430,000 individuals, nearly 50 percent, since placed on the U.S. Endangered Species List in 1967.

BY 6:30 P.M., the crew has been at work for half an hour. Benedict has four students—Jessica Adey, Liz DePenning, Adena Schnedler and Dan Applegate—outside assembling poles into two 30-foot lengths, attaching tarps and pulleys to the poles. This assemblage will cover an enormous hole where the haymow used to open.

"Walk the ropes out," Benedict calls. "We'll just attach the tarps to that pulley line."

It is obvious he is a teacher, skilled at giving clear instructions with enough details that they know why they

are doing it. Every once in a while, he interjects some humor, keeping the team members' spirits up.

"The smell of cows is OK in moderation," he alludes to the smell of manure emanating from the barn.

The team is relaxed, but aware that the bats will start flying as dusk rolls in. The air is hot and humid, without a breeze. Just standing is enough exertion to build a sheen of sweat on people's faces.

"The best weather for bats is the worst weather for us, as far as I'm concerned," Benedict tells the students. "Why?" It's a rhetorical question. One that he answers anyway, "Lots of insects."

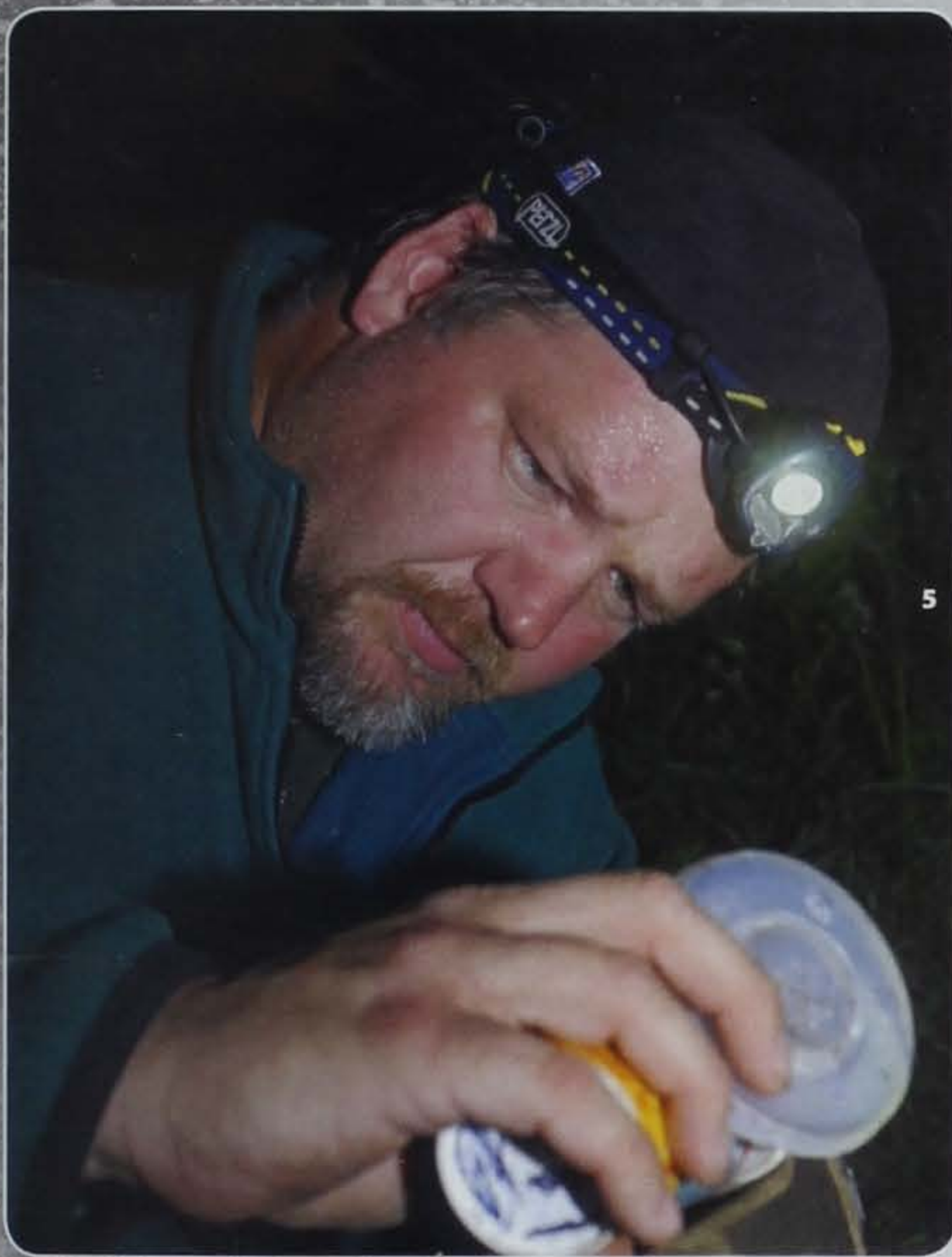
Insects and tree frogs hum as the students work. It's Iowa's summer orchestra. Cows munch to the east and a bull bellows to the south. A catbird calls.

"Hear that?" Benedict asks. "That's a scolding call." "Did you hear that? Whist da whist da whee-ee. That's a song sparrow."

The tarps and poles are joined and it takes five team members to hoist them.

While the others hoist, Howell places giant tarps over holes in the north end of the barn. As he finishes, he joins Russ' wife, Mary, and Russ' daughter, Sarah, as they put up harp traps on the south side of the building.

Resembling the instrument, harp traps are strung with monofilament lines 5 feet high, up and down in two offset rows. "The bats try to avoid the first line," Sarah Benedict



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says. "Then they hit the line in the second row and fall into a bag underneath." A senior at Central College, by age 20 she's been catching bats for more than 10 years.

IT'S 7:30 P.M. and the two 30-foot poles are finally hovering above the barn roof—a sure target for lightning. Then, with thunder still rumbling off to the east, a cool wind springs up.

"Warn the people on the ropes," exclaims Russ Benedict. "If they let go, we have to take the poles down to put the ropes back on."

The wind displaces the tarps and the poles have to be readjusted. In the end, they go up and down three times, then are left down because of the wind, on hold until the last possible moment.

IT'S 7:42 and a quiet sense of urgency fills the team. "We have an hour," he says.

Mary Benedict finishes hanging mist nets over the holes on the bottom half of the barn. These nets are long horizontal pouches made of black, very fine netting. "Each net has five pockets, so the bats hit the net, then tumble down into one of the pockets," she explains. "It's important to get the ropes right, because each pocket goes in sequence."

The pole team moves inside the barn where the cow pie aroma is stronger. There's just enough light to see and avoid pools of liquid cow manure. Applegate climbs a ladder with tarps in hand and ties them over small holes

on the barn's upper west side.

Sarah Benedict and Howell have already hung mist nets on the bottom half.

Applegate and Sarah Benedict are the two students with the most experience. A senior at Central College, Applegate has taken Russ Benedict's tropical ecology classes, netting bats in three different rain forests in Belize and Costa Rica.

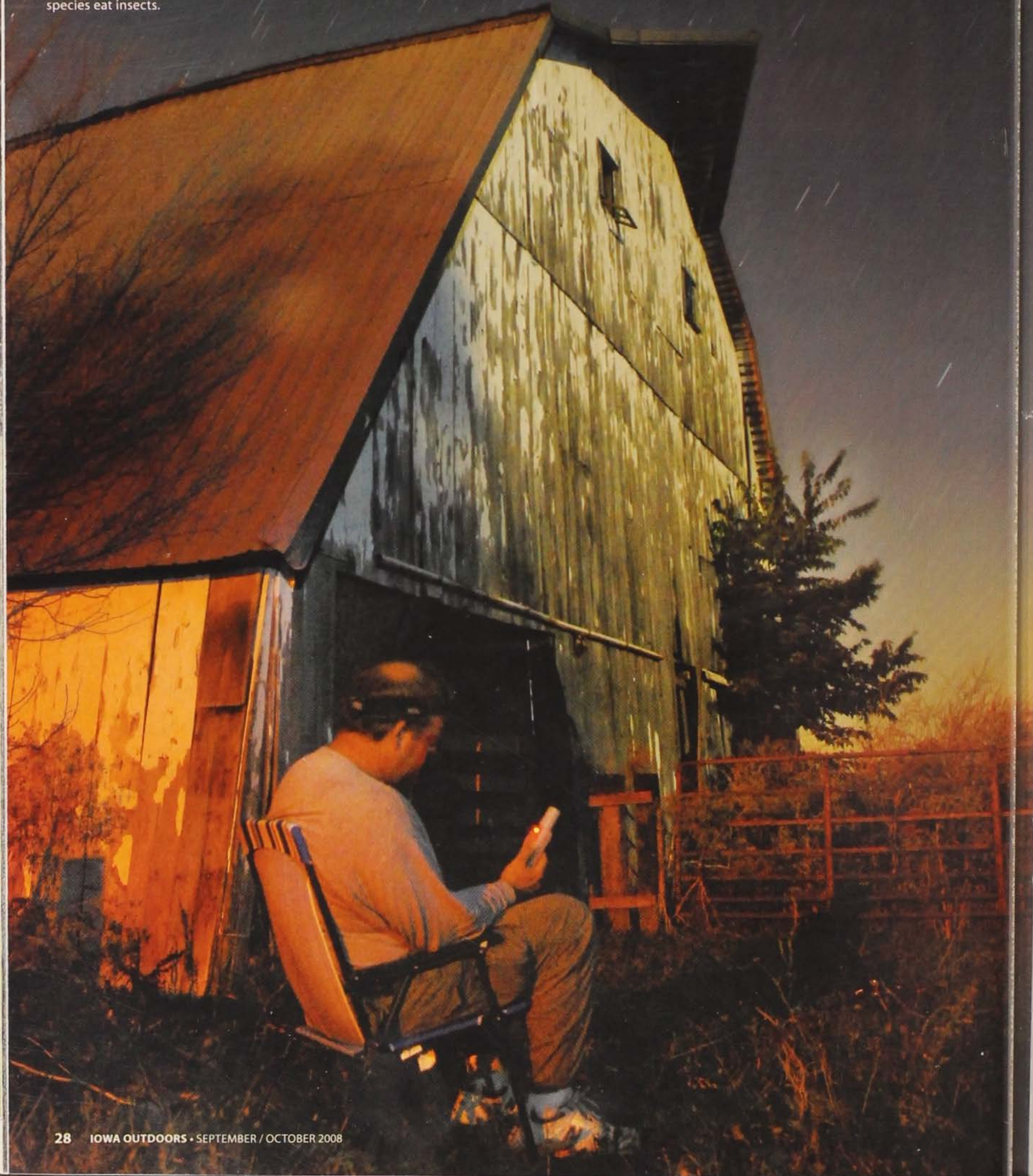
Russ Benedict calls, "I need two cup and lid people."

Schnedler, a high school senior from Bentonsport, and DePenning, a freshman at Iowa State University, volunteer. Their job will be recording data about each captured bat directly onto a McDonald's soda cup, the temporary holding pen for the bat.

It's late. Time to raise the tarps and poles for the final time. Almost as soon as they are up, a gust of wind threatens to blow them down. FINALLY AT 8:27 P.M., Russ

1) The bat netting team assembles on a hot July night. 2) Bob Clevestine, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, delights in the capture of a bat. 3) The team works to cover the many holes in the upper half of the barn. The biggest challenge is the giant hole near the haymow. They will raise four tarps on 30-foot poles to cover this gaping hole. 4) Most insect-eating bats catch bugs in their mouths. But they may use a membrane between their hind feet, the uropatagia, as a catcher's mitt to reposition the bug in their mouth. As they bring the membrane forward, they perform quick aerial acrobatics, almost doing a backwards somersault. 5) Benedict begins to remove and examine a captive. 6) Bats are marked with green dye so data on recaptures is not processed twice. 7) Sarah Benedict releases one of the brown bats.

Another barn, another night. Stars blur as researcher Russ Benedict tracks a released Indiana bat. Next time you step outside at night in a mosquito-free area, thank a bat. Most North American bats are voracious foragers whose evening forays take their toll on mosquitoes, moths and other night-flying insects. The ultimate organic pesticide, a small bat eats from 1,000 to 2,000 mosquito-sized insects per night. All of Iowa's nine bat species eat insects.



Benedict climbs a ladder to anchor the tarps, tying ropes to whatever board or roof corner he can reach.

In two and one-half hours, the team has put up two harp traps, four mist nets, seven tarps, plus one giant tarp on 30-ft. poles.

In the lull before dusk, Benedict explains that big brown and little brown bats roosting in the barn will begin to fly out. Normally it will take them about 20 minutes to empty the barn. "They'll be zooming around soon," he says. But because we are here and the nets and tarps will baffle them, it will take about an hour.

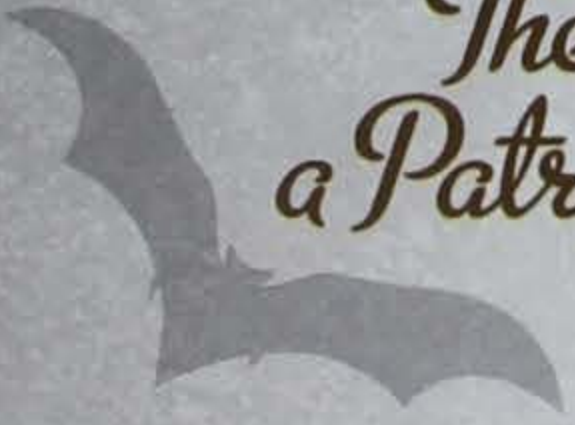
The expected catch ratio is 100 to 200 big and little brown bats to one Indiana. Tonight's catch will tell if the Indianas are using the barn as a maternity roost, as they use a church in Pennsylvania and a barn near Burlington, Iowa. If the Indiana bats fly into the barn about 55 minutes after dusk, it will indicate that they are using

8:50 P.M. and the first bat is caught in the harp nets on the south. It's almost dark outside and it's definitely dark inside the barn. Team members look for bat silhouettes against a starlit sky.

"Dr. B," Applegate calls, "they're going out that hole at the top on the right." The team scrambles to pull the big tarp a little to the right and plug the hole.

9:03 P.M. Howell explains that bats can detect something as fine as a hair with echolocation, by sending out high-pitched squeals, usually out of range for the human ear. The sound waves strike the prey, or in this case, the netting, and return as echoes.

"The bat's ability to locate prey makes a Patriot missile system look like throwing rocks at something," Howell said. Its skill at processing sound waves is so refined, a bat can fly in one direction, locate a flying insect the size of a mosquito, compensate for the insect's dodging



*"The bat's ability to locate prey makes a Patriot missile system look like throwing rocks at something"*

trees, not structures, for their maternity roosts.

The team gathers inside the barn and reminisces about other trapping expeditions. Mary Benedict, who uses vacation time to trap, says, "We netted one year in a dry rainforest and caught 11 leaf-nosed bats in the first night. The second night, we caught 30 to 40 in one-half hour. We found their watering hole.

"We caught five to six wrinkle-nosed bats," she adds. "They are just solid wrinkles, and bulging eyes, no hair on their face. Looks like a car accident. It is just hideous.

"Then there is the pygmy bat, so tiny."

Mary talks about how Russ became hooked on batting. "He had a professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha who took him netting once. Three of that professor's students went on to graduate studies in bats."

Russ' daughter Sarah pipes up, "I'm hooked. The more we see, the more I want to learn. Especially about what they do during the summer. They switch roosts."

Russ pipes in, in this barn "last year, we had 161 bats. At one point, we took some of the nets down, because we just had too many to process. This is a really nice maternity colony" for little brown bats.

Schnedler learned about the trapping when she registered for college. "Russ told me that they'd be catching bats near my home in Bentonsport this summer and to come along for the experience. I said, 'Are you crazy?'" But here she is.

She admits to some mild apprehension about being able to handle bats batting around her head in a barn. She's about to find out.

movements as it darts through the night air and intercept the insect at a precise spot.

Calling it the ability to see with sound, Howell said echolocation enables the bats to avoid the fine netting. "But we are hoping they will quit using echolocation and just go by memory," he says.

