



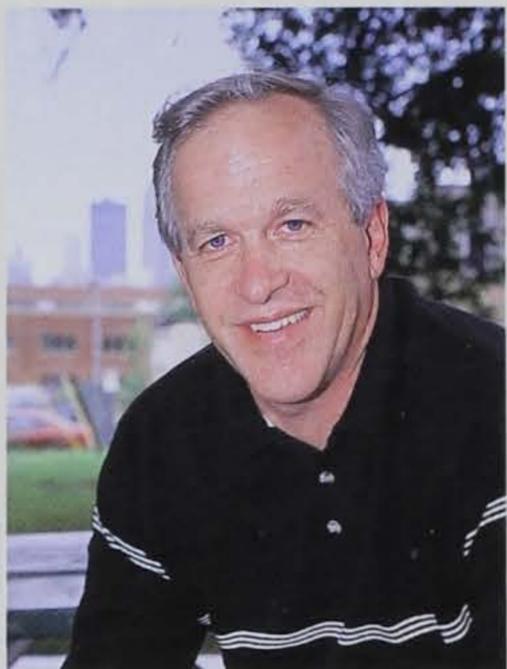
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2006

CONSERVATIONIST

IOWA'S PREMIER OUTDOOR MAGAZINE

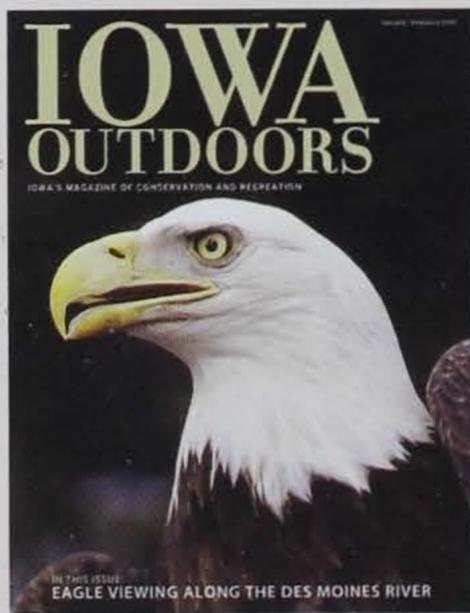
INSIDE 2006
**HUNTING
FORECAST**
PHEASANTS
WATERFOWL
WHITE-TAILED DEER

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Bob Castelline

A New Look for a Familiar Face



As the days grow shorter, the nights grow cooler and nature gears up for its final autumn splendor, it occurs to me that on one hand, Iowans are constantly adaptable to change, but still cling very closely to traditions that mean a lot to them.

One of those traditions is this very magazine, the *Iowa Conservationist*, which has been around for more than 60 years. Yet even the most sacred of traditions adapt from time-to-time to meet the changing needs of the society being served.

This issue, followed by the annual calendar, will be the last under the title of the *Iowa Conservationist*. Beginning with the January-February issue, the magazine, will be called *Iowa Outdoors* and will feature many new departments and features as well as a new look. The tradition,

however, will continue with the same stunning photos and entertaining, yet informative articles leading to a better understanding and appreciation of our natural resources for readers.

Updating the magazine, including the name change, is being done after considerable research and contact with readers and prospective readers

through focus groups. What people have told us is that they have a strong interest in Iowa's natural resources, impacts on our

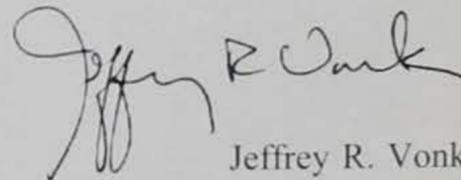
environment and what they can do to improve our state. People are also keenly interested in outdoor recreation opportunities in Iowa.

The magazine, both in the past and in the future, reflects a basic belief we in the DNR have: The more that people are involved in our natural resources, the more they will care for and about these natural resources. The more they care for those natural resources, the more likely they will be to get involved in protecting the natural resources. This magazine has always been and will continue to be an important tool toward this goal.

As redesign of the magazine progressed, it became quite evident that *Iowa Outdoors* was an appropriate title for what this publication is all about, furthering the understanding and appreciation of our environment and natural resources.

This magazine will continue to be a vital link between the DNR and the people of Iowa in the sharing of information. It will continue to be a solid and entertaining publication for those who appreciate our natural resources and who want to learn more.

We believe you will enjoy the updates we have made and hope that you will continue to value your bimonthly visits with the *Iowa Outdoors*.


Jeffrey R. Vonk

FRONT COVER: COOPER'S HAWK RECENTLY BANNED AT THE EFFIGY MOUNDS STATION DURING HAWK WATCH WEEKEND. (SEE STORY PAGE 6). PHOTO BY LOWELL WASHBURN

BACK COVER: SETTING OUT DECOYS BY LOWELL WASHBURN



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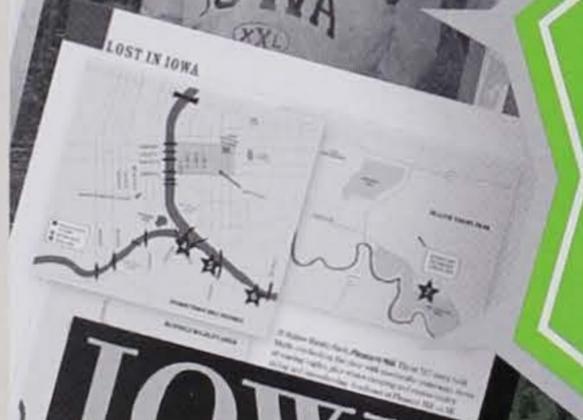
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hawk watch

Effigy Mounds will be the site of Hawk Head reunion as humans gather to celebrate the annual migration.

Story and photographs by
Lowell Washburn

It's as predictable as the change of season. From mid-September through the end of October, tens of thousands of migrating hawks will converge over northeast Iowa and then flood southward through the rugged, bluffland corridors of the Mississippi River.

Even more precise in its timing, is the assemblage of humans [Hawk Heads] who gather in the same place each autumn to observe and celebrate this annual and dramatic passage of winged hunters. For one glorious weekend, Effigy Mounds National Monument will become Raptor Central. A place where birds of prey enthusiasts come from far and wide to observe, learn and appreciate.

Officially known as Hawk Watch Weekend, it is Iowa's premier wildlife viewing event. Headquartered three miles north of Marquette at the Effigy Mounds Visitor's Center, the annual celebration occurs, rain or

shine, during the last full weekend of September.

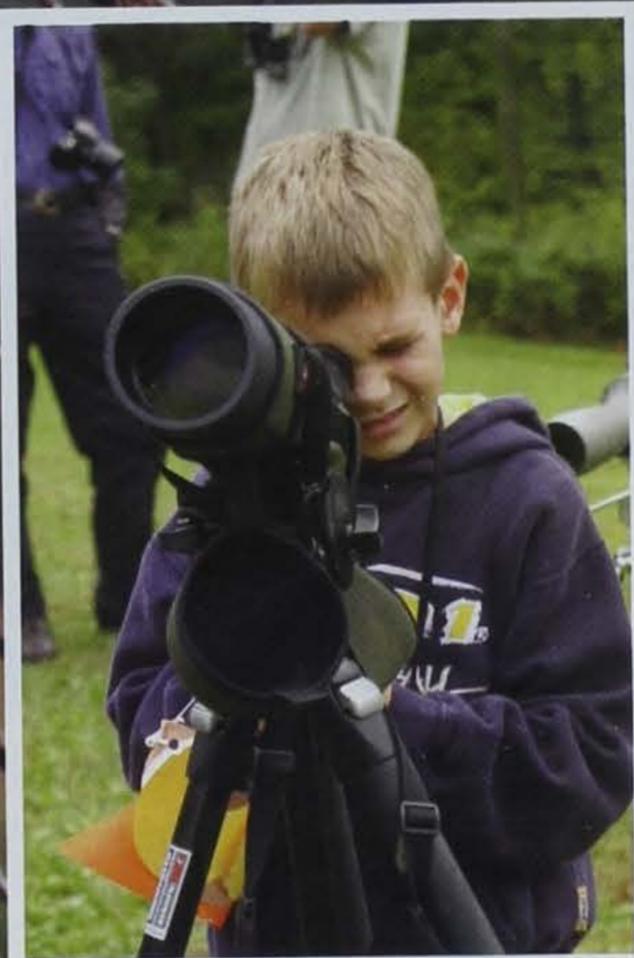
"Two things that people can definitely count on finding here are bird observations and education," said Hawk Watch coordinator, Pam Kester.

"Anyone who comes here can plan on learning how to identify migrating hawks, and they'll get an especially good feel for the accipters (short-winged, long-tailed, woodland hawks). People will also learn how to tell if the hawk they're watching is a red-tail or a broad-wing; if it's an adult or immature.

"There are lots of opportunities and we always have at least a few very good or unusual sightings," noted Kester. "Sometimes it's a huge kettle of broad-winged hawks or maybe an osprey that carries a fish right over the crowd. There are good opportunities for observing bald eagles here and we usually see migrating peregrine falcons. You just never know what's coming next.



A red-tailed hawk surveys the landscape near Effigy Mounds National Monument. Northeast Iowa's dairy region offers ideal hunting grounds for raptors such as this red-tail. During the fall migration, tens of thousands of southbound hawks will funnel through the area.



Eight-year-old, Brandon Kyle of Guttenberg searches the sky for migrating raptors during last September's Hawk Watch Weekend. "I love looking through the scope, it's like seeing a picture," said Kyle. "So far, I've seen a bald eagle and a falcon. They're really fast, and I like things that go fast. A lady helped my sister and me make owl masks. That was cool."

“For me it has been especially exciting to see Hawk Watch develop and expand,” said Kester. “It’s become a very family-oriented event. That’s our focus. Our goal is to provide programs and activities that reach all levels. We have a large number of return hawk watchers that come back every year, and so we’re always trying to develop new programs and activities. I think we’ve become one of those places that really does offer something for everyone.”

Iowa DNR wildlife diversity technician and osprey restoration coordinator, Pat Schlarbaum has assisted with Hawk Watch every year since 1984.

“One of the things that makes this event so exciting is that it just keeps getting better and better. People don’t just come here to be entertained. They come to engage; they come to learn,” said Schlarbaum.

“We see people at all levels of knowledge. Here, it doesn’t really matter if a person is already an expert or if they’re just learning to look through the right end of a spotting scope. There are opportunities for everyone to learn something new and to have fun while doing it.

“There’s no question that the biological information shared here is second to none. Hawk Watch attracts internationally



Hawk Watch veteran, Pat Schlarbaum puts the finishing touches on a bald eagle nest displayed at Effigy Mounds.



Bruce Ehresman, DNR wildlife diversity biologist, records a raptor sighting at the outdoor viewing area at Effigy Mounds Visitor’s Center.

(Above) Peregrine falcon sightings, although still rare, have increased during the Hawk Watch Weekend.



renowned raptor specialists, educators, falconers, you name it,” said Schlarbaum.

“When you combine these human resources with world class opportunities to observe the migration firsthand, it just naturally takes people to a

new level of environmental awareness. You can just see the wonder in the kids’ eyes as they absorb a bit of new information or see a bald eagle for the first time. That’s exciting. It’s what keeps me coming back year after year.”

The 22nd Annual Hawk
Watch Weekend will be held
September 22 - 24.



Pam Kester

Activities will be headquartered at the Effigy Mounds Visitor's Center, located 3 miles north of Marquette on Highway 76.

"This year's theme will focus on owls, and we'll be spending more time on the nocturnal aspects of migration," said Hawk Watch coordinator, Pam Kester. "Our activities will

begin at 7 p.m. Friday with a family owl program followed by an outdoor Owl Prowl."

During the remainder of the Hawk Watch weekend, raptor enthusiasts will be treated to a vast array of hands-on activities and live bird presentations by specialists from the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center, Houston Nature Center and the Boone County Education Center. Raptor educators Kay Neumann and Dianne Moller will also present live bird programs.

The Effigy Mounds Hawk Watch is sponsored by the Upper Iowa Audubon Chapter and co-sponsored by the staff of Effigy Mounds and the Iowa DNR. A support staff of more than 50 volunteers aid with annual programming and coordination.

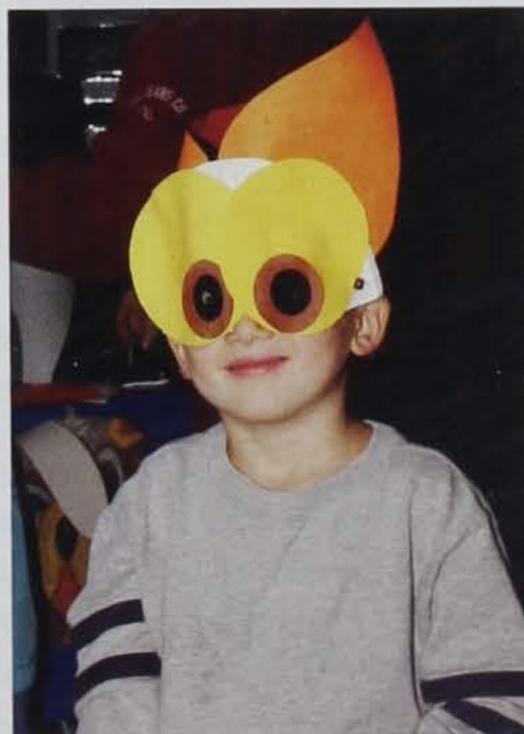
"Everything at Hawk Watch is absolutely free," said Kester. "Our goal is to have families come and enjoy the migration."

For additional information or specific program times contact the Effigy Mounds Visitor's Center at 563-873-3491 or visit www.nps.gov/efmo.

—LW



Sarah Block of Prairie DuChemin, Wis. has a chat with Strix the Owl (Marlene Ehresman). "I like all the stuff for kids," remarked Block. "I really liked picking apart the (owl) pellets and finding all the little bones. (Below) Sam Kepford of Waverly masquerades as an owl during last year's Hawk Watch.



On A Good Migration Day It Just Rains Hawks At The Effigy Mounds Banding Station

Peering from the camouflaged window of his ridge-top bunker, hawk trapper Dave Kester scanned the autumn sky.

"Looks like it's going to be a good migration day," Kester announced. "I can count one, two, three . . . no, five different raptors.

Probably Cooper's. They're usually among the first to show," he added.

With clear skies and crisp, but steadily rising temperatures, the soaring hawks were first to take advantage of the morning's strengthening thermals.

Although the distant raptors were mere specks above the horizon, a light north breeze

brought them ever closer to our location at the Effigy Mounds Hawk Banding Station near Marquette.

The birds had soon approached to within good binocular range and, as Kester predicted, all five were indeed Cooper's hawks — a high-strung, long-tailed woodland species best known for dramatic bursts of speed through thick cover.



Leg bands are vital tools in the study of migrating birds.

Accipters are bird hunters and Kester lost no time in pulling the length of rope that, by means of a small pulley, quickly hoisted his bait pigeon skyward. Attached to the rope by means of a leather vest, the pigeon lost no time in fluttering back to earth.

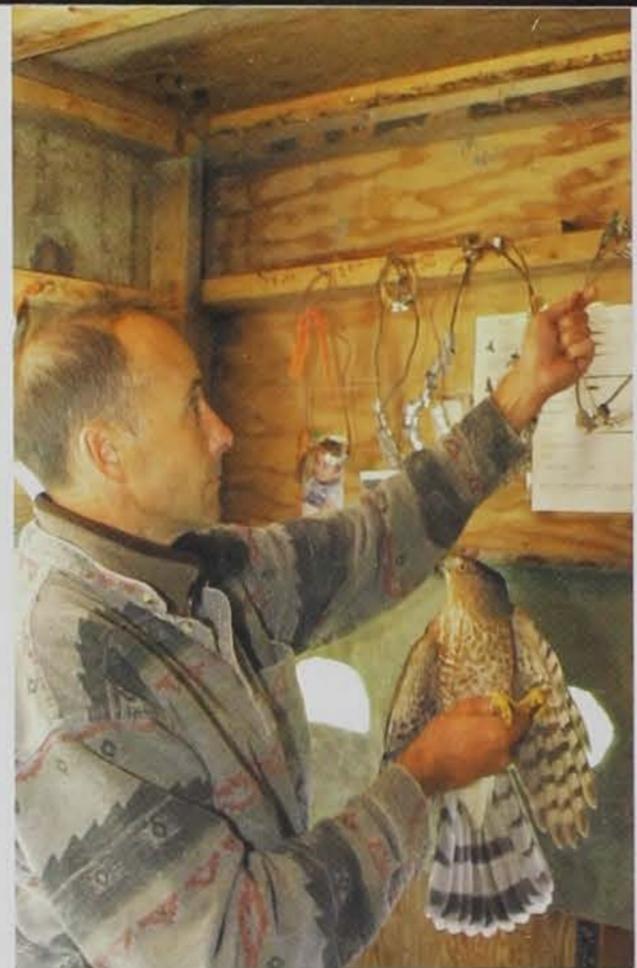
Although more than a hundred yards distant, the movement immediately

caught the attention of the nearest hawk. Instantly switching to full pursuit mode, the hungry Cooper's launched its attack.

From within the confines of the blind, we held our breath

as the raptor grew increasingly larger. It had nearly arrived when a second blur of movement caught our eye. Having effectively used every bush and fold of the landscape to mask its approach, it quickly became obvious that a second hawk had also put the pigeon in its cross-hairs. Boring in at full-throttle, the stealth hawk was first to arrive.

But as the hungry raptor reached to grasp the prize, its plan



An adult Cooper's hawk looks on as hawk trapper Dave Kester selects a band.

was suddenly foiled. Instead of obtaining an easy meal the hawk crashed, and then became hopelessly entangled, in the invisible wall of Kester's strategically placed mist net. Calmly watching from the safe side of this synthetic spider web, the harnessed pigeon never flinched. A veteran trapper himself, the pigeon had seen it all a hundred times before.

