

FALL 2018

# IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

IN THIS ISSUE:

**Painted Panoramas**

*FIND THE ROAD TO AUTUMN SPLENDOR AT SHIMEK STATE FOREST*



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ABOARD THE RIVERBOAT  
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Cruising May through October







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FALL 2018

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If you love the outdoors, thousands of acres at Shimek State Forest in extreme southeast Iowa need to be on your bucket list. If you like to ride horses, it's one of the top draws. If you like to fish or float, pick any of the four ponds. Hunters have little competition, especially if willing to walk a bit. And the fall colors will leave you speechless.

**PHOTO BY TY SMEDES**

## ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Afternoon sun backlights a tree in its autumn splendor at Pikes Peak State Park in northeast Iowa. Widely considered one of the best areas of the state to view fall foliage, follow the wondrous progression of change at [iowadnr.gov/fallcolor](http://iowadnr.gov/fallcolor), or call the fall color hotline at 515-233-4110. Take advantage of reduced rate camping during your trip. Book at [iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com](http://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com).

**PHOTO BY BRIAN BUTTON**





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PHOTOS BY IOWA DNR FLICKR



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#### ABOUT THIS PHOTO

The enigmatic Hungarian partridge was once a respectable component of the small game hunter's bag. Although numbers are down from historic years, this aerial jet-like bird provides some great hunting for those that stumble on an acrobatic covey.

PHOTO BY ROGER HILL



# IOWA OUTDOORS

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### DNR MISSION

To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life in Iowa and ensure a legacy for future generations.

### EDITORIAL MISSION

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

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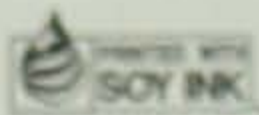
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# Contributors



**SANDY FLAHIVE**, is a writer who lives in Des Moines but likes getting behind the wheel of her Jeep and meandering around Iowa, discovering and exploring the hidden natural gems that lie in its many nooks and crannies.



**DAN MAGNESON** grew up in the southwest Iowa towns of Red Oak, Shenandoah and Clarinda, and today works as a fisheries biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Washington state's Olympic Peninsula. He believes the 1950s and 1960s were the absolute golden era of being a kid, and that nowhere on earth was this more true than in Iowa.



**TY SMEDES** is a full-time writer and photographer from Urbandale. Published in dozens of magazines, his work includes images of wildlife, wildflowers and scenery. He teaches photography classes and leads photo tours to the Sierras and Africa. His book, *The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles*, is sold at [iowan.com](http://iowan.com) or 1-877-899-9977 ext 211.



## CARP HAVE NO PREDATORS

Females can spawn more than 500,000 eggs over several days, leaving several thousand at each spawning site. Those eggs often fall victim to bacteria, fungi and a vast array of tiny predators, as can surviving juveniles. Panfish, like bluegill and crappie, find the minnow-size juveniles quite tasty. However, because juvenile carp grow fast, vulnerability to smaller predators is short lived. Northern pike, bass, muskies, flathead and channel catfish also consume juveniles, but also take larger carp. Even northern water snakes can consume bullhead-sized carp. Cormorants, herons, ospreys and bald eagles also devour some of the larger fish. Some mammals, especially otters and mink, eat any carp they can catch.

Even so, carp are prolific enough to overtake waterbodies in a hurry—especially those lacking natural predators. They can destroy spawning beds of more desirable fish. Their feeding habit of grubbing the bottom may destroy, uproot and eat submerged vegetation and cause declining water quality. Others that rely on these plants for food and cover, such as canvasback ducks and fish, can suffer as well. This competition for food can lead to fewer and smaller sport fish. Thus, carp are identified as one of the worst invasive species.

Once a carp reaches 2 to 3 pounds, natural predation is rarely an issue. At this point, the carps' only predator are anglers. Roughly 200,000 pounds of carp are commercially



harvested each year along the Mississippi River. More are taken by both commercial anglers and DNR staff at lakes deemed overpopulated with carp. In some cases a lake renovation is required where the lake level is lowered and rotenone applied. Rotenone is a naturally occurring chemical derived from various tropical plants that inhibits fish from absorbing oxygen. When applied, it depopulates the lake of fish. If known where carp are entering the system, like a connecting wetland, barriers may be installed. The lake is then restocked with game fish in a carp-free waterbody.

## Ask THE Expert *Why do oak trees drop different amounts of acorns?*

The oak is a strong and hardy tree, which is why it was chosen to be the state tree of Iowa. All oak species, 12 are native to Iowa, produce acorns—although they may look very different. Year to year, the number of acorns a single oak tree drops may also differ, as well as the relative abundance of acorns under different trees, even if they are not far apart.

Acorns, other nuts or seeds dropped by a tree are called that tree's mast. Walnut, hickory, maple and other trees also produce masts. State forester Jeff Goerndt says variability in all these species is not only because of the weather that year, but also the tree's microenvironment, species and exact genetic makeup.

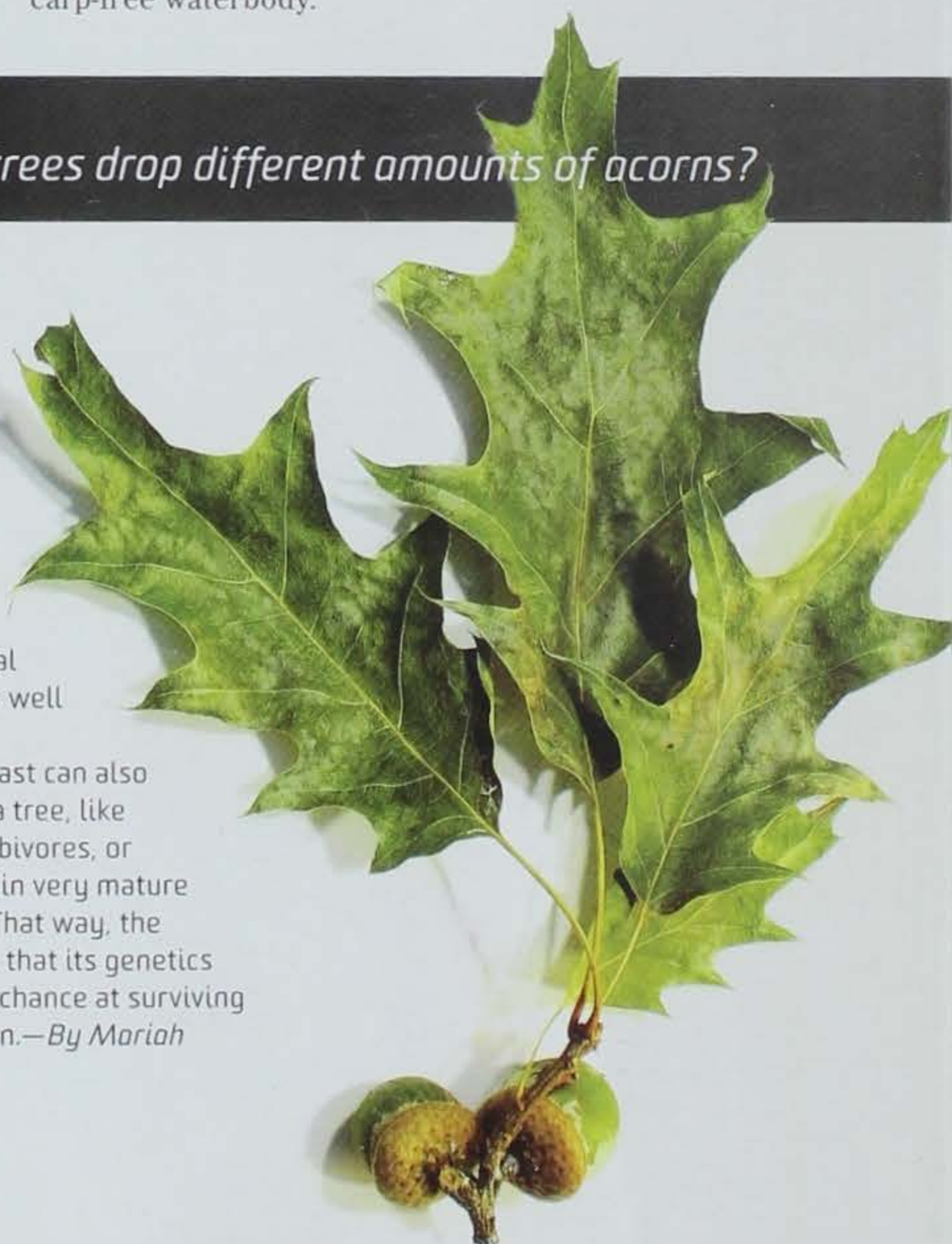
"Most trees run on a cycle," he says, "so every two or three years they might drop a larger number of seeds regardless of other conditions."

Mild weather throughout the year also

increases the number of seeds, like acorns, dropped.

The best years for acorns have few late spring frosts, and are not overly dry or wet. But even in the best conditions, masts of different trees may vary based on individual reproductive ability, as well as age and size.

Goerndt says the mast can also decrease by stress on a tree, like weather, pests and herbivores, or sporadically increased in very mature trees before they die. That way, the individual tree ensures that its genetics have the best possible chance at surviving into the next generation.—By Mariah Griffith





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

### LET THE Clouds Shine

Many casual photographers hit the fields when the sun is high and skies bright blue, staying indoors when weather threatens. But they are missing some of the best days for outdoor photography. Overcast or cloudy days can make for subdued photos to help enrich colors and create smooth, pleasing shadows. Adjust your white balance to a cloudy setting to make photos even richer. If you do shoot on a sunny day, target morning and late afternoon when natural light isn't so harsh.

### Drink Up

Dehydration can be an issue any time of year beyond the hot and sunny summers. Cooler but drier fall air can sap moisture or cause sweat to evaporate quickly without notice. And super dry winter air pulls moisture with every breath. Always drink plenty of water when outdoors. Test for dehydration with the skin turgor test. Pinch the lower arm and hold for a few seconds. If skin bounces back quickly, you are probably in good shape. If it takes a few seconds to return to normal shape, you are likely dehydrated. Mild dehydration occurs when fluid loss is at 5 percent, moderate is 10 percent and severe is 15 percent.

### Get Smart

More than three-quarters of Americans have smartphones—invaluable tools for outdoors people. They can help you get out of the woods if lost or injured. Nature guide apps, maps or other aides are useful, too. Hunters use the downloadable DNR hunting atlas to find public hunting areas. While phones (or other devices) can't be used to direct the movement of other hunters or communicate locations or direction of game travel, they can be used to scout hunting and fishing areas. But Smartphones are useless with dead batteries, lost coverage or a drop in the lake, so it's still good to carry a map and compass and to leave a plan with someone—where you're going and when you'll return.

### Fall Bonanza

Late fall can be a great time to camp, with fewer bugs, smaller crowds and often cheaper camping fees. To make the trip more comfortable, choose your tent site with warmth in mind. Pick a sheltered area, preferably one that gets morning sunlight. Double up on sleeping pads to help insulate the body from the cooler ground. Long hikes on the trail burn calories. Load up on complex carbs to keep the internal furnace burning and healthy fats like fish, nuts and avocados. Store your next day's clothing in your sleeping bag so they are warm in the morning.



## ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

### LESSONS FROM THE RAT RACE

This week I heard a new word—"behaviorceutical" (think of benefits better than pharmaceuticals derived from active lifestyles). The word was coined by Kelly G. Lambert, a professor of neuroscience at Randolph Macon College in Virginia. Perhaps you have read her popular book... *The Lab Rat Chronicles*.

Her observations from a great deal of research is that: "When animals engage in repetitive movement such as walking or grooming, cells that produce the neurochemical serotonin become more active." I am sure all of us are aware, serotonin has a well-known anti-anxiety impact.

Ms. Lambert had the audacity to call our brains "energy hogs" since our brain makes up 2 percent of our body weight but 20 percent of our body's energy consumption. Now at this point you might be saying "Shouldn't I conserve that energy for the hog?"

No...no...no. Being outdoors and walking, running, canoeing and playing increases oxygen and glucose delivery to the brain through blood flow.

Also, according to Dr. Lambert, "Running may also increase endogenous opioids, or endorphins, related to well-being and some natural 'highs.'" And, if you still need evidence that running is a wonderful brain Rx, it increases some of the brain's "fertilizer chemicals" such as brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) and the production of new cells.

I can use all the cells I can lay my hands on.

I particularly enjoy how Dr. Lambert describes her two groups of rats. The first she called "worker" rats and the second "trust-fund rats." As you might expect, the first group had to literally jump through hoops and press levers to get their food. The worker rats had their food buried and seemed pleased at their ability to discover it daily. The other group had food delivered on a silver rat tray.

Now the kicker came when the rats had to solve other problems. The worker rats, having gained confidence with their daily efforts, persisted and succeeded at a rate well above the privileged rats. The theory here being that they knew the value of hard work. Folks, there is a physical reward and a moral to be learned here.

Other conditions documented to have positive impacts on stress include close contact with those you admire and trust, beloved pets, kids and "desirable social contacts." Such activities can release oxytocin (a neuropeptide) in the brain to perform a sort of self-medicated calmness.

So contact a trusted friend, a dog, put a child in a stroller and go for a run or walk in nature. If you find such a prescription...thank a rat.

**TIM LANE** is a nationally-recognized authority on public health and physical activity. He is past president of the Iowa Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

### The LAB RAT CHRONICLES



A Neuroscientist Reveals  
Life Lessons from the Planet's  
Most Successful Mammals

KELLY LAMBERT, PhD

### But Why?

Helping adults answer  
children's nature questions

CINDY, 8, IN COLUMBUS JUNCTION, ASKS:

### Why Do Ladybugs Have Spots?



For starters, ladybugs are not true bugs but rather beetles. True bugs have piercing and sucking mouthparts, thus, most entomologists call them lady beetles. They also believe the spots, along with the bright body colors, ward off predators. Ladybugs are not poisonous to humans, but they can have toxic effects on some animals. Some even secrete a foul smelling odor to scare off potential predators. The color combination of black and red or orange is called aposematic coloration and is a natural signal that "I taste bad."

Spots and other markings do have a clear-cut meaning behind them—they help identify the species. The seven-spotted ladybug has—you guessed it—seven spots. That's important given Iowa has as many as 100 native ladybug species. The one most encounter, however, is the multicolored Asian ladybeetle, which emits a foul substance when disturbed.



HALF DAY ON \$50 **Together**

# THE SOUNDS OF CEDAR ROCK

Join the Friends of Cedar Rock for a concert with music written and played by Iowa artists



There is no place in the state park system like Cedar Rock—the 1950s summer home along the banks of the Wapsipinicon River designed by the master—Frank Lloyd Wright. Visitors from across the nation stroll here to view his architectural genius. And this fall is a unique opportunity to hear the piano (selected by Wright himself) play while soaking in the sounds of talented musical works composed and performed by Iowans. And it all takes place in the famed Garden Room.

"It looks like the house grew from the site," says park manager Kathryn Hund. The Garden Room has three walls made of glass with skylights above in the concrete ceiling. "Skylights allow light to come in like you are in a forest," she says. The massive concrete roof overhangs the windows to create soft, indirect light. Grape vines visually soften the edges of the house. "For the performance, guests can listen to live music and see the light transition from afternoon to evening outside through the glass walls and inside—a unique opportunity."

The featured work is James Romig's "Still," a solo piano work inspired by the art of Clyfford Still, performed by Ashlee Mack. Other featured composers include Shawn Crouch, Elaine Erickson, Ben Hippen, Denise Knaack, Robert Martin, Jerry Owen, Ray Songayllo, David Vayo, Randy Wells, Jonathan Wilson and Alec Wood.

The Iowa Composers Forum organizes the event of solo instrumental and vocal music by Iowa composers held at three historically significant locations. Three concerts will be presented: on Thursday, Oct. 4 at the Porter House Museum in Decorah (7:30 p.m. \$14), Saturday, Oct. 6 at Cedar Rock, The Walter House, in Quasqueton (5 p.m. \$25); and Sunday, Oct. 7 at Montauk Historic Site in Clermont (3 p.m., free will donation). Tickets are available at the door for each performance.

Seating at the Oct. 6 performance at Cedar Rock is limited to about 22 attendees. Concert tickets are \$25 and may be purchased at the door. Reservations are strongly recommended; contact Katie Hund at [kathryn.hund@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:kathryn.hund@dnr.iowa.gov) or call the park office at 319-934-3572.

## An Afternoon With Frank Lloyd Wright Lecture Symposium

The Friends of Cedar Rock invite you to their annual Afternoon with Frank Lloyd Wright Lecture Symposium. This year features guest speakers Roy Behrens and Doug Carr.

Roy Behrens, a professor of graphic arts at the University of Northern Iowa, will present "Sitting Down with Frank Lloyd Wright" to highlight the famed architect's furniture designs. Doug Carr, a retired photographer for the Illinois State Museum, will present, "An Early Frank Lloyd Wright Masterpiece, the Dana-Thomas House, Springfield, IL."

For those interested in touring the Cedar Rock home, call the park to arrange a tour reservation prior to the 1 p.m. lecture. Plan on one hour for the tour.

The decade-long annual lecture series is recorded on DVDs to document oral histories and experiences of Wright in Iowa and surrounding areas. Past lecturers include relatives of Frank Lloyd Wright or homeowners of his houses. DVDs are for sale at the park gift shop for \$7.

The event runs from 1 to 4 p.m. at the American Legion Hall in downtown Quasqueton at 101 Water Street. A \$10 admission at the door helps offset expenses. Refreshments provided. For more details contact the park at (319) 934-3572.

[cedar\\_rock@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:cedar_rock@dnr.iowa.gov) or [visitfriendsofcedarrock.org](http://visitfriendsofcedarrock.org)





# Strumming by the Lake

## 9th Annual Honey Creek Resort Bluegrass Festival

Get ready for some guitar strumming, banjo plucking and fiddling at the 9th Annual Bluegrass Festival held at Honey Creek Resort State Park Oct. 25-27. The event, sponsored by the Bluegrass Music Association of Iowa, features six groups from five states to keep audiences toe-tapping for three days. The event has workshops for kids and adults to help hone musical skills and keep bluegrass roots running deep.

Husband-wife duo, Quillan and Kim Roe have a self-described "good-time, old-time hillbilly band" from tiny Kirkwood Hollow, Minn.





## ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

- **Lori King and Junction 63** is an award-winning band from southern Iowa and Missouri. Lori and Joe King both performed with the long running group Bluegrass Addiction. They perform original material plus favorite covers. Their most recent album, "Family Tree," was named the 2017 Bluegrass Music Association of Iowa and SPBGMA Midwest Album of the Year.
- **Kati Penn & NewTown** features five artists with a vast array of acoustic music styling. Based out of Lexington, Ky., NewTown accurately cites local musical inspirations. Together, the band blends their vastly different musical influences to deliver a sound of their own.
- **Recording artists, the Roe Family Singers**, are a "good-time, old-time hillbilly band" from tiny Kirkwood Hollow, Minn. Led by wife and husband Kim and Quillan Roe, the band marries old-time sounds from barn-dances, fiddle pulls and county fairs with the rock and roll passion of youth. The band and family of fans have been regularly filling Minneapolis' 331 Club every Monday night since 2005.
- **The Bluegrass Blondies** from Ottumwa are a five-piece family band playing together since 2008. They were chosen 2017 Bluegrass Entertainers of the Year and member Scott Amos as Banjo Player of the Year by the Bluegrass Music Association of Iowa.
- **That Dalton Gang** is a versatile group of young musicians from Missouri. The group centers around the Dalton sisters, Cheyenne, 17, and Maddie, 14, playing twin fiddles and mandolin with astounding professionalism. The sibling harmony

vocals will pull you right to the center of every song along with band members on banjo, bass and guitar.