9:06 P.M. "Harps," cries one of the team members. "Two of them. Might be Indianas."

Moving in near total darkness, with headlamps on only when necessary, the team is extremely busy. There is no time for notions of bats flying around their heads or cow dung smells. Although later in the evening, DePenning will regret that she wore her favorite tennis shoes for the trapping.

BY 9:24, they've got 15 bats, including a little brown with bleeding gums and mouth that Sarah Benedict tenderly removes from the mist nets. "That happens when they are chewing on the nets," she says. "OK, baby."

BY 9:32, 25 are captured. Team members are busy, gently extracting fragile bats from nets, tucking them into cups and labeling the time and location of the catch then placing the cups upside down on a piece of plywood.

The cups tip and tremble as the captives try to escape. Faint, scrabbling sounds fill the night air.

The bats are tiny. Little browns are about three inches long and fit easily into a cupped hand.

Schnedler says, "This is different than I thought it would be. This is fun."

Applegate notes that he's been trapping bats for the last three weeks on every suitable night.

The barn is busy until NEARLY 10:45 P.M. when the team



runs out of cups and Russ begins to process bats.

He randomly picks up a cup, one of 70 or more, each holding a bat. He carefully lifts a bat from its waxed paper cage and focuses his headlamp on the tiny mammal. Justifiably outraged and scared, the bat bares its miniscule teeth.

Benedict reads the scribbled information on the cup. "9:06 ... Harp."

Then he identifies the bat and its sex, "ML ... Female... Adult...Non ... 41," he finishes as he examines the mammary glands and measures the forearm.

Translated, this means it was an adult female *Myotis lucifugus* (ML), or little brown, caught in the harp traps at 9:06. She was non-reproducing and had a forearm length of 41 millimeters.

His voice is loud, calm, regular—ticking off the data like a metronome, anchoring the trappers in the moment, overshadowing all the skittering and rustling noises and the hushed conversations. Schnedler and DePenning record the data and hand him another bat-filled cup.

Then, "8:50 ..NE," he reads.

"That was the first one we caught," says Applegate.

As each bat's vitals are recorded, it's dusted with an iridescent green dye, then released to fly away. A few are recaptured.

BY 11:00 P.M., catches are few. DePenning is still recording data, but swallows a big bug and chokes.

"Recording is a nasty job," says Mary Benedict. "The person with the light on gets the bugs."

"You'll have to buy surgical masks for your staff," kids Howell.

"Well this way, I don't have to feed them," Russ banter back.

In between catching bats, Sarah Benedict shares her considerable knowledge, "The big browns range up to five miles to forage. The little browns can go two to three miles. The Indiana ranges up to a mile."

Learning what they eat is mostly a matter of digging through scat, trying to determine the difference between moths and beetles from remnants of insect legs, shells, wings and feet. From prior studies, the Indiana eats moths, beetles, flies and midges.

Russ' voice rings out. "NLNM," meaning nipples large, no milk. Further translated, that means the female is done lactating, indicating her pup is feeding on something else or she's lost her young.

Then Benedict picks up a bat caught at 11:01 p.m. and identifies the first Indiana bat caught that night. "11:01. MS. Male." Instead of releasing the Indiana, he replaces it in the cup.

He tells students that telling the Indianas from the little browns is as simple as looking at their back feet. The little browns have larger, hairy back feet. The Indianas have pink lips, tiny feet with no hair and a glossy look to their fur.

Benedict is hopeful that more Indianas will be caught.



5



6



7



8

"Of the six caught in this barn last year, three or four were caught after 11," he says.

It is almost midnight and there are still 20 bats left to process. Yawns punctuate the low rumblings of conversation. The wind picks up and the tarp begins to scrape against the side of the barn. Only two lights punctuate the darkness: Russ' and the recorder's.

"I can't believe I'm sitting here in a barn with bats chirping away beside me and I am more worried about insects than the bats," exclaims Adey, taking turn as recorder.

Finally, it's time to process the three captured Indianas. Each will take about 45 minutes. The lactating female is first, so she can return to her pup. Howell picks a radio transmitter with frequency 316 from a box. He checks the transmitter to ensure it works.

Russ gently shaves the bat's back, using an electric razor to remove fur between her scapula, or shoulder bones. He places a small dab of surgical glue on the bare spot and lets it dry for five minutes. Then he glues on the transmitter, about one-half inch long by one-fourth inch wide. The attached wire antennae, about 6 inches long, sticks out behind the bat. She goes back in the cup so the glue can dry for 30 minutes.

The surgical glue will self-destruct within a week, allowing the transmitter to drop off and the female to fly freely. It will stay long enough for the team to track her

movements between day and night roosts.

The professionals, Benedict and Howell, continue to place transmitters on the Indianas. The second transmitter doesn't work, delaying the tagging. About 12:45 a.m., the first Indiana is released. Howell checks the radio receiver to make sure she's flying. She is. The signal shows she's zigzagging and flying up and down.

At 2 a.m. the team begins to roll up the nets and tarps. They come down much faster than they went up. By 2:30 a.m., the last Indiana bat is free and away.

One night's work. Eight hours. Eight team members. Two nets. Two traps. 142 bats caught. 10 big browns and 129 little browns. Only three Indianas caught and fitted with transmitters. Two males and one lactating female.

The team wearily stores the gear and discusses lodging for the remainder of the night, with breakfast by 9:30 a.m. so they can begin radio tracking the bats later that morning.

1) It's difficult to remove bats from mist nets as fine netting wraps tighter the longer they struggle. 2) Bats that hit harp traps normally drop into a pouch below, making extraction easier. 3) Russ Benedict shaves an Indiana's back, prepping for the transmitter attachment. 4) A tiny transmitter is held in place with surgical glue that self-destructs within a week to drop the transmitter and free the bat. 5) Each captured bat is marked with iridescent green dust so trappers can tell which bats were previously captured. 6) Captured bats are easily contained in paper soft drink cups. 7) An Indiana bat, complete with radio transmitter and antenna, is nearly ready for its return to the wild. 8) After hours of trapping, Howell tests equipment to ensure the next few days of sleep-deprived tracking will succeed.

Morning comes too early and it's with yawns that the trappers turn trackers and greet the day. It's an all-day process for the team to track the radio-tagged bats to their daytime roosts. After getting a fix on the bat, the team must identify the landowners and find them to ask permission to cross their land. Then it's a matter of trudging three-fourths of a mile through the woods, climbing up and down hills and across streams as tired people seek the bat's roost.

The team successfully tracks only one of the three Indiana bats caught on July 16 to a day roost. One is tracked for a day, but lost. The other is never found, despite the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service mounting an air

search to see if it flew beyond its normal daytime range.

The one bat they follow is an adult male that uses the same day roost, a live shagbark hickory tree, for each of the four days it was tracked. As the team waits for dusk to fall, 11 bats leave the tree the first night, with seven bats leaving the tree on each of the next two nights.

However, other nights lead to other successes. From July 5 to 30, the team traps bats on six nights, catching and radio tagging 12 Indiana bats in two barns, under two bridges and twice in forested areas. Ten of the bats are tracked to day roosts in trees where the team sees between one and 34 bats exit their woody home at dusk.

### HIDING OUT IN HIBERNACULA

Restoring the Indiana bat hinges on protecting its winter homes, or hibernacula, from human disturbance.

While many mammals sleep through the winter, bats are among the few who actually hibernate. If you could observe one of the 300-plus Indiana bats packed closely together into a mere square foot of cave ceiling, you would see it is barely breathing. Its body would be cold to the touch, less than a degree different from the cave's temperature of 39 to 46 degrees Fahrenheit. Its heart would beat about 25 times per minute, compared to about 400 beats during normal activity.

Hibernation is a survival mechanism for this tiny mammal. Unable to store pounds of fat or migrate long distances, the bat survives winter by traveling to cold caves where its metabolism is depressed. There it gradually consumes its fat reserves, occasionally waking to drink, urinate or change places as temperatures fluctuate in the cave.

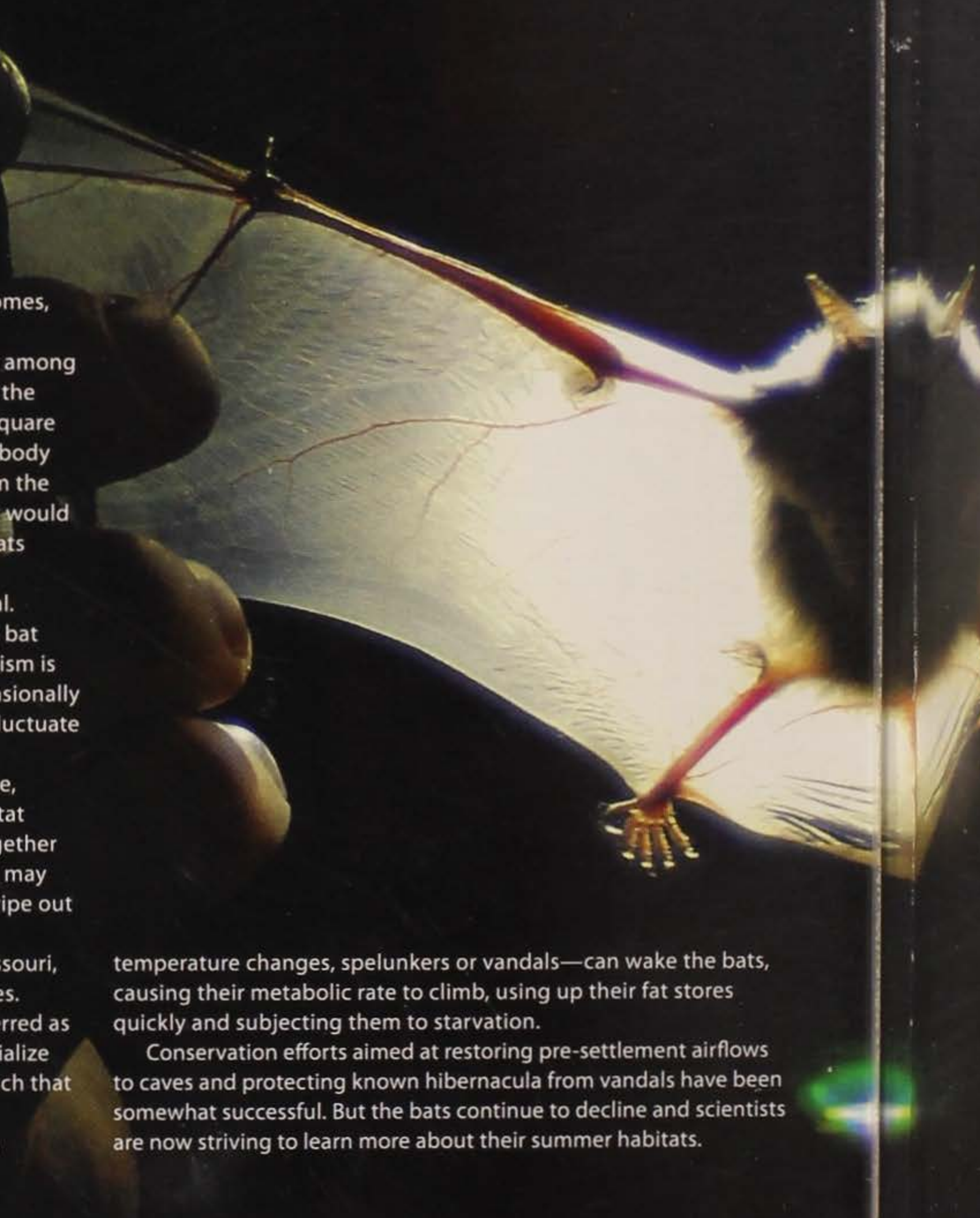
All hibernating bats are vulnerable as they hang, unaware, from cave ceilings. But, Indiana bats have such specific habitat requirements, that 85 percent of the population clusters together in a mere seven caves in the nation. Each major hibernacula may contain up to 125,000 bats. A disturbance in one cave can wipe out a large portion of the population.

The most suitable caves are in Indiana, Kentucky and Missouri, with less than 1 percent of the caves having sizeable colonies. Unfortunately, the caves preferred by the bats are also preferred as tourist attractions. Adding gates and entrances to commercialize the caves can alter the airflow or temperature regime so much that the Indiana bats must go elsewhere, or starve.

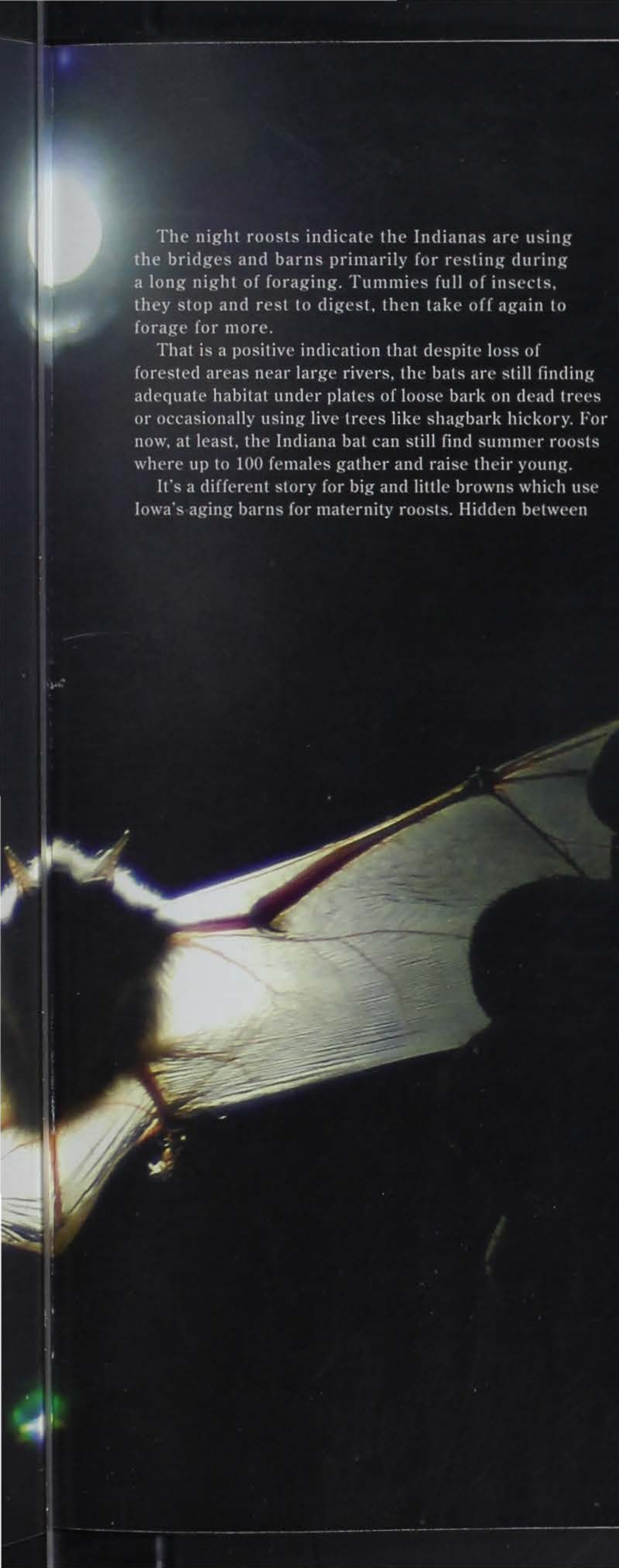
From October to March, any disturbance—whether from

temperature changes, spelunkers or vandals—can wake the bats, causing their metabolic rate to climb, using up their fat stores quickly and subjecting them to starvation.

Conservation efforts aimed at restoring pre-settlement airflows to caves and protecting known hibernacula from vandals have been somewhat successful. But the bats continue to decline and scientists are now striving to learn more about their summer habitats.







The night roosts indicate the Indianas are using the bridges and barns primarily for resting during a long night of foraging. Tummies full of insects, they stop and rest to digest, then take off again to forage for more.

That is a positive indication that despite loss of forested areas near large rivers, the bats are still finding adequate habitat under plates of loose bark on dead trees or occasionally using live trees like shagbark hickory. For now, at least, the Indiana bat can still find summer roosts where up to 100 females gather and raise their young.