"Sharp-shinned," Kester hollered as he conducted an impressive, high-speed exit from the blind.

Within seconds he had secured the hawk and begun, one needle-sharp talon at a time, to carefully untangle it from the net.

"I love it when they come in hot like that," remarked Kester.

"Look at this," he suddenly exclaimed, pointing to the bird's bulging crop.

"This hawk has already eaten and she came in anyway. Wow!

That's what I call attitude," he laughed.

A denizen of the forest, sharp-shinned are a jay-sized, scaled-down version of the larger Cooper's hawk. And, simply because they're accipters, the species is completely wired — an explosive bundle of nervous energy just waiting to detonate.

With the hawk safely extracted, we returned to the blind where the bird was hastily weighed, measured and banded. In spite of its full crop, Kester announced the tiny raptor's weight at a mere 190 grams. The pigeon weighed in at 450 grams.

"These little hawks are really something," said Kester. "They are predators, but because they're so tiny, they can also be prey — so they really have a foot in both worlds. I think that's part of the reason for their attitude. It makes them put on an act like they're the toughest kid on the block."

With his work completed, Kester released the young sharpie to continue its migration. Returning to the blind, we began our vigil for the next southbound hawk. It was a short wait. Within minutes the day's second catch, this time a fat second year Cooper's hawk, had been lured and netted. Before release, the bird was fitted with the numbered metal leg band that, for better or worse, would remain with the hawk for life.

"This banding site is pretty well-known," said Kester. "So far, we've trapped and banded more than ten species of raptors here. Goshawks, Cooper's, sharp-shinned, red-tails, kestrels, even an eagle or two. From smallest to largest, the list includes just about

every bird of prey that migrates down the Mississippi."

"Most of our return information comes when someone reports a dead bird," he noted. "There are exceptions. Sometimes we get to catch a hawk that's already banded. We trapped a four-year-old peregrine falcon here that had been banded in Alaska. We caught another peregrine that had been banded as a nestling in Greenland. Last fall, we recaptured an adult Cooper's hawk banded in Mexico. (See page 12) It's rare, and whenever someone catches a pre-banded hawk it becomes pretty exciting stuff," Kester added.

The conversation suddenly tailed off as Kester spotted the next incomer.

"Red-tail," he announced. "Look's like a big one, but I think it's going to miss us.

"Let's see what she thinks of this," he said as he grasped the bait rope.

A single flash from the pigeon and the game was on. Seconds later, the hawk was tangled in the net.

Returning to the blind with his latest catch, Kester had just begun recording the bird's weight and measurements when an audible thud commanded our attention.



Immature Cooper's hawk



Dave Kester peers from the window of his ridge-top bunker.

Peering out the window, we were amazed to see a second huge red-tail struggling against the net.

"I can't believe it!," exclaimed Kester. "What a migration day! It's just raining hawks. Red-tails are so thick they're trapping themselves. This place is just out of control."

—LW

Iowa Hawk Bander Makes Incredible Discovery

Like most long-time bird banders, John Stravers can relate some pretty exciting tales of close encounters, near misses and rare captures. But no story is likely to surpass the amazing account of a south-bound hawk netted by Stravers near Marquette.

The event occurred during October 2004. While trapping at the Effigy Mounds Hawk Banding Station, Stravers managed to capture an adult female Cooper's hawk. Adult Cooper's are always impressive, but this specimen was exceptional.

"This hawk was just magnificent," recalled Stravers. "Nothing but hard muscle and feathers — just a hunk. She was incredible."

Even more incredible was the fact that the newly captured hawk was already banded, a rare event among wild bird populations — and especially so among raptors. Before releasing his prize, Stravers duly recorded and reported the band number to officials with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Banding Laboratory. It is at this point that the story really begins to get interesting.

"I turned in the number and found out that the hawk had been banded at Vera Cruz, Mexico by someone named Ernesto Ruelas," said Stravers. "I was shocked. Wait a minute, I said, I know this guy — we worked together."

Stravers and Ruelas first met in Nevada in 1989. Stravers

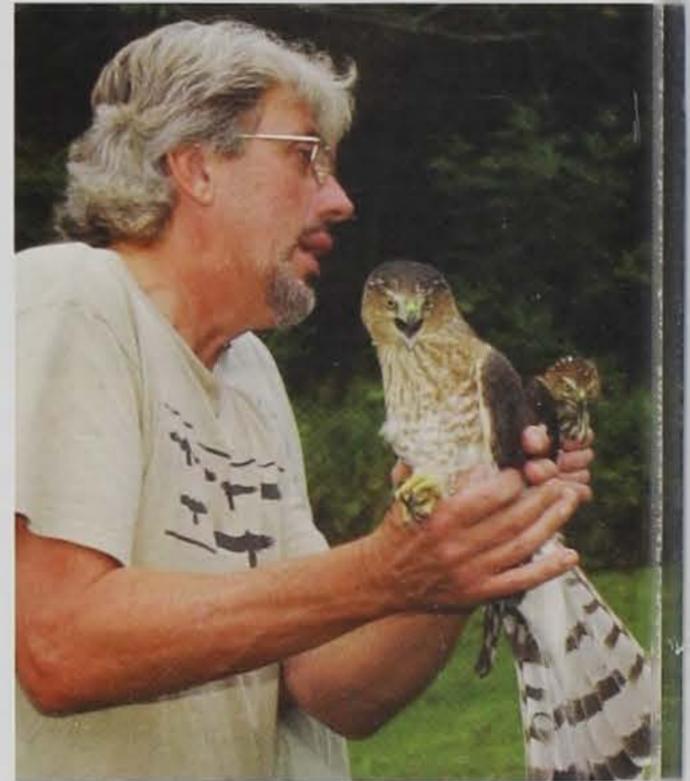
was studying birds of prey in the American West. Ruelas was studying hawk migration in Mexico. Suspecting he had discovered a major migration corridor, Ruelas had traveled to the U.S. to learn scientific survey methods. Although he wasn't quite sure how to accurately count the hawks using the Mexican route, he had made his best attempt at estimating their numbers.

"When Ernesto and I first met, my Spanish and his English were not so good," said Stravers. "The barriers were challenging at times, but we were both so enthused about the hawks that we managed to communicate. We ended up becoming great friends."

"No one really believed the counts could be that high, but it was enough to make everyone curious about what was going on down there," said Stravers. "A team from Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania, ended up going to Mexico. It did turn out that his numbers were off, but it was only because he had actually underestimated [instead of overestimating] the number of hawks down there. The U.S. team ended up counting 80,000 migrating hawks in one day, and estimated that up to 2 million use the flyway during an entire season. One of the things Ernesto wanted was to set up a banding station, and he got one."

The Vera Cruz banding station would become the exact

location where, in mid-October of 2000, Ruelas would capture and band the Cooper's hawk that, four years and four round trip migrations later, would be



John Stravers, with an adult Cooper's hawk, discusses the "hows and whys" of raptor migration during Hawk Watch.

recaptured in northeastern Iowa by his old friend, John Stravers.

"When people hear this story they just shake their heads," said Stravers. "When you think about it, it really is incredible. To recapture any banded hawk is extremely rare, but to have one go four years, to have the banding and recapture locations so widely separated, and then to have the guys on both ends of the chain actually know each other; I'd have say it goes beyond incredible."

—LW

Hawk Watch Banding Station Is A Hit With Kids

John Stravers has spent the better part of his life studying birds of prey. As a raptor scientist and educator, he has traveled down the Mississippi River, across the American West, down through Mexico and Costa Rica. Conducting much of his research in remote backwaters of the upper Mississippi, he has become a world expert on the ecology and conservation of the rare and secretive red-shouldered hawk.

A bird bander since the 1970s, Stravers is founder and operator of the Effigy Mounds Hawk Watch Banding Station. During Hawk Watch Weekend the station traps and bands migrating hawks. Before releasing the migrants, Stravers brings many of the hawks to the Effigy Mounds Visitor's Center where he effectively communicates the "hows and whys" of bird migration to enthusiastic crowds of hawk watchers.

"In addition to the banding, we also collect weights and measurements on all the birds we capture," said Stravers. "We trap throughout the fall migration and it's provided a pretty good data base. We've also learned something about migration routes. About half of the red-tails we've banded, for example, stay close to the river. Some of the hawks we band go as far south as Arkansas, some go to Mexico and a few to South America.

"The banding station is also a good way

to keep a finger on the pulse of what's happening with different populations," said Stravers. "It helps develop a good background profile for certain species. If new diseases or viruses pop up and affect populations, we have a way to make comparisons."

"I also feel that education is totally as important as the bird banding," said Stravers. "Every year we open the station to school groups. We have elementary kids from Iowa and Wisconsin, college students from as far down the river as



Raptor educators Mike Havlick (left) and John Stravers show visitors the differences between a sharp-shinned and a Cooper's hawk during Hawk Watch Weekend.

Dubuque, and natural resource students.

"This is very hands-on — a place where elementary students get face-to-face encounters with wild raptors. Sometimes you wonder if some of the kids are getting it and then all of a sudden you see them plug in. Let me tell you, that's exciting."

—LW

HUNTING FORECAST 2006



JUST WHEN PHEASANT HUNTERS THOUGHT EVERYTHING WAS LOOKING UP, MOTHER NATURE THREW A CURVE BALL. WHILE MOST WILDLIFE RESPONDED WELL TO THE MILD WINTER AND NORMAL SPRING WEATHER, IOWA PHEASANT NUMBERS WERE DOWN MORE THAN 22 PERCENT FROM 2005. EVEN THOUGH THE OUTLOOK FOR PHEASANT HUNTING IS NOT AS ROSY AS HOPED, IOWA WILL STILL OFFER SOME OF THE BEST HUNTING AROUND — NOT ONLY FOR PHEASANTS, BUT A MYRIAD OF OTHER SPECIES. CHECK OUT THE FORECAST FOR YOUR FAVORITE GAME ON THE PAGES AHEAD AND THE SEASON DATES AND BAG LIMITS ON PAGES 25 AND 26.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROGER A. HILL

The 2006 August Roadside Survey, conducted by the DNR, indicates pheasant populations across Iowa declined when compared to last year. Combining all routes statewide, DNR staff saw an average of 28 birds per route in 2006, compared to an average of 36 birds per route last year.

Numbers indicate pheasant populations declined in all regions of the state. Year to year, variations in pheasant numbers can be attributed to weather conditions. Statewide average weather conditions this past year were mostly “normal.” Based on that, Iowa should have had pheasant numbers similar to last year.

About 2 feet of fluffy snow and bitter cold were reported across the northern half of Iowa

in December, but temperatures moderated by January with no major storms the remainder of the winter. Hen mortality from this early storm was assumed to be minimal, but may have been higher than staff thought.

Severe drought impacted western Iowa this summer and may have impacted chick survival. Other states surrounding Iowa — South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas and Illinois — were reporting pheasant numbers similar or lower than last year.

For whatever reason, conditions were not optimal for good pheasant recruitment across much of the upper Midwest pheasant range in 2006. Staff did note that many broods appeared very old on this year’s survey and that they often did not have a hen

with them. This suggests an early pheasant hatch this spring and thus the roadside survey may not have done a good job counting the birds. The survey is only a tool and it has been wrong in the past.

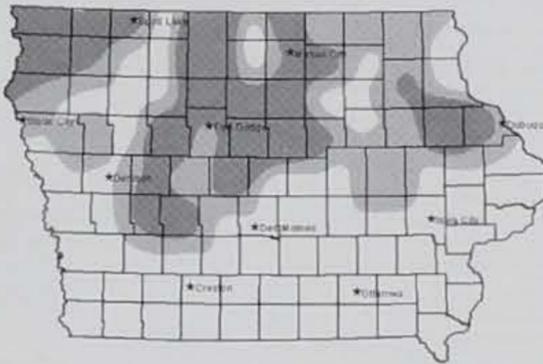
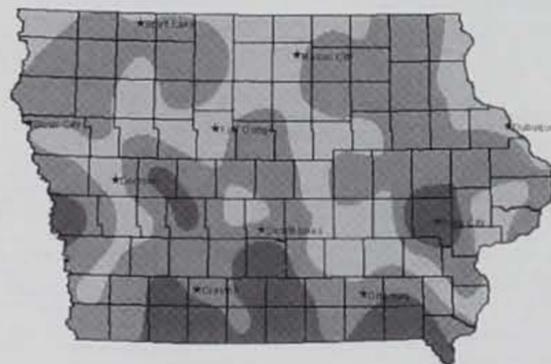
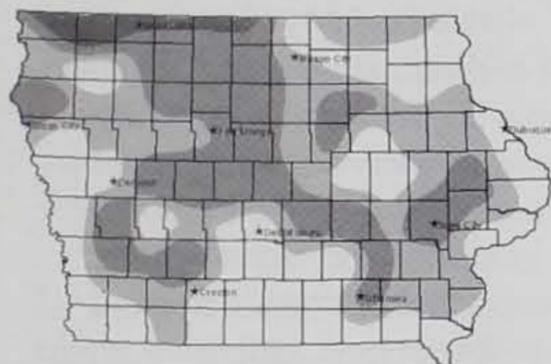
Based on this year’s roadside counts, Iowa pheasant hunters should harvest between 700,000 and 750,000 roosters this fall. If the roadside survey is wrong, it is possible the harvest will be higher. Parts of the northwest, north-central and central regions reported some of the better bird counts in 2006, but small, localized areas of good pheasant numbers were reported in the east-central and southwest regions.

Bobwhite Quail

Iowa’s southern three tiers of counties offer the best quail habitat in the state, and thus



Lowell Washburn



EXCELLENT

GOOD

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been relatively high since 2003. Last year Iowa had 40,000-plus rabbit hunters and they harvested more than 200,000 cottontails. While these numbers seem high they are relatively low for Iowa. In the 1960s Iowa had 150,000 rabbit hunters and they would harvest 2 million rabbits.

Hungarian Partridge and Jackrabbits

Both species are most common in the northwest, north-central, central and west-central,

regions of Iowa. Both seem to reproduce best when Iowa experiences drought throughout the spring and summer.

This year's roadside survey showed partridge numbers were 30 percent lower than last year, while jackrabbit numbers were unchanged statewide. Hunters wishing to pursue either species should focus their efforts on private lands in the northwestern regions of Iowa. Both species prefer wide open agricultural areas with few trees or brush.

Hunters wanting information on any of these species should visit the Iowa DNR's web site www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/ and look for the pheasant info link. The full August Roadside report and be downloaded from this site. Prospective hunters should also check out the DNR's new interactive web site to find public hunting lands: <http://programs.iowadnr.com/ims/website/recreation/viewer.htm>



WATERFOWL
OUTLOOK FOR IOWA

BY GUY ZENNER,
WATERFOWL RESEARCH BIOLOGIST

WATERFOWL

Every year at this time I am asked to forecast the outlook for waterfowl hunting in Iowa.

If only I could be as lucky as my colleagues who work with a relatively sedentary species like deer, pheasants and turkeys. After all, those animals spend their entire lives within a few square miles. They don't leave the state before or during the hunting season.

Waterfowl, on the other hand, are migratory and the hunting opportunities we get in Iowa are largely dependent upon when and how the migration occurs — which is fairly unpredictable. Let's start, however, by looking at a few facts that should make waterfowlers a little more optimistic about this year's outlook.

First, the ducks returning to the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) of North America this past spring found better-than-average habitat conditions awaiting them. The number of ponds in Prairie Canada and the north-central U.S. in May (6.1 million) was 13 percent higher than 2005 and 26 percent higher than the long-term average.

Most of this increase occurred in Prairie Canada, particularly in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The number of ponds estimated for the north-central U.S. (1.6 million) was similar to last year's estimate (1.5 million) and the long-term average. So, the stage was set this spring, at least as far as habitat was concerned, for some fairly good duck production across most of the Prairie Pothole Region.

Fortunately, good numbers of

ducks returned to the prairies to use that habitat. Spring surveys indicated there were roughly 36.2 million ducks in the traditional survey region that stretches from South Dakota to Alaska. That number was 14 percent greater than last year and 9 percent above the 1955-2005 long-term average.

Mallards numbered 7.3 million birds, similar to last year and the long-term average. Blue-winged teal abundance was 5.9 million birds, 28 percent greater than last year and 30 percent above the long-term average. Estimates for gadwall (+30%), green-winged teal (+20%), red-heads (+55%) and canvasbacks (+33%) were all higher than last year and well above their long-term averages.

Shoveler numbers were similar to 2005, but still well above (69 percent) their long-term average. The estimated number of pintails (3.4 million) was 32 percent higher than last year, but still 18 percent below its 1955-2005 average. American wigeon (2.2 million) and scaup (3.2 million) estimates were unchanged from 2005, but remained 17 percent and 37 percent below their long-term averages, respectively. The estimate for scaup was a record low for the second consecutive year.

Immediately to our north, in Minnesota, the duck production picture was a little less rosy. Pond numbers in Minnesota were 15 percent below the long-term average. The mallard breeding population declined significantly from 2005 and was 28 percent below the long-term average

— the lowest since 1983.

Blue-winged teal and “other” ducks numbers, excluding scaup, remained 24 percent below their long-term average. Minnesota biologists felt the survey timing this past spring may have contributed to the lower estimates; things like ice-out, leaf-out and duck migration appeared to be 10 days earlier than usual and weather delayed most of the counts until after mid-May.

In northern Iowa, spring counts suggested duck numbers were lower in 2006 than in 2005. Wetland habitat conditions appeared fair to good early in May and the first half of June, but deteriorated substantially as dry weather settled into the region in late June and July. Such conditions do not encourage reneating, so production is predicted to be below average this year.