- **Illinois Rail** is a high energy bluegrass/gospel band from central Illinois. The band offers award winning banjo picking, spirited mandolin and dobro, rock solid flat picking and bass and exceptional vocals.

## LODGING

Special hotel pricing available only by calling Honey Creek Resort State Park at **641-724-1450** (ask for the bluegrass rate). Limited rooms available.

## SCHEDULE

**Thursday, Oct. 25;** 7 p.m. gospel

**Friday, Oct. 26;** workshops and youth schools; music begins 6.30 p.m.

**Saturday, Oct. 27;** open stage noon to 1 p.m., show 1 p.m., open stage 6-6.30 p.m. and show at 6.30 p.m.

Tickets		Advance Sales (by Sept. 15)	Regular Pricing
Premium seating:	3-day pass	\$50	\$55
	2-day pass	\$45	\$50
General seating:	3-day pass	\$45	\$50
	2-day pass	\$35	\$40
Thursday evening:		\$15	\$20
Friday evening:		\$15	\$20
Saturday afternoon & evening		\$20	\$25
Saturday evening		\$15	\$20

Children 12 and under are free, ages 13-16 are \$5 per day. Order tickets and find details at [iowabluegrassmusic.com](http://iowabluegrassmusic.com)

# 2nd Annual Oktoberfest Beer Festival at Honey Creek Resort

**Saturday, Sept. 22**

**Honey Creek Resort, 12633 Resort Drive, Moravia**

Enjoy beer tastings from a dozen-plus Iowa and regional craft breweries, nosh on German food and enjoy live festive music by the Polka Police—a fun Omaha based duo playing spoofs of popular songs (Think Weird Al Yankovic with an accordion). It all happens 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the beer garden, culminating in the Sam Adams Stein Hoisting Competition.

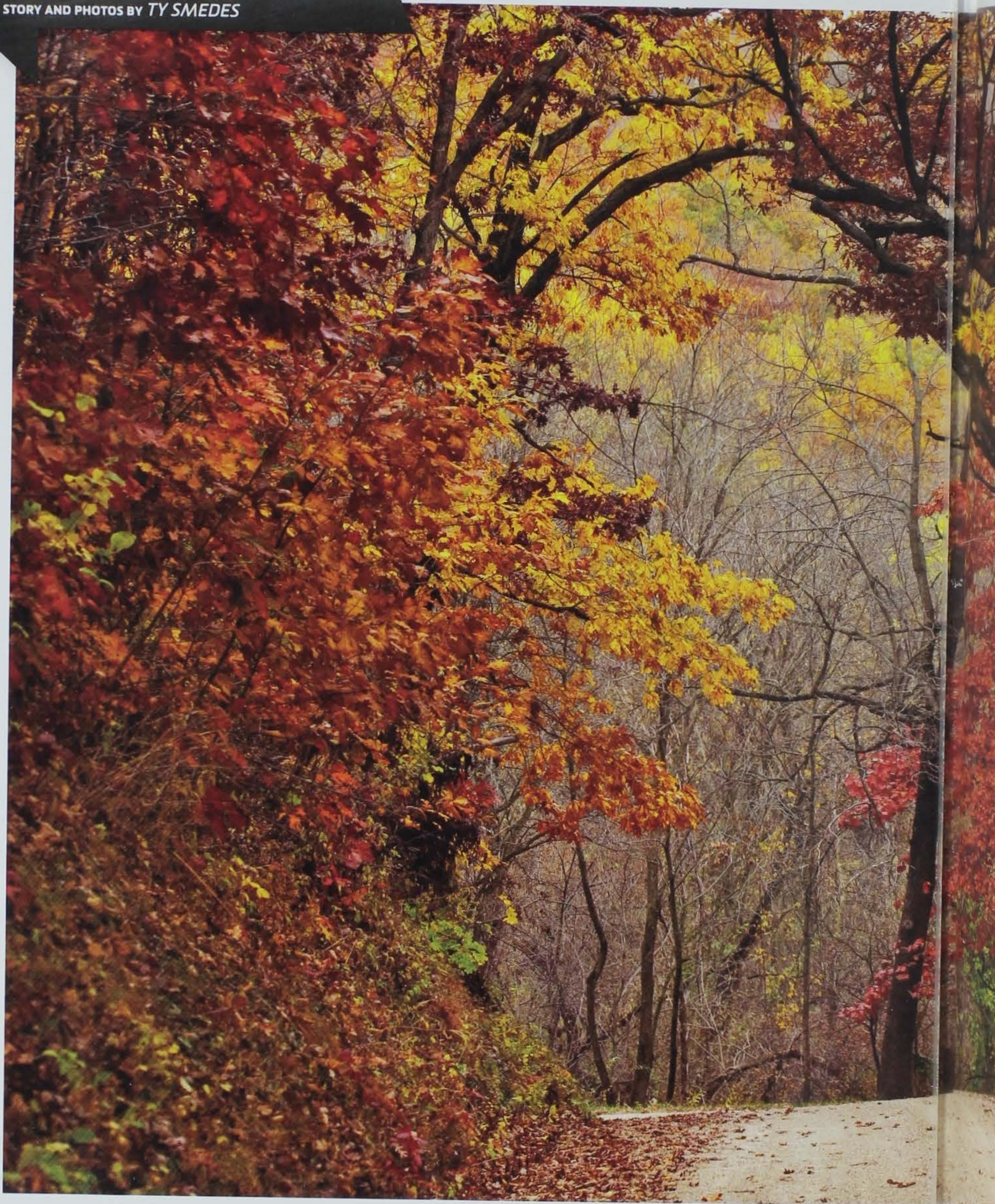
Nearly 15 breweries include Albia Brewing (Albia), Confluence (Des Moines), Green Tree (Le Clair), No Coast (Oskaloosa) and more. Price includes souvenir tasting glass and unlimited tastings. For room rates, tickets and event details, visit [honeycreekresort.com](http://honeycreekresort.com). Cost **\$35 advance or \$40 at door**.





# Lost In Iowa

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES







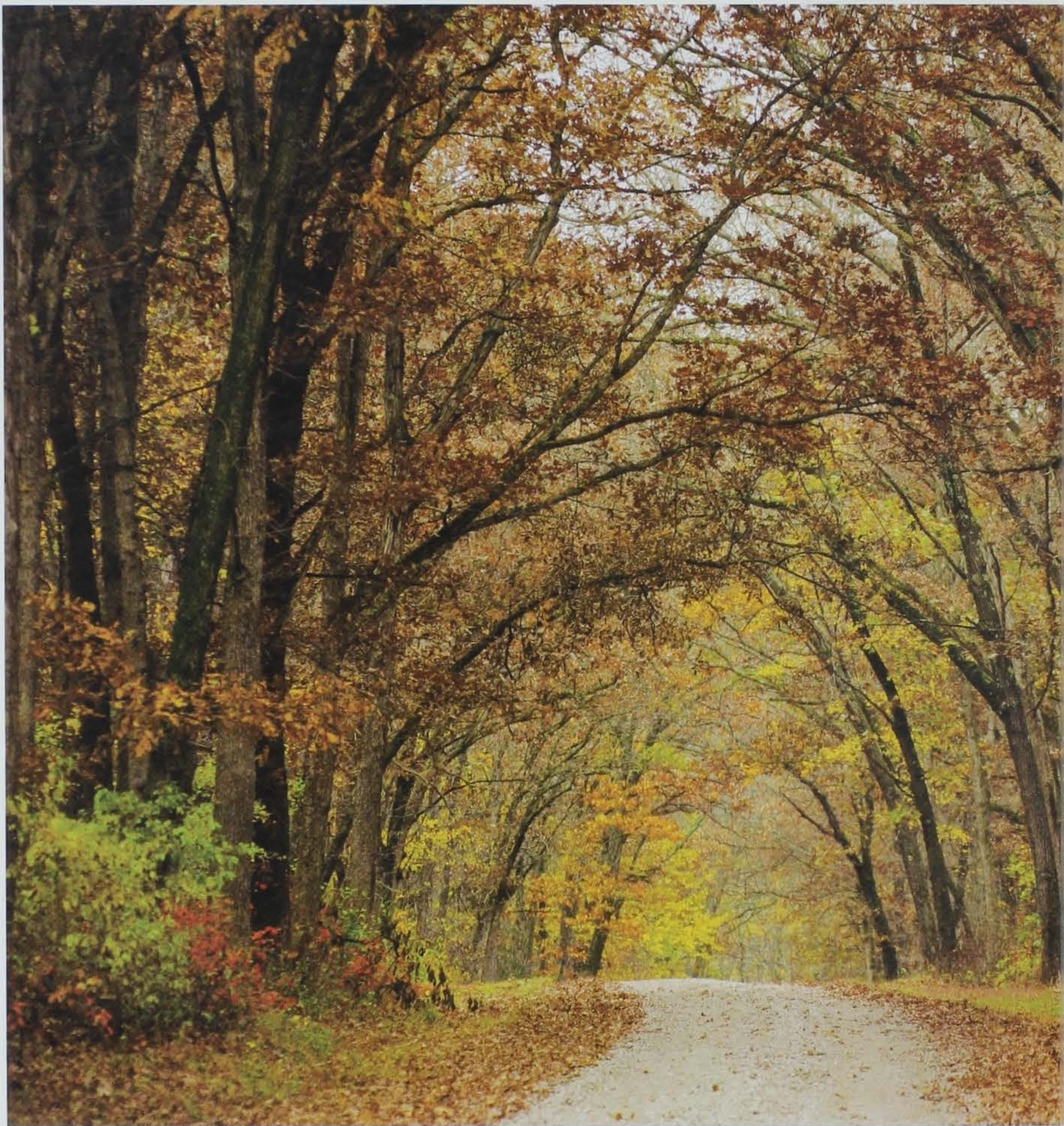
# Shimek State Forest

## Iowa's Holdout for Fall Color

After colors fade farther north, warm hues peak deep in southeast Iowa, where you can saddle-up to explore dozens of miles of trails under canopies of gold, red and yellow.



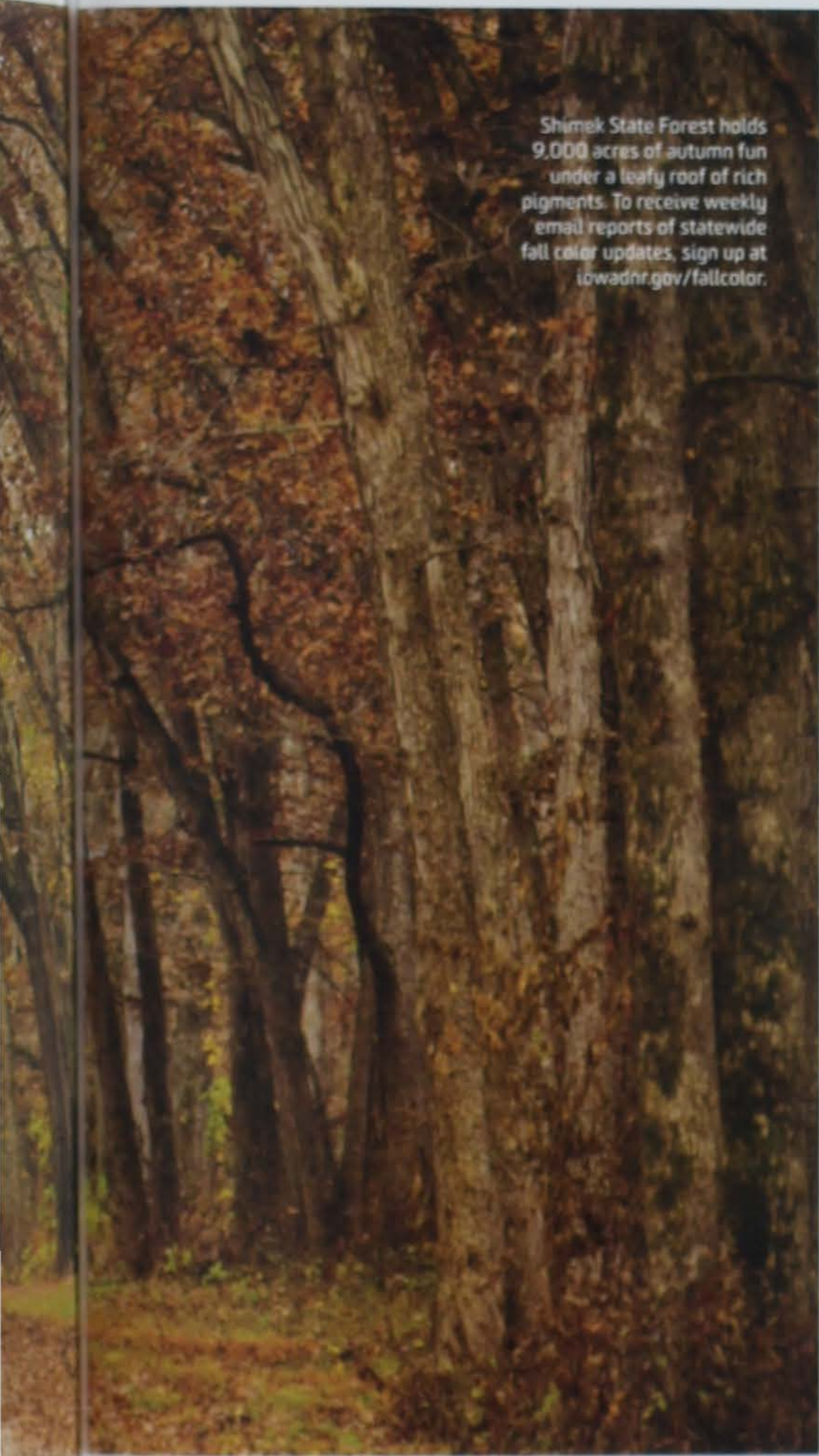
# Lost In Iowa



I'm hiking one of the trails in Shimek's Farmington Unit, and it's one of those beautiful sunny days in early October when the air is cool and dry and the fall color is simply intoxicating. It's a special time of year—fleeting short-sleeve days during this transitional season. In the distance, a migrating Eastern bluebird is calling as he makes his way south along timber's edge, his royal blue shining in the sun. The hearty song of a Carolina

wren rings loud and clear from atop the opposite ridge. Pausing to lean against a tree and enjoy forested wildness before me, a rustle of leaves and movement along the top of an adjoining ridge catch my attention. A big white-tailed buck muscles up to the crest of the hill and warily surveys his domain. Framed against a clear, deep blue sky, his massive head and shoulders add a sense of majesty to his presence. As he slowly turns and melts





Shimek State Forest holds 9,000 acres of autumn fun under a leafy roof of rich pigments. To receive weekly email reports of statewide fall color updates, sign up at [iowadnr.gov/fallcolor](http://iowadnr.gov/fallcolor).



back over the ridge, I wonder where he is headed. The image emblazoned on my memory will be even more special than the quickly taken photo I was lucky to get.

Shimek State Forest is named for the late Dr. Bohumil Shimek, an Iowa naturalist, University of Iowa professor and an early conservationist. In the 1930s, Shimek convinced state government to acquire forest lands in Lee and Van Buren counties, along with several

abandoned, worn out farms. Four of the five Shimek units are located near Farmington (find the headquarters one mile northeast of town, on county road J56). The fifth unit is near Keosauqua. The Lick Creek Unit was named for the small stream that flows through it. Others are near Donnellson and Croton. The latter is made of three separate parcels acquired in 1964 from the U.S. Forest Service.



# Lost In Iowa

## Plan on Horsing Around

Spring through fall, find Karry Yaley nearly every glorious weekend on her horse riding 25 miles of the Lick Creek Unit's equestrian trails.

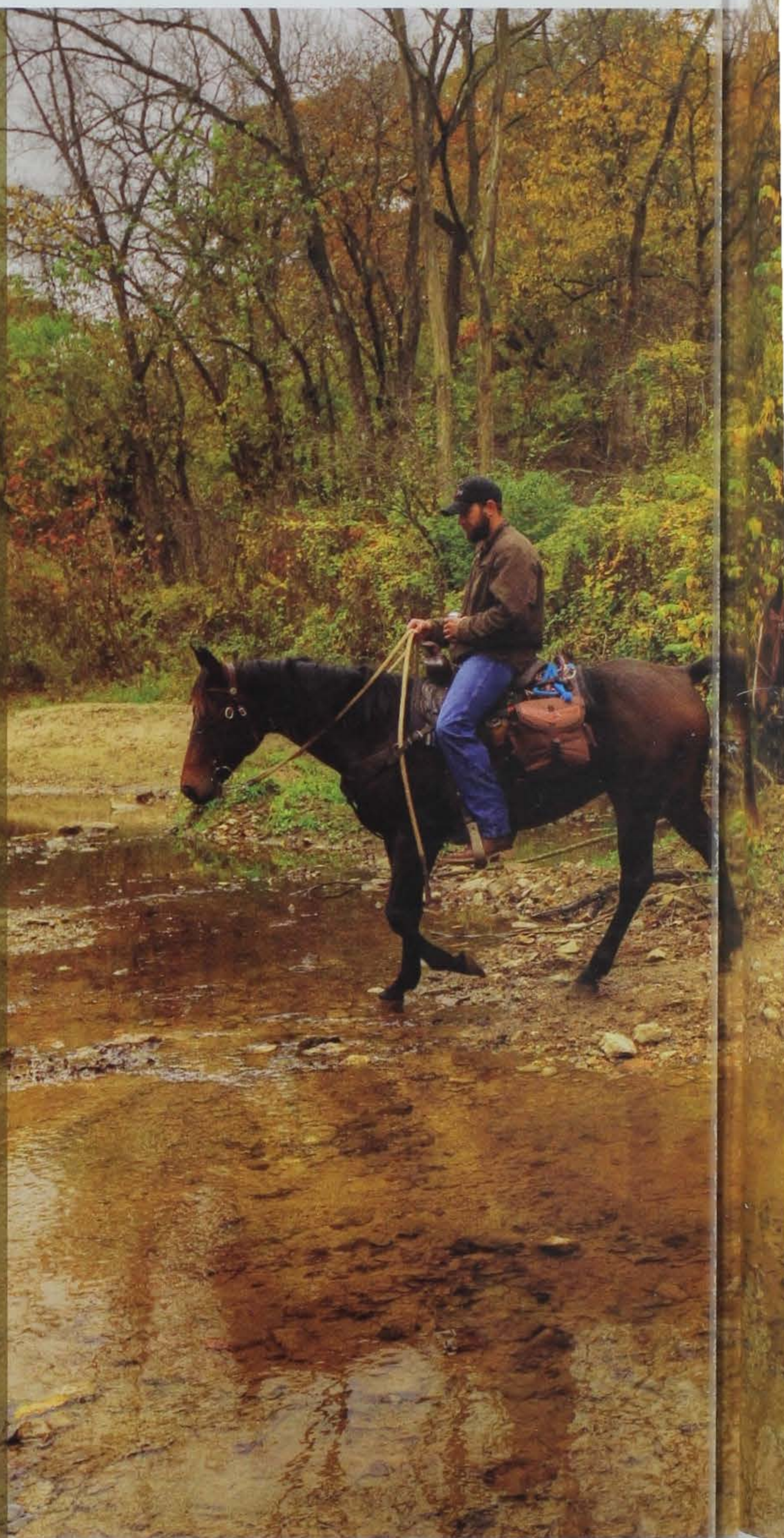
"I've bred and raised quarter horses my whole life," says Yaley, who makes her first visit early May, around Mother's Day weekend, and continues visiting each weekend until it snows or is too cold to ride.