It's a different story for big and little browns which use Iowa's aging barns for maternity roosts. Hidden between

the roofing materials, they select the hottest spots they can find to raise their young, sleeping out the day.

If you own such a building, consider leaving it up for bat habitat. It may be serving as a much needed home for our night marauders. If you must tear it down, check with the Iowa DNR to find out when the bats will leave their summer homes for winter habitat. Scheduling the demolition activities for fall, winter or early spring could save homes and lives.

If you are lucky enough to own forested land, think twice before you cut down a dead or dying tree. That decaying giant may be providing life for Iowa's endangered Indiana bat. 🦇

#### REPRODUCTIVE LIFE CYCLE OF THE INDIANA BAT

Like many bats in the Midwest, the Indiana Bat dances the mating dance in the fall just before hibernating. Unlike other mammals, though, the sperm lays dormant in the female's reproductive system throughout the winter months.

When she emerges from a cave in spring, ovulation occurs and the fertilized egg begins to grow as the female migrates to her summer roosts. From 50 to 100 pregnant females will congregate in a hollow tree or under the sheltering bark of a dead or dying tree.

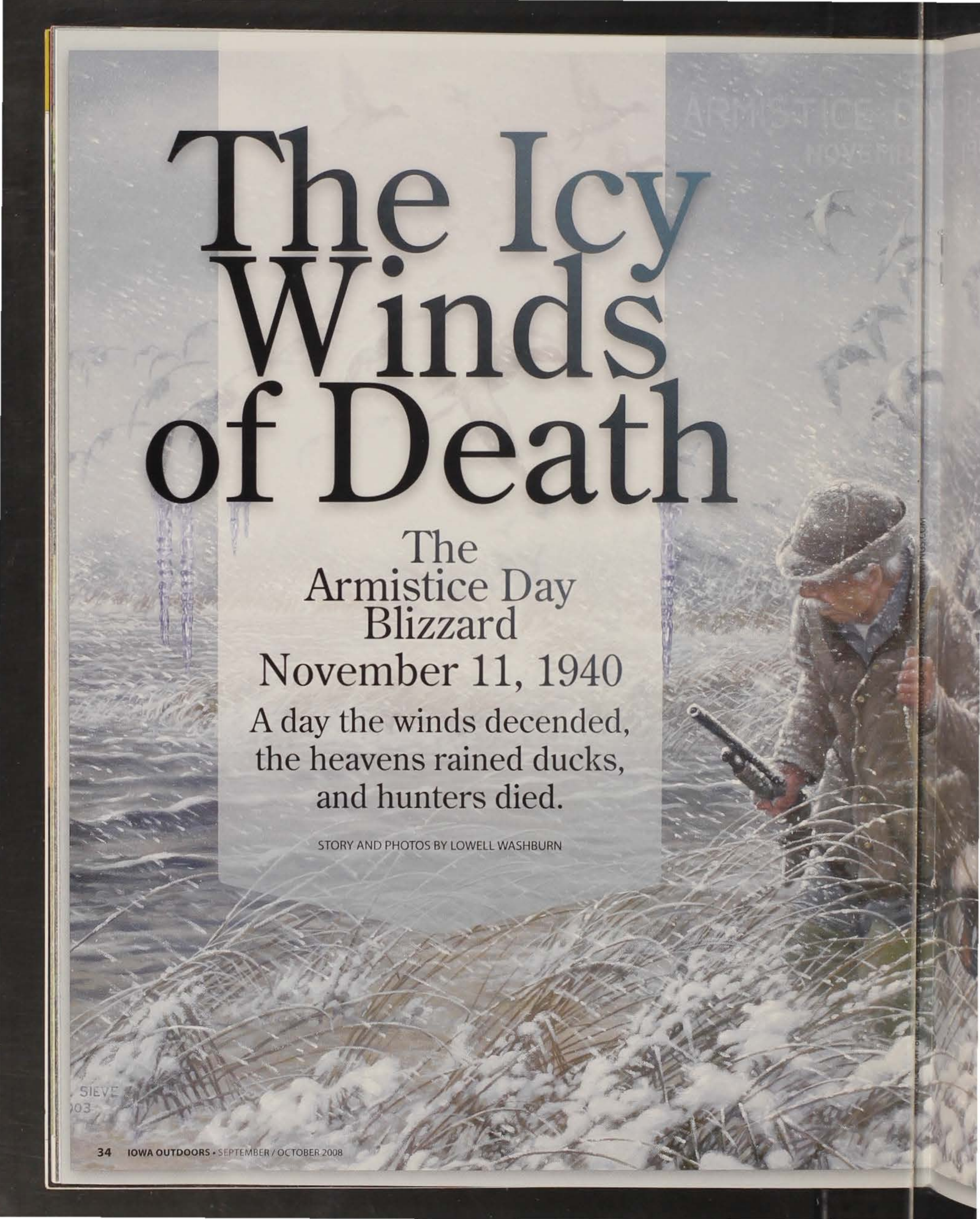
About 50 to 60 days after fertilization occurs, the female gives birth to a single pup. During the day, the female and pup shelter under the tree bark, soaking up the heat on the sunny side of the tree. At nightfall, the mother leaves the colony to hunt.

Her wings are slim and tapered, unsuitable for long flights, but designed to provide the utmost mobility as she darts in and out among the tree tops, nabbing her dinner—over and over again. She will rest in a variety of night roosts after feeding voraciously.

Fed on mother's milk, pups grow rapidly and are ready to fly within three to five weeks. Soon, they, too, are making night foraging trips.

By early fall, the female and pup have put on fat layers, their winter food supply. Before frost, they will migrate up to several hundred miles to overwinter in a cave. As they cluster around their winter homes, males and females breed before hibernating.

The Indiana bat lives about 10 years and may not breed until she is two or three, making six or seven offspring her limit.



# The Icy Winds of Death

The  
Armistice Day  
Blizzard

November 11, 1940

A day the winds descended,  
the heavens rained ducks,  
and hunters died.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

SIEVE  
03



Big Zepher  
1940

# C

all it a Weather Bomb, Perfect Storm, whatever. By any name, it was the recipe for disaster. Picture this: a powerful weather system swept over the Rocky Mountains, charging eastward. Meanwhile, a Canadian cold air mass was sliding down from the north, while warm moist air pulled up from the south. Any way you looked at it, the developing atmospheric brew spelled trouble.

But no one was looking. The year was 1940. Primitive by contemporary standards, weather forecasting was something many folks put little stock in. According to National Weather Service data, no one was even in the building at Chicago's Midwest Weather Headquarters during the late night hours of Nov. 10.

As the massive system organized during the wee hours of the following morning, its combined energy triggered a storm of fury. Barometric pressures plunged to among the lowest recorded in Iowa, reaching a then record low for November. By then, the storm began to cut its thousand-mile-wide path of death and destruction. Within 24 hours, the system would rank among the most infamous and disastrous blizzards in U.S. history.

## THESE ARE THE TALES OF THOSE WHO WERE THERE . . .

For Midwestern duck hunters, the fall of 1940 was warm and uneventful. As the waterfowl doldrums continued into the second week of November, hunters grew increasingly impatient. But the unseasonable weather could not hold out forever, they reasoned.

Cocking an eye to the north, waterfowlers watched, waited and hoped. Sooner or later, the inevitable cold fronts would arrive. Ducks would move south. For those willing to stick to their marshes, the annual Big Push



would be a sweet dream.

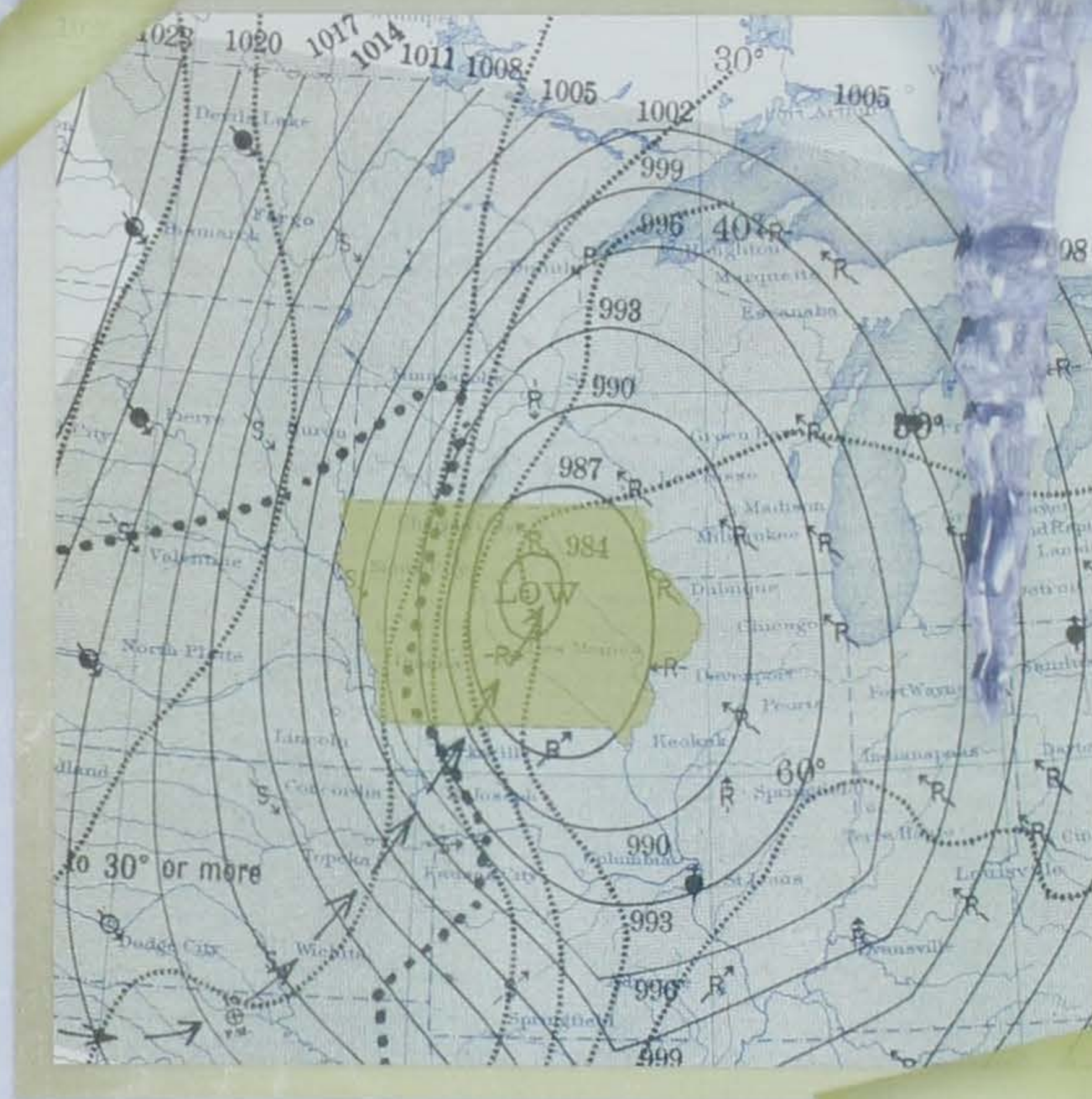
On Nov. 11, 1940, sportsmen got their wish. The weather changed dramatically; and with that change came the most infamous duck hunt in American history.

But the day was not what gunners had anticipated. Instead of realizing their sweet dream, hundreds of waterfowlers were suddenly plunged into a horrific, Stephen King-grade nightmare. Although nearly 70 years have passed, the storm stories are still too terrible for some survivors to recount.

Known now as the Armistice Day Snowstorm, the event remains among the deadliest of blizzards to cut its way through the Heartland. By the time it concluded, the storm dropped more than 2 feet of snow, buried vehicles and roadways beneath 20-foot drifts, killed thousands of Iowa cattle, and destroyed incalculable amounts of poultry—including more than a million Thanksgiving turkeys. It gave a yet unrecovered blow to Iowa's apple industry.

All told, the storm claimed 160 lives across the Midwest. Hundreds more suffered severe frostbite or frozen limbs. On Lake Michigan, three commercial

OPPOSITE PAGE: Mason City *Globe-Gazette* news photo from 1981 shows game warden, Jack Meggers, with orphaned white-tail fawn. RIGHT: A national weather bureau meteorological map of the Armistice Day Blizzard of 1940. Bureau documents from the era point out that had the storm occurred in January, it would have been passed off as just another blizzard. The outstanding feature of the storm was the warm weather beforehand. A larger November storm, also on the eleventh, occurred in 1911 with greater severity, wider temperature drops and a larger path of destruction.



freighters and more than 60 sailors were lost. Along the Mississippi River in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota, hundreds of duck hunters lost boats, guns and gear as 15-foot swells near Dubuque and 70 to 80 mile per hour winds swept down channels and across marshy backwaters.

Due to abnormally warm weather and fair skies, most hunters took to the field carrying little more than a light jacket. But as the fronts arrived, the scene changed. Temperatures plummeted from near 60 degrees to below freezing, and then into the single digits—all within hours.

What began as a holiday duck hunt quickly became the storm of the century. Panic reigned on the Mississippi that day as boats, equipment human lives were lost. Stranded atop mud bars and islands, scores of hunters were forced to endure the most horribly excruciating night of their lives. Huddled beneath overturned boats or beside makeshift piles of driftwood, survivors used cigarette papers to ignite meager fires that would save their lives.

Wet and afraid, dozens more perished during the black

night. At Winona, Minn., the city bus barn became a temporary morgue as, one by one, the bodies of frozen hunters were retrieved. Since many duck hunters were from out of town, identification was delayed until bodies thawed and pockets could be searched.

On an island near Harpers Ferry, 16-year-old Jack Meggers was one hunter who fought for his life. A retired Iowa game warden currently living in Mason City, Meggers has spent a lifetime in the out-of-doors. At 84, Jack remains a gifted storyteller with a knack for detail. His best loved tales recount outdoor adventure in strong winds, rough water and portray the vanished spectacle of storm-tossed wildfowl in a bygone era.

But mention the words Armistice Day Snowstorm, and Megger's demeanor immediately takes a quieter, reverent, tone. You can see it in his face as the mind's eye turns back to one of the most incredible events in American weather history.

"It was Armistice Day, now called Veteran's Day, and we were out of school," Meggers begins.

"Me, my dad, and two brothers headed out to an island at Harpers Ferry. It was warm for that late in the fall and we were dressed light. One of the things I remember most is that, just before the storm hit, the sky turned all orange. It's hard to explain, but I remember thinking that it was really strange."

The winds came suddenly, recalls Meggers. Fierce and chilling, the initial blast was a spearhead for the advancing storm.

And then the ducks arrived. Not just a flock here or a flock there, but rather hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands. It was a scene seldom witnessed, and in sheer magnitude, never to repeat.