The improvements in pond and duck numbers in Prairie Canada this past spring bodes well for Iowa waterfowlers. Many of the ducks that migrate through the state each fall are produced in Prairie Canada. The projected fall flight for mallards (9.8 million) this year should be similar to 2005 (9.3 million birds) but other ducks should contribute substantial numbers of young birds to this year’s fall flight. One notable outcome of this year’s improved duck numbers is that canvasbacks and pintails can be hunted for the entire season this year, with one of each allowed per day.

As is always the case, Iowa duck hunter’s opportunities will largely be determined by fall weather patterns and the condi-

tion of our local wetlands, both of which are near impossible to predict. Hunters would be well advised to check their favorite wetland to see if it is still holding water before venturing out in the dark on opening morning.

The biggest change that Iowa duck hunters need to note for the 2006 duck season is that the boundary line between the north and south duck hunting zones has been moved from Interstate 80 to Highway 30.

Every five years, federal regulations allow states to adjust their duck hunting zone boundaries. After much discussion with waterfowl hunters across Iowa, it was concluded that the boundary should be moved from Interstate 80, where it has been for more than 20 years, to Highway 30. The new zone dividing line will remain in place through the 2010 season.

The Canada goose hunting outlook is a little easier to predict since goose hunters are not quite as dependent upon water. Last year, Iowa hunters shot a record number of Canada geese in the state. This year’s prospects look to be pretty similar.

The Canada goose population in Iowa this spring was similar to what it was in 2005 and production was about average. In Minnesota, Canada goose numbers were also similar to 2005, but were still very high. With the good production predicted for the large numbers of Canada geese in southern Manitoba and Minnesota, a good fall flight is expected again this year.

Further to the north, the in-

terior Canada geese that nest in northern Manitoba had a better-than-average year, which also bodes well for late season goose hunting as these birds usually do not leave Manitoba and Minnesota until winter weather forces them south.

A change in the length of the Canada goose season this year will also give hunters more opportunity to pursue geese than they have had since 1930. Last year, our 70-day Canada goose season was split into 3 segments, not counting the 2-day special September season, to allow hunters to pursue geese from Oct. 1 through the first week of January. With the Canada goose season increased to 90 days this year, it was only necessary to split the season into 2 segments to provide this same opportunity.

Hunters should note that the zone boundary between the north and south goose hunting zones will remain at Highway 20 where it has been for the past two years.

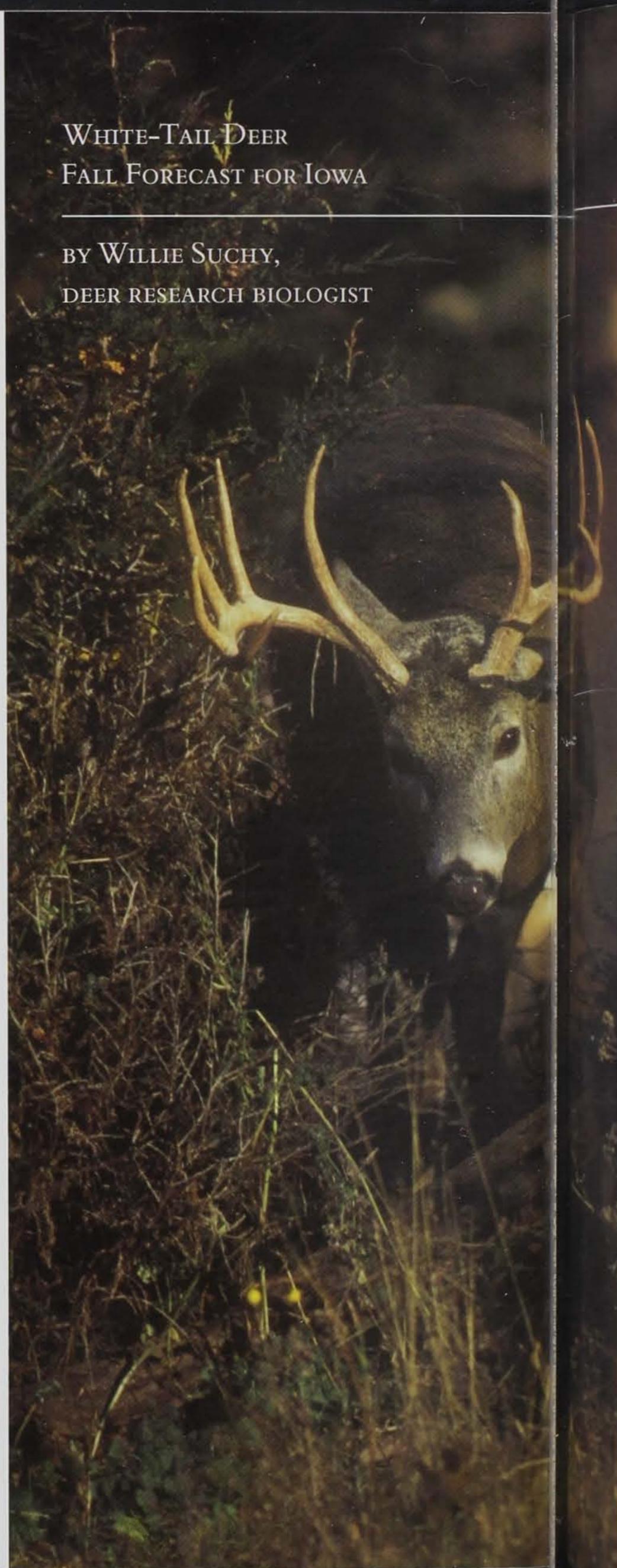
Waterfowl hunters would also be well advised to take note of the duck and goose zone boundaries and the season dates in each zone this year. Because the duck and goose zone boundaries are on different highways, it is possible to be hunting ducks in the north duck-hunting zone and, at the same time, be in the south goose-hunting zone where the goose season may be closed.

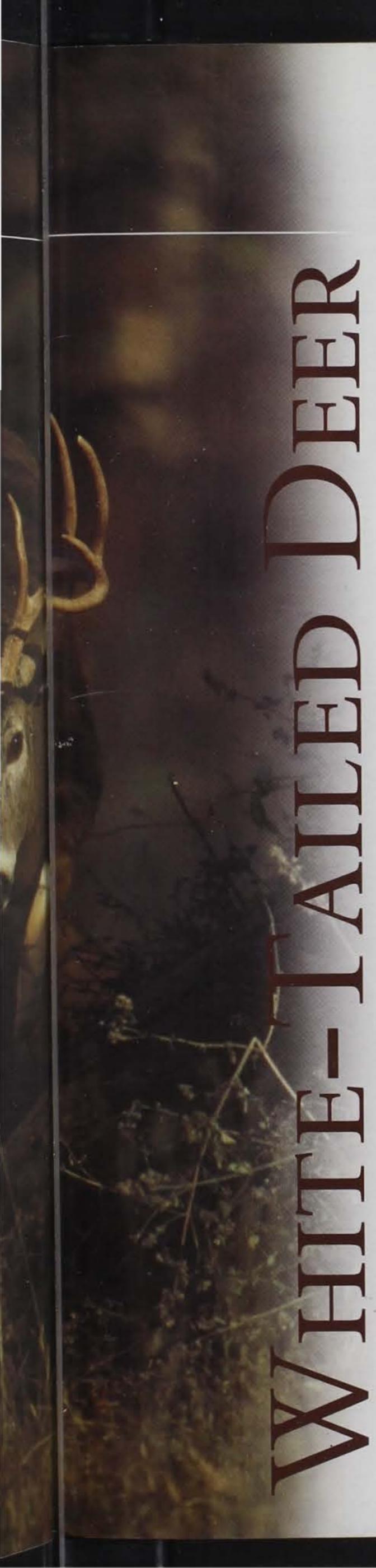
Although few duck hunters may view the current wetland conditions as favorable for the coming season, this summer's dry spell could be a mixed blessing. To be most productive, prairie wetlands need to periodically dry out and revegetate. If we would happen to get substantial rains this fall, duck hunting could be particularly good because many of these dry ponds are filled with duck foods like smartweed and wild millet. A few inches of water is all it would take, in most cases, to create attractive feeding areas for migrating ducks.

The other positive aspect of this scenario is that this summer's dry wetlands will have a wider diversity of plants and higher densities of invertebrates next spring, which will make them more attractive and productive to breeding pairs. The new vegetation will also make them more attractive to fall migrants as well. The short-term outlook may not be all that rosy, but the potholes that are dry today will offer greatly improved habitat conditions and hunting opportunities in the near future.

WHITE-TAIL DEER FALL FORECAST FOR IOWA

BY WILLIE SUCHY,
DEER RESEARCH BIOLOGIST





WHITE-TAILED DEER

Last year was another record year for deer hunters, with 211,511 deer killed. However, this fall will likely be the first time in eight years that fewer deer will be taken than the previous year.

The main reason for the decrease is that fewer antlerless licenses are available in 34 counties in the north-central and northwestern parts of the state. In these areas, deer numbers have been reduced to desirable levels, so extra antlerless deer do not need to be taken.

Hunters in other parts of the state, however, or those willing to travel, will still have ample opportunity to find deer. Deer numbers are still higher than desired in southern and eastern Iowa. Counties in these areas are good places to go for some extra venison.

Hunters doing a great job

Iowa's hunters did a tremendous job of taking advantage of the extra antlerless licenses in 2005. More than 65 percent of all deer killed last year were antlerless. Part of the reason for the increased antlerless kill was that hunters took advantage of 2 new opportunities to take more antlerless deer. Both of these options are available to hunters again this fall.

Last year was the first year for the November antlerless season. During this season, hunters killed nearly 7,000 antlerless deer. Hunters can take advantage of this season again this fall.

Shotguns, muzzleloaders, legal pistols and bows may be used during this season. License go on sale on Nov. 11. If the county antlerless quota is filled up by this date then there will be no November antlerless season in that county.

The second change last year allowed center-fire rifles to be used during the last week of the January antlerless season in southern Iowa. That option is available again in the bottom two tiers of counties, and there should be plenty of tags available in these counties again this fall. About 3,000 more antlerless deer were taken in these counties last year.

New for 2006

All hunters who successfully bag a deer this fall are required to register their deer. The registration can be done over the phone or by the internet. Hunters need to use the registration number on their deer license to register the kill, and will be given a verification number that must be written on the deer tag to show the deer has been registered. Deer must be registered by midnight of the day following the day the deer was taken.

The registration system will provide the DNR with the number of deer killed in a county in a more timely manner than the postcard survey used in the past.

Final advice

Always think about safety when in the field. Also make sure your equipment is safe and functioning properly. Practicing with your weapon will greatly increase your odds of success.

With that in mind, hunters should look forward to another good season. Iowa's deer herd is in great shape. Hunters need to continue to take antlerless deer if licenses are available. And if they want to see more mature bucks they need to let the yearling bucks grow up. By removing the extra does and letting the young bucks mature, hunter can continue to see great hunting opportunities.

WILD TURKEY

WILD TURKEY HUNTING OUTLOOK FOR FALL

BY TODD GOSSELINK,
TURKEY RESEARCH BIOLOGIST

With last spring's wild turkey harvest topping 22,000, hunters are having no problem finding turkeys.

Wild turkey populations in Iowa are doing excellent, which explains why the 50,000-plus turkey hunters enjoyed a 44 percent success rate last year. Iowa has one of the highest success rates for turkey hunters in the nation, most likely due to the mixed agricultural and forested habitat.

The 2005 brood survey, which tabulated the number of poults per hen during July and August, indicated an increase in that number, as well as an increase in the number of hens with young over the previous year. The weather conditions during hatch and shortly after were favorable for a good hatch this year. The dry and warm spring and summer will likely result in an increase in turkey recruitment numbers also. The brood survey this summer will help assess how good a hatch Iowa's turkeys had, and thus the outlook for fall turkey populations. Even during years of poor hatches, Iowa's wild turkey population provides ample opportunity for turkey hunting due to the good population numbers in Iowa over the years.

Similar to 2005, hunting regulations will give hunters more opportunities to take advantage of turkey hunting in 2006. Dogs will be allowed during the fall season. Traditionally, dogs were used to find and break up flocks, scattering them in different directions, allowing the hunter to call them back. Using dogs for fall hunting the traditional way is once again gaining popularity in the U.S., and this regulation change will allow Iowa hunters to try different methods of fall turkey hunting. Iowa hunters will also be allowed to purchase a third turkey license, if the quota in a zone has not been filled by Nov. 1. In 2005, zones 4 (southern Iowa) and 6 (northwest Iowa) did not fill their quotas. This will allow hunters to take advantage of the under-used turkey resource in these areas of the state. This year, hunters must report harvested turkeys using the DNR's new Harvest Reporting System (information is on the license).

Hunting turkeys this fall should prove to be great. Good turkey numbers throughout Iowa with a good reproduction this past spring, should provide hunters with excellent opportunities.

FURBEARER FORECAST
FOR IOWA

BY RON ANDREWS,
FURBEARER/WETLANDS BIOLOGIST

FURBEARER

Last year's high fur market has peaked the interest of furharvesters who hope to capitalize on a few more dollars in their pockets. I would predict that while fur values will remain fairly strong, I do anticipate a downward trend. I also encourage furharvesters to focus on the great outdoor experience which is priceless rather than the almighty dollar for their pelts.

Populations of raccoon, coyotes, mink, skunks, opossums and beaver remain very high. Red fox numbers continue to be sparse as does muskrats and badgers. No one seems to have an answer as to why muskrat populations have remained low for more than a decade.

Barring any difficulties between now and opening of the furbearer seasons on Nov. 4, a river otter harvest season for trappers will happen. It will be a very conservative and closely monitored harvest with a statewide season quota of only 400 river otters allowed and only 2 otters per season per trapper. All river otters will have to be tagged with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service tags. The whole protocol will be available on the DNR web site and in brochure form in October. This will be the first new season opening since 1973 when another restored animal, the wild turkey, was opened. It is very important that trappers adhere to the rules associated with this river otter harvest season and that they use the utmost of ethical practices while pursuing this species. The enforcement effort to allow this appropriate harvest management season to occur will be intensified so that all furharvesters are responsible and that they comply with the regulations.

2006-2007 TRAPPING SEASON

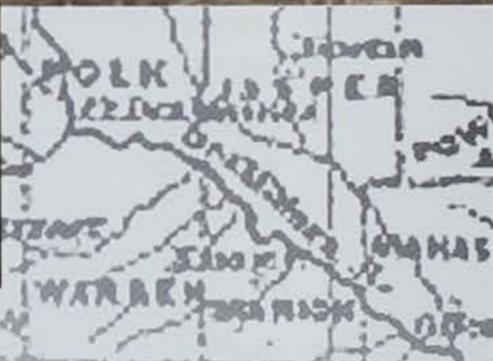
SPECIES	OPENING	CLOSING
Mink, Muskrat*, Raccoon, Weasel, Striped Skunk, Badger, Opos- sum, Fox (Red and Gray), Coyote	Nov. 4, 2006	Jan. 31, 2007
Beaver	Nov. 4, 2006	April 15, 2007
River Otter+	Nov. 4, 2006	Jan. 31, 2007
Groundhog	June 15, 2006	Oct. 31, 2007
Civet Cat (Spotted Skunk), Bobcat, Gray Wolf	Continuous Closed Season	

All furbearer seasons open at 8 a.m. On the opening date. There are no daily bag or possession limits

*Selected areas may be established in February for muskrat trapping only.

+ Season may close earlier if state quota is reached. See 2006-07 hunting and trapping regulations for details.

Lowell Washburn



HUNTERS MUST
report all deer and turkeys
harvested in Iowa by midnight
on the day after harvesting.

IOWA

HARVEST REPORTING SYSTEM

Only Successful Hunters Report

It's easy and convenient.

May report by
telephone at [1-800-771-4692](tel:1-800-771-4692), or
Internet at www.iowadnr.com

For more information



see the *Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations* or
page 59 this issue

Iowa 2006-2007 Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits

SPECIES	SEASON	SHOOTING HOURS	BAG LIMITS		
			DAILY	POSSESSION	
Youth Rooster Pheasant (Residents age 15 or younger)	Oct. 21-22	8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	1	2 (after first day)	
Rooster Pheasant	Oct. 28 - Jan. 10, 2007		3	12	
Bobwhite Quail	Oct. 28 - Jan. 31, 2007		8	16	
Gray Partridge	Oct. 14 - Jan. 31, 2007		8	16	
Turkey (Combination Gun/Bow)*	Oct. 16 - Dec. 1	One-half Hour Before Sunrise to Sunset	One Turkey Of Either Sex Per License	One Turkey Of Either Sex Per License	
Turkey (Bow Only)*	Oct. 1 - Dec. 1 and Dec. 18 - Jan. 10, 2007	One-half Hour Before Sunrise to One-half Hour After Sunset			One Deer Per License
Deer (Bow)	Oct. 1 - Dec. 1 and Dec. 18 - Jan. 10, 2007				
Deer — Early Muzzleloader*	Oct. 14-22*				
Deer — Late Muzzleloader	Dec. 18 - Jan. 10, 2007				
Deer -- Youth* and Severely Disabled	Sept. 16 - Oct. 1				
Deer — November Antlerless*	Nov. 24-26				
Deer — Shotgun Season 1	Dec. 2-6				
Deer — Shotgun Season 2	Dec. 9-17				
Deer — January Antlerless*	Jan. 11-21, 2007				
Nonresident Holiday Deer Season	Dec. 24 - Jan. 2, 2007				
Ruffed Grouse	Oct. 7 - Jan. 31, 2007		Sunrise to Sunset	3	
Rabbit (Cottontail)	Sept. 1 - Feb. 28, 2007	10		20	
Rabbit (Jack)	Oct. 28 - Dec. 1	1		2	
Squirrel (Fox and Gray)	Sept. 1 - Jan. 31, 2007	None	6	12	
Groundhog	June. 15 - Oct. 31				
Crow	Oct. 15 - Nov. 30 and Jan. 14 - March 31, 2007				
Pigeon**	Oct. 1 - March 31, 2007				
Coyote	Continuous Open Season				
Raccoon and Opossum	Nov. 4 - Jan. 31, 2007		None (Opens 8 a.m. first day only)		
Fox (Red and Gray)	Nov. 4 - Jan. 31, 2007				

* Residents Only.