"It's a great park and the DNR treats us really well. I like riding in spring because it's the beginning of the season, but fall is my favorite time because the colors are so beautiful," she says. "We especially enjoy camping at Shimek because we can leave camp and are right on the trails."

Horseback riding at the forest is also tradition for Van Buren County Sheriff Dan Tedrow and his family, who have been coming since the late 1980s. They bring several horses and love riding in the Lick Creek Unit.

"Camping with friends, we ride horses, sit around the campfire, eat camp food, stay all night and have a real good time," he says. "Fall is probably my favorite," although he also rides spring and summer.

"One of our fondest remembrances is from the 1990s when a bunch of us were camping in the lower campground. One moon-lit night, a group of eight or 10 of us took off and rode through the park at night. My daughter was only 8 or 10 then, but she remembers laying down and hugging the neck of her horse as we came up through the timber. It was moon-lit and was really pretty. As we got closer to camp we did a little bit of running. We just have a lot of good family memories there and it's a great park. We travel around the state a lot, and it's the best park I've found in Iowa."





### Did You Know?

Just 80-some years ago, early conservationist Bohumil Shimek helped acquire forest lands in Lee and Van Buren counties along with abandoned farms depleted from over a century of farming. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps began planting the oak-hickory woods patched in with red, white and jack pines that lend an air of magic to the place. Today's state forest provides lumber, recreation and habitat from its five separate units—Keosauqua, Donnellson, Farmington, Croton and Lick Creek.





# Lost In Iowa

## Hunt A Wooded Vastness Full of Turkey and Deer

"Shimek is open to public hunting and it is such a large area that it does allow for a large group of people to hunt it," says DNR Wildlife Biologist Andy Robbins. "If you are willing to put in the effort, and hike back in, there's a lot of opportunity there. What makes it a good area is its size, and it's on the radar for non-residents as a destination."

Robbins and Lee County conservation officer Ben Schlader are encouraged by the harvest estimates for deer and turkey. Both harvests have been stable to slightly increasing the last couple years. Three years ago, an Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) outbreak hit the herd hard. The good news is these short-term outbreaks are cyclical, generally the worst during drought conditions, and surviving deer build a tolerance that is passed on to offspring. Barring another round of EHD, the deer population seems to be recovering from the last outbreak.

Like deer, turkey harvest estimates have remained stable the past five years, according to wildlife biologist Jim Coffey. Shimek was one of the initial wild turkey reintroduction sites in the mid-1960s, and numbers quickly expanded.

Officer Schlader, who routinely checks hunters, said he has gradually seen more success by deer and turkey hunters, especially the last two years.

## Practicing Sustainable Forest Management

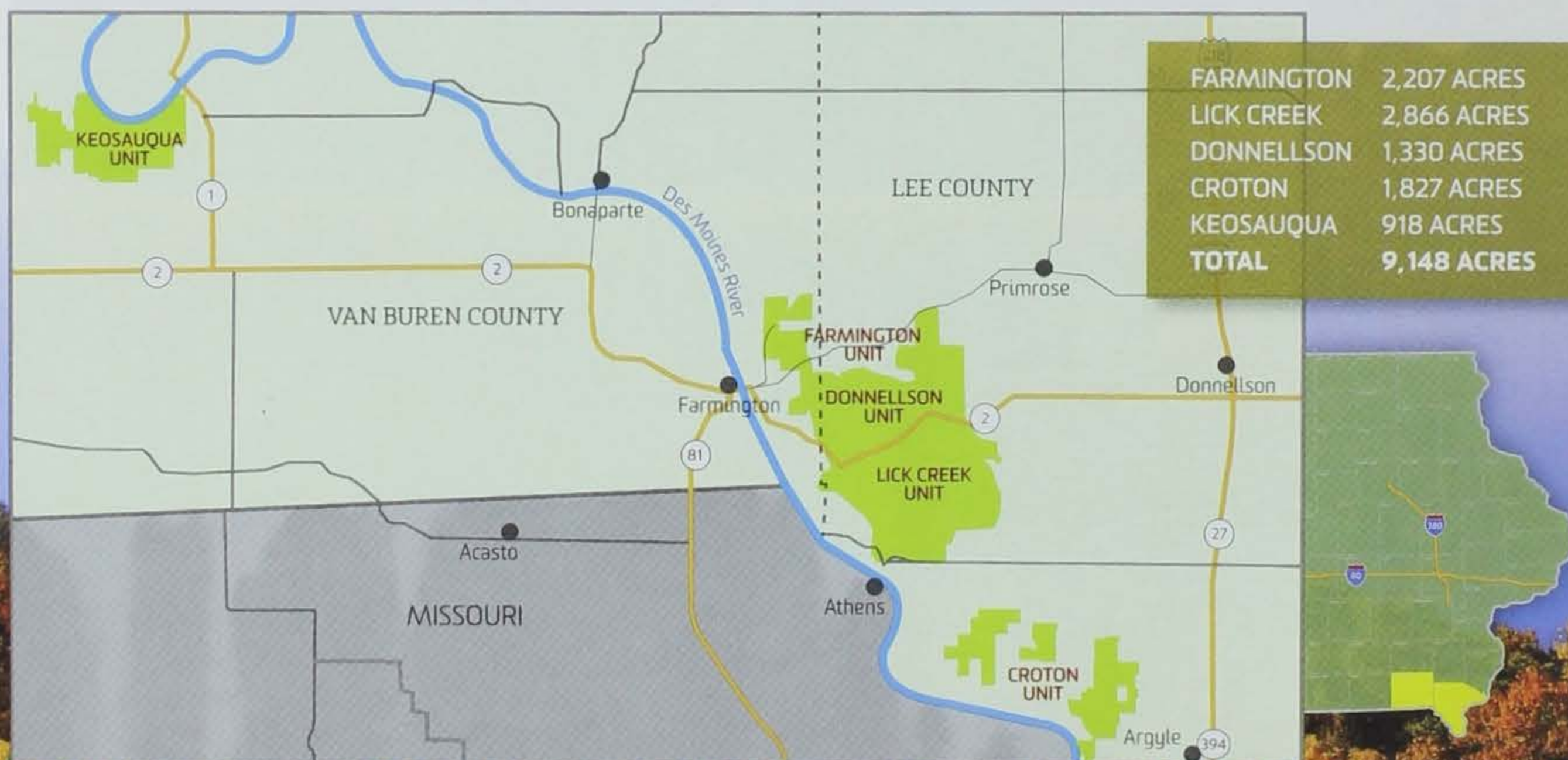
"Management of a park holds recreation as its number one priority, but our number one objective at Shimek is forest management with wildlife and recreation management secondary," explains DNR forester John Byrd.

He says by the early 1900s, the state was drastically overharvested. Since statehood in 1846, trees were used for railroad ties, fence posts and to fuel river boat and train boilers. The state's 10,000 miles of rail lines needed 800 trees (six acres of oaks) to make ties for every mile of track. And they needed to be replaced every five to seven years.

It was then that conservationists created state forests.

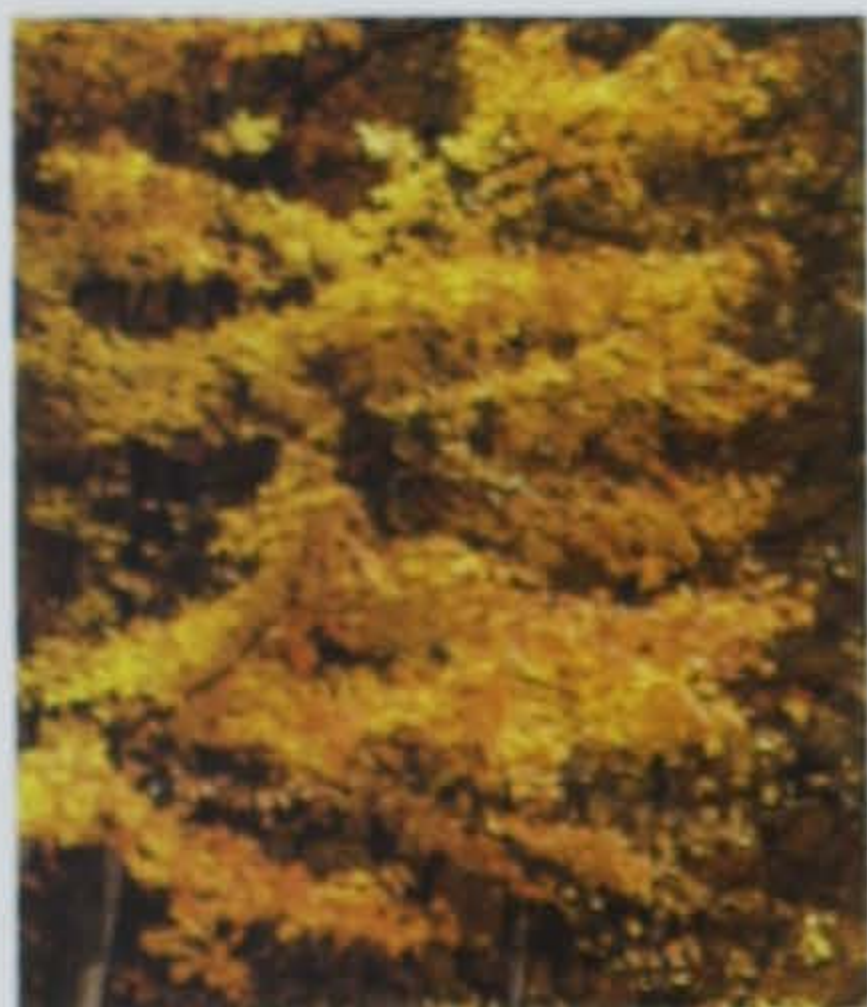
"We utilize a sustainable management plan, and our main goal is to maintain the oak component. Hard maple, hickory and elm are also harvested. Our annual harvest is 65 acres, and the rotation age of our oak resource is about 120 years. So by the time we harvest the last 65 acres, the

## EXPLORE THE 5 UNITS OF SHIMEK STATE FOREST.





Forester John Byrd has good reason to be proud of this massive contiguous forest that he and his staff tend using controlled burns, plus sustainable timber harvesting. You'll most likely be alone on its 25 miles of hiking trails and 27 miles of horse and multipurpose trails. Four primitive campgrounds provide shelter during nights alive with primal sound. **RIGHT:** Primarily an evening hunter, this fellow is likely headed for a place to bed down for the day. **BOTTOM:** Bobcats are plentiful across the southern counties, including Shimek Forest. They often use the same game trails as deer.





very first 65 acres will be ready to re-harvest, 120 years later. We could harvest 65 acres—every year for eternity.”

“We can practice what I call ‘real forestry’ at Shimek, which means I can go by the book with how you regenerate oak, as opposed to working with a private owner who may say ‘I really don’t want to do that.’”

Byrd says shelterwood management is used—the rule is you take the worst first. If a beautiful white oak is surrounded by a gnarly elm, deformed hickory or undesirable species like black or honey locust, those trees are removed. Then that white oak can naturally seed in the open areas where the poorer trees were located.

“We remove from 40 to 60 percent of the canopy in shelterwood forestry. This allows you to get a jump-start

on natural regeneration. The bottom 9 feet of trunk is usually the most valuable part, used for barrel staves, veneer and railroad ties. As you move up the tree you get into low-grade lumber, and eventually the higher wood is used for pallets.”

According to some, the forests hold more than trees. Last summer and fall there were Big Foot hunters in the campground. They left notes letting Byrd know they heard trees snapping and thought they were trying to imitate humans. Convinced they just didn’t have the evidence yet, they visited several times and are sure Big Foot was near the campground.

“Some of the locals have joked about perhaps making Shimek the next Big Foot destination,” Byrd says. 🐾



#### **Croton—Iowa's Civil War Skirmish Site**

Croton, three miles southeast of Farmington, owns the distinction of being among the northern-most battlegrounds of the Civil War when Iowa's border was threatened by Missouri rebels. One such unorganized group found out about a river shipment of guns to Union troops in Iowa. On Aug. 5, 1861, about 2,000 rebel forces attacked Athens, Mo., just across the Des Moines River, where a Union recruiting station had been set up. If successful, they hoped to cross the river into Iowa and capture the guns. However, 333

Missouri Unionists defended the town with Iowa soldiers taking long range shots in support from our riverbanks.

Armed with three small cannons, the poorly trained rebels lobbed a few stray cannon balls across the river into Croton. Although outnumbered, the Union troop's Springfield rifles and better training carried the day against the disorganized, squirrel gun-toting rebels. Three Union troops were killed while rebel losses tallied 31 or more killed and wounded, 20 captured, plus losses of 450 saddled horses, hundreds of arms and a wagon of knives.





Bitternut Lake in the Farmington Unit has a small campground with eight sites. It is one of four forest lakes stocked with bass, bluegill and channel cat.

### Camping, Fishing and Hiking

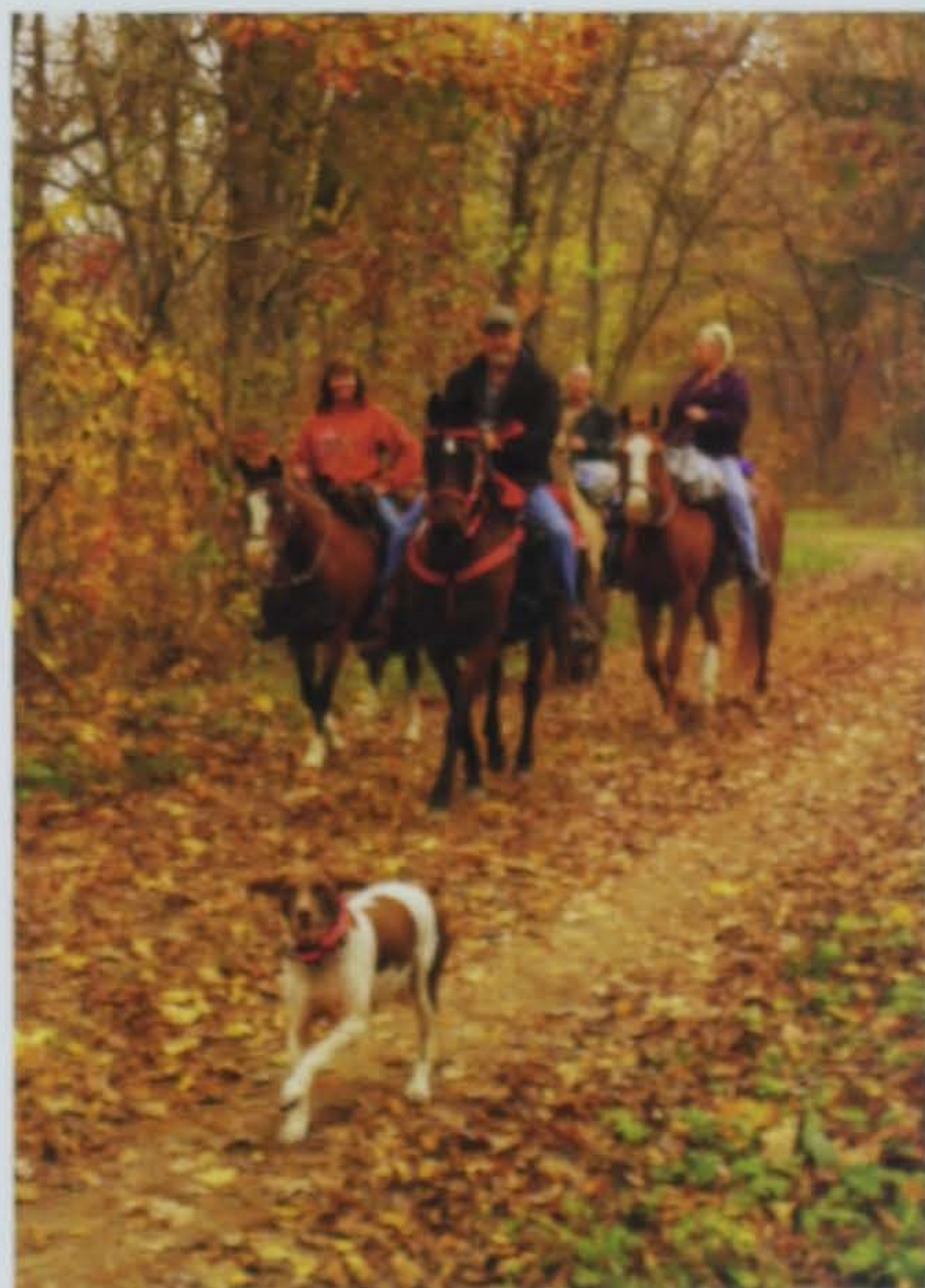
From hiking oak-hickory ridge tops or fishing ponds found in the moist bottomlands studded with elms, cottonwoods, walnut and hackberry, there are many nooks and crannies to explore among forested ravines and hills. The Keosauqua Unit alone, offers nearly eight miles of hiking trails.

Visitors can also find native prairie plants such as big and little bluestem, Indian grass, prairie cordgrass and forbs such as purple coneflower, round-headed bush clover and lead plant.

The Lick Creek Unit is an equestrian camper's dream, with all 37 sites in two campgrounds dedicated to horse lovers. Book in advance through the park reservation system, although half the campsites are available for self-registration on a first-come first-serve basis. The 25 miles of equestrian trails, including one gravel all-weather trail, more than satisfies riding passions. At the end of the day, hitch the horse to a shaded rail, treat it to a cool bucket of water and settle in for a night around the campfire. A day-use area, next to the upper equestrian campground, is provided for those not camping.

For even more serenity, check out Farmington Unit's Bitternut Lake campground, where eight first-come, first-served tent-only campsites guarantee peace and solitude. The Donnellson Unit's White Oak campground is just a touch bigger, with 11 sites available on a first-come first-serve basis. A boat ramp and walk-in campsite are located at Shagbark Lake. It also has a nature trail, two picnic areas and six miles of hiking trails.

For avid anglers, four lakes in the Farmington and Donnellson units are stocked with bass, channel catfish and panfish.








# Madison County Miser

STORY AND PHOTOS BY *LIZ JACAVINO*

To raise awareness, one hunter shares the brutal reality of a nearly fatal fall from a treestand in hopes his story will save lives and spare others agony.





X-ray image of Jeff Newman post-surgery. Two four-inch screws and a steel plate repaired a broken pelvis after tragedy struck.

"I fell out of a treestand. I hurt really bad," he croaked to the emergency dispatcher. "I know that I can't get out of here."





Jeff Newman nearly a year after his fall.