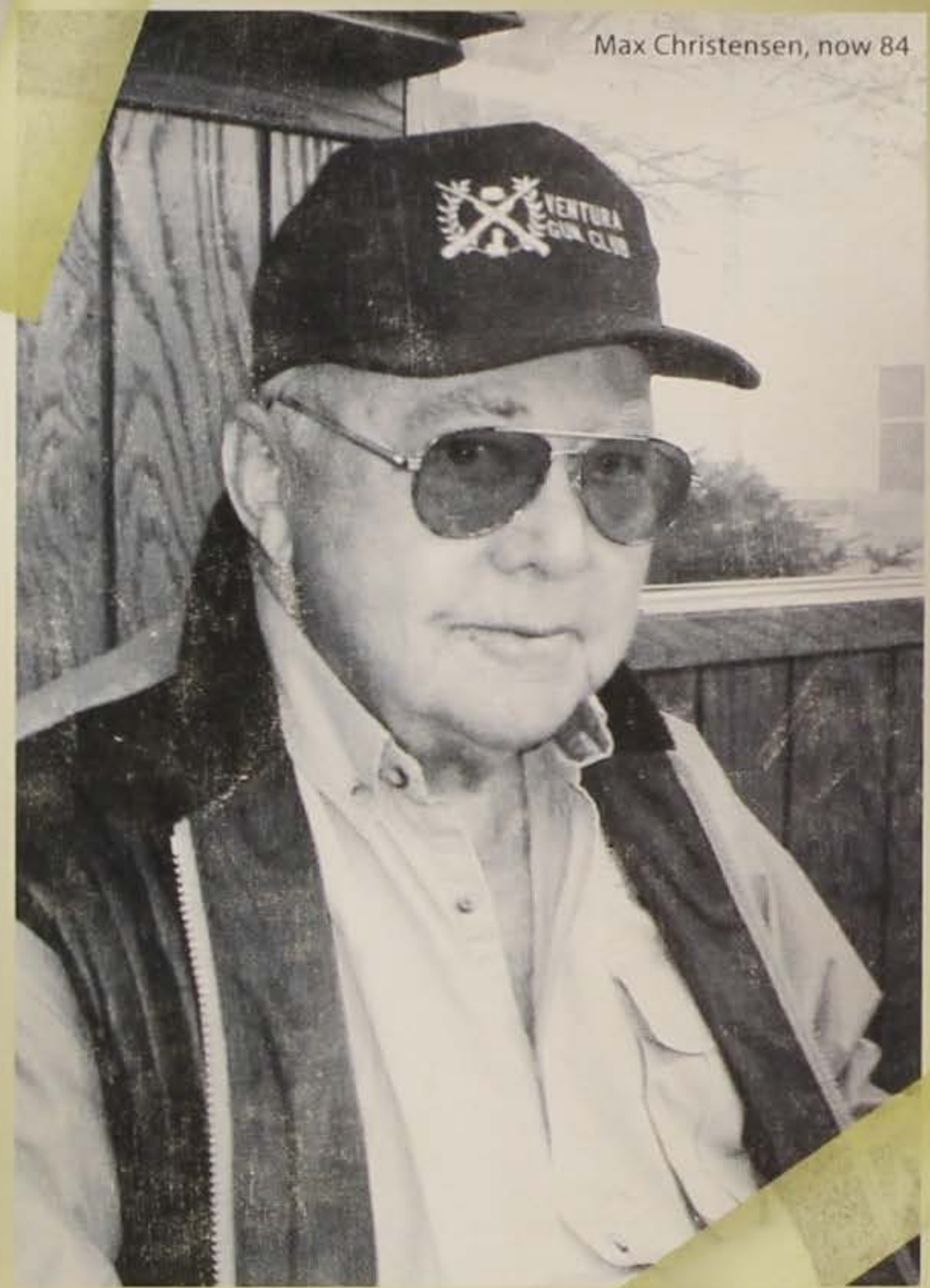
"We'd never seen anything like it," says Meggers. "When the ducks arrived, they came in unending waves and they came in all species."

"Those ducks were all flying about this high off the water," he says, motioning to his waist. "And they were all doing about 90 miles an hour with that wind."

The crew lost no time taking advantage of the astonishing flight. Although waterfowl continued to pour down in unending supply, connecting with the wind-driven birds presented a major challenge, recalls Meggers. The boys concentrated so hard on the task, that none seemed to notice as the winds increased.

"All of a sudden, dad said, 'Grab the decoys—we're getting out of here.' But we were throwing an awful lot of ammunition into the air, and none of us wanted to quit. The sky was just full of ducks," says Meggers. "Finally dad said, 'Grab the decoys *now* or we're leaving without them.' That's when we began to see how bad it was getting."

Max Christensen, now 84



Meggers' dad made a good call. In addition to raging winds and unfathomable legions of ducks, the storm began to deliver pelting rain, which quickly turned to sleet, then heavy snow. Visibility dropped to near zero as hunters all up and down the Great River struggled—many unsuccessfully—to return to shore.

"It was really rough. By the time we finally made it to the shoreline, you couldn't even see the shoreline," Meggers recalls. "By then, the combination of snow and wind was just incredible. Our group made it back. But not everyone did."

An island away from where the Meggers party hunted, a father and two sons were equally mesmerized by the arriving swarms of waterfowl. Lured into staying beyond the point of no return, their shallow draft duck boat proved no match for the wind and waves. As visibility and daylight faded, the hunters found themselves stranded.

"The oldest son was a college athlete," Meggers says. "When things started getting tough he told his younger brother to jump to stay warm," as a rain soaking and hours of exposure to wind and snow led to hypothermia. "Every time the younger kid quit jumping, his brother

would punch him. The dad and older brother died on that island. The younger brother just kept on jumping through the night. They rescued him the next day. His legs were frozen hard as wood below both knees and he lost them. He was the sole survivor of his group and he credited his brother with saving his life. The kid said, 'I knew my brother and dad were dead—but I just kept on jumping. My older brother told me to keep jumping so I knew it must be important.'

"That kid was 16, same as me," says Meggers. "I'll never forget what happened that day on the river."

A short distance downstream, four more hunters died during the night on an island near Marquette. In a duck blind at Guttenburg, Earl Butler and Wayne Reynolds narrowly escaped death as they spent the night huddled around a small fire. At Burlington, at least three more hunters perished from exposure or drowning. Unable to stand against wind and waves, several permanent duck blinds were uprooted and blown downstream.

The wrath of the Armistice Day Snowstorm was not limited to the Mississippi River. The early morning hours

of November 11, 1940, found Orville Kinsel heading out to hunt ducks on Wright County's Elm Lake, near Clarion, where he owned a duck shack. His story, recounted in the *Hampton Chronicle* by Ray Baltes, is no less intriguing than of those who hunted larger waters.

"I got up in the morning and it wasn't too bad," recalled Kinsel. "I looked to the west and the sky was green. I started out and that lake was just full of ducks—just swarming with them."

As the winds increased, things began to get wild. With rush beds already flattened by rising winds, lead anchor weights were no longer able to hold his decoys in place. A final clue that it was time to quit occurred as muskrat houses blew off the marsh. Kinsel returned to his shack carrying a coat load of mallards.

"By then it was snowing," he noted. "The ducks couldn't see anything. They were blind. It came so fast. By that time the wind was so strong I could barely walk in it."

For as long as he can remember, Cerro Gordo County's Max Christensen has been an avid waterfowler. Today, it seems somewhat ironic that Christensen nearly missed out on history's greatest duck hunt.

"I still remember nearly every detail from that day," Christensen begins. "I was a high school senior when the November 11 snowstorm arrived in Ventura. I lived on a farm and we hadn't even had a frost yet. The livestock was still in the fields and all the poultry was still outside."

"I got on the bus at eight o'clock, wearing just a light jacket. The bus driver was Max Millhouse, and I always sat right behind him because he liked to talk about hunting. As we got closer to Ventura, every cornfield had little >

With Rice Lake as the backdrop, Vern Hagen displays Armistice Day decoys.



**VERN HAGEN** was just 14 when the famous Armistice Day Blizzard swept across Winnebago County's Rice Lake.

"We lived at Joice and I spent the first part of the day in school," recalls Hagen. "The storm hit, and I spent the worst part of it at home. Our family always hunted and fished, but I wasn't allowed to go out that day."

"I was pretty young, and all I remember is that it was a terrible day," Hagen continues. "There were a lot of floating bogs on Rice Lake then. Later, while exploring the lake in a boat, we found six decoys sitting between the bogs. They were all from the same rig. The decoys had either blown away in the snowstorm or just been left there when hunters headed for shore."

In spite of more than a year's research, the factory-made Mason redheads are the only documented surviving relics of the Armistice Day blizzard that the writer was able to document. Complete with original paint and glass eyes, the wooden blocks sold new for around \$7 per dozen. Today, the same decoys may fetch hundreds of dollars apiece. Because of their unique historic value, Hagen's may be worth even more.

cyclones of feeding ducks. The closer we got to the lake, the more we saw. There were so many ducks that it was almost eerie.

"By the time we arrived at Ventura, I already decided to head back home. There were just too many ducks in the air to be in school. Max decided to go with me.

"When I got back home, the storm was coming up fast and my folks were trying to get the chickens inside. We helped, and so instead of being in trouble for skipping school, I was a hero.

"With that finished, we went to a place I called 'My Slough.' It was a 30-acre marsh that might have up to 500 muskrat houses on it—a perfect place for ducks," says Christensen. "It was already snowing when we got there, and at first we didn't see anything on the slough. I thought, 'Oh no, the ducks left.' Then we saw something move, and suddenly realized what was happening. That slough was completely covered in ducks—so many that you couldn't see any water or make out individual birds. We started shooting then, and it was something. Every duck on that slough was a mallard. We didn't see anything else. You can't even imagine what it was like."

The storm picked up and Max announced he would head back while he still could. "I went to a different marsh closer to home and kept hunting. I don't think it would have mattered where you went that day, every place was full of ducks. They were everywhere.

"The snow finally got so bad that I had to take my ducks and leave. The walk home was a little over a mile," says Christensen. "The wind was around 40 miles per hour and the snow was blowing straight sideways. A school bus came down the road, but it couldn't make it in the snow and had to turn back. Before leaving, it dropped off 17 school kids at our house. They had to stay the night."

When Christensen entered the farmstead, he learned that a Garner dentist, Doc Hayes had parked in the yard and walked to a nearby marsh. Since he hadn't returned, the hunter was feared lost.

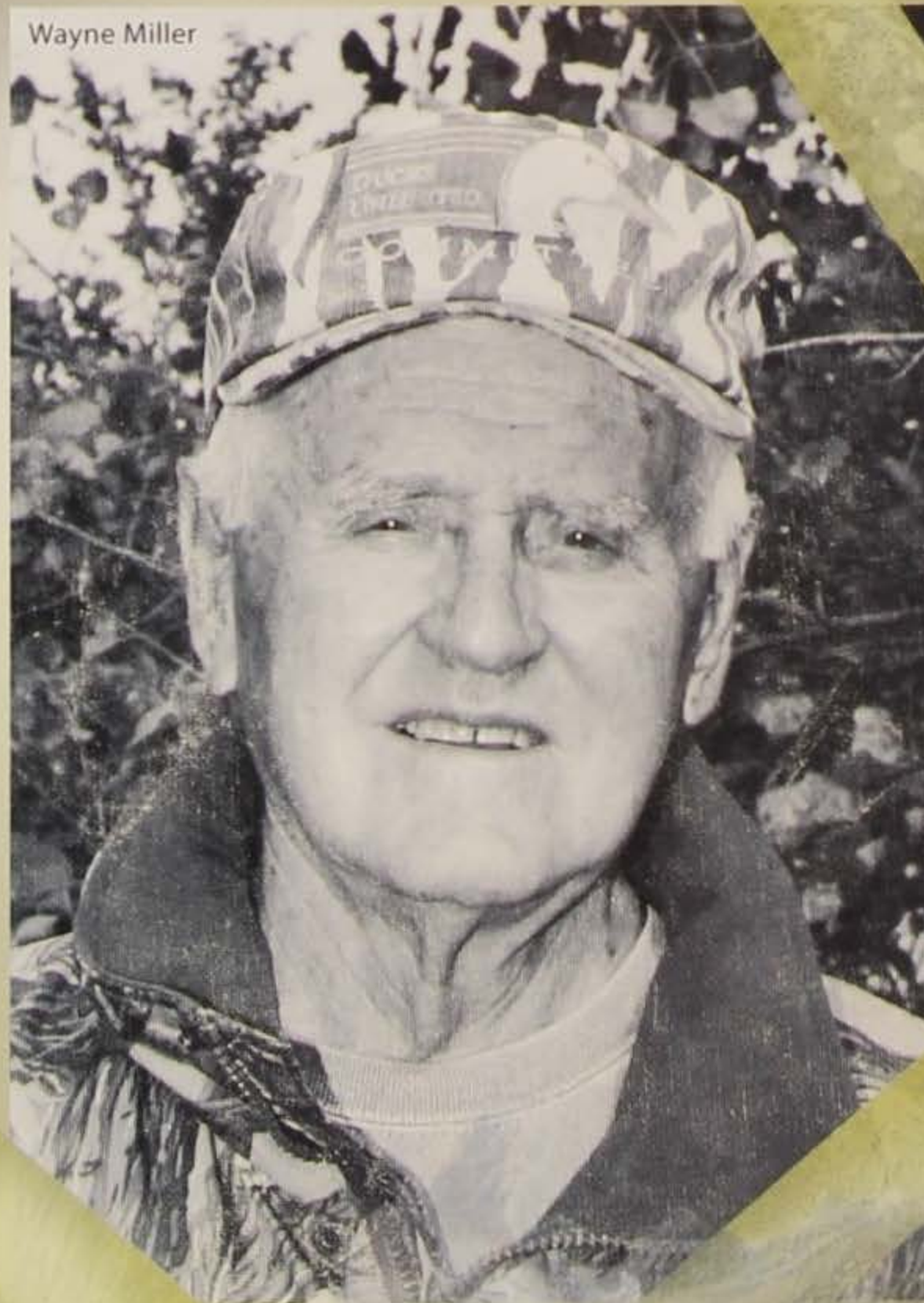
"I knew I had to try and find him," relates Christensen. "I was young and didn't think of the danger. I had a good idea of where he would have been hunting and started up a fenceline that led from the buildings. I don't think I could see more than 15 feet in front of me, that's how bad it was.

"I found Doc Hayes on that fenceline. He was just standing there, stuck in a drift. He couldn't move. When I got up to him, he just started crying. 'I thought I was dead,' he said to me. I took his gun and a big bunch of ducks and we started back. I told him to step in my tracks. I broke the trail, and our tracks would disappear almost instantly.

"When we got home, my dad and all those school kids were already in the basement picking my ducks. I don't know how many mallards were down there, but it was a lot. It was really something. We still had fresh tomatoes from the garden, all those ducks, and snow drifts piling up outside," says Christensen.

The next day they shoveled out Doc's Cadillac, which

Wayne Miller





was buried in the yard. "When we reached the road, something moved in the snow. I had shoveled out a live coot. That bird had lit on the road and become buried in a drift. The coot was just fine and flew away."

Although Armistice Day, 1940 remains best known for its memorable, often tragic, duck hunts—not all wildlife accounts focus on waterfowl.

Wayne Miller, a 16-year-old at the time, rode out the storm's fury on the family farm located in northwest Iowa's Emmet County, near Ringsted. What he remembers most are the pheasants.

"The day started out warm, then suddenly turned cold and began to snow. Our farm had a good thick grove. Pheasants were soon piling into that cover and they even sought shelter in the straw piles—anything to get out of that weather.

"When the storm was over there were big drifts and lots of dead pheasants. People gathered up a lot of those birds and brought them over to our farm," says Miller.