** Can be taken year round within 100 yards of buildings and bridges

2006-07 Migratory Game Bird Seasons and Bag Limits

	NORTH DUCK ZONE*	SOUTH DUCK ZONE*
Ducks, Mergansers and Coots	Sept. 23-27 Oct. 14 - Dec. 7	Sept. 23-27 Oct. 21 - Dec. 14
Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days	Oct. 7-8	Oct. 7-8
NORTH GOOSE ZONE*		SOUTH GOOSE ZONE*
Canada geese and brant	Sept. 30 - Dec. 10 Dec. 16 - Jan. 2, 2007	Sept. 30 - Oct. 8 Oct. 21 - Jan. 9, 2007
SPECIAL SEPTEMBER CANADA GOOSE SEASON		
Canada geese	Sept. 1-15 (Only in designated zones around Des Moines and Cedar Rapids/Iowa City.)	
Canada geese	Sept. 9-10 (statewide)	
STATEWIDE		
White-fronted geese	Sept. 30 - Dec. 10	
Light geese (white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese)	Sept. 30 - Jan. 14, 2007	
Light geese Conservation Order (white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese)	Jan. 15 - April 15, 2007 (Additional Regulations May Apply)	
Woodcock	Oct. 7 - Nov. 20	
Snipe	Sept. 2 - Nov. 26	
Rail (Sora and Virginia)	Sept. 2 - Nov. 10	

Shooting Hours: One-half hour before sunrise to sunset for all migratory game bird species except woodcock, which is sunrise to sunset.

Daily Bag Limits*:

Ducks: Daily limit is 6, including no more than 4 mallards (of which no more than 2 may be female), 2 wood ducks, 2 redheads, 1 pintail, 1 canvasback, 1 black duck, and 2 scaup.

Mergansers: Daily limit is 5, including no more than 2 hooded mergansers. **Coots:** Daily limit is 15.

Geese: Daily limit is 2 Canada, 2 white-fronted geese, 1 brant and 20 aggregate light geese (both white and blue phase snow geese and Ross' geese), **EXCEPT** during the Special September Canada goose season in the Des Moines and Cedar Rapids/Iowa City Zones when the daily bag limit is 3 Canada geese.

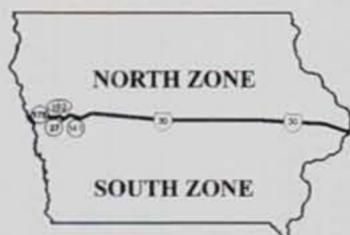
Woodcock: Daily limit is 3. **Snipe:** Daily limit is 8. **Rail (Sora and Virginia):** Daily limit is 12.

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days: Shooting hours and daily bag limits will conform to those set for the regular waterfowl seasons.

***Possession Limit** is twice the daily bag limit, except for light geese for which there is no possession limit.

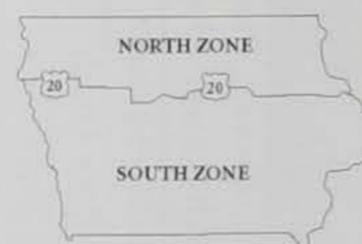
*Duck and Goose Hunting Zones

DUCK ZONE



For the purpose of duck hunting, the state is divided into two zones. The north zone is north of a line beginning on the Nebraska-Iowa border at State Highway 175, east to State Highway 37, southeast to State Highway 183, northeast to State Highway 141, east to U.S. Highway 30 and along U.S. Highway 30 east to the Iowa-Illinois border. The south zone is the rest of the state. For the purpose of goose hunting, the state is divided by U.S. Highway 20.

GOOSE ZONE



Look for this poster at your local locker.

Deer Hunters



The DNR needs your help to reduce the deer population.

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

Buy an extra doe license and donate your deer to HUSH.

Donate any legally taken deer of any sex from any season.

This LOCKER participates in HUSH.

HUSH

Help Us Stop Hunger

www.iowahush.com

A cooperative program of the Iowa DNR, the Food Bank of Iowa, this locker and Iowa deer hunters.

- Eighty lockers are participating.

- There is no cost for hunters to donate field dressed deer. (Hunters still need deer permit to take deer.)

- Iowa deer of any sex, any season can be donated.

- The average deer yields 200 servings of venison to the needy.

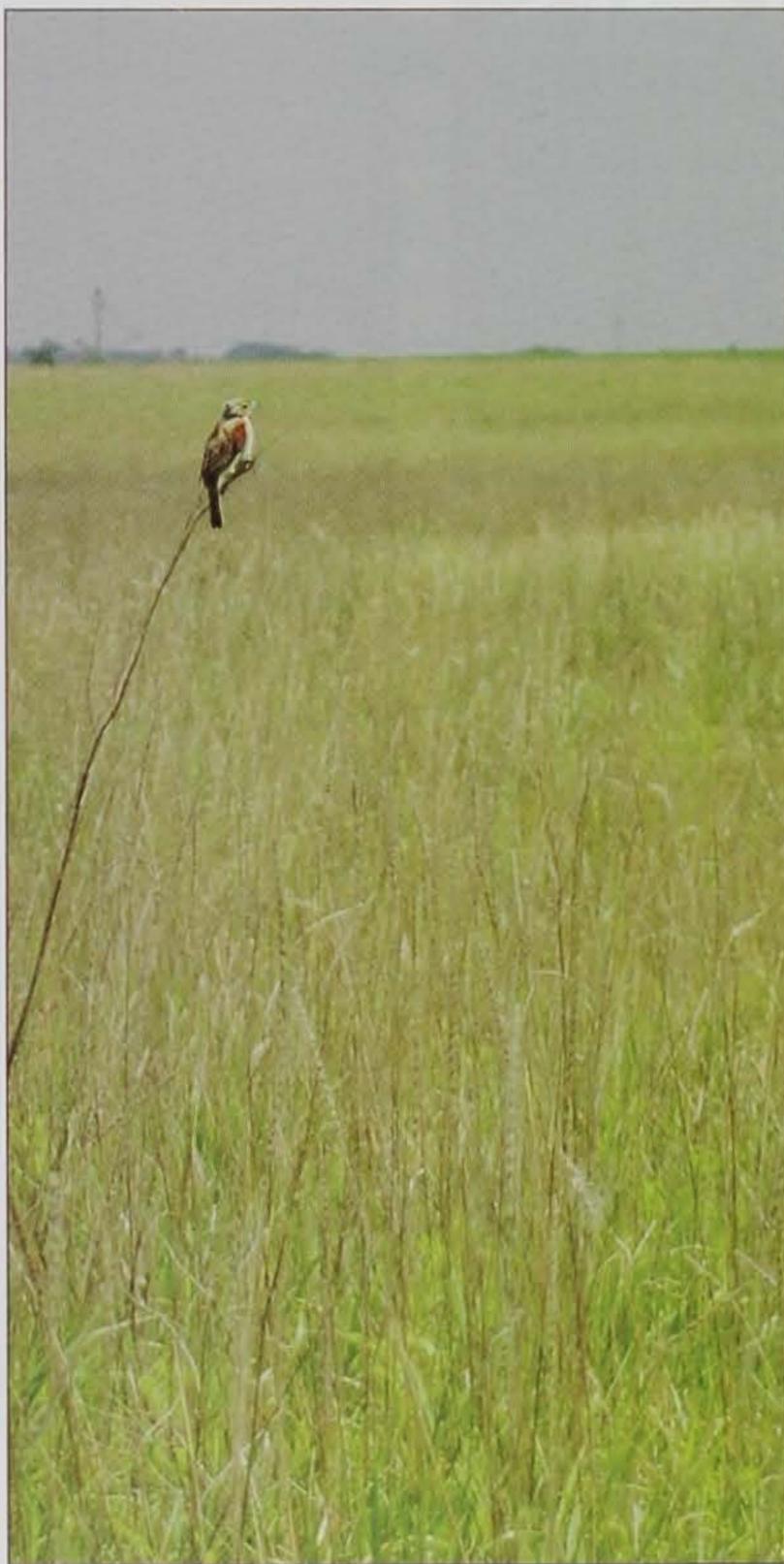
- Most venison goes to the needy in the local area of the locker to which it was donated.

- Iowa is a national leader in donated deer.

- Last year 6,416 deer were donated in Iowa.

cooperation yields wetland success

Outdoor specialty groups join forces to improve a key waterfowl area in eastern Iowa.

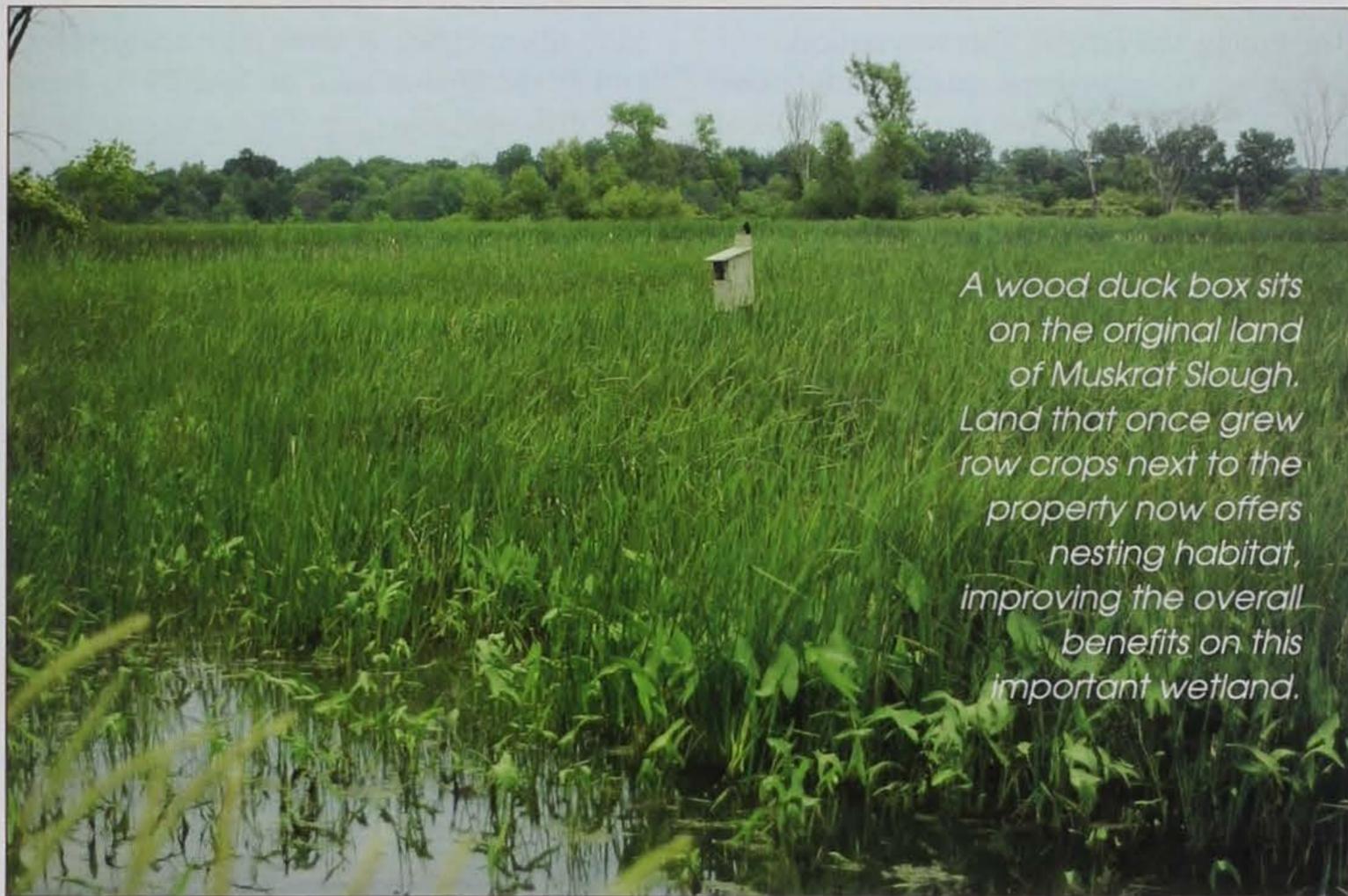


Story and photographs by
Joe Wilkinson

Winging overhead, a wood duck follows the tree line away from intruders. A few hundred yards away, a small flock of summer ducks curls above the small marsh; unsure, too, about dropping down to the shallow water. A red-winged blackbird “*crayks*” as it hops to another cattail. It’s a slow day on Muskrat Slough. But the activity behind the scenes over the last couple years has breathed new life into this wetland oasis in a sea of row crops.

The marsh took shape during formation of the Iowa surface roughly 20,000 years ago. Geologists believe the Wapsipinicon River may have looped through Muskrat Slough and continued down nearby Walnut Creek until rejoining its present channel near Olin. Over time, glacial moraines, erosion and wind deposits locked off the 375 acres, creating a wildlife island surrounded by a sea of corn, soybean and hay fields. Hunted as private ground for decades, it has been a state wildlife area since 1945; a welcome stopping-off point for migrating waterfowl each spring and fall.

Much of the ground around this Jones County basin drains into the slough; itself too wet to farm. For decades, though, early settlers tried. They tiled all around it. They farmed the surrounding sections. On Muskrat Slough, though, they gave up. Traditional row crops wouldn’t grow, but the wetland itself remained a productive “hemi marsh,”



A wood duck box sits on the original land of Muskrat Slough. Land that once grew row crops next to the property now offers nesting habitat, improving the overall benefits on this important wetland.

where vegetation and open-water conditions create first-rate feeding and loafing conditions for migrating waterfowl. However, the picture was incomplete.

“Muskrat Slough lacked good upland nesting habitat,” underscores Bob Sheets, wildlife biologist for the Department of Natural Resources in eastern Iowa. “Most of our resident waterfowl are grassland nesters. Without that element, waterfowl production is impossible. Only the wettest land was available there for public ownership. It always lacked the nearby grassland for nesting cover.”

Until now.

Enter a group of modern day conservation pioneers. They stuck with their vision of “what could be” and they convinced others to buy in. Today, an expanded, environmentally balanced Muskrat Slough stands as a living testimonial to that effort.

In 1998, Sheets was approached by Matt McQuillen of Monticello. Active in several conservation organizations, McQuillen was

then president of the Twin Rivers Pheasants Forever (PF) Chapter in Jones County. Chapter members were interested in improving pheasant populations and had just wrapped up the purchase and restoration of a 69-acre prairie tract nearby at Scotch Grove. The PF chapter purchased the land and turned it over to the Jones County Conservation Board. Then, with Jones County Ducks Unlimited, they teamed up to restore

prairies and wetlands. Could they turn around another acquisition and restoration project?

Sheets and the DNR had identified adjacent

private lands that would complement the marsh. One of them, a 90-acre parcel in row crops, was for sale on the western edge of the public area. With limited state dollars available, they had to pass on the parcel at that time. However, with a little research, McQuillen found a willing seller for an

“The timing was crucial. This was critical nesting habitat. Waterfowl and upland wildlife need that”

*Matt McQuillen
conservationist*

adjacent 50-acre tract near the southwest corner of the slough. But the clock was ticking.

"The timing was crucial. This was critical nesting habitat. Waterfowl and upland wildlife need that," recalls McQuillen. "You just can't say, 'hold on to it. I'll get all the parties together' because someone else will come along and buy it." So *he* bought it. With the land now in private hands, the groups had some breathing room to put together a purchase package.

Still, nothing was guaranteed. Meeting already with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), they determined the entire area qualified for the agency's wetlands programs. That would provide 10 years worth of rental payments for the idled acres through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The owners were guaranteed full, appraised value if they would sell their land. The local group worked further with the NRCS to reduce the eventual price tag.

Enlisting the help of Ducks Unlimited, their conservation muscle increased. The two groups authored a \$68,000 application for a state Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) grant.

"DU had several major financial commitments with the idea of upgrading the Muskrat Slough area," says DU activist Bob Shimanek of Monticello. "(After) a fund-raising dinner in Anamosa, we had five lifetime (\$10,000 each) sponsorships. That was our seed money for the whole thing."

Late in 2004, the \$375,000 package came together. Key to the funding was local involvement. REAP guidelines give a higher priority to grant applications with more "buy-down" dollars, such as those offered by the local group.

"The more broad-based the effort, the higher your score as REAP grants are awarded," explains McQuillen. "The rest came from conservation groups and fund-raisers." In June 2005, the area was dedicated as a Larry Wilson Legacy project, making it a priority with Ducks Unlimited in Iowa. Wilson, the former longtime director of the DNR, was on hand for the ceremony.