A few yards down the gravel road from Roberts Cemetery near Winterset, Jeff Newman shows me his 40 acres of heaven. The murky Middle River winds through the land as a white cabbage moth dances on the wind.

Even though we are smack in the middle of Iowa, I forget that we are steps away from cornfields and round hay bales. This land grows ruggedly wild. A wood duck nesting box, a long rope pulley system and a few treestands for hunting is the only evidence of human presence in the area.

About 600 yards from where we stood hung the remnants of a hunt-gone-awry from last November.

Newman started the morning of Nov. 5 early. He woke up at 4:30 a.m. and was out the door by 5 a.m. The air cooled with the promise of winter. He crossed the Middle River with the sun still snuffed out. His flashlight beamed him forward until he arrived at the stand that consumed his mind that morning. So far, Newman's hunting season consisted of a few hunting trips out of state. That day was his first hunt in Iowa of the season. Excited and forgetful, he scrambled up his steps. He landed on the stand and bent down to clear off the leaves that had accumulated. He stood back up. Seconds later he was hanging by the arms of his stand.

Then he dropped 23 feet.

"Down I went. Literally like a clown in a dunk tank," says Newman, reminiscing the fall.

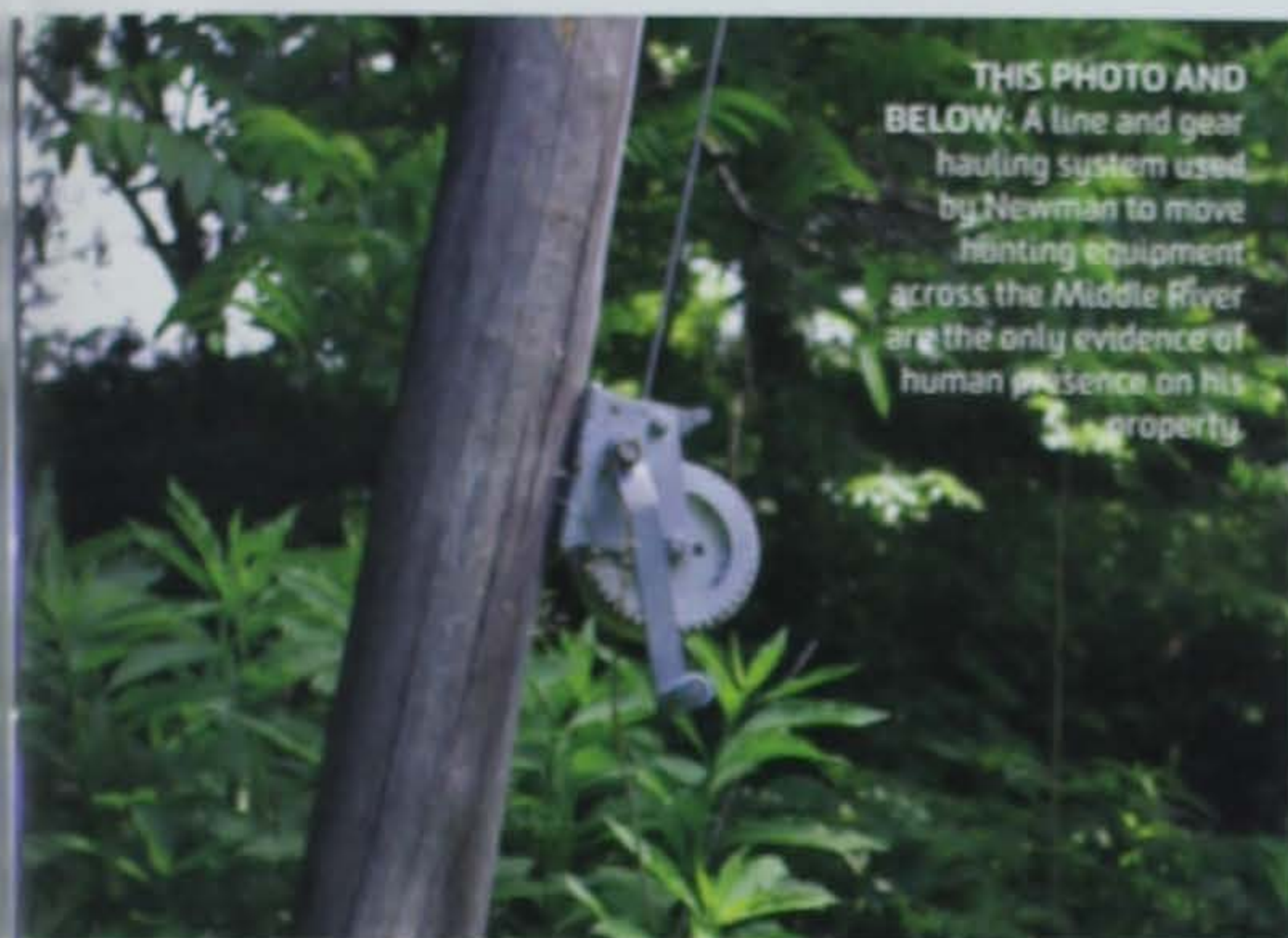
His right leg broke his fall, hitting the ground with brute force. His face crashed into his knee, knocking him unconscious. After about 10 minutes, Newman regained consciousness and felt his body ache in pain.

"I knew when I woke up that I was hurt," he says. "I got

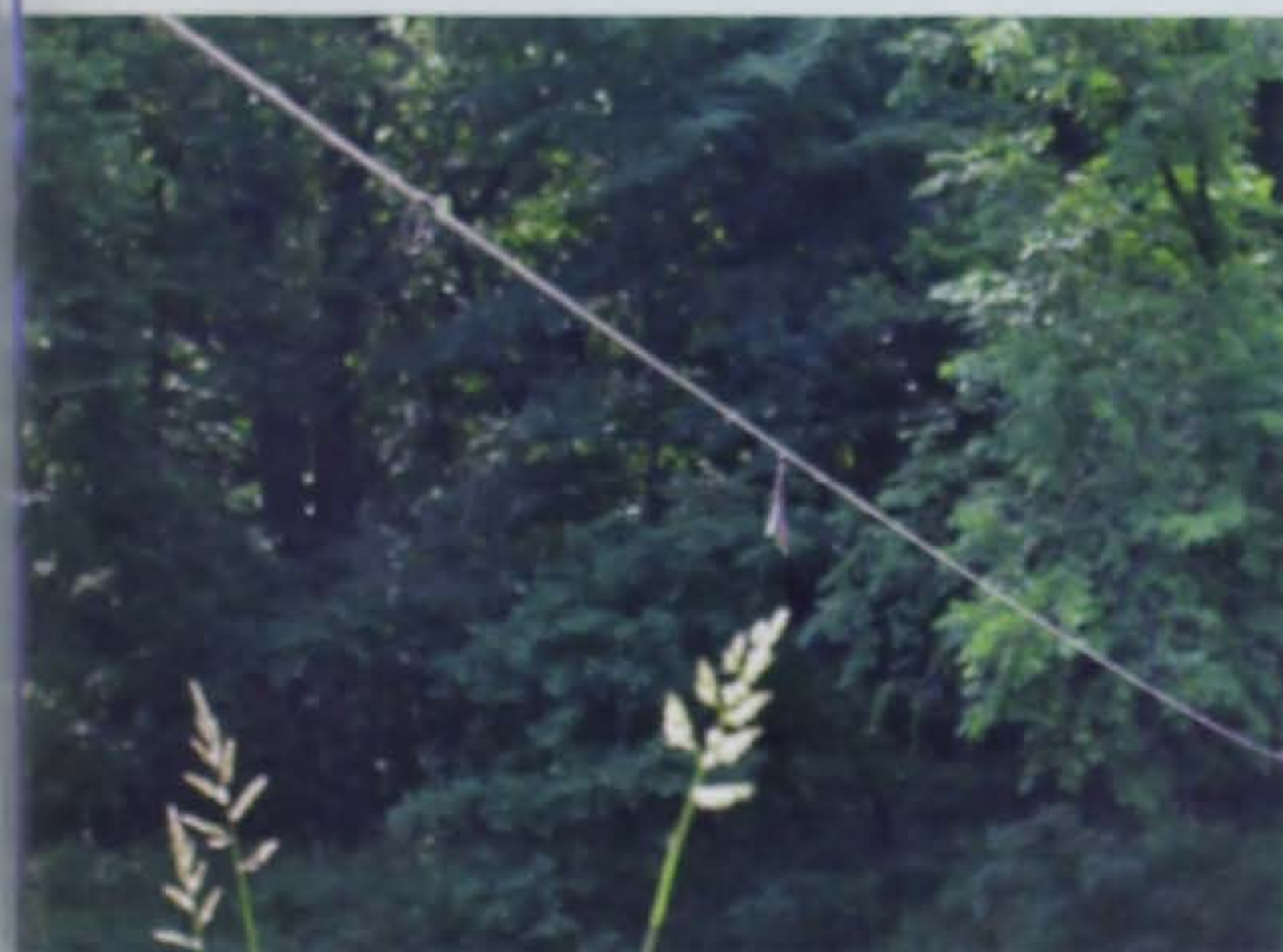


Newman's broken treestand still hangs from the tree of last November's accident.





**THIS PHOTO AND BELOW:** A line and gear hauling system used by Newman to move hunting equipment across the Middle River are the only evidence of human presence on his property.



**The rotted ratchet straps that snapped during Newman's hunt hang menacingly as photographed after the accident last fall.**

pain; that's all I knew."

In an attempt to relieve some of the pain, Newman decided to flip onto his stomach. "Moving like molasses," he rolled over and worked his hand to his phone. He turned on his phone, not knowing if he'd reach anyone.

"I couldn't believe it. I had two bars of service, lying face down in the dirt in the middle of nowhere," he recalls. "My eyes must have got big like, 'Oh my God.'"

He tried to call his wife, Debbie, but after two attempts he knew he needed to dial 911.

"I fell out of a treestand. I hurt really bad," he croaked to the emergency dispatcher. "I know that I can't get out of here." Excruciating pain from the fall rendered Newman immobile, but he knew pain was better than no pain.

"Thank God I (had) pain," he says. "It was such a relief even though I was hurting really bad."

The emergency operator agreed. He was lucky to have pain. It meant he still had feeling in his legs.

The emergency operator dispatched first responders.

Newman laid on his stomach waiting, not sure what to expect.

"If I'm gonna die, I'm going to die happy," he recalls thinking.

He pulled out a cigarette and smoked. If he died, Newman says he would be happy to die there. This was his little slice of heaven.

About 35 minutes later, the emergency dispatcher told Newman the first responders were close by. He could hardly speak, but he tried to yell out. He wheezed "over here." Responders found him lying face down.

The first responders needed to move him out quickly. A fall from that height can be fatal. They wanted to place him on a spinal board. When one of the responders told Newman they'd put him on his back, he pleaded for them not to.

"I begged them. 'Please let me lay face down; please, please, please!'" Newman recalls.

But due to gear limitations, he needed to lie on his back on the spinal board while the first responders carried him out. The pain was so excruciating, he blacked out





Julius, Newman's dog, consoles him after the accident that would keep him bed-ridden for a month. In addition to a broken pelvis, broken vertebrae required him to wear a back brace for two months.

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throughout the rescue.

About six to eight first responders traversed across the uneven, slippery and muddy terrain to find Newman. Steep hills and the cold morning air made rescuing him difficult. To add to it, they needed to cross a 12-foot deep river bank.

Adam Endres, one of the EMTs that helped rescue Newman, vividly remembers the details of that day.

Endres described the extraction as cold, wet and exhausting. The hills were steep and the valleys low. Even with multiple responders, the rescue took a lengthy time.

"It was slippery climbing up the hills," remembers Endres. "We had to keep stopping to rest our arms."

The most difficult part came when they needed to cross the Middle River.

"It was challenging. Our boots and bodies were wet from wading in the river," Endres says. "We had to figure out a safe way to get him over that river."

Endres and the others formed an assembly-like line through the river, four of the rescuers held the corners, handing the spinal board off to the two ahead. Shuffling through the water, the two at the back moved toward to the head of the line, ready for the next catch.

When they emerged from the woods, Debbie, his son and other first responders awaited them. They hitched Newman to the tailgate of a truck and drove him to the ambulance. Because of the narrow gravel roads, the ambulance waited a short distance away.

"Every single bump killed me," he sighs.

They drove Newman to Madison County Memorial Hospital. There they discovered he was internally bleeding and decided to airlift him to Mercy Medical Center in Des Moines. At Mercy, doctors learned the severity of his injuries. Along with internal bleeding, his pelvis was broken in half and sat askew with multiple ripped arteries around his pelvis. His extensive injuries prompted immediate surgery, hoping to stop the bleeding.

"From what they (told) me, I was very close to bleeding to death," he says. "I should not be alive today."

After some "medical super glue" and helicoils to reattach his arteries and stop the bleeding, Newman returned from his first surgery. The next day, he went into a five-hour

surgery to stabilize his pelvis. For a week, he laid in the critical care unit recovering from surgery.

"His entire back was black. Not even black and blue, but black," Debbie says.

For the next month, Newman moved through different hospital wards. He lay there, trapped by his own body.

"It was like being a caged animal," he recalls.

"He's usually so active and athletic," says Debbie.

Even bedridden, he tried to keep himself occupied. He started working mere days after surgery. He made phone calls and continued to work from his phone while in the hospital.

Newman's family and friends traveled from all over the country to support him. One of his brothers slept by his bed for four days straight. A few days after surgery, Newman spent his birthday lying in a hospital bed.

After a week in critical care, he moved to the orthopedic trauma wing. After a week there, he went to the rehab wing.

"It was extremely difficult," he recalls. "I couldn't stand at all. There was zero weight bearing on my legs."

Newman needed to learn to walk again. He began in a wheelchair. He practiced three to four hours a day sliding in and out of a wheelchair. During physical therapy, they discovered Newman's extensive nerve pain. He tried loads of

creams, drugs and exercises to help, but he continues to live with nerve pain today.

"When they touched my foot it felt like a bazillion needles coming up from the inside."

By the time February rolled around, Newman was still unable to walk. He missed his father's 80th birthday that month because he was immobile.

"I tried like hell to go," he says. "I says I'd crawl if I had to, (but) I couldn't even crawl."

About 10 weeks after the fall, Newman took his first steps. After another month, he transitioned to a walker, then a cane. Today he is able to walk freely and is working on walking without a limp.

"I knew it was going to get better. I didn't accept any other alternative," Debbie notes. "He wouldn't let himself be there for long."

Almost a year later, Jeff regularly attends physical therapy.



Newman met Iowa Outdoors intern Liz Jacavino at a favorite diner on the Winterset square to share his story.



His doctors consider him well advanced compared to most other people.

"I'm actually ahead of where most people are after an injury like this," says Newman. "They told me that most take over a year to (walk normally) again."

### Probability of a Fall

Newman isn't alone. Treestand accidents happen every year.

"If you hunt about 20 times throughout the season, every year for 20 years, your chances of falling are pretty high," says Jeff Barnes, DNR Recreational Safety Officer. "There's a saying. Two different types of people use treestands: those who have fallen and those who will fall."

Glen Mayhew, president of the Tree Stand Safety Awareness foundation (TSSA), agrees.

"If you haven't had a near fall yet, hunt long enough and you will," remarks Mayhew.

Mayhew also avidly hunts, but wants everyone to enjoy the outdoors safely. While working as a hunter education instructor, Mayhew asked

why so many people fall from treestands. He heard all the myths; using certain treestands creates a higher probability of falling, less experienced hunters fall more and only bow hunters fall. Mayhew looked into these statements only to find that no data backed the arguments.

"It didn't satisfy my scientific mind," says Mayhew. "So I started digging to put some science behind (it all)."

Mayhew researched treestand accidents in 10 different states from 2009 to 2014. His research broke a few tall tales. Stand type had no significant attribution to treestand falls,

middle-aged hunters account for the majority of falls, and both archery and firearm hunters count for a significant number of treestand falls.

Newman's fall is not a lone occurrence in Iowa. Three other individuals in Iowa sustained serious injuries from treestand accidents within those same 30 days.

Treestands are used by many deer hunters. Treestands allow for the hunter to be out of sight and smell from the animal. The hunter virtually does not exist to the animal. This gives one an advantage.



Jeff Newman's property on the outskirts of Winterset. The Middle River cuts through his property, which made the rescue effort even more difficult. INSET: His broken treestand hangs parallel to the tree after the ratchet straps snapped and caused his serious fall.







Newman and close friend Stan Brown hunting elk in Colorado just weeks before he fell 23 feet from his Iowa treestand.

Many treestands use ratchet straps to hold the stand against the tree. Ratchet straps can be worn out by sunlight, rotted through or chewed on by animals. Inspecting the treestand before climbing on is an easy preventative measure to ensure a safe hunt.

Newman notes that he usually brings extra straps for the treestand in case they had rotted, hunts in afternoon with full sunlight, and normally inspects the straps and stand before climbing on. He also normally hooks his harness to the tree immediately.

"It was out of the ordinary what I did that day. Totally out of the ordinary," he says.

Newman forgot to inspect the straps supporting the tree stand before he climbed up. The ratchet straps had rotted since last season, and the added weight caused them to break. He also wore a harness, but had yet to hook it onto the tree's strap.



### Treestand Safety

The Iowa DNR, TSSA and the Treestand Manufacturer's Association all share similar safety tips. The most important tip: always wear a harness. When used properly, a harness (fall arrest system) catches in midair to prevent from smacking into the ground.

Stay connected from the moment you leave the ground. Using a safety strap protects a hunter from hitting the ground if they are climbing onto or off the stand. The safety strap will prevent you from falling anything more than 12 inches.

Always have three points of contact to the tree stand while climbing on and off the ladder. Two arms and one leg or two legs and one arm will keep you in contact with the ladder.

Before going up, inspect every strap and always inspect your harness for any wear or damage. Follow the manufacturer's guide, which lays out exactly how to use the treestand and fall arrest system.

Plan your hunt and hunt your plan. Make a plan and stick to it, and make sure someone else knows the plan. The buddy system helps guarantee someone knows where you are in case something happens.

Finally, always have a rescue system. Do not hang by the harness for long. Suspension trauma can occur within five minutes after a fall. Keep legs moving and blood flowing, to prevent trapping blood in the legs.


Newman began hunting with his dad when he was 3 years old. After everything, there's no doubt he will be out hunting this season. But this year, he plans on using his new harness system that allows him to be attached from the moment he leaves the ground until he's safely back down. He says he won't let something like this happen again. 🐾





# Trout





# Fishing

## Under a Canopy of Fall Colors

STORY BY SHANNON HAFNER PHOTOS BY BRIAN BUTTON

**E**njoy the vibrant scenery and cool weather this fall, fishing for Iowa's prize trout along hundreds of gurgling miles of northeast Iowa trout streams. From easily accessible waters in state or county parks, to those found in Iowa's most wild and remote natural spaces, there are plenty of places to catch torpedo-shaped rainbow, brown and brook trout.

"It's a busy place this time of year," says Mike Steuck, Iowa DNR fisheries supervisor for interior streams. "A lot of wild fish are in these streams for anglers to test their skills."