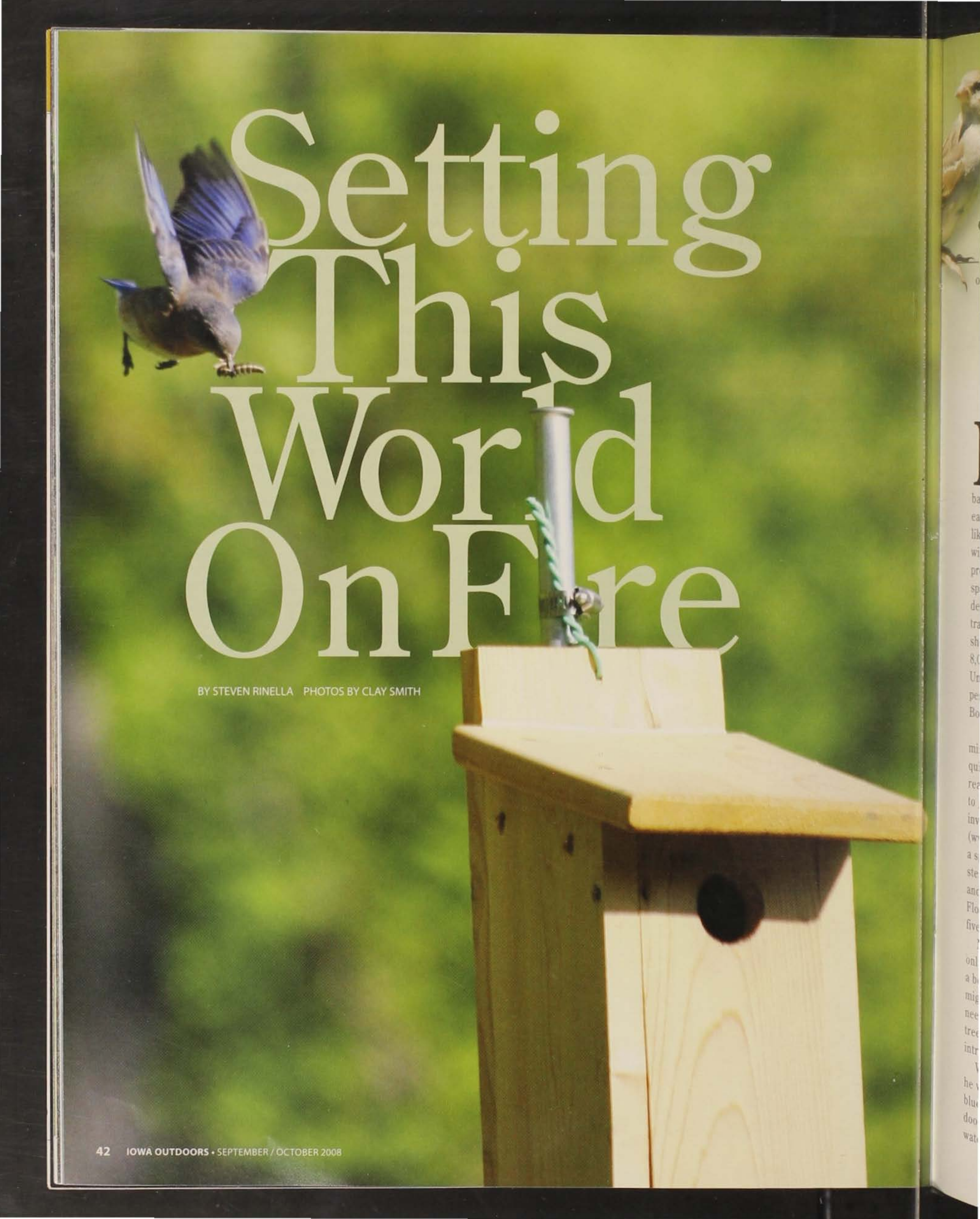
"We stacked them in the hay mow above the barn. It was warmer up there and the pheasants began to thaw out. Anyway, a bunch of them came back to life. When we went back up there, they were flying all over the place. We opened the big [hay loft] door and released around fifty of them. It was quite a sight when all those pheasants flew out of the barn.

"It was an incredible storm and everyone thought the pheasants would be wiped out. But there was lots and lots of habitat back then and the pheasants came back in a hurry."

While hardships are etched in the survivor's minds forever, severe storms—many stronger than the Armistice Day Blizzard—continue to pummel the land. But modern weather forecasting and rapid communication now prevent much of the human catastrophes. And for that, survivors and all outdoor lovers are thankful. 🐾

Winter-killed rooster pheasant.  
Losses ran high during the  
Armistice Day Blizzard of 1940.





# Setting This World On Fire

BY STEVEN RINELLA PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH



When writer Steven Rinella travels the nation in search of odd items to create a 45-course wild game meal, he lands in Iowa in search of house sparrows, and learns how this invasive species harms native bluebirds.

Rinella is author of the book, *The Scavenger's Guide to Haute Cuisine*. A rollicking tale of the American wild and its spoils, the book is an adventure in hunting and gathering and a visceral experience of the distance between ourselves and the food we love. After stumbling upon Auguste Escoffier's 1903 culinary milestone *Le Guide Culinaire*, outdoorsman, avid hunter and nature writer Steven Rinella embarks on an unusual quest: to procure all necessary ingredients for a feast, borne entirely of Escoffier's esoteric wild game recipes. For one year, Rinella traverses the country gathering the ingredients. *The Scavenger's Guide to Haute Cuisine* is a delicious, absorbing account of one man's relationship with his family, friends, food, and, of course, the natural world.

Floyd Van Ert traps English sparrows as a service to the United States of America. He is 71 years old, slightly rotund, and he dresses comfortably—usually in shorts, heavy work shoes, and a baseball cap. He lived near Carson, IA, about 20 miles east of Omaha, but since moved to Leon. Floyd does not like the word kill applied to his work. When pressed, he will admit to disposing of English sparrows, but he much prefers to describe his work as the control of English sparrows. Floyd devotes most of his waking hours to the designing, testing, manufacturing and selling of sparrow traps. Since he retired from his own commercial glass shop and took to building traps in 1995, he's sold about 8,000 devices of his own design. His designs include the Universal Sparrow Trap, the PVC Sparrow Trap, and—his personal pride and joy—the Urban/Country Sparrow Nest Box Trap.

By his own admission, Floyd doesn't even earn minimum wage for his efforts as a trap designer. As he's quick to point out, he does what he does for altruistic reasons; he does not desire financial reward. He's prone to giving traps away, often sells traps at a loss, and freely invites people to steal his trap designs from his website ([www.vanerttraps.com](http://www.vanerttraps.com)). If a person was looking to pirate a sparrow trap design, that person could do worse than stealing one from Floyd Van Ert. On his 10-acre spread and testing grounds along the West Nishnabotna River, Floyd has trapped more than 4,000 sparrows in the last five years. His traps work. Period.

If Floyd's a hard man with English sparrows, that's only because he's a soft man with the eastern bluebird, a beautiful and semi-rare indigenous bird that suffers mightily at the beak of the English sparrow. The bluebird needs holes where it can lay its eggs, preferably in old trees and stumps and farmyard fence posts, and the introduced birds often occupy all the available holes.

When Floyd first set out to help save the bluebird, he went into the workshop behind his house and built bluebird nesting boxes with bluebird-sized holes in the doors. He hung the boxes on trees and fence posts, then watched helplessly as most of the boxes were overrun by

English sparrows. The few bluebirds he attracted were evicted by sparrows, which tossed the bluebird nests out of the boxes and cracked open the bluebird eggs. When the sparrows found bluebird hatchlings inside the boxes, they pecked the baby birds to death.

The terribly ferocity of the English sparrow makes Floyd unapologetic about his work. If anyone ever did question Floyd's morals as a sparrow trapper, Floyd would hand that person his sparrow-trapper resume; he keeps a stack of these photocopies in his shop. When I went to Iowa, seeking Floyd's advice on how to better catch sparrows, he gave me my own copy. His resume includes a list of environmental organizations that he belongs to: Iowa Bluebird Conservationists; Bluebirds Across Nebraska; American Bird Conservation Association; North America Bluebird Society. When Floyd showed me this list, he said, "People ask me, 'Well, why haven't you gotten hate mail, for as much as you're known all over the United States for trapping sparrows?' Well, I've never got a hate mail."

To explain why, he tapped the resume. And then he turned his finger and pointed it at me. "And I never talk about killing," he said. "I might talk a little bit about disposing. But killing's a big word."

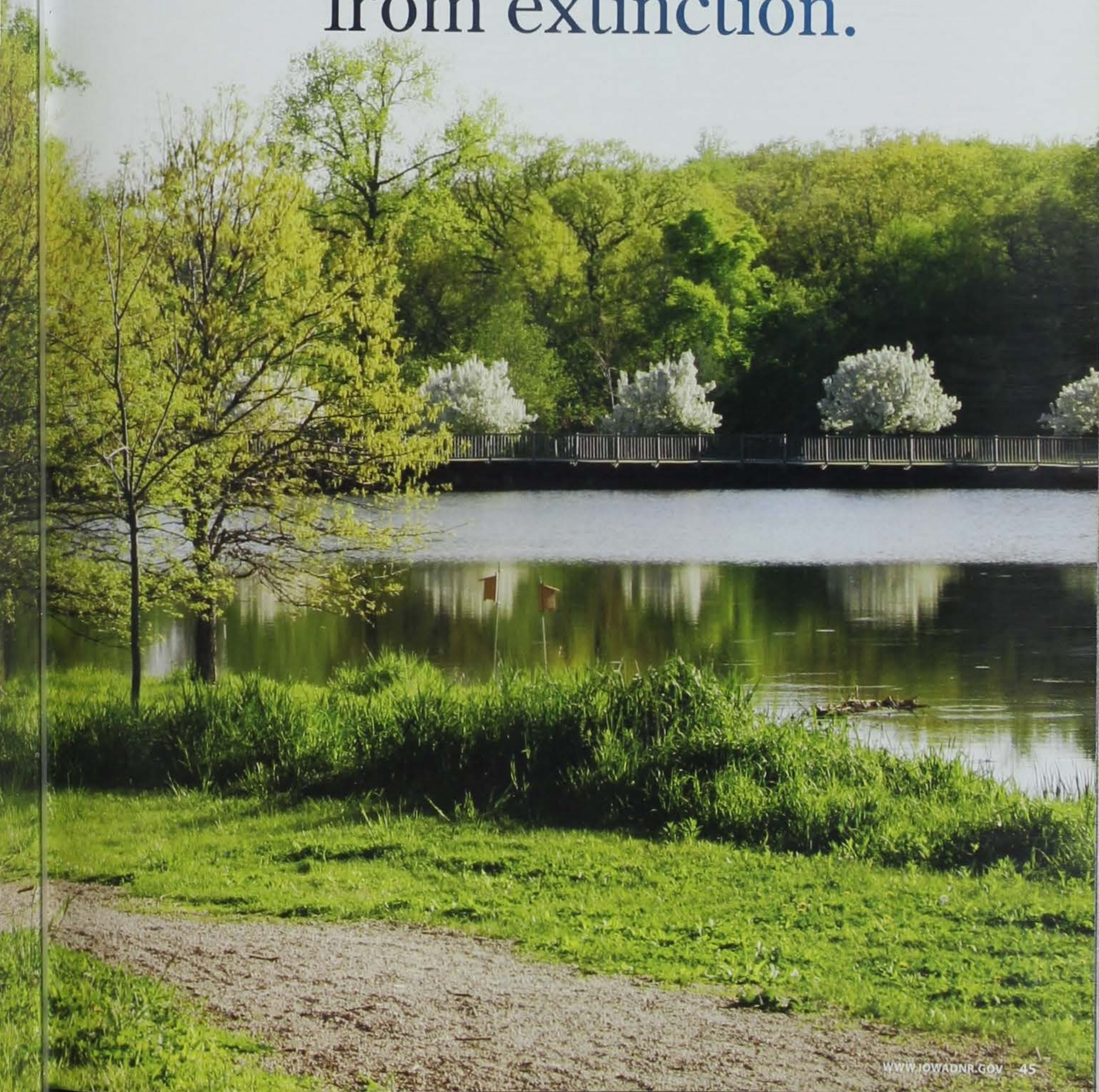
Although Floyd Van Ert kills enough sparrows to open an all-you-can-eat buffet, he's never eaten one. In fact, I was the first guy he'd ever heard of who wanted to trap sparrows in order to eat them. Before I visited him, I requested that he start saving sparrows for me, to supplement whatever we happened to catch together. He let me know that he was not excited about saving the birds. "I'd rather flick a sparrow into the bushes than to wrap it up and put it into my freezer next to my food," he told me. But he had been true to his word and saved me a medley of 27 sparrows and starlings. With that many birds, I didn't even need to learn how to catch my own.

If Floyd was mad at me about making him save sparrows, he got over it rather quickly when he started showing me around his place. He likes giving tours. Before we set out to explore his property, Floyd pulled his socks up to his knees in order to protect his legs from the tall

A photograph of a park landscape. In the foreground, there is a gravel path leading towards a pond. The pond is surrounded by lush green grass and trees. Two wooden signs on poles are visible near the pond. In the background, there are more trees and a building. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

A new urban bluebird trail established last spring by the City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department in Greenwood Park. The city has created trails in five locations with help from Drake University and local volunteers who monitor usage and keep harmful house sparrows at bay.

Bluebirders often boast  
that bluebird trails are  
what saved the bluebird  
from extinction.





vegetation. He started his tour just outside the front door of the house. He explained that he does not actually own this land or the house; it belongs to his second wife, Marty, who's quite a bit younger than Floyd. Marty was at work on the day we toured the property, but Floyd mentioned her often. He said he can't get over how much he loves her. He put it this way: "I've got a six-CD Bose stereo in my car, and when she's in there I don't even turn it on. We just like to talk." He thinks that their relationship derives strength from the fact that they each maintain their independence. Every month Marty gives Floyd a bill for what he owes in room and board at her house.

Marty is a bluebirder, which is what enthusiasts call themselves. She introduced Floyd to bird conservation. One of their first projects together was to restore her property, which was inundated with nonnative plants and grasses. Floyd persecuted the nonnative plants as vigorously as he persecutes nonnative birds. "I've got it all back to native plants and grasses now," he said. "This is all natural. Native grasses. Native wildflowers. It takes years to get it going and established. You really gotta care for it, but once you do it's beautiful. It's been fun too. My wife and I spent \$1,200 on seed alone. This land is now registered with the National Wildlife Federation as an official backyard wildlife habitat. That makes us proud. We've counted over 100 species of birds on this land. Marty's got a list inside, if you need to see it."

We walked down a slight hill to the foot of a long meadow that stretched along the river. Floyd said that I should have seen the meadow yesterday. Apparently, he had to mow the whole thing down because the wild lettuce was getting out of hand and threatening to choke out the other plants.

"This was a heck of a year for wild lettuce. It's an annual, and you've got to get rid of it. Otherwise it will go to seed. It started to set blossoms, so I mowed it all down with my tractor. I was mowing flowers down this tall alongside it." He held his hand up to his chest. "I about cried," he said, his voice cracking. He looked away for a moment.

The next stop on the tour was a bluebird trail that courses through the property. Floyd's bluebird trail comprises a series of wooden nesting boxes, about the size of shoe boxes. During the bluebird nesting season, Floyd tends the boxes every day. He walks from one to the next, along his trail. Bluebirders often boast that bluebird trails are what saved the bluebird from extinction. That's not an outlandish claim. A hunter and naturalist named Dr. T. E. Musselman invented the idea of bluebird trails in Illinois back in the 1930s, just as the birds were starting to disappear. By the 1940s bluebirds had vanished from much of their traditional range. Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, who founded the North American Bluebird Society, popularized Musselman's bluebird trail idea with his 1976 book, *The Bluebird: How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival*. In the 20 years following the

book's publication, bluebirds made a radical recovery. The recovery is considered by many to be the greatest grassroots conservation effort in American history.

When Floyd approached one of his nest boxes, he talks so loudly that the parents will hear him, get scared and fly off. The birds are only seven inches long, but they show up brightly, like tossed Frisbees, as they fly above the grass. Once the adults take off, Floyd opens the front of the box and makes sure that everything is going OK on the inside. He says that putting up a bluebird box and not monitoring it is worse than not putting up a bluebird box at all.

Floyd opened one of his boxes and was pleased to see five beautiful bluebird eggs in the nest. "She raised six babies out of here the first hatch. Now she'll raise five. I've had over 60 bluebird babies come off my land so far this year. If I didn't monitor it, that number might be zero. If I didn't trap sparrows, I might not have one nest."

If Floyd opens one of his boxes and finds a sparrow nest, he scatters it and busts the eggs. Then he places one of his traps in the box to catch the culprits. He mainly wants to get the adult male sparrows, which do the brunt of the bluebird killing. "An old male sparrow, he even looks mean," said Floyd. "And he's smart."

I wanted Floyd to give me a rundown on how to use his sparrow traps effectively, but first he wanted to go down and get a burger and a pop from Dairy Queen. I drove. On the way back to his house, he tried to convince me to help him write a book about trapping sparrows in cities. Earlier he had told me that bluebirds don't like cities, and that city people don't care about saving bluebirds.

I said, "If there are no bluebirds in the cities, and city people don't care about bluebirds, then why do city people need to know how to get rid of sparrows?"

"Because they bitch all the time. I read 'em on the Web. They hate sparrows in a city just as bad as a bluebirder does. They hate 'em. But those people don't do anything about it."

I wanted to pursue this conversation with Floyd, but he suddenly got very excited as we passed the bank. He demanded that I turn into the bank's parking lot. He guided me around to the back of the building, where there was a telephone pole with a bluebird box nailed to it. The box was Floyd's. The hole in the box, where the bird would supposedly enter, was blocked by a metal flap with an orange, round sticker on it. This orange sticker is what Floyd had spotted from the window of the car.