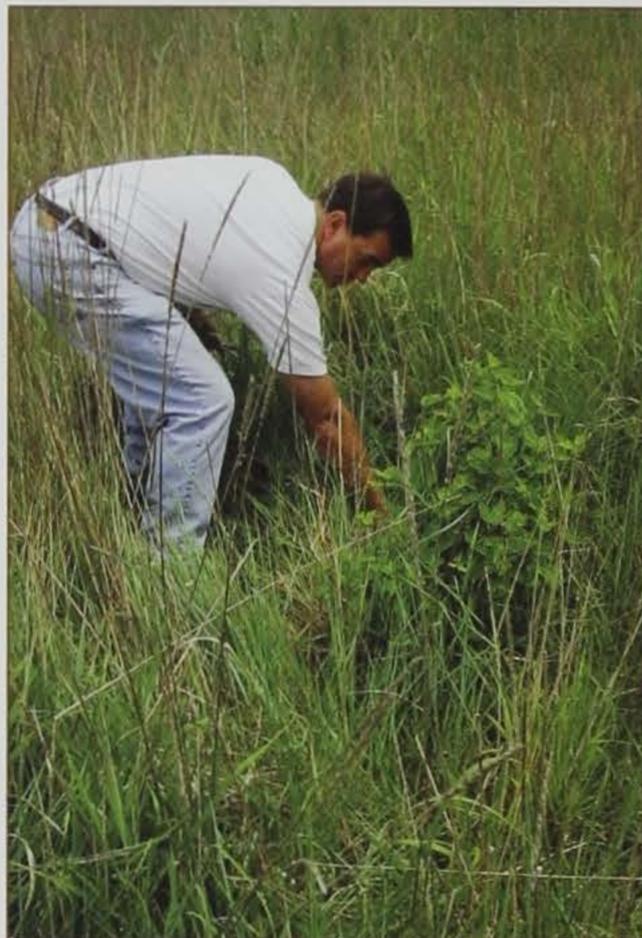
From there, the work shifted from applications and fund-raisers, to back-twisting labor and on-the-ground planning. For instance, interior fencing was removed during a couple volunteer work days. "We

had people unhooking wire; a couple skid loaders were pulling posts. It was sweaty, hot labor," recalls McQuillen. "(The fencing and posts) served no purpose anymore; it was just another form of garbage."

As the undesirables were removed, the improvements began. A 7-acre basin was identified and a dike was formed, creating a wetland. DU wood duck boxes dot the area now. It and other basins pull out significant loads of nitrogen and ammonia from runoff that trickles eventually to Muskrat Slough. Eight rows of shrubs and cedar trees are taking root, to provide critical winter cover. The whole area has been sown to native grasses and forbs. Pheasants, quail and other upland species also benefit.

"Grassland is every bit as important for nesting purposes as the wetlands," emphasizes Shimanek. "Many people think of ducks just nesting on a clump of grass in the middle of the pond. They need grasslands to hold those nests and also to use for food sources. This is a perfect addition to Muskrat Slough."

"The personal commitment to buy and hold land (while the funding package came together)



McQuillen pulls weeds around a shrub planted as part of a habitat belt that will provide a windbreak and important cover.



This 7-acre retention pond was created on former crop ground after the land was acquired.

Wetland/grassland combinations are vital to both upland wildlife and waterfowl. Ducks need grasslands adjacent to marshes for nesting, and pheasants use the areas for both nesting and winter cover. Mallard nest and hen pheasant (left).



Lowell Washburn



Lowell Washburn

was an original and innovative way to protect critical wildlife habitat," acknowledges Sheets. "The power of cooperation of conservation groups sets a road map of sorts that others can follow."

Just as importantly, through the acquisition the groups became aware of four adjacent sites that might come up for sale. "If they do, we have a good shot at it. Jones County has a lot of intense row-crop production. It has very limited property for outdoor use," observes McQuillen. "This small

piece going out of production? Agriculture is not going to miss it."

For those involved, the long road to completion leaves a good feeling. "It will offer a lot of opportunities for outdoor recreation and education. We have the ball rolling. . . it feels wonderful," he concedes.

Joe Wilkinson is an information specialist for the department in Iowa City.

at long last it's opening day

The countdown is on, and excitement mounts as pheasant hunters anticipate their return to the field. It's an event that reigns as the crowning jewel of the Iowa outdoors.

Story and photographs by
Lowell Washburn



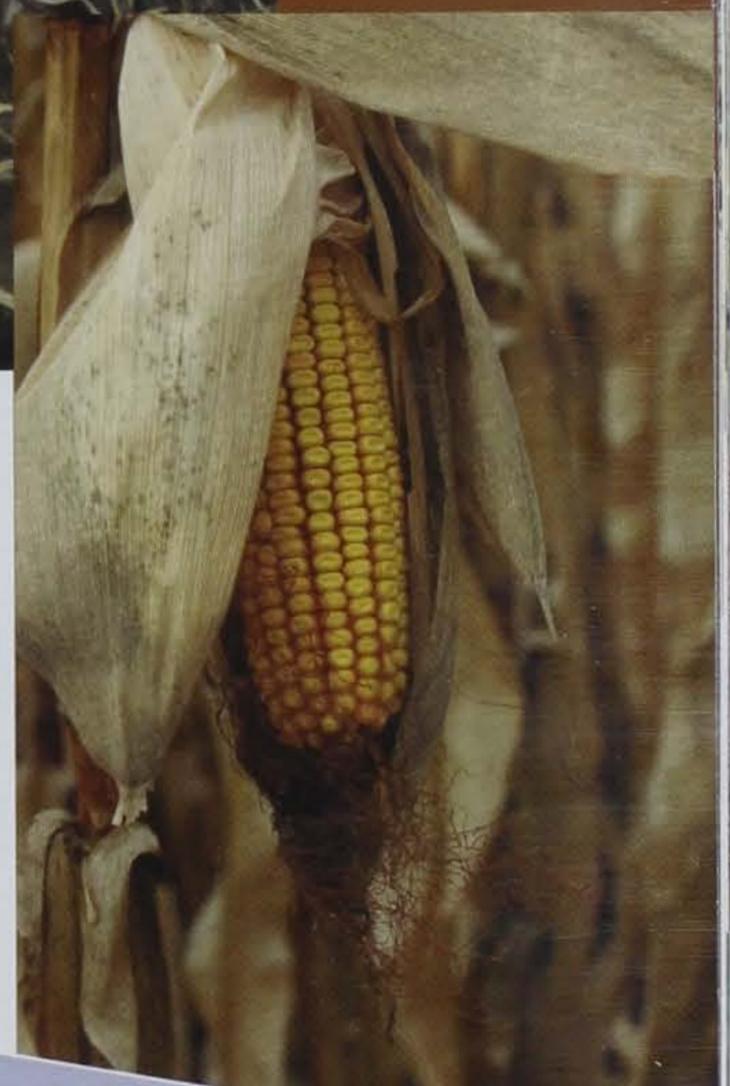


The alarm begins to clatter at 4:00 a.m. You didn't really need it though. You've already been wide awake for more than an hour.

Leaping from bed, you feel a welcome surge of energy. This is no ordinary morning, you see. It's Opening Day of the pheasant season!

Downstairs, the dogs are quick to sense the excitement. They began to pace, then dance, as you shove candy bars, sandwiches and dog treats into the day pack. Anxious tails pound against kitchen appliances and cupboard doors. The offbeat rhythm is a pleasing symphony.

It's still pitch dark and starry when you leave the house. Your first stop is the annual pheasant hunter's breakfast down at the school gym. The parking lot is already half full when you arrive. Apparently you weren't the only one who couldn't sleep.



Anxious bird dogs whine and bark from the confines of portable, pick-up bed kennels. Moving inside you're greeted by an ocean of faces and the aroma of sausage, flapjacks and fresh coffee. Although you don't know them by name, many of the faces are familiar from past pheasant opener breakfasts. You quickly spot your hunting partners, already seated and tying into their pancakes.

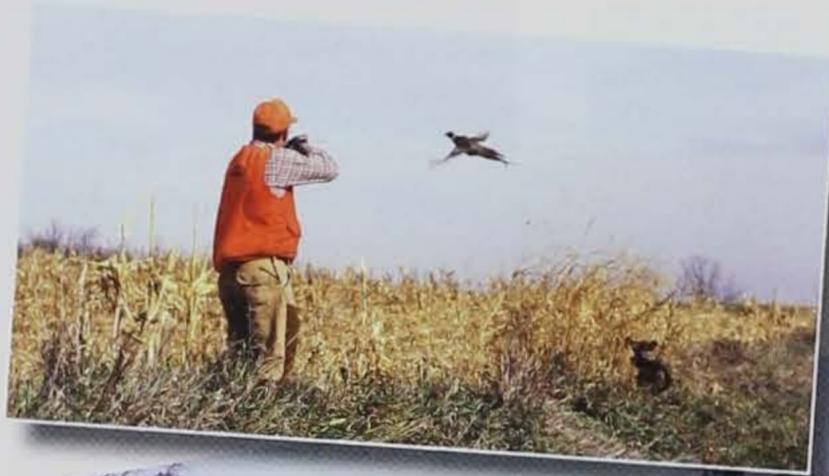
The gym is noisy. Only two styles of clothing are in fashion here — camouflage and blaze orange. The only topics of conversation are pheasants and pheasant hunting.



Everyone seems to agree with what area farmers have been preaching in the coffee shops all fall. Pheasant numbers are plentiful, and in some places are the best in years. Most of the corn is already out, and good weather is predicted for the weekend. All things considered, the forecast couldn't be much better.

It's exactly 7:15 in the morning when you arrive at "The Farm." The piece you've decided to hunt first is a big block of grassland that surrounds a 2-acre, cattail-choked slough. You're elated to discover that the adjacent cornfield has just been harvested.





"Looking good," you muse to yourself. As you ease the truck off the gravel and into the gate entrance, three roosters erupt from the grass. The trio noisily cackles its way to the edge of the marsh. You're about to blow a gasket. The 45-minute wait until legal shooting time seems unbearable.



Finally, 8 o'clock arrives and you and your buddies release the dogs. Within minutes, all four are birdy. Gathering a stronger scent your dog heads sharply left, running slightly crosswind.



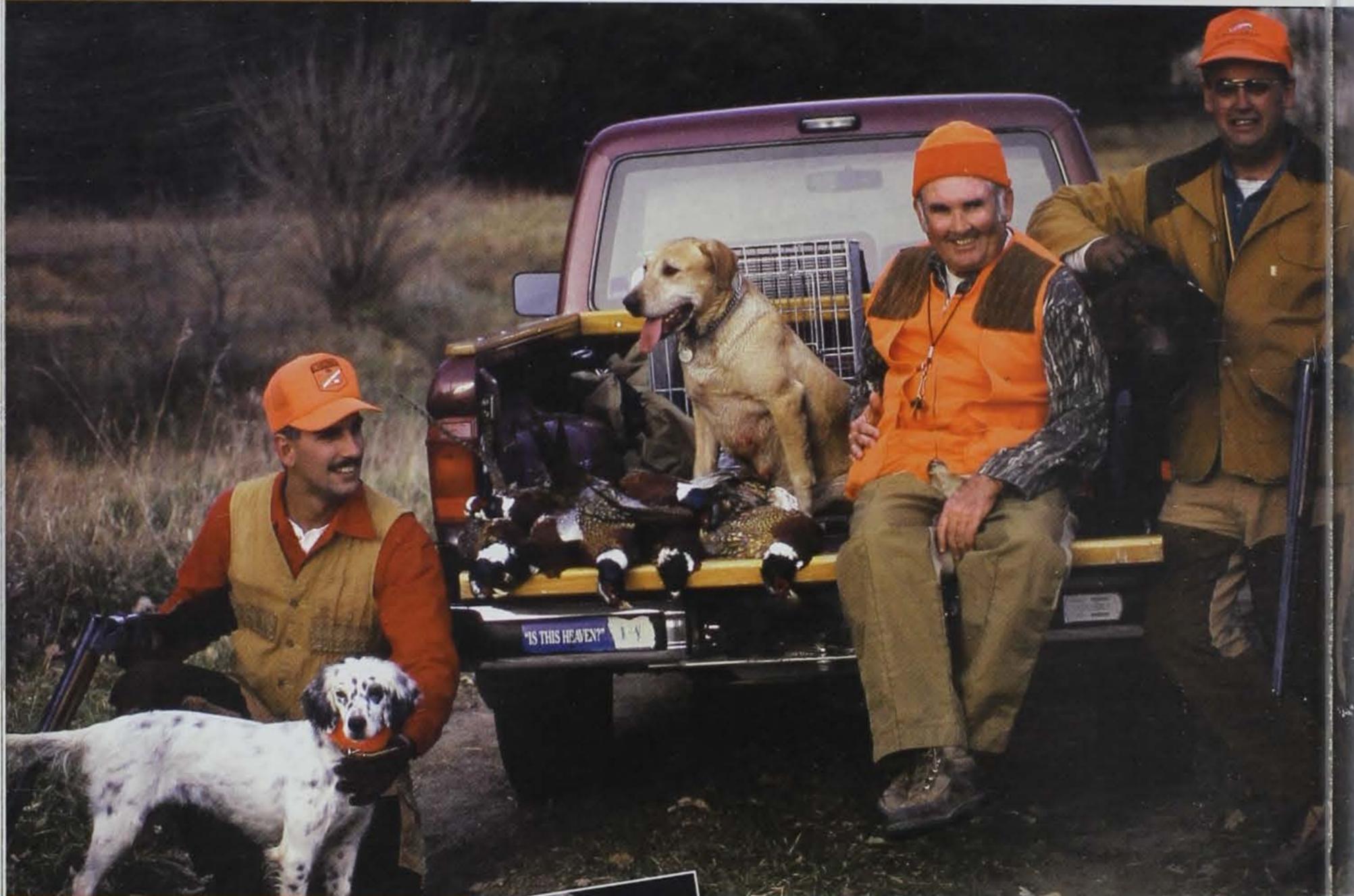


Suddenly, he locks on in one of those high speed, whiplash points that leaves his body in the shape of a giant horseshoe with both ends of the dog pointing in more or less the same direction.

Suddenly, all eyes are upon you and the dog. It's the first point of the year, and the pressure is on. You pray the bird is really there. With a point like that it has to be — doesn't it?

With trembling steps you begin the approach. The dog remains rock solid and frozen. By the time you walk past his nose, your heart is audibly beating in your throat. You halt. Nothing. Then, as if on cue, the tight-holding rooster explodes.





He's at point blank range and cackling. The urge is to panic and fire. You force yourself to slow down and focus — swinging the barrel through, and then slightly ahead of the accelerating bird. The 20-gauge barks. The pheasant folds. A cheer goes up from the gallery. You pause to breathe a sigh of relief.

A new pheasant season has begun!

Check out this year's
Hunting Forecast on page 14.

Iowa's superbowl saturday

Like kids waiting for Christmas, pheasant hunters mark the days. Just a few more Xs on the calendar and the wait will be over.

Finally, the biggest day on the outdoor calendar will have arrived. The OPENING DAY of the pheasant season is here!

Any way you slice it, the Iowa pheasant opener is a big deal. With an estimated 130,000 ringneck enthusiasts taking to the fields, no competing activity can stand in its shadow. Opening Day is the Sporting Event of the Year. Around one million roosters are bagged in Iowa each year. South Dakota is the only state to exceed our harvest.

For centuries, the pheasant has reigned as the undisputed King of Gamebirds. From Gengis



Khan, to feudal noblemen, to Teddy Roosevelt, no gamebird has remained more popular in more places for a longer period of time than has the regal ringneck.

Pheasants came to North America during the 1700s, and Benjamin Franklin's son-in-law was one of the first Americans to stock the gamebird. But this and dozens of other attempts across the country failed to establish a wild population. Then, in 1881 Judge O.N. Denny, Consul General to China, sent wild pheasants to his brother who lived in Oregon's Willamette Valley. The birds took root, and firmly established the species in the New World.

Pheasants arrived in Iowa around 1900. In 1925, Iowa opened 13, north-central counties to hunting. The first season ran for three days with a daily bag limit of three roosters. Around 75,000 Iowans participated in that first season.

As cunning as they are colorful, pheasants rarely come easy. Never doing the same thing twice, a rooster will run like crazy or flush wild at one moment and then dig in to let you walk within inches at the next. Those that hold may not lose their nerve until nearly stepped on. The result is shock and surprise at its finest. To a human hunter, the tactic is totally unnerving. As the pheasant suddenly launches, the sound of throbbing wings is combined with the bird's distinctive, raucous clamor. When all is said and done, no other gamebird can so consistently try the patience of both dog and hunter.

—LW





quality deer management

Landowners and hunters are finding benefits in practicing the philosophies of QDM, taking deer management to the next level.

Introduction by Willie Suchy, Iowa deer research biologist

Story by Kip P. Adams and Tim Lilley

Photographs by Roger A. Hill

More than 50 percent of Iowa's hunters pursue the white-tailed deer today. This was not true even 20 years ago when most hunters hunted only small game. Deer have become Iowa's most popular game animal for a variety of reasons. The abundance of deer today is probably one of the main reasons for this change. This abundance has allowed

for many more opportunities to hunt deer. Deer seasons begin in September with the special youth season and end in January with a special antlerless season. Hunters have many opportunities to pursue deer with a variety of weapons and methods of hunting.

Deer regulations have changed over this time period as well. Up until 20 years ago a hunter could take only one deer per year. Although a hunter could obtain both a gun and a bow

license but they could only take one deer in any one year. In some years the license was only good for an antlered deer during the firearm season, so success rates were lower. These regulations were designed to allow the deer herd to grow yet allow as many people as possible to participate in deer hunting.

Since the late 1980s, regulations have changed to allow more deer to be taken. During the past 3 years a hunter could take



a deer with a bow and one with a gun and if they are willing to take antlerless deer they could take many more. Landowners can obtain up to 5 licenses just for their land as well the regular licenses. All of these changes were designed to encourage hunters to take enough deer to reduce the population and keep it from growing any further.

Hunters have done a good job of using these opportunities and are taking more antlerless deer. This change in attitude falls directly in line with the philosophy known as "Quality Deer Management" or QDM. This change in hunter attitude is necessary to control deer numbers. Removing the stigma from killing does is a good thing. Killing the proper number of does is today and has always been the cornerstone of a sound deer management program.