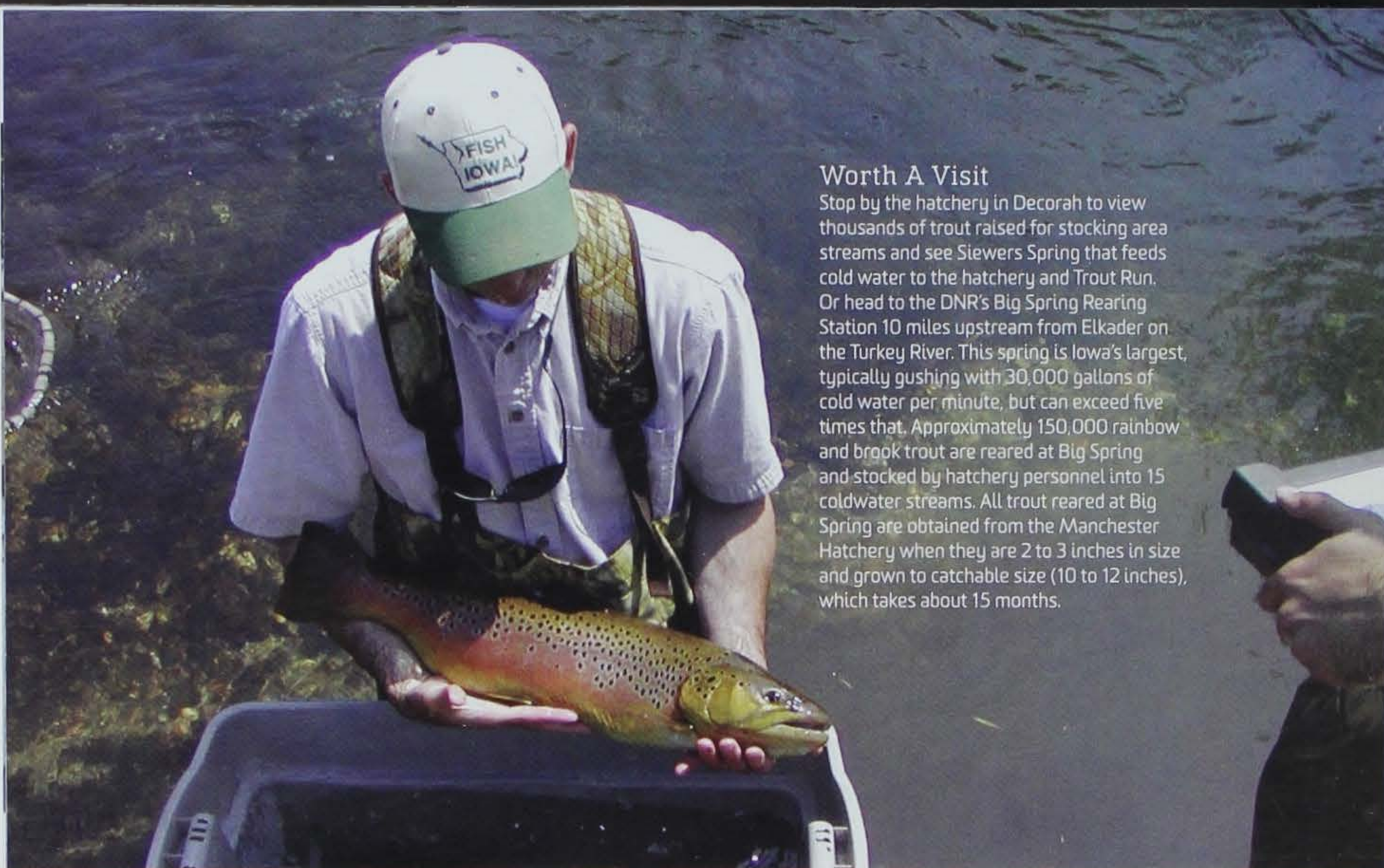
View some of the best fall colors in the three-mile narrow valley of Little Paint in Yellow River State Forest, west of Harpers Ferry. Look for trout behind larger boulders and under rock ledges. Let your lure, bait or fly drift around the boulders and just in front of the ledges. And with 8,500 acres of surrounding forested bluffs, valleys and steep hills, the fall color is bowl-you-over-beautiful.

Catch stream-reared brown trout up to 16 inches and 10- to 12-inch stocked rainbow trout in the Maquoketa River, which holds trout over an eight-mile stretch from Joy Springs to three miles southwest of Strawberry Point. Miles of public access spots line the river in Clayton and Delaware counties. Find rainbow trout in pools and runs, while brown trout will be near wood habitat.

The best opportunity to catch all three species in a single trip is at Spring Branch Creek, southeast of Manchester. There is great public access to more than 1.5 miles of coldwater stream.

Hit Sny Magill Creek in Clayton County to cast for abundant wild brown trout with 12- to 14-inch fish common, along with stocked rainbow and brook trout. Located just a few hilly miles southeast of





### Worth A Visit

Stop by the hatchery in Decorah to view thousands of trout raised for stocking area streams and see Siewers Spring that feeds cold water to the hatchery and Trout Run. Or head to the DNR's Big Spring Rearing Station 10 miles upstream from Elkader on the Turkey River. This spring is Iowa's largest, typically gushing with 30,000 gallons of cold water per minute, but can exceed five times that. Approximately 150,000 rainbow and brook trout are reared at Big Spring and stocked by hatchery personnel into 15 coldwater streams. All trout reared at Big Spring are obtained from the Manchester Hatchery when they are 2 to 3 inches in size and grown to catchable size (10 to 12 inches), which takes about 15 months.

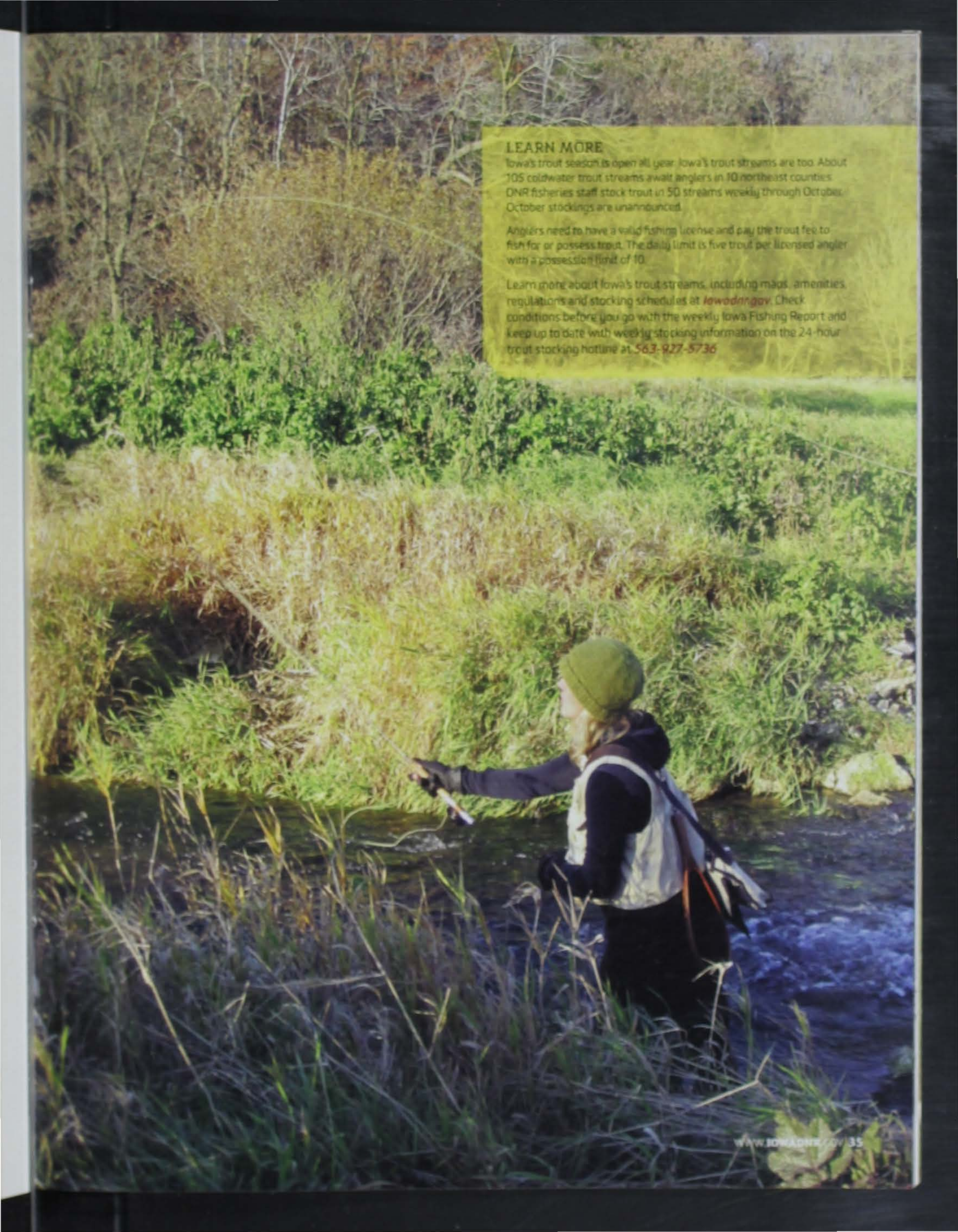
Pikes Peak State Park near the Mississippi River, the area is always a hotbed for some seriously intense fall colors in the valleys and precipitous hillsides. Several access points along a 7.5-mile stretch of Sny Magill's cold water make getting on the water convenient. Lots of habitat work has been done along this stream corridor enhancing the plethora of deeper holes and long runs. Try a flashy spinner or a worm on a hook under a bobber in the deeper holes.

### Tips to Become a Trout Whisperer

- Learn to read a stream and identify sections with food and cover. Trout are not randomly scattered in a stream, but locate along edges of current flow near protective cover. That current carries food to the trout while it lays in wait.
- Trout bulk up in fall for winter and seem to always be hungry. Brown and brook trout lay their eggs in nests called redds during October and November. The eggs remain in these areas of cleaned gravel on the stream bottom until they hatch in late winter or early spring. Be careful where you walk to avoid stepping in or directly above these nests.
- "Brown trout are wary; be as quiet and hidden as you can," says Steuck. "If you can see them, they have already seen you and probably will not bite."
- Fish overcast and gray days when using spin fishing gear. Trout seem to be less wary of lures at this time. If fly fishing during late fall, bright warmer days can stimulate an insect hatch. Dry flies can still be productive, but insect hatches become more sporadic and less intense than in summer.
- Early fall is grasshopper time, especially for brown trout. Gather them on cool early mornings. Imitation grasshoppers also work well, along with night crawlers, particularly following light rainfall.





A person wearing a green beanie, a dark jacket, and a white fishing vest is standing in a shallow stream. They are holding a fishing rod and looking down at the water. The stream is surrounded by tall grass and some green bushes. The background shows a grassy hillside with some bare trees.

### LEARN MORE

Iowa's trout season is open all year. Iowa's trout streams are too. About 105 coldwater trout streams await anglers in 10 northeast counties. DNR fisheries staff stock trout in 50 streams weekly through October. October stockings are unannounced.

Anglers need to have a valid fishing license and pay the trout fee to fish for or possess trout. The daily limit is five trout per licensed angler with a possession limit of 10.

Learn more about Iowa's trout streams, including maps, amenities, regulations and stocking schedules at [iowadnr.gov](http://iowadnr.gov). Check conditions before you go with the weekly Iowa Fishing Report and keep up to date with weekly stocking information on the 24-hour trout stocking hotline at [563-927-5736](tel:563-927-5736).



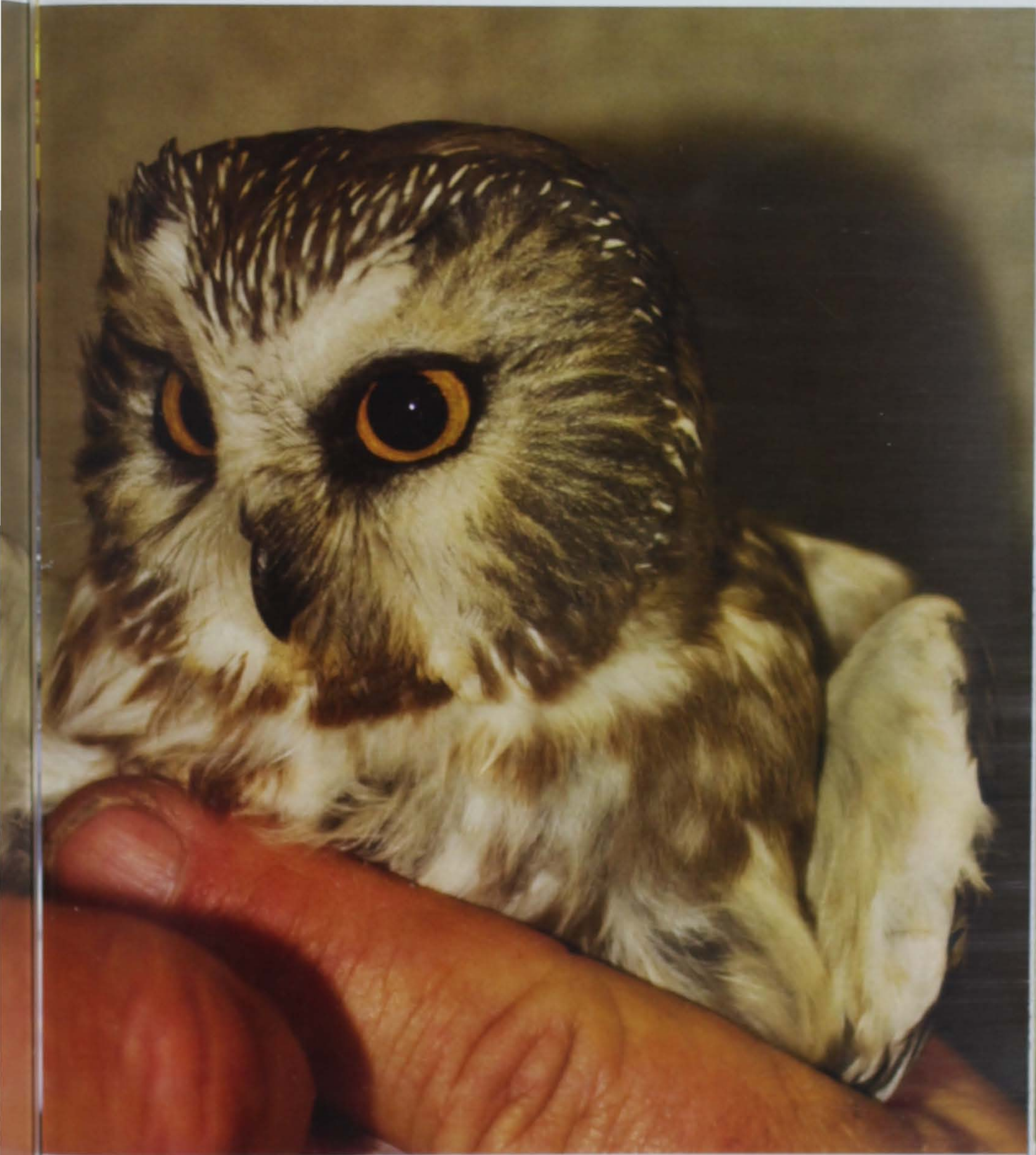
# The Secret, Shy Lives of SAW WHET OWLS

STORY BY AND PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES

*Seemingly nomadic, Iowa's tiniest owl is under study to better learn its migration routes and why individuals choose new wintering sites from year to year—often many hundreds of miles away. To learn more, researchers trap, band and release saw whets across southern counties.*









Northern saw whet owls are lured into a mist net by playing recordings of mating calls. Although it's not mating season, curious owls come to investigate anyway. The nets don't harm the owls, and the bird is quickly released once measurements are taken.



**I**t's Oct. 24 and we're approaching the peak northern saw whet owl migration through Iowa. I've joined biologist Veronica

Mecko and her assistant, Emily Wilmoth, at the Mount Ayr Wildlife Management Area in Ringgold County. They've set up several mist nets and are going to play a recorded saw whet mating call in hopes of luring curious owls to the net.

There's a light northwest wind, favorable, since these petite owls prefer calm conditions or a light tailwind. However, the moon is high above and nearly full, and with no overhead canopy of leaves to shade the nets, we move closer to the north side of a line of cedars, shaded from moonbeams. Owls have incredible night vision, enabling them to spot mist nets on a bright moonlit night, so all precautions are taken. The nets opened a half hour after sunset, and will be left open five hours.

We check nets every 45 minutes, and at 9:25 p.m., thinking they are empty, we prepare to leave when Mecko spots a tiny ball of brown and white feathers at the bottom of one net. Firmly entrapped, it is our first capture tonight. It takes just moments for Wilmoth to extract the tiny traveler, place it in a soft cloth bag and turn off the recorded audio for our walk back to the table for banding data collection.

Age and sex are determined. Mecko and Wilmoth record

the weight and measure the wing chord (length from the wrist to the tip of the longest flight feather), tail length, nostril to bill tip and fat and muscle, which indicate health.

These small mysterious birds have a flashy, hidden secret. Adult birds of most species typically molt all of their feathers after breeding, making it hard to determine their age. But owls molt only some flight feathers each year. And in the 1990s researchers discovered that a chemical, porphyrin, found in newly molted feathers fluoresces or glows under ultraviolet light. This compound fades over time with exposure to sunlight to show clear differences in the





ages of feathers. When an ultraviolet light hits their wings, feathers glow, and do so differently based on the age of the feathers. Sex is determined using a wing chord to weight comparison, which for this owl is inconclusive, so the sex is logged "unknown."

The miniature owl, weighing just 82 grams (12 grams less than a deck of playing cards) is confined in a dark, cloth bag for five to 10 minutes to allow its eyes to readjust. We walk part way back to the nets where Wilmoth opens the bag and carefully removes the captive little raptor. Gently, she tosses it into the air, where it silently melts into the night. The audio recording is again turned on, and we retreat to our cozy bonfire before rechecking the nets again 45 minutes later. The team captures a second owl at 10:10 p.m. before wrapping up the nets and calling it a night.

## The Realm of Secretive Saw Whets

"Very little is known about the migratory movements


of northern saw whets in the state of Iowa," says project manager and master bander Jerry Toll. At Hitchcock Nature Area, located in the central Loess Hills of western Iowa, a long-term fall migration monitoring project began in 2007 to advance the knowledge of this elusive, but common, wintering owl species. However, its distribution across Iowa continues to rely on incidental sightings during overwintering.

They are hard to spot. Migrating out of their primary habitat in Canada during winter to a warmer climate in the U.S., it takes a keen-eyed birder to find a tiny, shy saw whet on its daytime roost, often tucked close to the trunk of a cedar tree. As the smallest owl in eastern North America, it can be difficult to locate among the shadowy boughs of an evergreen.

So researchers are systematically searching for the owls at state-owned sites in seven of 10 southern counties across the width of the state, river to river, to further understand

the extent of their winter range. The project also investigates whether migratory habitat, more abundant in the eastern half of the state, translates into increased owl numbers there.

From seven years of monitoring northern saw whet owl fall migrations at Hitchcock Nature Center, the majority of migration is known to occur during a three-week period, Toll says. "Thus, if surveying occurs for a three evening



Unlike most birds, owls molt only some flight feathers annually. Porphyrin, a chemical found in newly molted feathers, fluoresces or glows under ultraviolet light as shown here. The chemical fades over time with exposure to sunlight, providing a unique aging technique.