"This is fun," he said. "I love this." He got out of the car and pointed to the sticker. "See, this tells me the trap's been set off, or tripped. Then I go over here and open this door." He cracked open a small sliding door on the side of the trap. "I open it up about that far," he said. "And pretty soon we see the beak."

The beak belonged to a European starling. Floyd hates starlings almost as much as he hates English sparrows,



Floyd Van Ert inspects a bluebird box. An avid bluebirder, his traps protect the species from invasive house sparrows, which can destroy bluebird eggs and peck fledglings to death. RIGHT: A clutch of bluebird eggs.



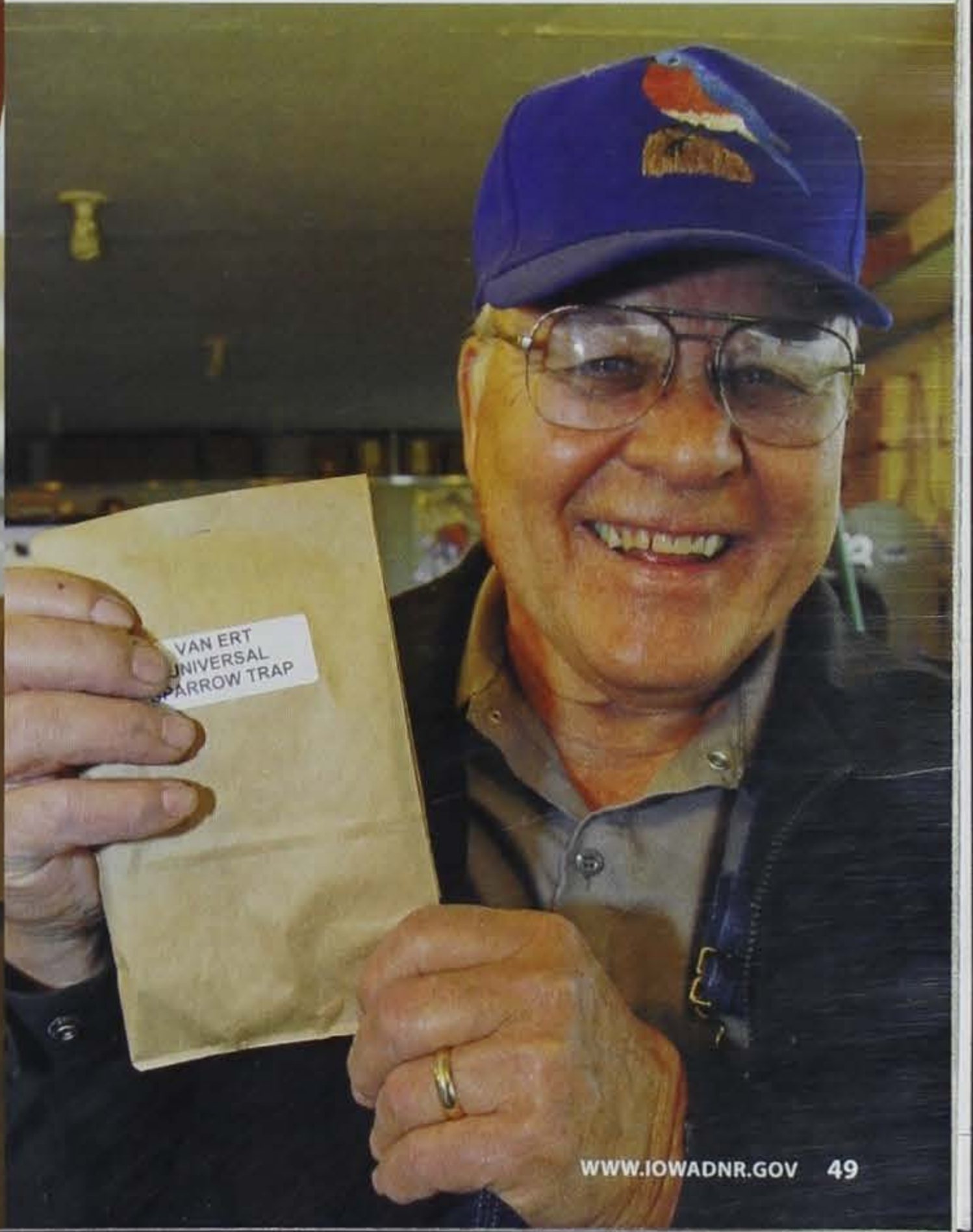




#### AN AERIAL POPULATION EXPLOSION

Starlings and house sparrows, also called English sparrows, are two songbirds not protected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. First introduced in 1851, eight pairs of house sparrows were brought to Brooklyn, NY—they now number 150 million in North America and are the most common songbird. Some estimates have them at twice the number of all other songbirds combined. The invasive, undesirable bird can take over bluebird houses, destroy nests and peck fledglings to death. House sparrows also compete for habitat with native chipping and song sparrows.

Floyd Van Ert builds traps by hand from his own design using stock pieces of metal. Upon entering the house, the trap is tripped and an orange colored obstruction is sprung to cover the entry hole, keeping the sparrow inside the nest box. Trapped sparrows are destroyed or can be provided to local wildlife rehabilitators to feed recovering sharp-shinned hawks or other raptors. His traps help bluebird populations rebound and are well known by bluebirders across the United States.





and he hates them for the same reasons. He's developing a line of traps for starlings. This trap with the starling was a prototype for a new design. Floyd said he was still working out the bugs in the system.

The starling wanted out in a big way. Floyd grabbed the bird's long, yellowish beak through the small door. He held it, then opened up the front of the house and grabbed the bird by the body. He reset the trap and climbed into the car, cradling the bird in his lap. He said he couldn't believe that anyone would eat one of these dirty things. We crossed the West Nishnabotna River and drove up a hill and pulled into Floyd's yard. When he climbed out of the car, he realized that the bird had died in transit. "He had a heart attack," Floyd said. "Here's another bird for you to eat." We walked into the house to listen to his phone messages. A woman from the bank was on there, telling Floyd that his starling trap was tripped.

When I told Floyd that I had been trying to catch sparrows with a stick-and-prop trap over the winter, he just rolled his eyes. Floyd builds his traps from scratch, right from stock pieces of metal. He builds some of his own manufacturing equipment. He buys some of his equipment on eBay. He polishes the metal corners of his traps with a machine normally used to polish window glass. Once an engineer phoned Floyd to ask how he got such a nice polish on the corners of his metal. "He could hardly believe that's how I did it," Floyd told me.

Out in his workshop, Floyd showed me how the Universal Sparrow Trap works. He mounts the trap on the inside of a sparrow-infested bluebird box. When the sparrow comes in, it hits the trap's trigger and the metal flap swings up, lightning fast, and blocks the hole so the sparrow can't get out. Floyd held up a little block of wood that he wanted me to inspect. He uses the block to test the trigger tension on his traps.

"See how dirty this is?" he asked. "I've dropped this thousands of times. This weighs two-thirds of a sparrow's weight. A sparrow weighs 28 grams. When a sparrow drops down from the hole, it has built up velocity too. So it weighs more than 28 grams really. If I drop this block of wood and it trips the trap, then I know a sparrow is gonna get caught."

Floyd's traps are so reliable, he hardly needs to advertise. "A lot of my sales are word of mouth," he said. "That's what got my name started. Other guys who sell traps are just envious. They see me and they say, 'How do you do it? You're setting this world on fire.' I say, 'I ain't doing anything. I'm just making a trap.'"

As Floyd explained the supremacy of his traps, he got excited and his voice rose. He could tell that I liked hearing about it, so he pulled out a few of his competitor's traps. He keeps them around as a form of amusement. Floyd held up one trap that he considers particularly loathsome. To layman eyes, it was very similar to Floyd's trap, though it

lacked the durable yet delicate flourishes of workmanship.

"An old male sparrow is too smart for this trap. It's worthless, because as soon as you put it in there, the sparrow won't go in." Floyd demonstrated how to install the trap in a bluebird box. He pointed to the hole. The trap had altered the hole's appearance. "A sparrow will see that little bitty tiny cavity that wasn't in the hole before. You could put a different screw on the outside of the box and an old sparrow wouldn't go in. The guy that built this thinks he's got something. I know this guy personally. I asked him, 'How many of these traps do you sell?' He said, 'Oh, couple hundred a year. Why, Floyd? How many of your traps do you sell?' I just laughed. I didn't tell him how many I sell.

"Look," he went on. "The North America Bluebird Society had a bunch of different traps for sale on their website two years ago. And then the lady called me up and said, 'We're taking them all off. Except yours.' She said, 'You've got a trap. Those other ones are junk.' And they put mine on the Web and they sell them for \$11. And I sell to them for \$6.50. Everybody gets them for the same price. And I pay the freight."

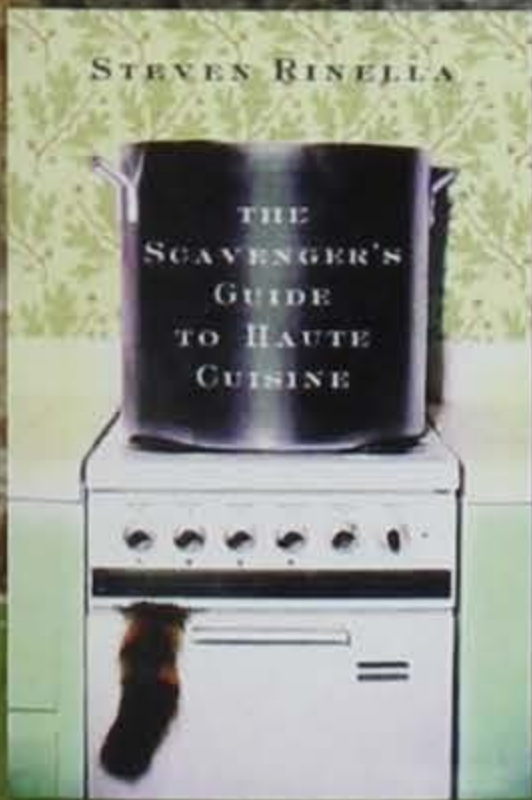
Though he's sold traps to research scientists and municipalities, Floyd's primary customers are bluebirders. "Bluebirders are older people," he said. "If it weren't for old people, bluebirds would have disappeared. That's who I sell my traps to. I just send them out, before I get paid. No credit cards or nothing. But I always get paid. I'm working with a different class of people. They're bluebirders and they're honest people."

An MBA would cringe at Floyd's business model. There is no difference between his retail sales plan and his wholesale plan. There's a guy in Tennessee who sells Floyd's Universal Sparrow Trap inside one of Floyd's boxes for \$49. Floyd sells the same setup for \$21 dollars. And the Tennessee guy doesn't even buy the products straight from Floyd. He gets them from some other retailer. Floyd doesn't even know who.

"Why don't you call that Tennessee guy up?" I asked. "You could sell the traps to him at a higher price than you usually charge but at a lower price than he's currently paying. And why don't you patent your designs?"

"Because I don't care. He's buying 'em from someone who bought 'em from me. It's not like he's stealing 'em. If I sell a Universal trap to you for \$6.50, and you turn around and sell it to Joe Blow for \$10.50, I'm not going to call Joe Blow and steal your customer. It's wrong. You've got to be happy at some point.

"For me, I'm happy to make a good trap. I've got a handle on this trap market. My traps, they just trap sparrows like crazy. If I kept my feedback, you wouldn't have time to read it all. I have the best trap on the market. I know that I do. Everybody tells me that. And I don't do it for money. I do it for recognition." 🐦



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*Le Guide Culinaire*, by Auguste Escoffier was written in 1903. The fourth edition, 1927, contains over 5,000 recipes and was translated into English in 1979.



# FALL HUNTING FORECAST

BY MICK KLEMESRUD PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH AND LOWELL WASHBURN

# While a cold winter, wet spring and mighty floods harmed some game species, many were unaffected while others may even have benefitted.

## PHEASANT FORECAST

Iowa's pheasant population needed a break to bounce back this year, but winter and spring were two of the most inhospitable on record. However, there will be some good hunting in 2008, but hunters may have to work a little harder or try new areas to bag birds.

"Hunters are still going to find birds and have good hunting," says Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife biologist for the DNR. "The key will be finding habitat. Areas with good habitat will be areas holding birds. But if we ever needed to have a good spring, it was this year and we didn't get it."

Most of Iowa's best pheasant habitat is land enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Flooding in Iowa and other Midwestern states this spring has the USDA looking into the possibility of releasing land enrolled in CRP before contracts are completed. In Iowa, about 500,000 additional acres of CRP could be plowed under this fall for row crop production in the spring if the early release is approved.

These 500,000 acres are marginal quality farm ground, but critical nesting habitat. High crop prices have brought marginal land back into crop production at an alarming rate. Farmers are also planting fewer acres of hay or oats, habitat types that benefit pheasants, when corn and bean prices are at current high levels.

"The real impact for wildlife will be felt over the next few years as less and less cover is available to get



PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH



# FALL HUNTING FORECAST

through the harsh winter, and less nesting habitat is available to produce young," Bogenschutz says. "We need to hold on to what CRP land we have not only to provide nesting cover, but to reduce soil erosion and chemical runoff to our streams. This marginal land is more prone to erosion and offers lower crop yields than land not in the program."

The pheasant population has trended down the past five years, save for 2005. Critical CRP habitat began expiring in 2006 to produce more corn. Then late last fall Mother Nature threw in an ice storm followed by nearly 4 feet of snow during the winter, followed by the wettest spring on record and some of the coolest temperatures in the last 45 years. Finally, the peak hatch was around June 10 to 15, during the height of the devastating 2008 flood.

The optimist will note that if a hen loses her nest before her eggs hatch, she will likely try to nest again, although with fewer eggs than the first attempt. She may even attempt a third nest, if she lost the first two, but with fewer eggs yet. Also, the wet weather delayed haying past the peak of the hatch to potentially help mitigate nests lost to flooding.

Even with that depressing scenario, Iowa still has pheasants. Bogenschutz estimates the overall population will be similar to the all-time low seen in 2001. The DNR's annual August Roadside Survey is the best predictor of how pheasant hunting will be in the fall. The survey takes place Aug. 1-15, driven over the same 210 routes each year. Each 30 mile route is on a gravel road and surveyed on mornings with heavy dew when hens will bring chicks to the road to dry off.

Based on weather data and computer models, early indications are northwest Iowa may have better bird numbers. The remainder of the state saw significant snow and the heaviest rainfall and flooding. These areas will likely have fewer birds overall, but better numbers found in areas with good habitat.

## DEERFORECAST

*Another banner year pursuing Iowa's prized whitetails*

The 2008 deer hunting season should be similar to 2007, hopefully minus the rotten weather. Efforts to reduce Iowa's deer herd to levels of the mid-to-late 1990s are beginning to pay dividends in northwest and north-central counties. Eastern and southern counties are also trending toward that goal, but some are not yet there.

Managing the deer herd is a challenge to find a balance between hunters, motorists and farmers who have different ideas on optimal herd size.

"We are starting to get some complaints from hunters about not seeing as many deer, even from some mid-eastern and northeast counties. It's not a lot of noise, but it is out there," says Tom Litchfield, DNR deer biologist.

Litchfield says some areas have higher deer numbers than he would like, but most appear to be reaching a plateau or heading downward. The herd may have increased slightly in certain areas of central and southern Iowa, and scattered areas in northeast Iowa.

"The herd in the Red Rock Management Unit near Des Moines is leveling off and we hope to get it turned," Litchfield says.

The Riverton Unit herd in far southwest Iowa has essentially peaked and appears to be in a downward trend. Litchfield still recommends an increase in the doe harvest to drive the herd down a little more quickly.

The deer population in the west central region in the Loess Hills needs more pressure to get numbers down. The Missouri River Unit is very close to turning the corner, but the Bays Branch Unit is definitely not.