QDM also encourages hunters to pass up young bucks. This can increase the average age of the bucks in the herd. Although passing up young bucks in general is a good thing, especially for experienced hunters, it can potentially be a barrier for young or less-experienced hunters new to the sport. Some of these hunters may view these "extra" restrictions as being intimidating or confusing. They may want to do the right thing but honestly can't tell the difference between a young buck and an older one. If they make a mistake and shoot a young buck it is a mistake to make them feel bad about their accomplishment. A legal animal, ethically taken, should be reason for celebration and congratulations.

QDM, when properly practiced, encourages hunters to manage the deer population. This

is good for the deer and good for the habitat and all the wildlife species that depend on that habitat. Unfortunately sometimes this line of thinking is taken too far. In some cases people begin to view the deer on their land as "their deer" which is just not true as deer rarely stay on just one landowner's property. This selfish thinking can ultimately be counter productive if taken to the extreme and access to deer hunting opportunity is severely limited.

The following articles relate the principles and story behind QDM. Used properly, QDM can be a great management tool. But like any tool it can be misused as well. Please keep that in mind if you try to implement these practices with your hunting parties. Hunting should be a good experience for all those involved.

Quality deer management (QDM) is a familiar term to many deer hunters today. You can't pick up a hunting magazine or watch the Outdoor Channel without seeing or hearing about QDM. Although hunters are more educated than ever before, there are still many who don't fully understand how QDM differs from traditional or trophy deer management. Some biologists even get the management strategies

confused. A common misconception is that QDM is just about large antlers. Read on to find out why this isn't true and how QDM differs from traditional and trophy deer management.

Traditional Deer Management

This is the most common deer management strategy employed by state wildlife agencies in the United States. Under traditional deer management, bucks of any

age or antler quality may be harvested and antlerless deer harvest is regulated to produce an abundant deer herd and/or to maximize total buck harvest. Under this approach, most bucks harvested are yearlings (1½ years old), with few bucks surviving beyond their second year. This harvest strategy produces a young age structure for the buck population and prohibits the vast majority of bucks from reaching maturity.

Restricted antlerless harvests permit rapid herd growth, so this management approach is best suited to deer herds far below the carrying capacity of the habitat when the goal is to increase the deer population. This management approach is the least intensive, and its weaknesses become apparent when the herd reaches or exceeds the habitat's carrying capacity. Traditional management programs often allow herds to increase to levels that can damage the habitat.

Depending on herd productivity and the intensity of buck harvest, the adult sex ratio often becomes heavily skewed in favor of females. In some herds, particularly those where substantial buck harvest occurs before the rut, this imbalance may result in some does not breeding during their first estrus (heat) period. If does do not conceive during their first estrus, the next breeding opportunity will not occur until 28-30 days later. The doe's fawns will be born one month later for each cycle missed. Later-born fawns have lower survival rates, lower weaning weights, and poorer antler development as yearlings than fawns born at the appropriate time of year.



Quality Deer Management

Quality deer management is a management philosophy/practice that unites landowners, hunters, and resource managers in a common goal of producing healthy deer herds with balanced adult sex ratios and age structures. In simplest terms, QDM involves balancing the deer herd with the habitat and having deer – bucks and does – in multiple age classes. QDM is first and foremost about putting the right number of deer on the landscape. This is achieved by harvesting an appropriate number of female deer. QDM also improves the buck age structure by protecting young bucks. This allows a fair percentage of bucks to reach maturity.

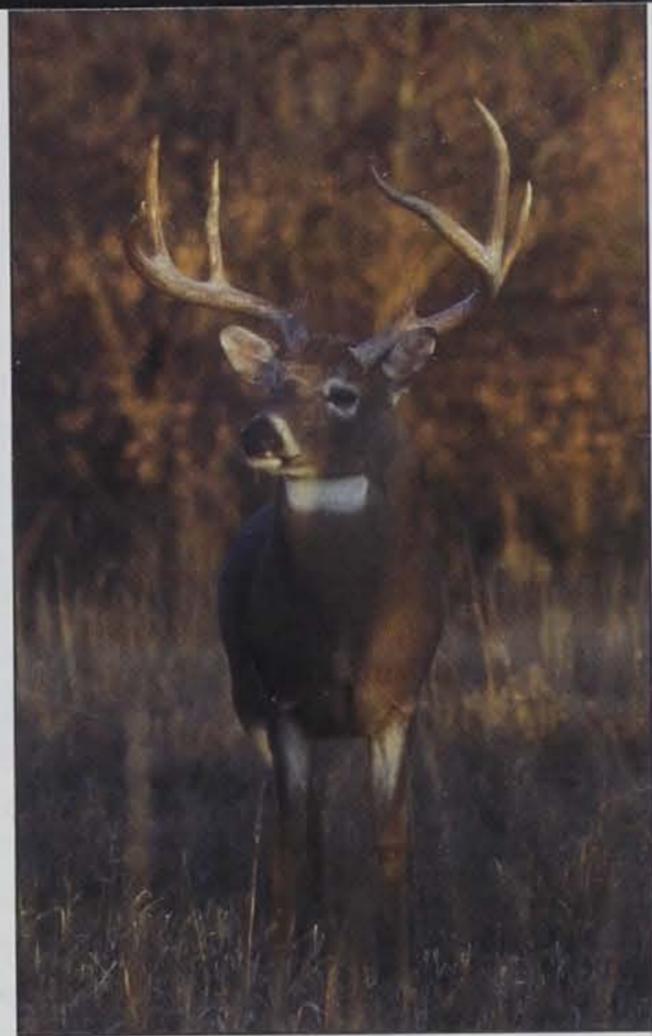
A successful QDM program requires an increased knowledge of deer biology and active participation in management. This level of involvement extends the role of the hunter from mere consumer to manager. The progression from education to understanding bestows an ethical obligation on the hunter to practice sound deer management. Consequently, to an increasing number of landowners and hunters, QDM is a desirable alternative to traditional deer management.

Practicing QDM produces many benefits. Typically, the sex ratio becomes more balanced and the number (or proportion) of bucks in the older age classes increases. Often, more mature bucks are available for breeding, resulting in less stress on yearling bucks and an earlier, more-defined rut. In many cases, deer health and body weights improve

due to improved habitat conditions, which also benefit many other wildlife species. The lower deer density also helps reduce crop damage and deer-vehicle accidents.

One obvious benefit is the increased presence of mature bucks and the exhilaration of observing their behavior. Many landowners and hunters receive great satisfaction from the increased involvement with their deer herd that QDM offers.

The benefits of QDM do not come without costs. Typically, large tracts of land are required to achieve maximum results. While defining a minimum size is difficult, 600-1,000 acres is a reasonable starting point in most areas. Many state, federal and commercially-owned properties fall in this size range but fewer private lands are this large. Fortunately, QDM can be practiced successfully on smaller properties. Smaller landowners simply must realize they don't control all of the habitat components needed by deer on a yearly basis. However, small landowners can improve the quality of hunting experiences on their property by improving the habitat to provide deer with as many habitat components as possible. Small landowners can take steps to balance the deer herd with the habitat and pass yearling bucks, and



QDM is not about large antlers at all. QDM is about balancing the deer herd with the habitat and having bucks and does in multiple age classes.

they can form QDM cooperatives with neighboring landowners to increase the effective size of the property being managed.

Trophy Deer Management

QDM is often confused with trophy deer management. The two approaches share some objectives, but they differ in many ways. Trophy deer management is the approach where only fully mature bucks (5½-8½ years of age) with high scoring antlers are harvested, and does are aggressively harvested to maintain low deer density and optimum nutrition for the remaining animals. Most QDM programs protect yearlings and possibly 2½ year-old bucks

while trophy management programs protect these PLUS 3½ and 4½ year-old bucks.

Producing bucks of this age and antler quality requires many ingredients not available to most hunters. Because some adult bucks have home ranges of 2,000 acres or more, large tracts of land are required. Because buck home ranges are not uniform in shape and size, few adult bucks live their entire lives on a single property, even on 2,000-5,000 acres.

The ability to control hunting pressure is paramount, especially on promising 2½, 3½, and 4½-year-old bucks (these bucks would be eligible for harvest in most QDM programs). This requires

considerable field-judging skill and self-control. Unless the herd is enclosed and supplementally fed, deer density must be kept low to allow optimum nutrition so bucks can maximize antler potential. This often involves aggressive doe harvests (even higher than under QDM) and intensive habitat management. Trophy deer management is not practical in much of the United States, and it is viewed negatively by much of the hunting and non-hunting public. While trophy management is a biologically sound approach, the associated "costs" outweigh the benefits for most hunters.

So, is QDM just about large antlers? Actually, it's not about large antlers at all. QDM is about balancing the deer herd with the habitat and having bucks and does in multiple age classes. And when QDM works, a given deer herd inevitably will include a higher number of mature bucks with large antlers than a herd managed under traditional-management guidelines. A biologically appropriate number of deer with a balanced adult sex ratio and age structure constitutes a healthy deer herd. Healthy deer herds and healthy habitats are good for other wildlife and they are great for hunters.

Kip P. Adams is a wildlife biologist and director of education and outreach for QDM's northern region.

Tim Lilley is the director of public relations for QDM.

More Information on the Quality Deer Management Association

The Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) is a national non-profit wildlife conservation organization. The QDMA's mission is to promote sustainable, high-quality, white-tailed deer populations, wildlife habitats and ethical hunting experiences through education, research and management in partnership with hunters, landowners, natural resource professionals and the public.

The QDMA serves nearly 40,000 members in the United States and several foreign countries, including 1,500 of the nation's leading wildlife biologists, researchers and managers. These professionals enable the QDMA to remain at the forefront of whitetail research and management, and to provide this information to its members for improved on-the-ground management.

Membership in QDMA is open to anyone interested in better deer and better deer hunting, and committed to ethical hunting, sound deer management and the preservation of the deer-hunting heritage. To learn more about QDMA and why it is the future of deer hunting, call (800) 209-DEER [(800) 209-3337] or visit www.QDMA.com.

Zach Lives the QDM Philosophy

Iowa wildlife artist, Larry Zach has practiced Quality Deer Management on a 240-acre farm in the southern part of the state for the past eight years. But his QDM roots run much deeper.

"I had been bowhunting since the 1960s, and I always tried to approach my hunting with the overall management of the resource in mind," he added. "What I heard about QDM interested me very much."

Since then, Zach has expanded his knowledge of habitat management and herd management, and he's seen the results firsthand. "QDM has taken my hunting enjoyment to a whole new level," he explained, "because it has expanded my time in the field."

"I look forward to the off-season trips to the farm — to the time I spend there. It's not just a 'deer thing' for me any more." Zach's farm includes about 70 acres of open ground, with the rest in timber. His habitat improvements have included adding food plots, tree plantings, ponds, wetlands and native prairie.

"Thanks to my district forester, I've also learned you can make significant improvements in the forest habitat through timber stand improvement (TSI). New oak seedlings are now appearing and the old oaks are thriving due to removing less desirable trees. Improving habitat quality benefits all wildlife, not just deer," Zach said.

"You see all kinds of things respond to the habitat management. Habitat management is good for the soul, good exercise and for me, additional motivation to stay healthy. I want to live a long time so I can keep watching these trees grow!"

Although he admits that his work on the farm transcends his interest in deer and deer hunting, Zach makes no mistake that whitetails remain his primary focus for work on the property.

"My priorities are to provide the deer with a quality food supply year-round," he explained, "and to provide the kind of quality habitat they need." He also approaches his hunting with the need to balance age structures and sex ratios in mind.

Photo courtesy of Larry Zach



"Southern Iowa has some areas remaining with deer population issues," he said, "and my farm is in one of those areas. I continue to focus on a fairly heavy doe harvest. I've learned that maintaining a balanced deer herd requires a significant doe harvest."

Zach has used trail cameras in past seasons to monitor the whitetails using his property, and it's something he plans to get into more with the advent of newer technology.

"They also make it possible to monitor trespassing activity unobtrusively," he said.

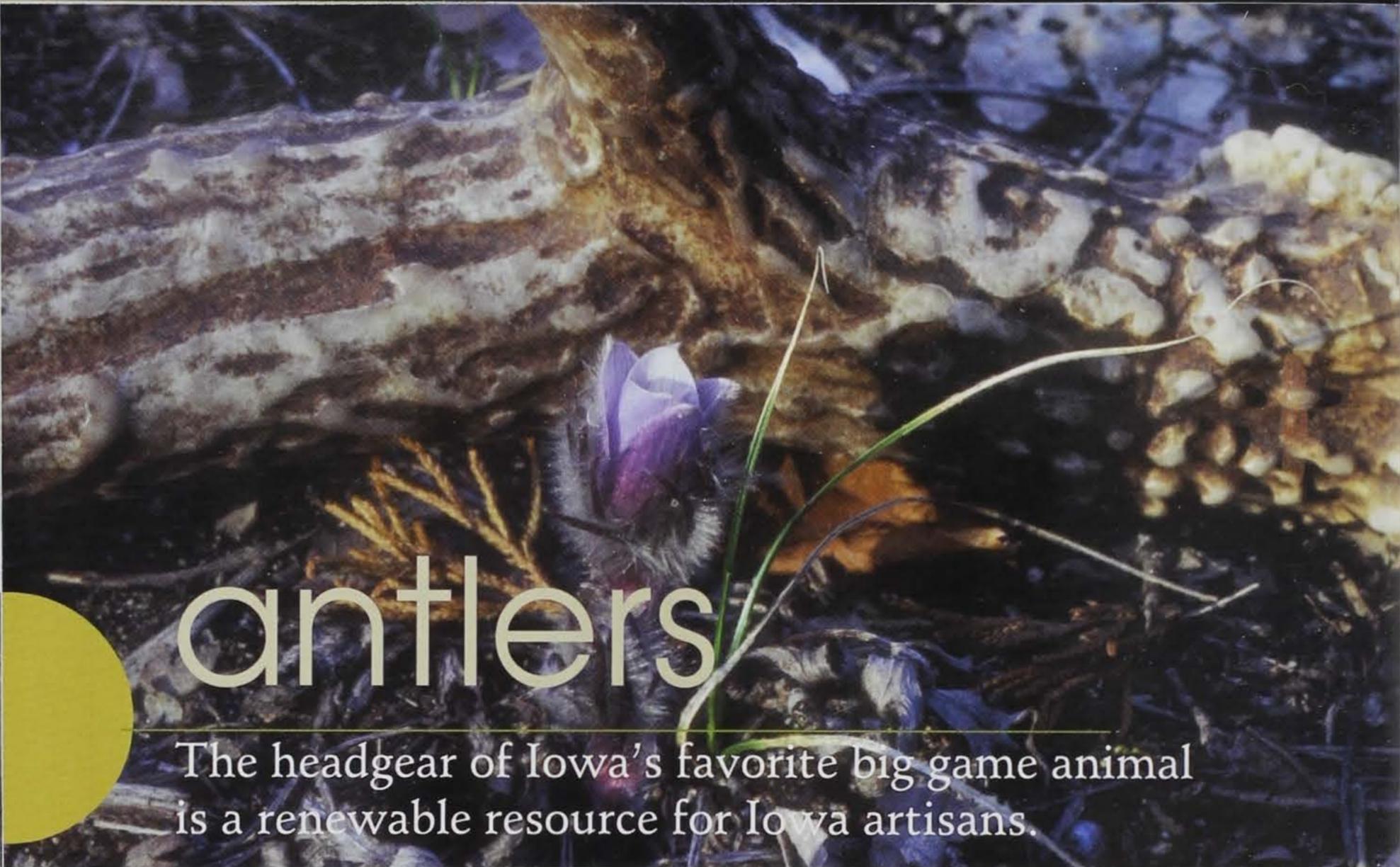
Neighboring landowners have joined Zach in developing a kind of "neighborhood watch" program to keep an eye out for suspicious visitors.

"I am seeing firsthand that, when you sell your neighbors on QDM, you end up with everybody helping everybody in many different ways," he offered. "It's a big plus. And virtually all of my neighboring landowners are doing some QDM on their lands. It's continuing to grow throughout the whole region."

Zach truly gets the biggest kick out of seeing how active stewardship can benefit the entire ecosystem on his property.

"I love to go down to the farm and check on the tree plantings, the prairie, the food plots and even to see what frogs are breeding in the wetlands. It is all therapeutic for me," he said of his QDM work, "and it benefits all the wildlife on my property. It feels great to know that when I'm gone, I will have left a piece of ground in much better shape than I found it."

—KPA



antlers

The headgear of Iowa's favorite big game animal is a renewable resource for Iowa artisans.

Roger A. Hill

Story and photos by Michael Dhar

Every spring, the raw materials for Paul Hellenschmidt's art renew themselves, sprouting from the heads of forest animals. In the winter, they drop to the earth, free for the artist's taking.

For more than 30 years, Hellenschmidt has crafted artwork from deer antlers. The Minnesota-based artisan has carved hundreds of earrings, pendants, belt buckles and other projects for friends and customers, opening a small business called "Antlercraft" in 1984.

For Hellenschmidt — and the many other crafts people working in the medium of "whitetail" — deer have nearly unlimited potential. The antlers can be carved, filed, drilled and etched into countless projects. Artisans also create a wide array of tools and art from the animals' hides, hooves and even internal organs.

While some of these projects require significant artistic skill, beginning craftspeople with little to no experience can easily create many items.

Recalling the practices of Native American tribes (who famously used every part of a hunted animal), modern-day artisans of all skill levels can honor nature through their creativity.

Crafts made from deer have a special significance, since they come from natural sources, said DNR biologist Pat Schlarbaum, who turns antlers into buttons and handles for feeders, placards and gate handles.

"I see them as a gift of the land," Schlarbaum said.