As daylight wanes and twilight arrives, researcher Veronica Mecko begins deploying nets for evening trapping.



period at each location, allowing for variables in weather and logistics, seven sites would be optimal. State lands seemed the simplest to access. We looked at forested public lands with associated possible forested migratory corridors, particularly but not singularly on or near river systems."

### The Right Person for the Job

Although Toll conceived the idea and planned the project, Mecko was mostly responsible for the "boots on the ground" operation, night after night during three weeks of trapping across the state. Meeting her, I immediately sensed a high level of expertise at hand.

"I have a degree in biology, and after graduation I interned at the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas," Mecko explains. "In 2002, I took the training in nature mapping and began entering data for my area. Continuing to work and raise a family, I still found time to become involved with doing some citizen science by visiting the DNR's nearby Mount Ayr Wildlife Management Area where I continued nature mapping. Then in 2007 and 2008 I made annual trips to Pottawatomie County's Hitchcock Nature Area to participate in the fall Hawk Watch."

Mecko took a two-week leave from her job in 2010 to learn basic bird banding at the Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, Canada. The endeavor gave her hands-on experience removing birds from nets, banding and processing passerines. She continued to attend Hitchcock hawk watches, and one evening in 2010, opted to stay and watch Toll trap and band saw whets. That night, they trapped four owls.

"And when Jerry told me he was looking for qualified people to open satellite banding stations for saw whets elsewhere in the state, I immediately thought of the great habitat in the Mount Ayr Wildlife Management Area and



decided to take on the responsibility," she says. "In 2011, I was back at Hitchcock, assisting with hawk trapping during the day and saw whet trapping at night."

Her participation allowed Toll to obtain a sub-permit for Mecko to begin banding saw whets. In October 2011, Hitchcock trapping assistant Sandy Reinken joined Mecko at the Mount Ayr Wildlife Management Area for the first saw whet trapping endeavor in that area.

"We put up nets in an area protected by a grove of cedars and caught four owls the first night and two the next," she says. "It was at that point that Jerry gave me the green light to continue trapping."

From Oct. 16 through early November 2011, Mecko captured, banded and released 41 saw whets, with more than half being young birds. They were all different individuals, which showed they could be moving through south-central Iowa.

"I continued trapping there in 2013, but trapped just 12 owls, apparently due to a poor reproduction year, since only two were young of the year. Other saw whet trappers across the country weren't catching many owls as well," she says.

Mecko continued to trap at Mount Ayr in 2014 on a voluntary basis due to lack of funding. During the fall of 2015, she and Wilmoth set up nets in Harrison County, Mo., about six miles south of Lamon. It served as part of Wilmoth's training and to test equipment for their return to Hitchcock Nature Center for a final night of training.

## Project Results

"Historically, our best success has come between Oct. 26 and Nov. 1, and at least three owls were captured at each of the seven locations, with the highest number captured (nine owls) at Lake Wapello State Park," says Mecko. "We captured 32 saw whets across the state."

Trapping at Lacey Keosauqua State Park was well advertised through emails and Facebook, Mecko says, and when the public was invited, 40 people showed up, including families with children.

"It was a Wednesday night, and some people even stopped by after church," she recalls. "Some were there when the nets went up and stayed until about 9 p.m., with three owls captured that night." Wilmoth, who is an educator by training, took the lead.

Sometimes a scientific study can generate as many questions as answers, and Toll's research certainly does.

"The small sampling size made me realize the ratio of young to adults (which varied from 73 percent at Hitchcock to 47 percent across southern Iowa) demonstrated that we can't make assumptions based upon such a small sampling," he says. "And the same small sampling really didn't prove or disprove the theory there would be more captures in the eastern part of the state due to increased habitat. Maybe the eastern region has so much habitat that they don't become concentrated like they do in the west, but again I can't prove that, based on our data. And trapping would have to continue on a frequent basis to learn more."



Once an owl is transported to the banding station, it is placed in a can to calm it while measurements are recorded and the bird is banded.







Owls digest only the soft tissue of their prey and expel undigestable bones, fur or feathers in the form of a regurgitated pellet.

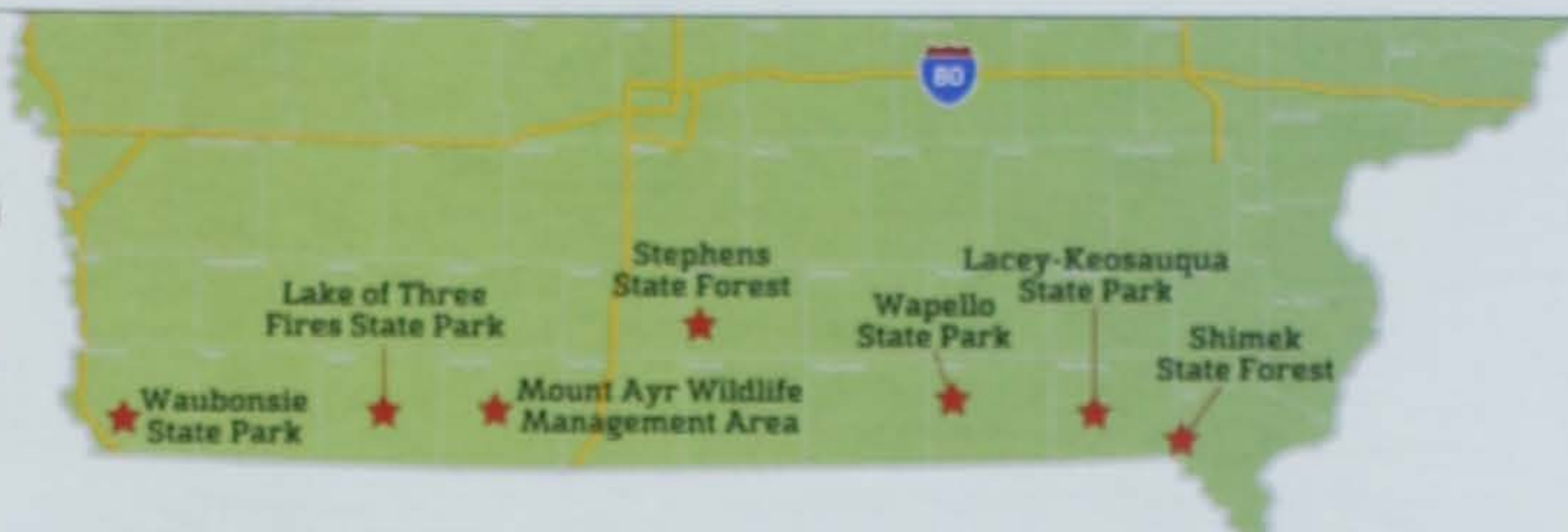
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## SOUTHERN IOWA SEARCH SITES

Researcher Jerry Toll looked at seven locations with optimal conditions to trap, band and release northern saw whet owls. He looked at forested public land for ease of access, preferably in or near a migratory corridor. If it was on or near a river system, even better. Ultimately he settled on seven locations.



### Amazing Visitors From Far Away

An interesting finding is that the Hitchcock location continually recaptures saw whets previously banded at Duluth, Minn., and along the north shore of Lake Superior, while Mecko's trapping at Mount Ayr Wildlife Management Area haven't logged any Duluth area recaptures. Banders in central Missouri also have not caught any of the north shore birds, although they've recaptured owls initially caught in central Minnesota," adds Toll.

He also marvels at the Hitchcock recapture of an owl initially banded along the Ontario and Quebec border, some 300 miles north of Toronto, indicating a diagonal migration line to Hitchcock. Even more astounding, Toll netted an owl at Hitchcock recaptured the next year by researchers near Sacramento, Calif.

To place this mystery in perspective, in his new *Peterson Reference Guide to Owls of North America and the Caribbean*, noted owl biologist and author Scott Weidensaul writes, "While these owls may adhere to broad regional flyways, significant long-distance movements have also been documented, like an owl banded one fall in Montana, then recaptured the following year near Boston some 1,864 miles to the east. There is some evidence to suggest that northern saw whet owls may be nomadic between breeding seasons, shifting territories in response to local prey cycles and abundance."

Perhaps it's both the mystery and intrigue that draw Toll and Mecko to continue research, which will add to our limited understanding of this fascinating little owl. 🦉





# FEATHER LIGHT

*The Enigmatic Hungarian Partridge* Hard

STORY BY DAN MAGNESON PHOTOS BY ROGER HILL

**Y**ou've hunted all day for the Hungarian partridges you know just have to be near. You've seen them in good numbers after sunrise and before sunset along gravel roads, and you've seen them hunkered among snow drifts in the winter. They're here...somewhere.

You've spent a splendid afternoon hunting every area that looks "birdy" to no avail. What gives?

Nearing dusk, you throw in the towel to take a shortcut to your car, cutting across a fall-plowed field—bared earth virtually devoid of cover. Walking in the middle of it, a large covey of Huns burst skyward—characteristic rust-colored tail feathers fanned and flared out, filling the air with fast flapping fury of wingbeats while calling rick!-rick!-rick! in machine gun-like unison.

They quickly turn that ceaseless prairie wind to their tails and transform into blurs before vanishing.

Welcome to the challenging world of hunting—or should I say trying to





# FEATHERED LIGHTNING

*Hard to Hunt, Harder To Hit*

hunt—the seemingly-inexplicable gray partridge—feathered lightning—whose swift, strong and sure flight makes it the cheetah of upland gamebirds.

I had a friend who remarked, “Pheasants are where you find them.” I knew what he meant, but that statement is far more suited to the Hun, which—due to their very minimal need for cover—are the least predictable gamebird in terms of finding them.

As a passionate upland gamebird enthusiast and ardent hunter, I live for the thunderous bedlam of these covey rises, accompanied by those vocalizations that sound to my ears somewhat squealing, but which at the same time are not unmusical, having even a melodious quality. The Hun has the most exciting flush of all gamebirds.

Also known as the gray partridge, *Perdix perdix*, this Eurasian bird was imported from various countries in its European range, with the country of Hungary chief among them, thus the common nickname “Hun.” They are on the smaller end of being a medium-sized gamebird, usually a little over a foot long and topping three-quarters of a pound.

Like everyone, I’m awestruck by the eye-popping iridescent and vivid



coloration of a drake wood duck or rooster pheasant. But there is room in my heart for those having understated beauty—the drake pintail duck being a personal favorite.

So it is with the Hun, demurely done up in flat, muted pastel earth tones handsomely overlain with the chocolate-chestnut horseshoe-shape emblazoned upon their breasts and in a dramatically-barred pattern down their sides.

My favorite description is taken from *Discover The Outdoors*:

“...The male is mostly gray with a distinct “U”-shaped, rust colored, band on its lower breast. Its face and throat is tinged with burnished orange and the breast is stamped with minute bits of a darker gray. At the demarcation of upper abdomen to belly, the feathers lighten to almost white and pale beige. The upper back is an almost non-discernable blend of brown, gray and white, shifting to mottled dark brown wings. The male partridge’s tail is a dark, chestnut-brown. Female Hungarian partridges are similar...”

Little wonder the plumage is highly prized by anglers who tie their own fishing flies.

Feathers near the shoulder of the folded wings helps determine the sex of the Hun. Males have only a blond mark along the central shaft of the feather, whereas females have this same mark, but with added blond crossbars at right angles to the central shaft. This pattern on the female represents the Cross of Lorraine.

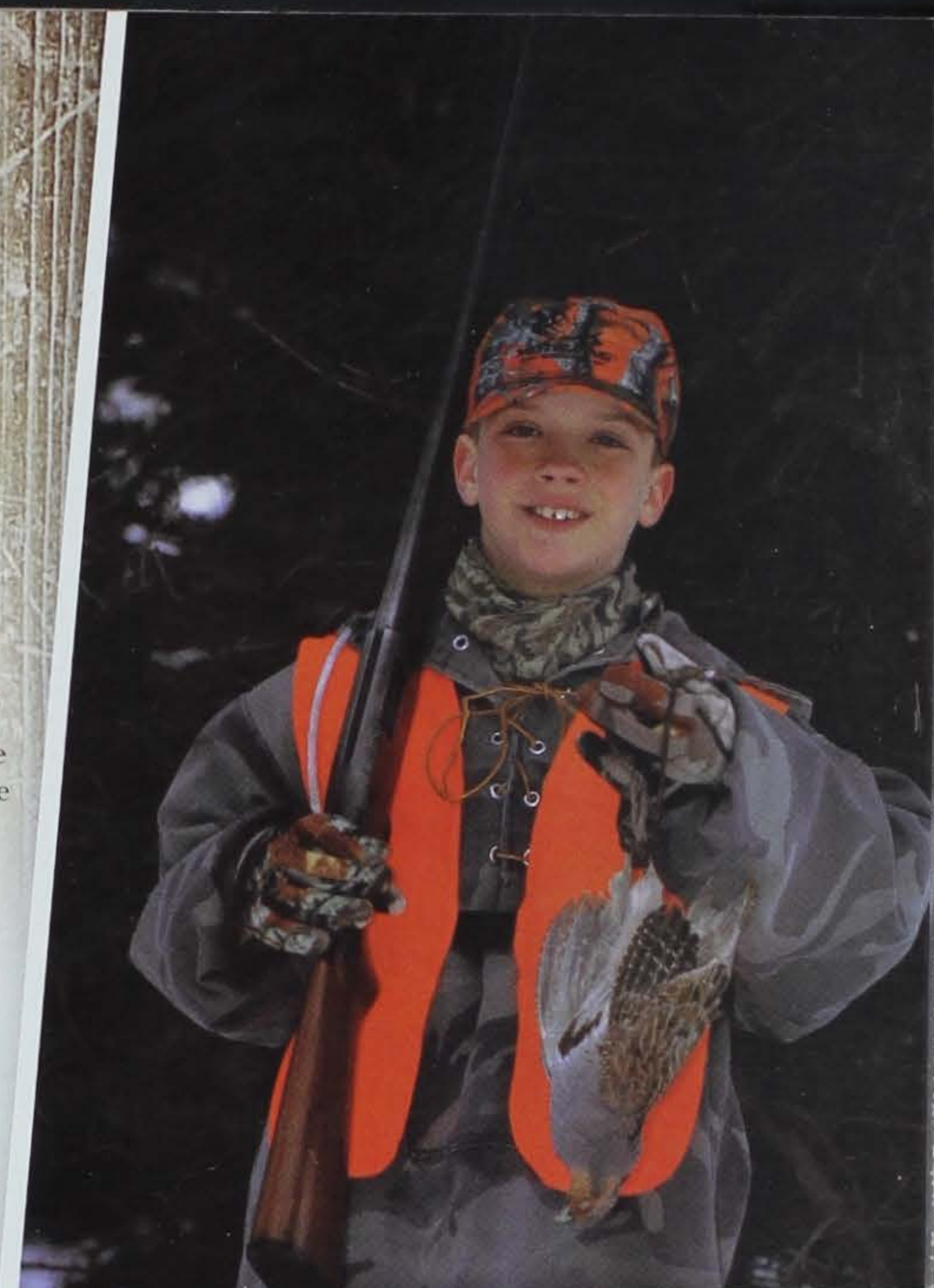
## Tales of the Hun

There are Hun stories just as colorful as a rooster pheasant. I read of one describing a World War I soldier in Europe crawling about at night in “no man’s land” between two entrenched, opposing armies. He accidentally placed his hand smack dab in the middle of a snoozing covey of a dozen Huns. In that split second before he came to his senses, he’d thought he had set off a landmine and was on his way toward knocking on those Pearly Gates. I myself recall driving down a seldom-used gravel road well after darkness, when a covey of Huns that had roosted in the center of the road flushed through the headlight beams.

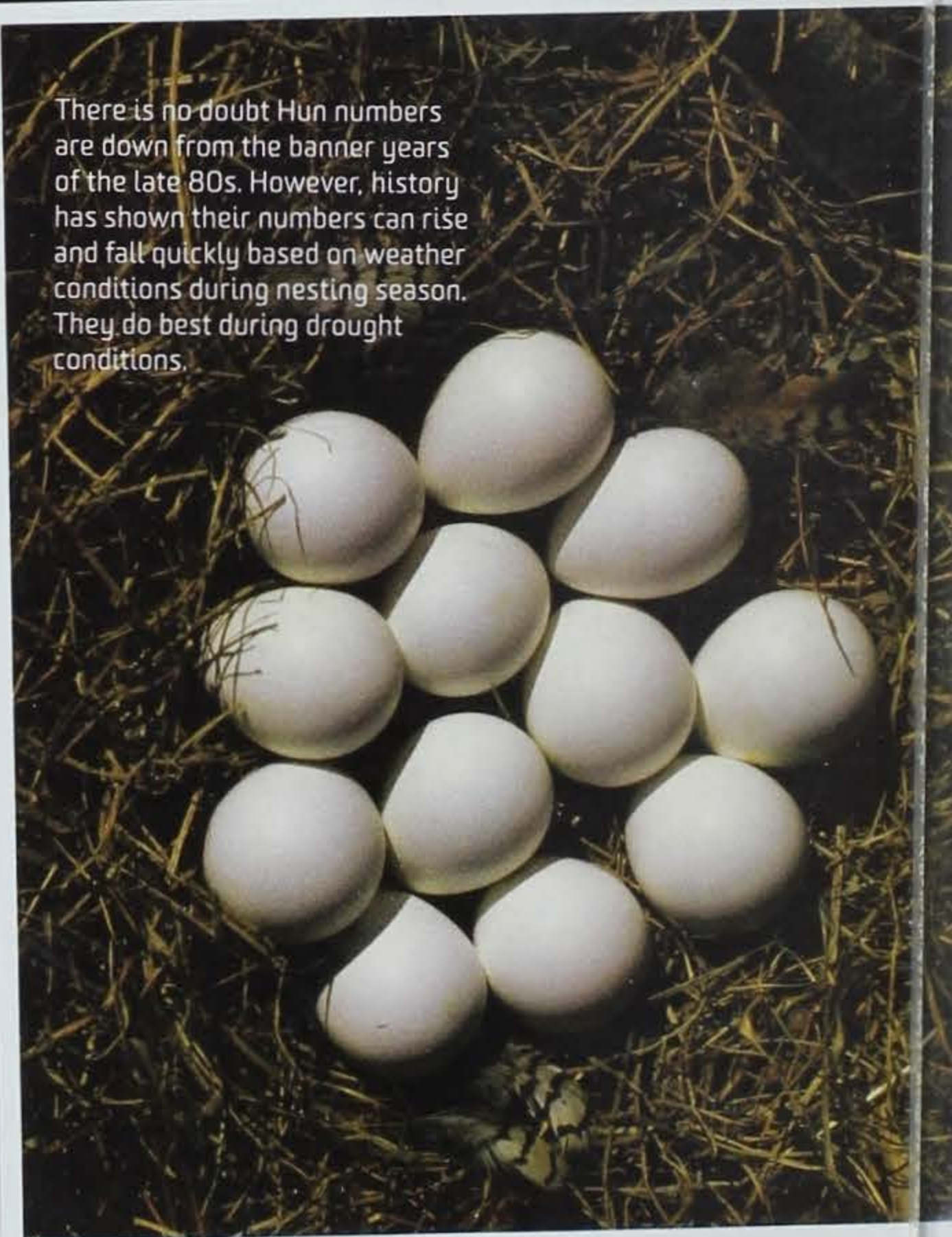
On a heart-warming holiday note, one man notes how the song lyric “and a partridge in a pear tree” from *The Twelve Days of Christmas* reminds him of Christmas mornings of his childhood. He describes how his siblings and he, at his father’s behest, carried a bucket of grain just far enough away from their prairie farmhouse that the partridges felt secure. They would retreat into the house, tiptoe to the window and peek out to watch the Huns come to enjoy their own Christmas presents.