Limited access to private land in two or three counties in the Bays Branch Unit has essentially created a refuge for deer by not allowing adequate hunting pressure. In these same counties the public land is getting hit hard. "The population needs to be reduced on private land so we need to make inroads there to turn the herd," he says.

"No matter what the antlerless quotas were in these counties, there are these small refuge spots that do not get enough hunting pressure. Landowners in these refuges do not allow any hunting or only hunt during one season," Litchfield says. "If the landowner or owners are not going to change the way they operate and allow access to more hunters, we will have to address these hotspot access issues through depredation permits on neighboring properties. Turning the rest of the county into a deer desert to make up for these refuges won't solve these types of problems."





PHEASANT PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH; DEER PHOTO BY LOWELL WASHBURN



# FALL HUNTING FORECAST



PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

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Iowa hunters will continue to experience some of the best deer hunting in the nation and hunters will see plenty of deer, including bucks, but, overall, they will see fewer deer, he says.

"That's not a bad thing," Litchfield says. "Our management plan should result in stabilized to slightly growing deer numbers that we will manage through antlerless harvest. However, even with fewer deer, hunters should plan on taking at least as many does as they do bucks. Passing up small bucks and taking a doe will provide better hunting in the future in most areas. If we get to the point where we harvest too many deer, well, we know how to grow more deer if the time comes."

## WATERFOWL FORECAST

Wetlands across the state were generally in good shape this past spring, much better overall than recent years. Wetland restoration has improved the quantity and quality of wetlands, much of it funded with federal dollars through the Wetland Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program and the Farmed Wetlands Program.

## GEESE

For the second year in a row, Canada goose populations in Iowa declined due to poorer-than-average production in 2006 and 2007 and higher-than-average harvests resulting from the special early Canada goose seasons those same years. Unfortunately, Canada goose production was below average again this year due to heavy rains during late April. These precipitation events resulted in flooding of river systems in the eastern half of the state, which likely destroyed most goose nests on floodplains. Because of the declining population estimates, the DNR closed the early September goose season.

This decline may not be noticed in urban areas where geese have higher survival rates due to less hunting pressure than their rural cousins. To continue to put hunting pressure on urban geese, the special September hunt zones around Des Moines and Cedar Rapids/Iowa City will remain in effect. Additionally, a new special September hunt zone will be opened around Cedar Falls/Waterloo.

"These special hunts do help to suppress urban goose populations, but often other population control techniques must also be employed to keep urban geese from becoming overabundant," says Guy Zenner, state waterfowl biologist.

The better Canada goose hunting will be in northwest, southwest and south-central Iowa, which had fair to good production. Hunting in the eastern half will not likely be as good due to the poor production, at least until migrating geese arrive.

Weather is the major factor influencing Canada goose hunting during the latter half of the season. Weather

patterns in Iowa and the upper Midwest dictate when, where and how geese migrate—whether they trickle through or migrate en masse at season's end.

Snow goose hunting continues to be challenging in Iowa. The migration—if it does come through the state—only lasted a few days in recent years. Snow goose migrations are evolving as birds stay longer in the Dakotas and Canada and shift migration paths west to Kansas and Oklahoma. Once a large part of the waterfowl hunting scene in Iowa, snow goose hunting has all but disappeared during fall.

**"Everything hinges on the wetland habitat conditions we have in Iowa in September, October and November, and on the weather patterns that develop during the fall."**

## DUCKS

With just average summer precipitation, Iowa's wetlands would have remained in good condition and produce an above average number of ducklings. Habitat and breeding population information for Canada was unavailable at the time this article was written, but Zenner expects about average production for ducks on the Canadian prairies.

"Assuming we have fair to good wetland habitat this fall, we should entice some of these migrating birds to stop in Iowa for a while," Zenner says. "Everything hinges on the wetland habitat conditions we have in Iowa in September, October and November, and on the weather patterns that develop during the fall."

Locally, Iowa should have better-than-average teal production due to the spring rains that filled temporary wetlands this spring and created good wetland conditions over much of northern Iowa.

## TURKEY FORECAST

Iowa turkey hunters can expect to find good numbers of birds over much of the state this fall, despite the unusual weather the past 12 months.

"The winter of 2007-08 likely had minimal impact on the turkey population" overall says Todd Gosselink, DNR forest wildlife research biologist. "Many birds had access to waste grain and came through the winter in good shape, but some local areas may have had significant



# FALL HUNTING FORECAST

overwinter losses where turkeys did not have access to waste grain."

Above average spring rainfall resulted in record or near-record floods in some portions of Iowa, and Gosselink is expecting turkey populations in those regions to decline. Depending on the severity, some regions could experience a noticeable decline in turkey numbers compared to 2007.

"Roughly half of the turkey population can be lost each year to various causes of mortality," says Gosselink. "Turkeys rely on the reproductive season to at least maintain existing population levels. Wet conditions often lead to higher numbers of nests being destroyed by nest predators, and this problem is compounded when nests are also lost to flooding." Research suggests cool, dry weather is best during the nesting season, and warm, dry conditions are optimal during the brood-rearing period.

Another indicator of good turkey numbers is the number of turkeys harvested during the 2008 spring season. Although the harvest declined slightly from 2007, fewer licenses were issued due to the rainy, cold weather. Success rates were similar to the previous spring, which indicates numbers have remained somewhat constant.

The regional outlook for fall 2008 is probably best in western and northeast Iowa where ideal mixes of trees, row crops and grasslands result in good turkey numbers. "DNR surveys show that turkey populations are strong in the Loess Hills region of western Iowa and the wooded areas in northeast Iowa. These regions should continue to provide excellent hunting this fall," says Gosselink.

A combination of poor weather and less-than-ideal habitat in the southern region lead to several years of declining numbers. Plenty of turkeys are available, but not at the level of western and northeast Iowa. Much of the southern Iowa habitat is pasture and old fields with stunted brome grass, which is not ideal for turkeys. Some of those old brome grass pastures are being returned to corn and beans, which may help turkey populations.

Wild turkey habitat in the central and north-central regions largely consists of riparian habitat associated with the Des Moines, Skunk and Boone rivers. These regions support turkey populations but are limited by the lack of substantial woodlands. Good hunting opportunities exist in areas with habitat, but overall numbers are lower. Extensive flooding in these regions will undoubtedly decrease 2008 reproduction in flood plains.

Fall turkey hunting is not nearly as popular as spring hunting, but fall provides a different experience that can be both challenging and rewarding.

"This is an excellent hunting opportunity for young hunters because the traditional approach to fall hunting allows hunters to make a lot of noise, scream and yell, when attempting to break up a flock," Gosselink says. "Then, the strategy is to sit down, wait until the turkeys begin calling, then call the turkeys back."

Fall hunters may also use a dog to point a turkey or aid in scattering flocks. The long fall season reduces chances of hunter interference.

## FUR HARVESTER FORECAST

Iowa's fur harvesters should expect plenty of opportunity this season. Raccoons—the number one, bread and butter species—are available in good numbers and currently have a fairly good pelt market.

Coyote numbers are doing well statewide, with higher numbers in the Loess Hills, the southern half of Iowa and the far eastern counties.

There is a good population of beaver and mink over much of the state. Andrews says the DNR receives a number of beaver-damage complaints each year. Mink provide a challenging option to late season trappers who battle ice and cold to keep their traps functional.

Iowa's river otter population is in good shape and supported a good harvest. The initial harvest quota of 400 otters has not caused any impacts in the population. The 2008-09 otter quota was increased to 500.

"We continue to have otters statewide. Rivers that meander and have wooded corridors nearby tend to have more otters than straightened rivers, like in western Iowa," says Ron Andrews, DNR fur bearer biologist.

## NUMBERS STILL DOWN

Red fox numbers are down and the population is seemingly trending downward. The loss of habitat, past outbreaks of mange and predation by coyotes have all added to the decline of the red fox. The past three years is on the low end of harvest totals.

Muskrats, once the mainstay for Iowa trappers, remain in low numbers in Iowa, the Midwest and across much of the nation.

## PELT MARKET

The pelt market appears to be fairly strong. Most pelts are bought in foreign countries and a weak dollar leads to better sales. "I would rather have our trappers have the outdoor experience as their main objective and share that experience with someone, than to do it with an eye on the almighty dollar," Andrews says. 🐾



# ELECTRIC CARS SELLING LIKE LIGHTNING



While high gas prices have many tempers blowing a fuse, other drivers are simply plugging in, getting amped about the super-low operating costs of electric vehicles.

"I would burn \$350 in gas a month" with a combustion engine, says Thomas Gleisner of Ames, who owns Amescars.com, Iowa's only seller of Zenn electric vehicles. "With the electric car, I'll drive 5,000 miles for \$50."

A wave of electric vehicles will hit markets soon. By 2010, the long-anticipated Chevy Volt, a Nissan model and others are expected to grace showrooms, but for now, Iowans can snatch up a two-seat hatchback built by the Zenn Motor Company.

The Zenn (short for zero-emissions, no noise) fully charges overnight using a standard 110-volt outlet and comes with heater and air conditioner. The rugged body, built overseas, has a 20-year track record of enduring all the pounding that European cobblestones can inflict. "It's

a high quality piece of equipment and a proven product," says Gleisner, who also sells Dymac electric trucks and seven-seat passenger and cargo vans.

The Zenn is a city and town car, perfect for errands and local commutes with a top speed of 25 mph off the lot, says Gleisner, who owns one himself, and uses a regular car for highway trips. For \$250, most buyers pick up an aftermarket upgrade kit to hit 35 mph, he says. Priced around \$17,000, one buyer put several thousand down with \$200 monthly payments less than his current gasoline bill.

Without oil changes, filters or hoses, "The Zenn is pretty much a low-maintenance vehicle," says Gleisner, who has 2,500 miles on his. "Once you've had one it is like freedom."

Gleisner plans to offer a new generation electric Smart car with highway speeds up to 75 mph and a 200 mile range to the pleasure of those with longer, costly commutes. Already, "several people are on the list," he says, noting the range is 300 miles when cruising at 55 mph.

"We need to somehow, someday get a portion of our driving away from the gas pump. Then we have control of our lives and our economy."



## EASY ON THE GAS BILL AT 200 MPG

Volkswagen has a two-seat diesel concept car, planned for a 2010 release, with super-low drag styling capable of 200 mpg. The two seats are arranged behind one another, like a glider. A futuristic-styled three-wheel car built by Aptera boasts an outlandish 230 mpg plug-in electric or hybrid. With top speeds of 85 mph, passengers are cradled in a Formula-1 composite safety cage. At present, the Aptera is available only to California residents.

## LEARN MORE

- Amescars.com, 128 S. Duff Ave., Ames, IA 50010, 515-233-9900, [www.amescars.com](http://www.amescars.com)
- [www.Zenncars.com](http://www.Zenncars.com)
- Dymac electric trucks, cargo and passenger vans, [www.dymacvehiclegroup.com](http://www.dymacvehiclegroup.com)
- [www.aptera.com](http://www.aptera.com)



## ELECTRIC CARS COME FULL CIRCLE

The 1916 Milburn Electric Brougham Model 22 is an example of a successful electric car of the early 20th century. Its rechargeable batteries could last four hours on a charge while cruising around town at 15 mph.

Built in Toledo, Ohio from 1915 to 1923, the car provided city dwellers with a viable option to the gas engine.

Iowa's then governor, George W. Clark and wife Arletta, purchased a used one in 1918 when he left office and returned to Adel. He did not enjoy driving and the Milburn rapidly became Arletta's pride and joy. She drove it the next 23 years until 1941, when it was presented to the state. It is on display at the State Historical Center in Des Moines at 600 East Locust.

"It's the ideal car for a lady to drive. It is very easy to drive and completely silent. I have had a great deal of enjoyment, using it for shopping and making calls," Arletta said in 1941.

"The Milburn Electrics were among the most popular and elegant cars of the time and were used by President Woodrow Wilson's secret service men. President Wilson owned a 1918 Milburn Electric, which he drove around the White House grounds," according to the Milburn Electric car website.

## A SHORT LIVED SPARK IN CEDAR RAPIDS

In 1904, Roy McCartney of Cedar Rapids built an electric auto called the Maxen Electric. Although three were built, he was unable to secure funding for manufacturing. In 1913, he unsuccessfully tried again to build and interest financiers in his vehicle.

BY SHELENE CODNER

# Go Nuts!

*A simple guide to being your own squirrel*

Considering oaks are Iowa's state tree and add a majestic beauty to landscapes, they are excellent trees to plant. Of course, you could buy a tree or grow your own by collecting and planting acorns.

## COLLECTING

Collect acorns in the fall when they begin falling from the trees. The acorn is ripe for collecting when you can easily remove the cap. Do not allow acorns to heat up; keep them in the shade while collecting. The acorn could lose the ability to germinate if it gets too warm. Collect plenty so you have a good selection.

Immediate planting should be limited to white oak acorns, which germinate shortly after falling, but can be stored for later planting. Red oak acorns must be planted in the spring following collection. If you are not sure which acorns you have, store them in a plastic bag in damp peat or saw dust and refrigerate at 40°F for spring planting. Keep an eye on your acorns over the winter; it is crucial they are not allowed to dry out or heat up as they will lose their ability to germinate.

## PLANTING

After deciding the proper time to plant, remove your acorns from storage and select the best ones for planting (plump and free of rot). Test your acorns to see if they are viable by placing them in a bucket of water. Viable acorns will sink. Place your viable acorns in loose potting soil in one-gallon pots. Pots should have holes in the bottom to allow for drainage. Plant acorns on their sides at a depth of one half to one times the width of the acorn. Keep the soil moist.

## TRANSPLANTING

Seedlings should be transplanted as soon as the first leaves open and become firm, but before extensive root development occurs. The planting hole should be twice as wide and deep as the pot and root ball. Carefully remove the root ball and gently set it in the hole with the root crown at the level of the soil surface. Fill the hole with soil and water generously.

*For a host of resources including wildlife habitat planting, cost-share programs or to order seedlings, visit the DNR's Forestry Bureau at [www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/index.html](http://www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/index.html).*



Pan-seared pheasant breast and braised kale



Kim McWane Friese, Chef Emeritus Kurt Michael Friese and Chef de Cuisine Kevin Henning

Although Chef Friese has swapped his chef's hat for a laptop to pursue his writing career, Devotay (named after the Frieses' sons, Devon and Taylor) has been left in the capable hands of his wife, Kim, who oversees day-to-day operations, and Chef de Cuisine Kevin Henning. Make sure to sample the vegetable tourine—much like lasagna but tastier and healthier. Or try a bowl of the Devotay paella, a traditional Spanish rice casserole stuffed with organic pasture-raised chicken, chorizo sausage and shellfish.

## Iowa City's Devotay Plates Local Food With Worldly Flair

RELAX AT THIS DOWNTOWN EATERY WHERE NEARLY EVERYTHING—RIGHT DOWN TO THE TABLEWARE—IS FROM IOWA.

*"It used to be a restaurant was judged on how far away the food and ingredients came from," says owner and chef emeritus Kurt Michael Friese. "That's all changing. Now it's all about how close it is." Buying local, Friese gets better products, traceable origins, trust in the producer and better control on timely delivery. "I really enjoy seeing my dollar again," Friese says. "I am giving back to the community that is giving to me."*

### APPLEWOOD SMOKED TROUT MOUSSE

1 pound applewood smoked trout fillets  
1 tablespoon prepared horseradish  
¾ cup heavy cream, or as needed  
Juice of one lemon (about 2 tablespoons)  
¼ teaspoon white pepper

Remove skin and bones from fillets. In a food processor, chop the trout fine, like bread crumbs. Remove to a large bowl and fold in remaining ingredients. Add cream to desired consistency. Chill one hour to overnight and serve with crostini (small, thin slices of toasted bread) or crackers. Garnish with capers and lemon slices.

### PAN-SEARED PHEASANT BREAST WITH LA QUERCIA PROSCIUTTO, KALONA MOZZARELLA AND WILD MUSHROOM CREAM

2 boneless pheasant breasts, skin on  
2 slices of prosciutto, paper thin (about ¼ oz.)