Working with such natural objects also presents artists with unique challenges and opportunities, Helleschmidt said. Individual antlers vary widely, and so an artist must respond to the dictates of nature. For most of his projects, Hellenschmidt lets the antlers guide his work.

"It always starts out with the shape of the antler," he said. "Every piece is different."

Antler color and density will also vary, depending on the animal's diet. Hues can range from pure white to gray to yellow to almost red. Shape, of

course, also varies, with some deer sporting giant, perfectly symmetrical trophy racks while others have misshapen racks laden with drop tines.

Since antlers are basically modified bone, they provide a consistency different from other sculpting materials, Schlarbaum said.

"It's a nice substance to work with," he said. "It's harder than wood and softer than stone, so you can kind of engrave it."

Hellenschmidt began carving antlers as a hobby while still in college. As a student at Iowa State University, he discovered a shed antler in the woods and crafted a ring from it. The project inspired requests for additional pieces, and Hellenschmidt became more and more invested in his hobby.

A soft-spoken man with long, slim limbs and a dark, brushy beard, Hellenschmidt brings a nature-lover's perspective to the craft of carving antlers. The former forestry major had no formal art training, but over the years, taught himself to make increasingly accomplished work.

Hellenschmidt uses a simple set of tools to craft jewelry and other items with remarkably fine detail. A hand drill, called a "Moto Tool," mounted with different-sized dental bits allows him to carve, for example, rose petals on a set of quarter-inch-wide earrings. He uses emery boards and jeweler's files to finish many projects.

The artist has also made buttons, pendants, earrings, bracelets, finger rings, belt buckles, cigarette holders, hair combs and more. For the buttons, he simply slices sections from an antler tine, buffs the cut surfaces and drills thread holes. He then carves symmetric designs into the button's surfaces.

Finger rings require a bit more skill than some other projects, especially when made for specific finger-sizes.

"Rings are difficult," he said. "You have to size it first from the inside out, and then carve the design from the outside in."

For most of his projects, Hellenschmidt carves symmetrical designs inspired by the art nouveau or neo-gothic schools of sculpture. This usually means braid-like or chain-like patterns.

The artist also produces what he calls "touch stones," which are worn like pendants and used like worry stones — people can fiddle with them in times of stress.

In recent years, Hellenschmidt has incorporated precious stones and metalwork into his designs. He sometimes mounts sapphire or other jewels into earrings and pendants and has worked with a metalsmith to add silver work to projects.

"When I first started out, I was an antler purist," he said. "I wouldn't incorporate stones. But, I found some stones that would complement the antler."

In 1984, Hellenschmidt began attending the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, where he first



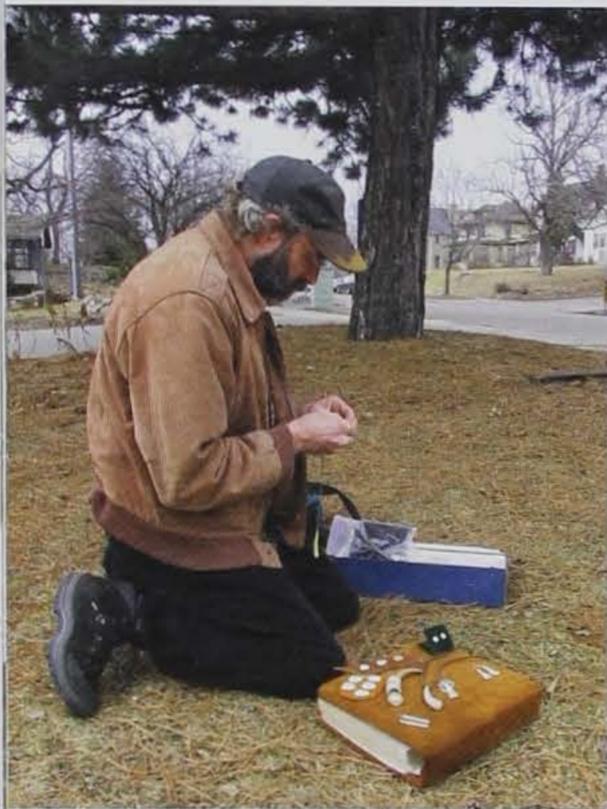
Hellenschmidt developed a small business around antlers more than 20 years ago.

tried selling his wares. That experience forced him to make useful, smaller items, the kind of things festival-goers wanted to buy.

Now, Hellenschmidt has turned to larger sculptures, which require a longer time commitment: 135 hours versus as few as four hours for a ring.

For much of his work, Hellenschmidt carves naturalistic designs: leaves, acorns, fish, flowers, animals and vines. Antler, because of its organic curves and textures, lends itself to such work. Other artisans have found even more naturalistic uses for antlers. In one popular project, the rugged base of an antler turns into a strikingly realistic copy of a morel mushroom.

Monte Kasper, an amateur craftsman and lifelong outdoorsman from Iowa City, first began carving mushroom sculptures about two years ago.



Hellenschmidt's first piece was a ring he made from a shed he found. Today his pieces include pendants, buttons, earrings, bracelets, belt buckles, cigarette holders and combs. He recently started incorporating stones and metal work into some of his designs.



"People think they're amazing," he said. "If they knew how simple they were, maybe it wouldn't be so impressive. It just takes time."

For some pieces, Kasper will dip the antler in stain, and then wipe clean the high ridges. The procedure leaves the lower regions looking darker, adding to the mushroom's texture. For other pieces,

he attaches a piece of felt to the drill, and spins it against the antler's surface. The quickly spinning felt will burn the antler different shades of brown, depending on pressure and speed.

"It's like a toaster," he said. "You get various shades, from light brown to dark brown, almost black."

During a visit to his home, Kasper produced an antler mushroom in about 20 minutes. More detailed work can take more time, but the basic piece comes together fairly quickly, he said.

Kasper has also taken on other projects, including zipper pulls and a knife handle. For the former, he saws off the tip of a tine, drills a hole, screws in an eye-hook and uses a pair of pliers to attach the hook to a zipper. For the knife handle, he hollowed out a piece of antler, into which he secured a blade with epoxy.

A friend who owned a Texas micro-brewery asked Kasper to carve the business' name, "Hog Heaven," into a piece of antler. That item then became the handle for a keg tapper. Further projects on Kasper's to-do list include antler drawer pulls and a rabbit call. For that project, he'll hollow out a fairly straight section of antler, cut a notch at one end and insert the "squeaker" from a dog toy.

For those not content with antler crafts, there are many more deer parts to use. Kathy Dice, a naturalist with the Louisa County Conservation Board, has spent the last 15

years studying and teaching about Native American uses for deer. While sculptors like Hellenschmidt and Kasper may see rings or mushrooms hiding within the modified bone of an antler, Native Americans saw clothing, tools and shelter within the animals.

Deer hide was used extensively, usually for clothing, Dice said. Un-tanned hide, or rawhide, was prepared by scraping off the inside and outside of the skin, often using bones from the deer itself. For the tanning process, many tribes seeped the hide in fluids from the animal's own brain cavity.

"Every animal has enough brains to tan its own hide," Dice said.

The naturalist once completed an entire tanning project using only the methods and tools available to pre-Western Native Americans. Though a fulfilling learning experience, Dice said she prefers to take advantage of the labor shortcuts offered by modern equipment.

"Metal is nice," she said. "Brain tanning a hide requires a lot of skill. There are a lot of steps involved."

Some of the more surprising deer-related products came from deep inside the animal. The "pericardium" or "heart sac," a membrane surrounding the heart, could be turned into a cup or bowl.

"You have to cut high on the heart, so you don't cut through the sac, and then just slide it off," Dice said. "If you feel something sliding around, then you have hold of the pericardium."

Artisans can mold the membrane, once removed, into a cup or sack-like shape, which it will maintain once it dries. A similar, though larger sac comes from the stomach, and can serve as a jug or pot. Native Americans often used such items to cook over hot rocks.

For most people today, of course, range tops provide a handy alternative to hot rocks, and Tupperware trumps pericardium sacs. The availability of modern tools, however, only increases the number of uses to which a deer's resources can be put.

Hellenschmidt's dental drill bits, for example, allow for much finer detail than did the tools

Jesse Bainter of Des Moines uses antlers to craft fine writing instruments. "It's difficult to find just the right piece of antler, it has to be the right length, thick enough to drill through and straight. That's what I like best about using antlers, it's a challenge."



Kati Bainter



Monte Kasper's mushroom starts with a 2- to 3-inch section of antler. Narrowing the piece just above its base makes it more closely resemble a mushroom and also keeps the item standing upright.

available to Native Americans. And power tools make it easy to complete simple projects — like morel mushrooms — opening up the field of deer craft work to anyone.

Deer hunters, shed gatherers and crafts people at all levels of experience have the ability to complete most projects they can imagine. Nature has provided the renewable resource, but human creativity provides a wealth of possibilities.

Michael Dhar is a communications specialist with the department's volunteer program in Des Moines.



Antler Development

Deer antlers are ambitious things. The appendages, "one of the fastest growing tissues in the animal world," can add as many as 5 pounds to a deer's head in just a few months, said Iowa DNR wildlife biologist Willie Suchy.

Deer, as every Iowa hunter knows, grow a new set of antlers every year. This fact may come as a surprise to some people, however. When Paul Hellenschmidt began selling artwork crafted from deer antlers, he sometimes had to explain that a set of detached antlers didn't necessarily imply a dead deer.

"I had to explain to them that antlers are a renewable resource," he said.

In other words, antlers drop off the heads of their owners every winter. New ones replace them the following spring. In between, bucks use the antlers for fighting and establishing dominance. Antlers are also used to mark trees in order to delineate territory.

The growth period for antlers typically starts in late April or early May, when new antlers sprout from "pedicles," small nubs on the animal's head. "Photoperiod," or the number of sunlight hours during the day, determines when antler growth begins.

New antlers pass through a phase called the "velvet stage," when a soft layer of vascular tissue covers the hard bony matter. Blood vessels in this outer layer supply the growing antlers with vital nutrients. Eventually, the animal sloughs off its velvet layer by scraping against tree trunks.

Antler growth typically ends around the first of September. In winter, the antlers detach from the animals' heads. Between late December and early March, cells on the skull plate weaken enough that a leap or head movement will jar the growths loose.

Deer will develop larger and larger antlers as they progress towards maturity. A first-year set of antlers, for example, will only weigh a few ounces, but a mature deer can sport antlers weighing 4 to 5 pounds and stretching 18 to 24 inches in width. After about five years of age, however, general health begins to decline, and antler size falls as well.



Roger A. Hill



Roger A. Hill



stock photo

Don't you dare call them horns. Antlers are actually modified bone, fed by a velvety "skin" during their growth period. Unlike horns — which are made of keratin (the same substance that makes up hair and fingernails) — antlers are shed each year. However, North America's pronghorn is an exception to the horn rule because the outer layer of their horn is shed each year.

Antlers, growing anew every spring, are sometimes susceptible to structural errors. Genetics, poor nutrition and physical injury can all result in misshapen, asymmetrical or unnatural antlers.

Nutrition does not usually come into play in Iowa, however, Suchy said. Our state's rich soil provides all the nutrients deer antlers need (including calcium, phosphorous, potassium and other trace elements). Amidst the relatively impoverished soils of the southern United States, however, deer develop smaller body and antler sizes. Overpopulation can result in similar effects.

Physical injury to one side of a deer's body, for reasons not yet understood, can affect antler growth on the opposite side of the body. The affected antler might grow the wrong way, sometimes becoming ingrown and push into the animal's eye, mouth or brain (which results in death).

An injury to the antler itself, or head, can also alter normal growth patterns. Antlers on the left side, for example, could develop a much smaller size or different shape than those on the right.

"Direct injury can cause some really weird looking growths," Suchy said.

Genetics sometimes leads to even stranger "mistakes." These can include so-called "drop tines," which, instead of pointing upwards, jut out sideways or point towards the ground. In one particularly odd-looking deformation, a deer may appear to be wearing a pineapple on its head. The antler, instead of fanning out into a normal shape, bulks up in the middle, with the tines poking out like spikes.

"That's pretty unusual," Suchy said.

Regardless of deformations, never call an antler a "horn." Deer may grow a new set of antlers every year, but never has a white tail deer grown a pair of "horns." The terms "horns" and "antlers" refer to two different types of structure, characteristic of different species.

Antlers are modified bone, built from the same minerals and stuffed with the same marrow as skeletons. Horns, by contrast, developed over evolutionary time from hair. Ironically, despite being modified hair, most horns are never shed.

"Pronghorns," however, break the above rule. These growths, like regular horns, are a modified form of hair. But the outer layer of pronghorns falls off every year.

Legal Restrictions

Since deer are a natural resource, craftspeople may be concerned about legal restrictions regarding antler use. The law says, first of all, that sheds are fair game.

"Anybody can go and pick up sheds," said DNR Law Enforcement assistant bureau chief Randy Edwards.

If you lawfully hunt a deer, of course, the antlers also belong to you. The antlers of any unlawfully killed deer become property of the state, no matter who finds them. For that reason, it's important to contact law enforcement officials if you find a dead deer.

If it died naturally or was, for example, hit by a car, officials will usually award the animal, along with its antlers, to the finder. If the animal was poached, however, the state will take

possession of it — even if the finder didn't poach it.

"If deer are killed illegally, we can't let you keep it," Edwards said.

Gray areas might crop up when disputes arise among hunters and landowners. When a difference of opinion arises between a hunter and a landowner over how a deer died, or who killed it, "we will usually give the benefit of the doubt to the landowner," Edwards said.

Rules about the sale of antlers, or crafts made from antlers, are basically the same as those for ownership. If you're allowed to keep the antlers, you're allowed to sell them.

"As long as the deer is lawfully obtained, antler sales are legal," Edwards said. "Sheds can be sold as well."

governor's environmental excellence awards

Story by Gaye Wiekierak
Photographs by Clay Smith

The New Bohemia Solar Project, Iowa's largest solar array system, is up and running in Cedar Rapids. Capable of generating 7,200 watts of electricity, the project is a shining example of solar power at work.

The solar array was dedicated in September 2005 and is located on the Kouba Building, part of a brownfield redevelopment area adjacent to the Downtown Bohemian Commercial Historic District in southeast Cedar Rapids.

"We're excited about this project and hope it will streamline the process for future photovoltaic projects," said Dave Evans, program planner with DNR's Energy and Waste Management Bureau. "Since Iowa imports about 97 percent of its energy needs, it's important that the state coordinate and showcase sustainable, environmentally safe energy sources."

New Bohemia is a partnership among Alliant Energy-Interstate Power and Light Company, the City of Cedar Rapids, the Iowa Renewable Energy Association (I-Renew), Thorland Company, the Iowa DNR, and the U.S. Department of Energy (U.S. DOE).

The project was funded by a \$65,604 U.S. DOE grant intended to boost community economic development by establishing solar technologies in



brownfields, with matching funds and services provided by project partners. New Bohemia was the highest-ranked solar project funded by U.S. DOE in 2004, based on scope of project, partnership among organizations and benefit to the environment and community.

“Renewable energy is a big part of economic development in Iowa,” said Rich Dana, past president of I-Renew and partner with Plan B Consulting. “Iowa City and Cedar Rapids are trying to develop themselves as the ‘technology corridor,’ and this project stands as a symbol of those efforts.”

Unique features enhance project

The solar array has three types of racks — single axis (tracks the sun from east to west), dual axis (tracks the sun from east to west throughout the day and north to south through the seasons), and fixed (facing south only). This unique design allows for side-by-side comparisons of real-time energy production, total energy production and avoided emissions. All of the data is displayed to the public at an interactive educational kiosk outside the building.

Twenty-eight volunteers installed the solar arrays during summer workshops hosted by I-Renew — saving more than \$10,000 in installation costs and giving architects, builders,





homeowners, university students and other community volunteers hands-on training in solar technology.

“The kiosk and workshops have benefited the public in a highly visible way,” said Evans. “There is no substitute for physical, interactive on-site experience.”

All of the solar power generated by the array provides electricity to Alliant Energy’s Second Nature customers through a purchased power agreement — a first for the company. “We’re pleased to be part of this project as it advances opportunities to gauge the effectiveness and viability

of photovoltaic systems,” said Janice Mathis, Second Nature product manager. “This is the first solar energy to be added to the fuel mix of our Second Nature renewable energy program, helping to create a diversified resource mix of renewable energy.”

Tours of the New Bohemia Solar Project can be arranged in advance for interested individuals or organizations. The DNR can also coordinate tours of Alliant Energy’s Prairie Creek Power Plant to coincide with the New Bohemia tour.

To schedule a tour or for more information about the solar project, contact Dave Evans at (515) 281-6150 or by e-mail at Dave.Evans@dnr.state.ia.us.

Applications for the 2006 Governor’s Environmental Excellence Awards are available by contacting Jill Cornell at (515) 281-0279 or Jill.Cornell@dnr.state.ia.us. The deadline for applications is November 13, 2006.

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VOLUNTEER CORNER

"Impossibly," volunteers clear giant logjam

by Michael Dhar

For decades, it clogged a bend in the East Fork of the Des Moines River — a logjam the size of a city block. Though officials have long wanted to remove it, they called the project impossible.

That was all the motivation local volunteer Ron Reefer needed.

"The best way to get Ron to do something is to say it can't be done," said Scott Moeller, a Kossuth County Conservation Board naturalist who nominated Reefer for a volunteer award last

year. "He did the impossible, and did a great job organizing things."

Over the course of two weekends in February 2004 — through consultation with natural resources professionals — Reefer and more than 50 volunteers pulled a huge pile of wood and debris from the river. It had occupied a spot just outside of Algona for at least four decades, growing in size every year.