## The nod goes to the Hun

The story of how the Hun came to North America begins with unregulated overhunting and destruction of historic habitats that decimated so many of our native upland gamebird species. Faced with steep declines and eager



There is no doubt Hun numbers are down from the banner years of the late 80s. However, history has shown their numbers can rise and fall quickly based on weather conditions during nesting season. They do best during drought conditions.





to find a replacement. Americans naturally turned to Old World gamebirds already familiar to many recent European immigrants.

Like bobwhite quail, Huns are sociable and gregarious, coalescing into a cooperative social unit termed a covey—mainly birds related to one another. They feed together, keep watch and sound a warning at the presence of predators. They sleep overnight in a circle with tails pressed inward, bodies hugged against the others on both sides and heads and eyes facing outward to cover a collective 360 degree field of view. Benefits are two-fold: body warmth is conserved and predators are observed. And just with a covey of bobwhites, if a Hun covey scatters, they employ a unique call to reunite.

These imports peaked from the late 1800s through the early 1900s, abruptly ceasing in 1914 with the start of World War I. Numerous entities were stocking Huns: state game agencies, private hunting clubs and independently by wealthy, well-heeled individuals. Releases along the Atlantic states generally failed, but farther west they held in areas similar to the Hun's native environment at similar latitudes where annual precipitation fell between 1 to 2 feet and where grasses were often no more than knee-high and the distance between standing stems is sparsely-spaced.

The stunning success of introducing ring-necked pheasants into Oregon's Willamette Valley by Judge Owen Denny is a well-known story, but lesser known is the story of Canadian Hun stocking in the early 1900s.

Like a lit match tossed into gasoline vapor, these birds exploded across prairie provinces at a rate of 28 miles per year (eventually spanning 400 miles) spilling across the border into northern U.S. states to augment stocking attempts here.

It may be the most successful attempt at stocking an introduced gamebird anywhere in the world—ever.

In North Dakota alone, it was estimated that by the early 1940s the population had reached its all-time peak of 9 to 10 million birds.

In Iowa, an extended period of droughty to drier weather from 1977 to 1989, plus large numbers of farm acres enrolled for long periods in the newly-created Conservation Reserve Program (often planted in grassy cover), favored Hun reproduction. They expanded their range south to the Iowa-Missouri border.

Today in Iowa, the return of wetter conditions and fewer CRP acres has Huns again bunkered in their historic stronghold in the northwestern counties.

Probably no other American gamebird rubs shoulders with so many other species of upland gamebirds across such a wide range of varying habitats. But they are never particularly thick anywhere and are taken as a bonus or filler gamebird, taken incidentally while hunting more popular species. Relatively few hunters specifically key in on Huns.

But for those that do, knowing their life history, seasonal patterns of habitat and behaviors might help one to adapt their hunting strategy to boost success.



## Spring

The covey has disintegrated, with young from the previous year paired in strong monogamous bonds with Huns from other coveys. If still alive, their parents stay together and start yet another new family. If one has died, the survivor readily forms a pair bond with a different mate.

The nest site is usually chosen in sparser dried stems of taller grass intermixed among stalks of broadleaf weed cover consisting of the previous year's dead growth and thus creating a light canopy overhead. Hay and alfalfa fields mowed the previous year are virtually never chosen for nesting. Huns have a propensity for nesting in strips of cover along fencelines and in wide ditches along roadsides, possibly a function of their spending so much time along edges of adjacent fields.

Depending somewhat on latitude, the great majority of nesting occurs around Memorial Day to the summer solstice. Both male and female are devoted parents and actively defend the nest.

If the Hun is like a feathered cheetah when it comes to speed, they are like a feathered rabbit when it comes to reproducing.

The female constructs a simple ground nest while the male stands guard. Once completed, she typically lays 16 to 18 buff-olive eggs (some are occasionally white). Some hens lay 22 eggs—by far the most of any gamebird and among the most of any bird on earth.

This, coupled with and enhanced by extremely good early brood rearing conditions, explains their sharp population spikes in certain years and why coveys can be unexpectedly encountered in new areas.

Normally, the Hun is much less subject to mortality from predation during winter versus other gamebirds—except predators can and often do exact a heavier toll during horrifically-bad weather of exceptionally long duration.

But their numbers take it on the chin during extended periods of cold and wet conditions early in a chick's life to severely depress their numbers. The importance of warm, dry conditions to one-and-a-half inch tall chicks cannot be overstated.

As chicks continue to grow, they become less associated with canopy cover.



## Summer

The female carefully conceals eggs with vegetation whenever she briefly departs, and by now the last of the later clutches will hatch in July. Insects are paramount for hungry chicks, the high protein levels fueling their rapid growth.

## Autumn

Hun coveys are comprised mostly of inexperienced and naïve young-of-the-year birds, affording closer shots and more opportunity to flush again since they generally won't go far before landing. Their early season behavior always reminds me of hunting bobwhites along Osage-orange hedgerows in my native southwest Iowa.

Composed at its core of immediate family members, falling in with this central covey are otherwise-unpaired adults.

Besides watching them so you can pursue them again, there is another reason—if you have shot at them. Sometimes

a bird you thought you missed or barely “tickled” suddenly drops from flight deadlier than yesterday's news, or you see a bird land short of the rest of the covey. You owe it to your quarry to bag these otherwise-wasted birds.

Like a big ol' trophy bucket-mouthed bass near a submerged stump, Huns orient to certain features in an otherwise homogenous landscape. That elevated knoll or hillock or that lone bush or rock pile in the field are spots to focus your efforts, as are abandoned farm machinery.

A covey may flush twice—maybe three times—very rarely four times. Huns stick together. The first flush is likely straight to a familiar landmark. The second will likely see them veering in an arc. The countryside may look featureless to you, but rest assured it is not to them. If you flush them a third time and at the limits of their home range, they might turn and come back over your head to return to familiar turf—quite often the same spot you originally found them,





demonstrating how anchored to a home range they are.

If you succeed in fragmenting a covey into singles and doubles, these are the birds to pursue—they hold tighter and flush at closer range than the remaining bulk of the covey.

Keep an eye peeled for places Huns take dust baths, and the odd loose feather or two confirming that. Look for droppings indicating where they have roosted. Droppings are pointed at one end and broad at the other, like a miniature green sugar cone with a scoop of white vanilla ice cream.

If you shoot a double-barreled gun, a fast 20-gauge with a number 7 ½ load in a barrel with an improved cylinder choke and the other barrel choked modified with a number 6 load is fine in most instances.

Insects such as beetles, grasshoppers, crickets and ants continue to be eaten by Huns, but carbohydrates and lipids found in grains have by now begun making up more of the diet as overnight frosty temperatures cause insects to die.

As autumn grows long in the tooth, Huns have wised up, becoming ultra-wary and hyper-alert. They flush wildly, far out of shotgun range, and showcase how well they twist and turn on a dime in flight. Oddly enough, Huns do generally hold for a pointing dog—provided it doesn't press too closely. The ideal Hun dog has endurance like the Energizer Bunny, casts to-and-fro across fields widely, but is solid as a statue on point, allowing you plenty of time to get there. Don't dilly-dally with skittish Huns. Hunt the dog into the wind and don't be afraid to experiment. Circle far to the side, around the covey, then come directly at the dog to perplex them long enough for a decent shot. A hawk whistle may freeze running birds in their tracks.

Stick with number 6 loads, and consider using a 12-gauge shotgun. You never know what Huns might do—flush close or way out beyond gun range. Often they flush far, so I'd lean more toward a modified or full choke.







## Winter

I attended college in Bottineau, N.D., in the far north-central part of the state. Blizzards would howl with wind-driven snow making thin, powdery waves across the ground, the mercury far below zero, yet Huns would scurry around feeding, impervious to the bitter cold.

For such a small bird, their winter survival skills are incredible, unfazed by ferocious blizzards that lay waste to pheasant populations.

Forming a warm roosting ring is part of it. With snow lingering on the ground, one author spoke of repeatedly finding different overnight roosts used by the same covey of nine Huns. They always packed into an area smaller than a single pheasant.

But unlike pheasants or bobwhite quail, during especially severe, deadly conditions, Huns use the blanket of snow as insulating cover, readily burrowing down into it

to escape. They may tunnel under the snow to feed on the frozen ground, protected by the snow above.


Wind may whip up big snowdrifts, but other areas are commonly kept largely snow-free by the same winds that also give Huns a place to forage.

But a uniform cover of four inches or more of snow, Huns will use woody cover, as Aldo Leopold noted in 1931: "Hungarians come nearer being able to get along without cover than pheasants or quail, but during snow they do require some heavy grass, weeds or standing corn."

In the northwestern quarter of Iowa, wild plum thickets are favorite Hun hideouts.

Neither food nor length of daylight is as plentiful now, so looking out into the very middle of fields becomes worthwhile as Huns now spend a greater portion of daylight hours feeding. After a new snow, fresh tracks betray their presence. Scan far ahead to plot an ambush; if



A photograph of two Huns, a type of quail, standing in a snowy field. The birds are dark with mottled patterns. In the background, there is a wooden fence made of vertical planks. The ground is covered in snow with some dry grass visible.

No stranger to cold weather, Huns are most populated in the north-central part of the state and prefer open crop fields and pastures. That's what makes them so difficult to hunt.

you don't see them actively moving, look for "dirt clods" in the snow.

Also don't forget the effects of wind. They will escape cold winds by hiding on the lee sides of hills, in protective creek banks, or in abandoned farm buildings, grain bins and machine sheds. If such areas receive warming sunshine and thin areas of snow melts off, so much the better. Wind can work to your benefit by better masking your approach, but remember nervous birds compensate by relying on their vision when conditions diminish their hearing.

As in all seasons, if there is a spring or seep where sprouts continue to grow from the unfrozen ground, they are worth checking.

I definitely would go with a 12 gauge shotgun in winter, preferably with a PolyChoke as you never know what range they will flush. I like a tightly-choked barrel with a number 6 shell chambered, followed with number 5 shells in the

magazine for successive shots at longer ranges.

During deep snows, worse yet, covered by a thick glaze of ice for a prolonged period, Huns become desperately hungry and begin approaching gravel roadsides, feedlots, silos and farmsteads, searching for bare ground to locate food. But no ethical hunter would ever exploit such a pitiful plight.

Late winter, after the season closes and the weather warms and the snow melts, males begin squaring off to engage in ritualized fighting, with the victor getting to stay put and the vanquished having to leave.

Females are more aggressive now than females of most gamebird species, and will decisively lower the boom on other females caught flirting with their chosen mate. Hens favor those males seen as covey leaders or who maintain a state of heightened alert.

The cycle of a new Hun generation begins anew. ■





# A Secluded Pocket of

STORY BY SANDY FLAHIVE PHOTOS BY IOWA DNR FLICKR





# Paradise

See what makes Lake Wapello State Park  
Southern Iowa's Soothing Sanctuary

**O**n a balmy autumn night gilded with a gleaming-gold Hunter's Moon and sweetened by softly dancing breezes, a wild, penetrating "OW-OOO-OOOO" rips through the tranquility of Lake Wapello State Park, an obvious display of unleashed joy in celebration of the spectacular night.



The explosive tribute offered up by what?—an ecstatic coyote? A joyful owl?—ceases as abruptly as it begins. In its wake, a soothing silence tumbles anew over the 1,150-acre park in Davis County and its centerpiece, 289-acre Lake Wapello. Mirrored on the water's glassy surface, courtesy of the abundant moonlight, is everything that hugs the shoreline, including a still lush and leafy russet and yellow oak and hickory forest spiked with red maples, 13 cozy guest cabins wrapped in a cocoon of timber like an encampment of wagon trains and the park's 70 accommodating campsites.

However, for all the ensuing solitude, the clamor created by the nighttime reveler awakens a cabin dweller who, shaken from deep slumber, groggily takes a look-see outside and immediately is grateful for the 2 a.m. wake-up call.

Beyond the cabin door, an enchanted world beckons. Darkness skitters and whispers between the cabins. Jagged shadows breathe and stretch from the tree line out into the moonlit clearing. A whoosh here, a flurry there, indicates other creatures are relishing this breathtaking night.

Forgotten is summer's steamy assault just ended and winter's siege to come. Nestling in a chair on the small patio, the night's lone human participant whiles away the next two hours in delicious nocturnal reverie of the present before shuffling back to bed.

Daylight dawns equally intoxicating. Drenched in morning fog, the park's surroundings resemble a French Impressionist painting. Vapors billow and churn off the lake, creating a hazy, shadowy outline of trees on the opposite shore. Muted gray hues periodically give way to a barrage of vermillion and gold before being recaptured by

curling fingers of fog.

Docks behind the cabins, where guests park their boats, play a game of hide-and-seek until the persistent mid-morning sun shoos away the tossing blanket of steam.

For a newcomer, these introductory—and unexpected—experiences immediately brand Lake Wapello State Park as enchanted, mellow, and bordering on magical.

However, Park Manager Ron Moore and Park Ranger Chad Horn, along with their equally dedicated and enthusiastic AmeriCorps workers, Billy Joe Hinton and Shannon Esser, smile knowingly when they receive this effusive assessment.

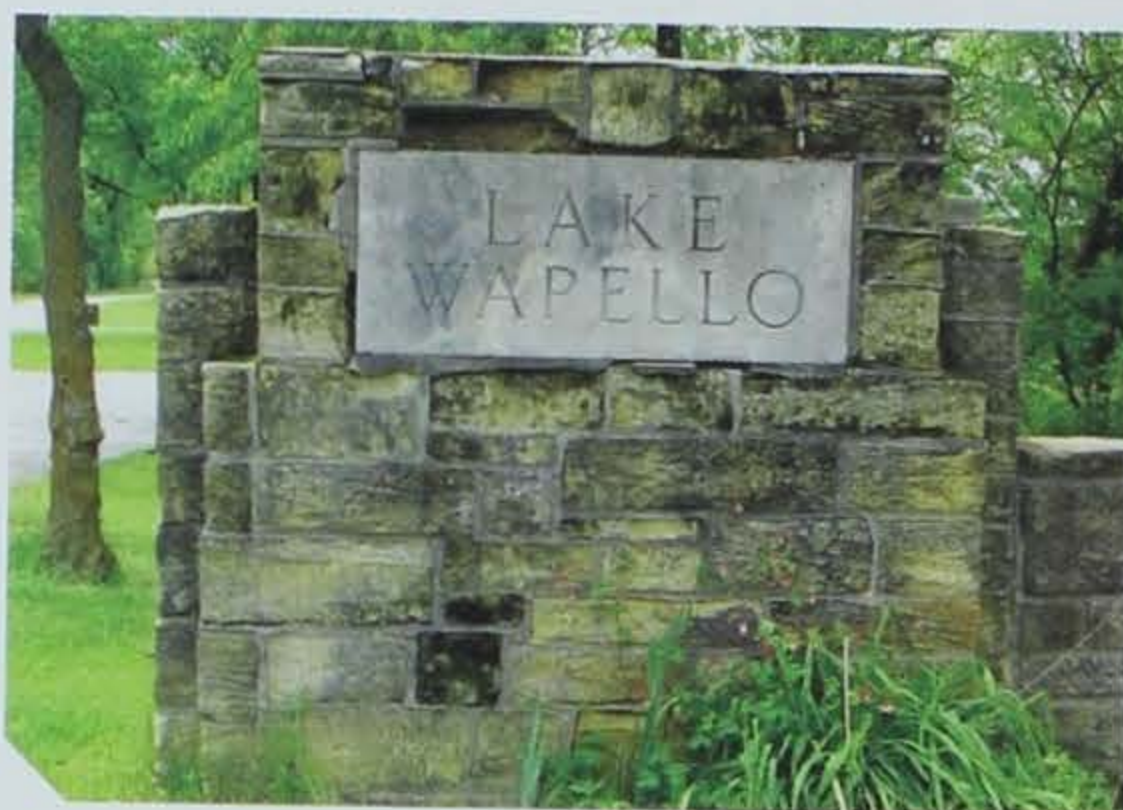
"Yeah, we hear that a lot," agrees Horn. "It's that homey, laid-back atmosphere that keeps people coming back year after year."

"Well, that and everything else about the park," insists

Moore, eager to tally its more down-to-earth attributes. "What's not to like? The lake's well known as an excellent fishing lake. Our trails are popular because they're relatively easy to hike and snow ski. The hunting's good around here, and the cabins and campsites are top-notch."

"Plus, it's secluded," emphasizes Horn. "You can't fully describe the park without mentioning that."

Fair enough. It's all of those things and a bit secluded to boot. A pocket of elegant beauty featuring wooded hillsides, secluded picnic areas, and a shimmering lake serenely located in an area of southern Iowa crisscrossed by 85 miles of the Woodlands Scenic Byway. A hidden paradise a mere six miles from the hamlet of Drakesville, 13 miles from the charming Davis County seat of Bloomfield, and an easy jaunt from the quintessential southern Iowa towns of Ottumwa and Centerville.








Lake Wapello's 1,150 acres easily could be called the "country club" of Iowa's state parks. There is a quiet elegance here, with wooded hillsides, shaded picnic areas, an always busy and popular beach and 13 family cabins, one of which is open rear-round for those hearty souls who wish to hunt the area, cross country ski for heart pumping action or take an exhilarating snowmobile ride on a designated trail. Cabins hold four people comfortably and come complete with restroom, shower and cooking facility (bring your own linens, dishes, pots and pans and utensils). Reserve at [iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com](http://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com). Rent a kayak, stand-up paddleboard or jon boat at the Lake Wapello Bathhouse, and make sure to grab an ice cream cone or cool drink.







Bass (catch and release only) crappies, catfish and bluegills are plentiful in the 289-acre lake, enough to share a campside fish fry or stock the freezer.

### ...in the beginning...

It was because of fishing, or the lack thereof, that Lake Wapello, the state's first artificial lake, and subsequently the park created on its shore, came into existence in the early 1930s as an Iowa Fish and Game Commission project to provide the public a place to fish.

"It came about through a lot of combined effort," explains Moore, who has researched and written about the park. "Local citizens pitched in by donating cash and labor to clear the lake area of trees and underbrush, and the Civilian Conservation Corps played a huge part in development of the infrastructure."

That it did. Records show the 208-member crew who showed up in 1933 worked tirelessly on construction of the

lakebed and on soil erosion. They planted trees and built the cabins, beach house, open shelters and sewage disposal system.

Hopefully, as these industrious men wrapped up the backbreaking project, they were rewarded with an opportunity for a relaxing swim in the lake and a well-deserved stretch in the sun on the superb beach they had carved out of a nook of the lake.

One can only imagine that hovering over the park dedication in 1936, vigorously applauding this unified effort, was the spirit of Chief Wapello, the distinguished Native American who roamed and resided in the state 100 years earlier and whose illustrious name was proudly bestowed on this recreational gem.