2 tablespoons shredded mozzarella  
2 tablespoons olive oil or butter  
salt and pepper to taste

#### SAUCE:

½ cup tightly packed sliced wild mushrooms, such as oyster, goat's beard, or any edible mushroom  
1 clove garlic, sliced paper thin  
¼ cup roasted red pepper cut into very thin strips  
1 tablespoon butter or olive oil  
¼ cup dry sherry  
¾ cup heavy cream  
1 tablespoon chopped rosemary  
Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 400° F. Meanwhile,

Deeply entrenched in the Slow Food movement, the Frieses advocate a food system that is good, clean and fair. That ensures virtually everything that reaches the tables at Devotay is fresh, locally grown and the producers are fairly compensated for their work. In fact, all of Devotay's meat and dairy needs and 60 percent of its remaining ingredients are met through local partners. Even the tableware comes from the skilled hands of professional potter Kim McWane Friese.

Ceiling adorned in draped fabrics



Vegetable terrine



Applewood smoked trout mousse

→ HAVE A GOOD RECIPE OF WILD FOODS TO SHARE? Send to: [WILDCUISINE@DNR.IOWA.GOV](mailto:WILDCUISINE@DNR.IOWA.GOV) ←

using a sharp fillet knife, carefully slice a pocket into the thicker edge of the pheasant breast. Stuff each breast with one slice of prosciutto and one tablespoon of mozzarella. Press to seal and season with salt and pepper.

Heat olive oil or butter in a large saute pan over high. Add pheasant breasts skin side down and adjust heat to medium-high. Saute about four minutes or until golden brown. Turn and cook until golden brown, about three minutes. Remove pan from heat. Transfer breasts to an oven-proof pan and place in oven for six minutes or desired doneness. Remove from oven and allow to rest covered while sauce is completed.

Return saute-pan to burner at medium high and add oil or butter. Add in mushrooms and peppers, stirring frequently for two minutes. Add garlic and stir another two minutes. When mixture is tender and mushrooms have released juices, add sherry. Caution: May ignite!

Allow sherry to evaporate until almost dry (about 1 tablespoon left) then add cream and turn heat to medium. Add rosemary. Allow cream to reduce in volume by half (about five minutes.) Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper to taste.

If desired, slice breasts to 1/4 inch slices and fan on serving plate. Drizzle with sauce and serve immediately with a dry white or a light-bodied red wine.

## DEVOTAY

117 North Linn St.  
Iowa City  
319-354-1001  
[www.devotay.net](http://www.devotay.net)

### HOURS:

LUNCH: Monday-Saturday, 11-2.  
DINNER: Monday-Thursday and Sunday,  
5-9; Friday-Saturday, 5-10.  
SUNDAY BRUNCH: 10-2

Sign up for Devotay's newsletter, or check out Chef Friese's forthcoming book, *Slow Food in the Heartland: A Cook's Journey* at [www.icecubepress.com](http://www.icecubepress.com) or booksellers.



## Pass the Pawpaws, Please

WALK IOWA'S WILD SIDE FOR A SEASONAL TROPICAL FRUIT-LIKE DELIGHT

Called the "Indiana banana," "custard apple" and other handles, the pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) tree grows through the southeast and lower Midwest. Iowa is the northern edge of this mystery fruit's range.

"They are found along the Mississippi River and southeast Iowa," says Pat O'Malley, horticulturalist with Iowa State University Extension, who grows them in his Iowa City yard.

Finding them is challenging. They prefer filtered sun, protected slopes and moisture. Look within 100 yards of a railroad right of way in southern Iowa. "As they were building railroads, crews snacked on pawpaws from Missouri. They spit out the seeds," he says.

Simply pick, peel and eat. Ripe when the fruit gives a little to pressure, usually early fall. Much like a peach, they'll have a strong, fruity aroma. "It's a creamy, sweet taste; a cross between a melon and a banana," says O'Malley. "The texture is sort of like a melon; softer flesh, though; a vanilla custard taste."

### PAWPAW MUFFINS

Mark F. Sohn, of Pikeville, Ky., from *Mountain Country Cooking*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1996

1 lb. very ripe pawpaws,  
non-stick vegetable spray

- 1½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup white cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 egg
- ⅓ cup 100 percent pure sweet sorghum
- ¼ cup oil
- 1 cup 2 percent milk
- ½ cup hickory nut or pecan pieces
- ½ cup raisins

Wash and peel pawpaws and press through a food mill. Measure out 1 cup of pulp. Preheat oven to 400° F. Spray 18 medium muffin cups. Sprinkle a little cornmeal into each cup. In a large bowl, whisk flour, cornmeal and baking powder. Crack the egg into the dry mix, whisk until egg is well mixed. Add sorghum, oil and milk, stirring until almost mixed. Stir in nuts and raisins. With the nuts barely mixed in and the flour just incorporated, pour batter into the muffin cups, filling each about 2/3 full. Bake 17 minutes or until an inserted toothpick comes out clean. Muffins should be crusty on the top and brown on the bottom. Cool three minutes on a wire rack, then lift from the pan onto the wire rack to finish cooling.

**WEB BONUS:** Pawpaw-Pineapple Sherbet and pawpaw cream pie recipes at [www.iowadnr.gov/magazine/index.html](http://www.iowadnr.gov/magazine/index.html).





# GOLDENROD GALL FLY

The life and death of a goldenrod gall fly (*Eurosta solidaginis*) centers around the goldenrod plant (*Solidago rigida*). Adult flies inject eggs into the plant stem, and larvae feed on the goldenrod, forcing the plant to produce a protective outer shell, called a gall. Home sweet home. It's symbiosis, pure and simple.

### I SHOULD GET OUT MORE

Adult goldenrod gall flies are rather clumsy, and despite the classification, do not fly very well. As such, they'd rather walk up and down the plant stem. Males will choose a bud on a plant and remain there until a female shows up. When she does, he'll perform a dance to attract her.

### SHORT LIFE SPAN

Larvae live in the gall for a year before emerging as adults. Once they do, they live for only two weeks, focusing solely on mating and laying eggs. Adult gall flies do not eat.

### LIVING BY THE GOLDEN RULE

Parasitic themselves, gall flies often find themselves on the other end of the food chain. Two species of wasps are known to parasitize gall flies, laying their own eggs in the gall, which hatch and feed on the fly larvae. Beetles and spiders also find the succulent larvae to their liking. And some birds—including downy woodpeckers, wild turkeys and hummingbirds—see the goldenrod gall as nothing more than fancy food packaging and will break open the protective shells to get to the tasty insides.

### A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

Goldenrod gall flies only lay their eggs on goldenrod plants. Two species of parasitic wasps, *Eurytoma gigantea* and *Eurytoma obtusiventris*, only lay their eggs where gall flies are present. Thus, both insects are dependent upon the plant for survival.

### SNUG AS A BUG...

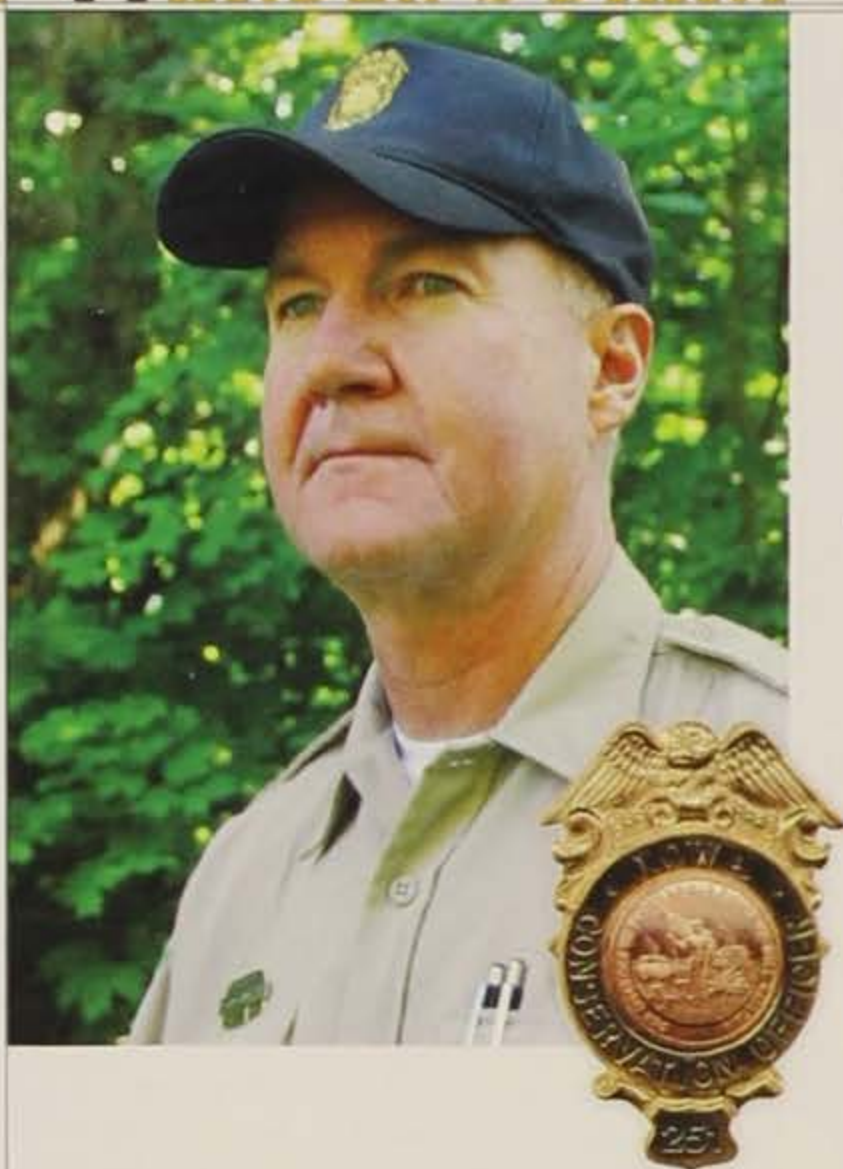
To prepare for winter in the gall, larvae produce glycerol in their bodies, which acts like an antifreeze. It keeps them from dying in cold weather.

### INJECT THE VENOM

After mating, female flies inject eggs into a goldenrod plant stem via her ovipositor. After 10 days, the larvae hatch and immediately begin eating from inside the stem. A chemical in the larvae's saliva causes the plant to develop a protective, sphere-shaped shell—a gall—which the larvae live in.



GOLDENROD GALL FLY PHOTO BY CHRISTINE HANRAHAN (FLETCHER WILDLIFE GARDEN); GOLDENROD PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH; ILLUSTRATION BY STUDIO Z



# A Tale of Two Hunters

Remember last deer season? That's like asking, "Remember the Ice Bowl game between Green Bay and Dallas?" for those of us old enough to have seen it.

It didn't start out that unusual, but deer season never seems short on suspense. It's always busy, and it's not for lack of good reason that most officers refer to December as "Deercember."

Opening Day started out as a drizzle, then turned to flying ice. Road conditions quickly turned south, with "travel not recommended." The radio dispatcher called and asked what the road conditions were in my area. "Deer hunting not recommended," I responded, but that didn't fly. It quickly got incredibly slick, and I remembered all those opening days the past few years so warm deer hunters were hunting in T-shirts.

It seemed many hunters were staying home. It was tempting to think, "Nobody is going to be out in this," but thinking so would only show you had never worked deer season before.

I popped over a hill and saw a car parked at the bottom with a couple of men next to it. One was wearing an orange vest. Pulling up I recognized the man in the vest as someone I've known for years and a long time hunter. He was absolutely covered in ice. He looked like someone had dunked him in the water then thrown him in a deep freeze. I've never seen anyone that caked in ice and still moving. He looked like an ice sculpture. I rolled down the window, said hello, and told him, "You know you kind of look like the Tin Man from the Wizard of Oz."

He laughed. "Yeah, it's pretty rough out there." He had been hunting all morning. It was rough going, but it

didn't take the smile off his face. He was hunting by himself, sitting and waiting, but, apparently even the deer had run for cover as he didn't have anything yet. We talked for quite awhile. I knew he would probably dry out his gear and be back.

I drove on, and the rest of the morning was as uneventful as I had ever seen. I didn't mind. After all these years and all the adventures, I live by the motto "Boring is a good thing."

I stopped and had lunch with a couple of my neighboring officers who were also trying to break through the worsening ice. People passing by our table asked, "How are the hunters doing out there today?" Not good, we answered.

After lunch, I walked back out to my truck, dug out the ice scraper and started to chip away at my windshield while I cranked up the heater to sauna-like levels in the cab. Driving away, one could only creep along the extremely slick roads. Trying to stop someone was nearly impossible as it could send us both into the ditch.

I continued to an area long a source of complaints during deer seasons past. Driving along a ridge I could see the tell-tale sign ahead that not everyone was going home. Two pickups were beside each other, facing opposite directions in the middle of the road, exhaust rising from the tailpipes. I could see orange through the rear windows and reflected in their outside rearview mirrors. I correctly guessed they and their friends had a section surrounded, probably had the deer spotted, and were planning the next move. I started a long way behind them to bring my truck to a stop, got out, and approached them. They didn't have any deer yet, so I checked their



DEER PHOTO BY TY SMEDES; HUNTER PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH

**"THE DRIVER JUMPED  
OUT ONTO THE  
SLICK ROAD WITH  
SHOTGUN IN HAND.  
I COULD TELL HE WAS  
SO FIXATED ON THE  
DEER THAT HE HAD  
ABSOLUTELY NO  
IDEA MY ICE CUBE ON  
WHEELS WAS THERE."**



licenses and gun cases. By now the ice was flying so hard it stung the face, and you could hear it bouncing off the metal of the pickups. You could hardly see as the wind picked up, turning the ice into flying icicles.

I got back in the truck, and I knew what would be happening now. The cell phones would be ringing, or the pocket radios would be squawking, warning everyone I was in the area. "Fine," I thought, "I can use the help today. All of a sudden I'm everywhere."

I had to stop again to clear off my windshield. It was a losing battle. The pickup started to fishtail as I tried to make my way up a hill. As the road emerged from between a line of trees, something to my left caught my eye. An enormous buck was running at high speed toward the road. "It's being chased," I immediately thought. I didn't even have time to stop and get out the binoculars. As the buck leaped the fence in a huge graceful arc, I saw it coming from the left ahead of me.

A pickup slid almost sideways through the intersection just ahead of me and sped toward me. I turned on my lights to stop it. It slid to a stop facing me just as the deer started to bound across the road between us. The door opened, and experience told me what would happen next. The driver jumped out onto the slick road with shotgun in hand. I could tell he was so fixated on the deer that he had absolutely no idea my ice-cube-on-wheels was there. He raised the shotgun, and I only had time to think, "Oh no." He was starting to track the deer with the shotgun.


I ducked behind the dashboard for what little cover it offered. I fully expected the next sound to be the

subsonic whoosh of the slug tumbling through glass or, worse yet, the crash of it impacting metal. For several seconds I waited. Finally I slowly raised my head and peered over the dash. I could see him putting his shotgun in a case. I could only guess he had been looking down the gun barrel at the deer through his sights, and as he tried to take aim thought, "Deer, deer, deer, uh oh, game warden!" All the while, it was white tail and antlers jumping the next fence and escaping across the field.

I opened the door and tried to skate my way up to him. "I think we have a little problem here today," I said, as I asked to see his license. While he maintained he had the gun in a case and got out of the pickup to load it, I told him I really didn't believe that. I mentioned there was the little problem of chasing deer with the pickup, also.

I told him to put away his gun, and to get in my truck as there was no use in us both standing out in the storm. While I wrote the ticket I could tell he was upset, but it turned out to be more about not getting the deer than the fine. Apparently he had been watching it for some time. "Well, this isn't the way you do it," I said. "We get lots of complaints about this sort of thing."

I guess you could call it blind luck depending on which side of it you're on, that I was in the right place at the right time. But I can't be everywhere. I don't delude myself that I catch them all. So, I think of those two individual hunters. I wonder, if I hadn't been there, and if both of them harvested a deer, which one could look in the mirror and have the greatest satisfaction with how they did it? I think each would have a very different tale to tell. 🐾



Early October color from a gravel road  
vantage off Highway 52 in Clayton County.

State Library Of Iowa  
State Documents Center  
Miller Building  
Des Moines, Iowa