Reefer first suggested removing the jam after he joined Moeller and other Algona citizens in a river improvement project. That group removed several small logjams and was prepared to quit, but Reefer

insisted on tackling what had come to be a local legend. Thanks to Reefer's determination, volunteers eventually flocked to the effort.

"Once we said we were doing it, people got interested," he said.



Michael Dhar

Ron Reefer clearing stray logs from the East Fork

Reefer timed the effort to coincide with low water levels during the winter, he said. Officials also considered the impact removing the jam would have on wildlife habitat and water quality — and weighed that against the dangers it posed to paddlers.

For these reasons, volunteers are always encouraged to contact local DNR officials before attempting to remove any logjams.

Participants in the so-called "Logjam Cleanup Crew" included Boy Scout Troops, a high school class and a local sheriff. Algona businesses donated food and

equipment to the effort.

Crewmembers worked for hours — the core group stayed at it from dawn until dusk each day — in near freezing weather.

"We grew up on the river, got up at 4 a.m. as kids to set traps," said Jim Struecker who helped Reefer organize the event. "It's nice to clean it up and get it back in good shape."

Use of the river has increased greatly since the jam's removal, Moeller said. Reefer's effort made it possible to canoe all the way through Algona. And his work didn't stop there.

Reefer has maintained a core group of volunteers who continue work with officials to care for the river. He currently has his eyes on

another large logjam, located just south of Algona.

Volunteer Opportunities

* Learn more about AmeriCorps opportunities with the DNR at:

[www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/
americorps/](http://www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/ Americorps/)

* Find more information, including our events calendar, at:

www.keepersoftheland.org

hungarian venison roast

Story by Mick Klemesrud
Photographs by Clay Smith

Cooking a delicious venison roast outdoors in a Dutch oven just sounds right. This recipe comes from the Warden's Cookbook and is prepared by an actual game warden, Rod Slings, a 33-year veteran with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Bureau.

Wash and clean the roast removing any dried or freezer burned or tallowy edges. Place in preheated skillet and brown all sides. Place roast in Dutch oven and season with salt, pepper and caraway seeds. Wrap roast with slices of bacon, overlapping

completely and add 2 cups of water. Encircle the roast with the vegetables: potatoes, onions, etc.

Place cover on Dutch oven and place directly on coals. Add coals to the lid and cook for about 45 minutes, turning every 15 minutes for even cooking. Cooking time will depend on the size of the roast and the amount of heat. Adding old-fashioned biscuits to this one pot meal is a nice touch.

Mick Klemesrud is an information specialist for the department in Des Moines.





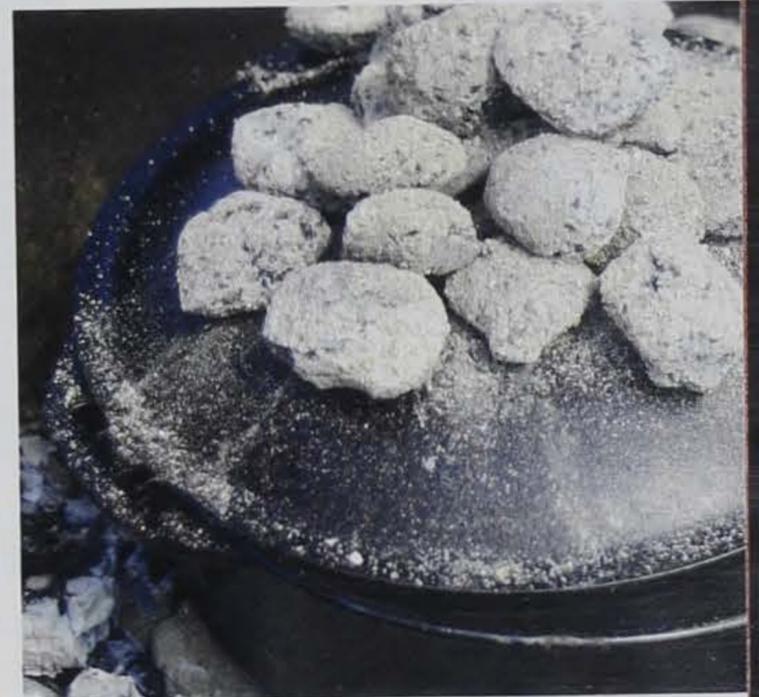
Recreational Safety Coordinator Rod Slings is a Dutch oven guru, and a longtime sampler and chef of fine cuisine.

Ingredients

3 pound roast
 Coarse chopped potatoes
 Coarse chopped onion
 Slices of bell peppers
 2 tsp. Salt
 1 tsp. Pepper
 2 tsp. Caraway seed
 8 strips of bacon
 2 c. water

Supplies

Dutch oven
 Lid lifter
 Charcoal or firewood
 Foil liner, optional



The recipe, provided by Don Simonson, Conservation Officer (retired) from Des Moines County, is from the *Warden's Cookbook*; a collection of wild game recipes. For a copy of the *Warden's Cookbook*, send \$12 plus \$2 for shipping and handling to George Hemmen, 2277 250th St., Guthrie Center, Iowa 50115. Additional recipes are available as a supplement for \$5 (plus \$2 shipping and handling if ordered separately from the cookbook). Make checks payable to Iowa Fish and Game Officers Association. Supplies are limited.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

Exotic Invasive Honeysuckle Pose Problems For Some Iowa Timber Owners

Iowa's woodlands are a place to pick morel mushrooms, see wildflowers, wildlife and an array of fall colors. They are not a place to see exotic, nonnative plants, like honeysuckle, which threaten the beauty and quality of Iowa's woodlands.

"Exotic plants such as

honeysuckle are a threat to our woodlands because they are very aggressive and out-compete native vegetation for space," said Mark Vitosh, district forester with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "The reduction of native plants within our woodlands can negatively impact

wildlife that depends on specific habitats, and it can also reduce the overall quality and balance of native woodlands."

Exotic honeysuckle is a shrub that can be introduced into a forested area by birds. This multi-stemmed shrub can grow 8 to 15 feet tall, and can spread up to 10 feet wide. This plant can be so aggressive that invaded woodlands are often difficult to even walk through.

Honeysuckle leafs-out early in the spring before most of the native shrubs. Flowers on different selections of these plants can be white, pinkish-red, or yellow while fruit colors can be red or yellowish-orange.

When removing these plants, pulling is a good technique on plants smaller than 3 feet tall. For larger plants, cut them in the fall and treat the stumps immediately with a registered herbicide to prevent re-sprouting.

A number of other exotic plants such as garlic mustard, common buckthorn, multiflora rose, privet and barberry are also threatening Iowa's woodlands. The longer these plants are allowed to spread, the more difficult they will be to control in the future. For assistance in assessing the health of your forest resources contact your Iowa DNR district forester. To locate your forester on the web, log on to www.iowadnr.com/forestry/district.html.



Lowell Washburn

Canvasback

Waterfowl Hunting Regulations Contain Error

Iowa duck hunters will want to take note of an error in the 2006 Iowa Waterfowl Hunting Regulations before going afield this season.

As printed, the regulations booklet specifies season dates for "Ducks, Mergansers and Coots – excluding canvasbacks." This is incorrect. The season for canvasbacks is open with all ducks, mergansers and coots in both the north and south duck hunting zones in Iowa this year.

Last year, canvasbacks had a much shorter season, which required a separate entry in the

waterfowl regulations booklet, and a reference to "excluding canvasbacks" under the Ducks, Mergansers and Coots entry. This reference to "excluding canvasbacks" was, regrettably, not deleted.

A corrected version of the Waterfowl Seasons is available on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources web site at www.iowadnr.com. Click on Hunting, then on Hunting and Trapping Regulations, then click on Migratory Bird Regulations. The season dates and bag limits are on page 6.

Deer, Turkey Hunters Required To Report Harvest

Decades of postcard surveys to determine hunter success in deer and turkey seasons are giving way to on-line or telephone reporting. Beginning this fall, any hunter who tags a deer or turkey must report the kill to the DNR.

"The postcard surveys were slow and cumbersome, and often didn't provide reliable harvest information at the county level," explains DNR wildlife biologist Steve Roberts.

"The reporting system will provide this information much faster and with much more detail. In turn, this will lead to more responsive management of deer and turkey populations."

After a deer or turkey is harvested, the hunter still must record the date and attach a transportation tag to the animal, as has been required in the past. However, this year's tag also has a registration number and instructions (in the lower left corner) for reporting the harvest by phone (800-771-4692) or on-line (www.iowadnr.com). After answering a short series of questions, the hunter will receive a confirmation number. This number must be written in the blank space provided on the tag, and the number is the hunter's



Roger Hill

proof that a report has been completed.

The harvest report must be completed by midnight of the day following the harvest of an animal, before processing the animal for consumption, before taking it to a locker, or before transporting the animal out of state, whichever comes first.

Only successful hunters need to report the harvest. One hunter may report multiple harvests (such as during shotgun season party hunting), but must ensure that the correct confirmation number is written on the appropriate tag.

Failure to report the harvest could result in a fine. Law enforcement officers will actively enforce the new regulation during this fall and winter.

Historic House At Black Hawk State Park Now Available To Rent

The former residence of the state park attendant at Black Hawk State Park, built by the Civil Conservation Corps in the 1930s, is available for public use as a cabin. Sitting a few blocks from the lake, the cabin can sleep up to 10 people, has an outside patio and a fire ring with a grill.

"This is really a unique opportunity for anyone interested in a different kind of camping experience," said Ryan O'Neill, manager of Black Hawk State Park. "A lot of improvements were made to the cabin by park staff and by our AmeriCorps employee, Luke Wright, to make this project happen."

The cabin has four bedrooms and one and a half baths. O'Neill said it is available immediately by calling 712-657-8712. Due to the renovation, the cabin is not currently listed among those available on the DNR reservation web site.

With a full-size kitchen, furnace and air conditioning, the historic house is much larger than other cabins in state parks. It rents for \$100 per night and has a two-night minimum. The weekly rate is \$600. The cabin is handicap accessible and does not allow smoking inside. Guests must provide all their own linens for beds.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

Viking Lake Fish Renovation Underway

The water level at Viking Lake is being lowered to allow the DNR to renovate the fish population that has been overtaken by small yellow bass. The work initially called for the removal of 85 percent of the lake water, but the lake will be lowered completely to address some problems with the outlet gate.

"The gates had been leaking for a while so we decided to fix the problem, replace any worn parts and to give the gates a good cleaning while the other work was underway," said Chris Larson, fisheries biologist with the DNR.

The fish population will be chemically renovated in late September. After the lake is



Clay Smith

Work has started at Viking Lake to renovate a fish population overtaken by small yellow bass and fix a leaking outlet gate.

emptied, any remaining pools will receive a chemical treatment to make sure all yellow bass are eliminated. The gates will be closed in early October and the lake will be allowed to refill.

Viking Lake will be restocked with advanced growth fingerling bluegills, largemouth bass and channel catfish this fall or next spring.

Polk County Deer Task Force Celebrating 10th Anniversary In October

A successful program that has significantly reduced deer populations in Polk County is nearing a milestone. The Polk County Deer Task Force is celebrating its 10th anniversary in October.

The mission of the task force was to develop a deer management plan for the growing deer population in Polk County. After a year of planning, discussions and research, the first controlled bow hunt was held in 1998, with about 100 antlerless deer killed in a special management zone. The hunt has expanded to new areas, and in 2005 nearly 400 antlerless deer were killed.

Due to the hunt's success, the number of deer counted on the annual aerial survey has dropped significantly over the past two years from about 50 per square mile in 2004 to less than 30 in 2006. Willie Suchy, wildlife biologist with the DNR, estimates the controlled hunt has reduced deer numbers by nearly 2,000 in the last two years.

The success of the program is directly related to the planning and dedication of task force members. The task force has been proactive in promoting the program by providing city officials with updates and infor-

mation about how the program works. Jim Youngblood, who has chaired the task force from the beginning, stresses that after 10 years there have been no accidents or safety problems and that the program has cost the taxpayers of Polk County nothing while significantly reducing the deer population.

"Jim and all the members of the task force should be commended for their hard work," Suchy said. "Their dedication and willingness to take on this challenge speak very highly of the role that citizen volunteers can have in resolving these issues."

Funds Available for Targeted Watersheds

Governor Tom Vilsack and DNR Director Jeff Vonk recently announced that eligible watersheds in Iowa may qualify for federal funds under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Targeted Watersheds Grant Program.

Under this program, \$16 million is available to support the protection and restoration of the country's water resources through a holistic watershed approach. This program is designed to encourage successful community-based approaches and techniques to protect water resources throughout the country. Governor Vilsack can nominate an unlimited number of meritorious projects for funding consideration by the EPA. Successful applicants will be eligible for funding of \$600,000 to \$900,000.

Several Iowa projects have received funding under this program in recent years. In 2003, the Rathbun Land and Water Alliance was awarded \$600,000 to support a comprehensive watershed project to protect and improve water quality in Lake Rathbun. In 2004, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and Iowa State University were awarded \$1 million to carry out an integrated drainage tile management-wetlands project, in cooperation with three drainage districts in Palo Alto and Pocahontas counties.

Both Vilsack and Vonk said

the grant program offers excellent opportunities for local communities looking to improve water quality.

The DNR will solicit applications for the program and provide recommendations to the Governor regarding projects to be submitted for funding consideration. In accordance with EPA guidance, applications will be evaluated upon their anticipated water quality benefits, their breadth of local support, their level of innovative environmental problem-solving, and their compatibility with other federal and state efforts.

To be considered, applications must be received by the DNR no later than Oct. 25, 2006. Governor Vilsack will submit Iowa's nominations to EPA, with final selections being determined by EPA.

Additional details on how to apply for the Targeted Watersheds Grant Program, including eligibility requirements and where to send your application, can be found at www.iowadnr.com/water/nonpoint/watershed.html.

Questions can also be directed to: Ubbo Agena, Nonpoint Program Coordinator, Iowa Department of Natural Resources (phone 515-281-6402, email: ubbo.agena@dnr.state.is.us) or Becky Schwiete, Environmental Specialist Sr. Iowa Department of Natural Resources (phone 515-242-6196, email: rebecca.schwiete@dnr.state.ia.us)

Upcoming NRC and EPC Meetings

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

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

Natural Resource Commission:

- October 12
Dubuque
- November 9
Des Moines
- December 14
Des Moines

Environmental Protection Commission:

- October 3 (tentative)
Urbandale
- November 7
Urbandale
- December 5
Urbandale

WARDEN'S DIARY



Think back to when you started your job? Remember the first day? Since then, has anything happened or changed to cause you to think, "Whoa there, nobody told me about this when I signed on with this outfit?"

I can think of a couple. The first involves personal watercraft — the jet ski if you will. When they first appeared on the scene they were an oddity. Once in a while you'd see somebody skating across the water standing on something that looked like a two-wheel scooter you might have had as a kid, only on water.

I remember thinking, "That will never take off."

Was I ever wrong. Next thing I knew they were everywhere. Bigger and more powerful. Where you used to see a boat dock and a hoist, now you saw a boat dock, boat hoist and hoist for two or more personal watercraft. Interest may have peaked, but they never have — and probably never will — go away.

How Did I Get Into This?

by Chuck Humeston

The second phenomenon has been building for awhile, but now has seemed to explode. Yes, I'm talking about the all-terrain vehicle, better known as the ATV.

Probably the first one I ever saw was on Rush Lake when I was in northwest Iowa. I remember seeing out on the marsh what looked like a fiberglass tub with six wheels. It worked great on land and in the mud, but when it reached open water, the poor guy had a problem. Six spinning wheels didn't work nearly as well as a propeller.

"An oddity. It will never take off," I thought.

Well, after awhile, ATV version 2.0 arrived. This was the trike. You remember them — a tricycle frame with handlebars, motorcycle engine and three large low-pressure terra tires. They worked well for their intended purpose. The problem was nobody used them for their intended purpose. Most people wanted to get on the road, albeit illegally, and fly.

The problem there was stability. On bumps, they tended

to bounce like a basketball, which usually resulted in bad things. I remember responding to an accident where one machine started bouncing. The operator lost control, flew off a curve and struck a phone pole. Not good.

"Fad. It'll never fly," I thought.

Wrong again. The quad-runner soon appeared. Not to mention advances in motorcycles, or "dirt bikes." The next thing I knew they were everywhere, and quite honestly, they were becoming a problem, again mostly with regard to riding on the road illegally. And again, they like to bounce when speeds increase.

It eventually became legal for people to ride these machines in the road ditch as long as there was snow cover. Thus, people were hitting things. Along with that came complaints of quads and dirt bikes hill-climbing in public areas, causing damage to natural areas.

The popularity for the quad grew for hunting. You can get as many accessories now for them as you can for a touring motorcycle. And moto-cross grew in popularity with the dirt bike crowd. These guys take a run at a jump, go

airborne, do whoop-de-doo in the air then, hopefully land on two wheels. My hat's off to them, as my wife and I both own motorcycles, cruisers that is. All I know is if you lift off, and you have air under a cruiser, that is not good.

Add to that, motor sports in general have exploded. ATVs soon became the dryland personal watercraft. They were everywhere, being ridden by all ages. It's no surprise ATV owners began saying, "Hey, where can we ride?" Clubs formed, and the next thing I knew ATV parks were opening. A lot of these were built in areas such as reclaimed quarries. Trails were built along with moto-cross tracks. Some with campgrounds.

Now, added to our duties are enforcing ATV laws. It's not uncommon now for me to drive into an ATV park thinking, "They didn't tell me about this one 25 years ago." As with on our lakes, we've even begun to hire seasonal officers to patrol and enforce ATV laws.

Watching pickups and trailers drive into the park loaded with quads or dirt bikes, I think, "They're here to stay."

By the way have you read about these small, personal jet airplanes you can get now? They will never . . . oh forget it.

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