### ...the jewel of the Park...

It took no time at all for Lake Wapello to become known as the place where anglers are more often than not rewarded with a praiseworthy catch of bluegill, largemouth bass, crappie and channel cats. To assure that remains the case, the lake has been kept up to snuff.

"Through the years, extensive renovations have taken place to make the fishing experience here better and better," states Moore. "You name it, we've added it: jetties, universally accessible fishing piers, shoreline access, underwater reefs, sunken cedar trees and spawning beds, to mention a few updates."

Even so, there have been major challenges, including recent occurrences. "In 2008, a leaking pipe made it



Boone Point Monument

necessary to drain the lake," he says. "A year later, it had to be drained again because of gizzard shad. But things were back to normal by the 2011 fishing season."

But you say you're not into fishing? Fear not. This no-wake lake is user-friendly on many fronts. What could be sweeter than dabbing a little sunscreen on your person, plunking a brimmed hat on your head, slipping into a canoe or kayak and whiling away a sparkly autumn afternoon in a leisurely exploration of the lake?

"The calmness of everything around here—and the no-wake rule really adds to that—attracts people from large metropolitan areas, especially Chicago and the Quad Cities," says Horn, reiterating his earlier assertion that the relaxed nature of the park is a definite draw.



On shore, the CCC-constructed swimming beach is widely known as one of the finest sand beaches in southern Iowa. Close by is the largest beach house facility in the state park system. "In the summer, the beach is packed," reports Horn. "And depending on where we are in terms of lake and building-renovation projects, the beach house, sometimes called The Lodge, has contained everything from a restaurant and super-sized banquet facility to a concession stand, bait shop and boat rental station."

The banquet room, adorned at one end with an enormous fireplace, sports stunning chandeliers installed when it was built in 1936, and impressive oak tables and chairs made by state woodworkers.

The structure's breezeways and open patios, which provide scenic lake views, are popular for weddings and reunions. "We have families who've come here for their gatherings for the past 35 or 40 years," indicates Moore.

#### ....land ahoy ...

Sunlight hums quietly through the trees before

breaking full force onto the seven-mile Lake Shore Trail around the lake and through the park, creating a dazzling tunnel of sorts for a hiker. This trek is popular with cross-country skiers and snowmobilers, as well, because, although there are patches where the going elevates the heartbeat a tad, most of the trail is moderate in terms of its difficulty to navigate.

The path, scoured by wind and animals, is pocked along the sides with small, shady glades. In one, a fawn worries close to the trail, hope apparent in its curious eyes and caution evident in its quivering legs. Farther down the trail, zillions of miniscule insects twirl in a sunbeam. Oak trees throw off an acorn or two. A brilliant scarlet leaf surrenders and silently plunges earthward. In short, like almost everything at Lake Wapello State Park, the trail experience offers genuine contentment.

According to Horn, the usual cadre of wildlife hangs out around here—whitetailed deer, wild turkeys, eagles, blue herons, ducks, geese, bobcats and river otters, but the







Lake Wapello is home to the usual cadre of wildlife—deer, turkey, waterfowl and birds. But the featured attraction is the trumpeter swans that have made an abandoned pond across from the park office their home.

trumpeter swans that make their home in the abandoned fish pond across from the park office have favored status.

"Because trumpeters became extinct in this area, we started a restoration program in 2000, the only state park to do this (at the time)," says Moore. "We still have the female from that first breeding pair that successfully hatched and raised three cygnets. She's had three mates and a total of 23 babies since. They've all flown the coop, so to speak, and we get reports of them from as far away as the Boundary Waters of Minnesota."

After lake and land exploration, the cabins and

campsites offer welcome end-of-day respite. The 14 tidy, cedar-sided dwellings are equipped with heat, air conditioning, kitchen facilities, and one or two bedroom. Thirteen are seasonal—April through October rentals—and one is year-round for the happy soul who loves to retreat to a snowy Iowa woods in the heart of winter.

The 40 electric or 38 non-electric campsites offer modern restrooms, showers, and dump stations. New playground equipment is close by.

Surely that slight wink in the white, fluffy clouds overhead is Chief Wapello nodding in agreement.



## SUPPORT POLLINATORS AND SONGBIRDS WITH BEAUTIFUL NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS

Many *Iowa Outdoors* readers have planted milkweeds and other care-free native perennials for nectar and pollen sources to help populations of monarch butterflies and other beneficial pollinators. Often overlooked for pollinator habitat and nectar are the importance of native trees and shrubs. (They also offer serious curb appeal.)

Oak species alone provide habitat needed for reproduction of at least 534 species of butterflies and moths. The banded hairstreak butterfly uses oaks, walnut and hickory as host trees and dogwood as a nectar source. The eastern tiger swallowtail uses wild cherry, basswood, birch and cottonwood as a host tree, and wild cherry and lilac as nectar sources. Willow, cherry, plum, maple, box elder, hickory and elm support 400 or more butterfly and moth species.

Autumn is a great time to add shrubs and trees to enjoy their beauty next growing season and for decades to come. Below are tips for selection and how to obtain the most robust nursery stock.



### Why Plant Iowa Seed Stock Native Trees?

Trees grown from seed harvested in Iowa have the genetics best suited to thrive here. The further a tree is planted from its seed source, the greater its risk of suffering from disease or early mortality—even if the seed source and planting site are within its native range. Habitat provided by native trees is far superior to non-native species, as wildlife and pollinators are adapted to native trees. Iowa has the enviable distinction of possessing the soil and climate ideal for producing some of the finest trees in the world, and the State Forest Nursery strives to grow and distribute the best stock possible using tree seeds collected in Iowa.

### Order Iowa Genetic Tree and Shrub Stock from the DNR's State Forest Nursery

Since the 1930s, The DNR's State Forest Nursery in Ames has provided low cost, native seedlings to help beautify acreages, farms, communities and homes with quality, affordable trees.

The new online store features 44 species of quality Iowa trees and shrubs with an easy check-out process. Orders can be placed Aug. 1 through May 31.

### As of last year, improvements include:

- Lower order minimums: Purchase tree seedlings in bundles of 25, versus the previous 200.
- Plant for any purpose: Create windbreaks, shade, erosion control, wildlife habitat, pollinator habitat or beautify your land.
- Share or resell: Landowners can share or resell trees rather than just plant themselves (Licenses may be needed to resell).

Seedling prices range from \$.40 to \$1.40 per plant, depending on size and species. Size ranges from 4 to 30 inches.

Orders can be picked up in Ames or inexpensively shipped via Spee-Dee or FedEx (prices range from \$10 to \$20 for 25-100 seedlings.) Fall shipments start the last week of October. To obtain a catalog or order online: call 800-865-2477 or visit [nursery.iowadnr.gov](http://nursery.iowadnr.gov)

### Give Seedlings

Purchase seedlings for birthdays, Christmas and other holidays. You will receive a gift acknowledgment to give to the recipient and the seedlings can be shipped directly to the recipient's address.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Ninety-five percent or more of all insects are not pests and often provide beneficial services such as keeping harmful insect populations in check. Since the majority of pesticides affect more than just one species, chemical use can negatively impact beneficial species and pollinators. Minimize or avoid use of insecticides and herbicides to protect unwanted effects to bees, butterflies, moths, birds and bats.

The banded hairstreak uses many oak, walnut and hickory species as host trees and dogwood as a nectar source.

### Songbird Packet

This packet includes 16 favorite shrubs and four trees to attract a variety of songbirds all year: two bur oak, two white pine, four wild plum, four chokecherry, four gray dogwood and four serviceberry. Recommended by Iowa Audubon Society. Cost: \$45 1-800-865-2477 or [nursery.iowadnr.gov](http://nursery.iowadnr.gov).

The nursery sells about 1 million seedlings per year, with 3- to 5-million seedlings grown on-site at any given time on 98 acres just south of Highway 30 in Ames.

Scarlet tanager



### GET INVOLVED

Providing a diverse mix of native tree and shrub species on your property helps create pollinator habitat. Plant a variety of native tree and shrubs that support both nectar and larval host needs of pollinators. Native trees and shrubs also attract beautiful, melodic songbirds, provide fall color and shade during the heat of summer.



## Gray Fox

*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

### PRETTY PELT

During the day, gray fox are easily distinguishable from red fox by their color. While their sides and underbelly are rusty red, the majority of the fox is salt-and-pepper gray with a black streak down the ridge of their tail. Gray fox are generally smaller, more agile and wiry than red fox.

"The gray fox is more adapted to the deciduous forests of the Eastern United States, whereas the red fox adapted to prairies," says biologist Vince Eversizer. He notes both are found throughout the nation, and the two are not exclusive.

### LESS THAN RED HOT NUMBERS

Although not yet endangered or threatened in Iowa, gray fox populations have steadily declined since 1980. Red fox populations have also declined, but not to the degree of the gray fox. The cause of the gray fox population drop hasn't been determined, but suspect causes include disease, competition with rising raccoon populations and habitat loss from urban development. A coalition of Midwest states has recently initiated research into similar declines throughout the region.

### OPEN SEASON

Iowa has a hunting season for both red and gray foxes between Nov. 1 and Jan. 31, with no daily bag limits or possession limits. While the gray fox season could possibly close in the future, hunting is not considered to have a major effect on their population. Most fox that are harvested are caught incidentally, and few hunters would specifically target them because there is not extensive demand for gray fox pelts. During the 2016-2017 season, only 19 gray foxes were harvested.



### BARKING UP THE RIGHT TREE

Due to their small stature, gray fox are susceptible to predation and competition from larger animals like coyotes. To avoid confrontation, the fox makes a quick exit and climbs a tree. Gray fox have longer and more hooked claws than their red relation, and use these to grip tree bark. Although an effective strategy, the process can be rather comical. First, the fox hugs the tree, gripping bark with its claws. The hind legs are not capable of rotating to hold on in the same manner, so they are used to push against the tree and propel upward. The resulting motion is a series of upward scoots that continue until the fox can dismount the trunk and stand on a branch. To get down, the process is reversed if the trunk is straight, but if it's bent the fox may run down the trunk.

### FOX IN THE HENHOUSE

As habitat loss pushes gray fox closer to urban areas, that could create some trouble for keepers of backyard chickens. "They're almost more of a cat-like critter than a canine," says Eversizer. He says that although fox are crafty, properly constructed henhouses and enclosures drastically reduce their success. A roof or a wire ceiling on a chicken enclosure keeps foxes from jumping or dropping inside, but basic chicken wire may need reinforcement to stand up to a fox. Still, Eversizer says fox are not the main predatory concern. "Mink and weasels are very aggressive, and they're small enough to fit through holes in most basic wire fencing," he says. Foxes are opportunistic hunters, and regularly eat everything from grasshoppers and fruit to rodents and lizards.



## THE SMOKING GUN

Any fan of meat has experienced the joy of a perfectly slow smoked pheasant, quail, partridge or wild turkey breast. You dive into the breast meat with a knife and immediately notice the quarter-inch of pink flesh, an indication of a perfect smoke ring. It's pure heaven for barbecue aficionados.

If preparing skinned game bird, marinating and adding fat are essential. Most meats, especially lighter colored meats, love olive oil, garlic and rosemary. Bacon is an added plus, especially for low-fat meats like pheasant, quail and skinless wild turkey. Toss a half-cup of olive oil, four cloves crushed garlic and four sprigs of rosemary in a bowl. Add salt and pepper

to taste. Marinate chosen game for at least two hours or overnight.

Just because you don't have a smoker doesn't mean you can't enjoy a flavorful smoked dinner. If you have a Dutch oven, you are good to go. What you decide to smoke with is your preference. Mesquite wood is always good. Grape and apple are too. Peach is a personal favorite. But some people like a little more bite. In that case, try smoking meat with pine needles. Whatever the fuel, go light until you determine your taste preference.

Cook at about 350 degrees, so plan accordingly. A 10-inch Dutch oven should heartily feed a family of four or more. In that case, the recommendation

is 14 briquettes on top and seven on the bottom.

Add a tablespoon or two of olive oil to the Dutch oven. Place two handfuls of wood or needles in the pot; in this case we used pine needles. Place on heat. Cover needles with an upside-down aluminum pie tin or oven liner and poke holes in the bottom. Once the smoke begins, place marinated meat on top. Make sure to spoon marinade into the cavity. Cover, add briquettes and cook for about 10 minutes. Meat should be slightly pink. Remove meat from oven, cover with foil, and let rest for 10 to 15 minutes. Pair with roasted cauliflower, a side salad or buttered and seasoned rice.





## Smoked Rabbit Gumbo

All gumbo starts with basic ingredients that make it special—a dark roux made of oil or butter and flour—and the holy trinity of vegetables—onions, bell peppers and celery. After that, it's pretty much the protein of choice, stock and a long, slow simmer. Okra or filé powder (dried and ground sassafras leaves) can also be used to help thicken the stew. Gumbo is best served with a scoop of white rice, and maybe a slice of thick, hearty toasted bread.

Most gumbos start with spicy sausage. What goes in next is the cook's

discretion. Chicken is a favorite, but so is ham and shellfish. It's a great time to incorporate wild game, too. This is a perfect recipe to toss in a rabbit, a squirrel or two, pheasant, wild turkey or quail. A few chunks of thick fish wouldn't hurt either. And if you have access to a smoker for the meat, that just adds flavor to the dish.

Traditional gumbo has its roots in heat, so don't skimp on Creole seasoning and hot sauce. Feel free to spice to your desire, allowing others to season at the table.

As versatile as gumbo is, the secret is

in the roux—the darker the better. The best roux is cooked “a few shades from burning” and it could take an hour to develop, with constant stirring required. But once the labor intensive job of making roux is done, the actual gumbo is done at a relaxing slow simmer with occasional stirring.

### RABBIT GUMBO

1 to 2 rabbits, cut into pieces, bone in  
1 pound andouille sausage, sliced  
1 tablespoon Creole/Cajun rub  
3 cups oil  
3 cups flour





PHOTO BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS FOR EAT YOUR WORD

2 to 3 cups chopped onion  
 1 cup chopped green pepper  
 1 cup diced red pepper  
 1 cup chopped celery  
 6 cloves minced garlic  
 1/2 cup chopped parsley  
 Fresh thyme, oregano, rosemary to taste  
 1 can tomatoes with green chilies  
 8 to 10 cups wild game, chicken or vegetable stock  
 1 cup cooked rice per serving  
 Salt, black pepper, cayenne pepper to taste

Season rabbit with salt and pepper. In a pre-heated cast iron skillet, brown

rabbit in oil along with sausage, about 3 to 4 minutes per side and remove from heat. To make the roux, in a separate pan, heat up the oil or butter and gradually stir in flour. Cook over medium low heat, stirring often, until it turns a dark brown color, almost like chocolate. The process could take up to an hour and requires constant stirring. The last half hour is when attention is most crucial so the roux doesn't burn. Although tedious, it's what gives the gumbo the rich flavor.

This recipe makes enough roux for two batches of gumbo. Reserve half the roux and store in a glass jar in the fridge

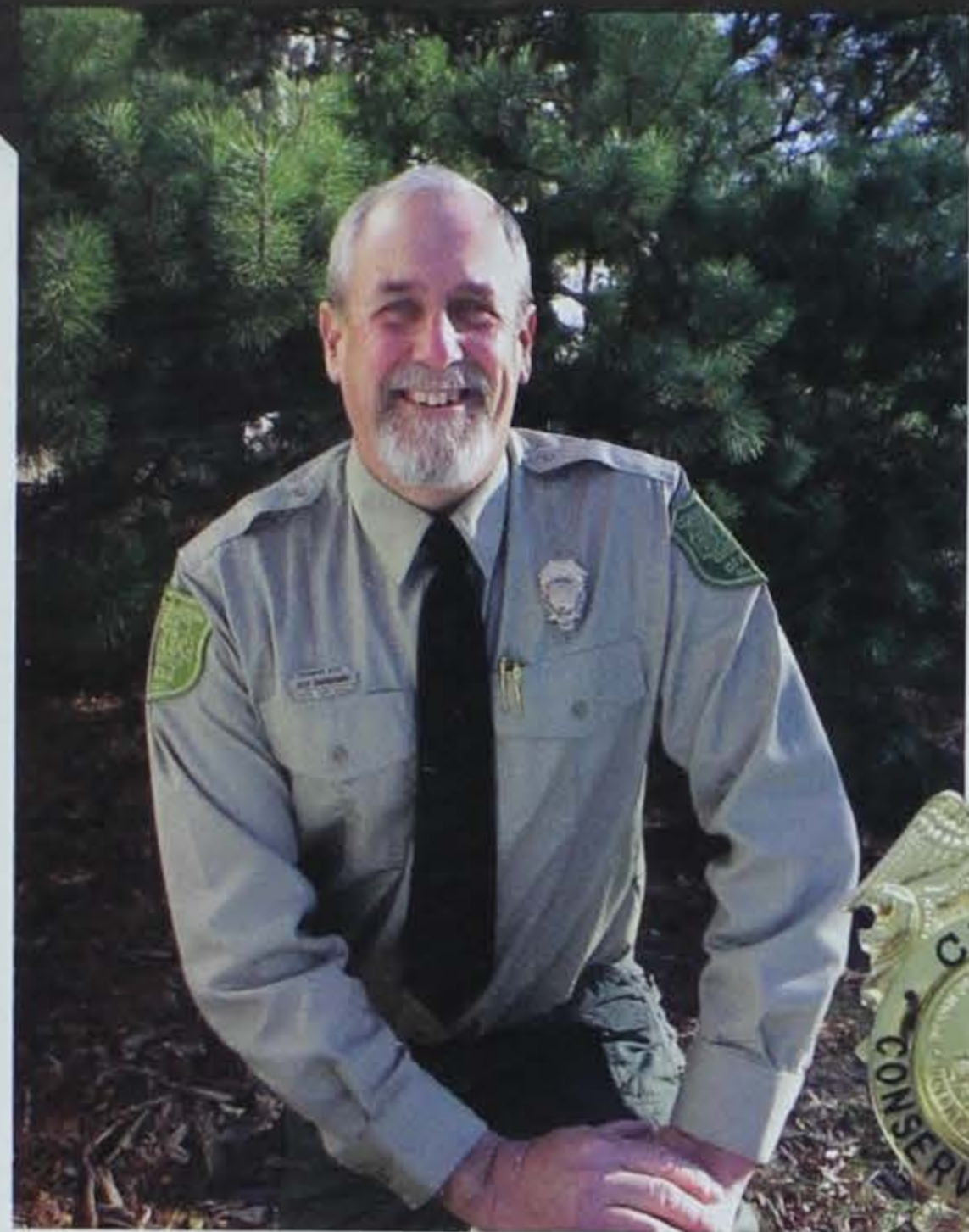
for up to a year for more gumbo at a later time. Pour the other half of the roux into the cast iron pot, add browned meat, game, peppers, onion, celery, garlic and Creole seasoning and cook five minutes. Add herbs, tomatoes (if desired) and stock. Bring to a boil, stir and simmer two hours.

Remove meat from bone. Seafood or fish should be added at the end, about the last 10 minutes. In the meantime, cook rice following package directions. Place a cup of rice in a bowl, ladle gumbo around the sides and garnish with green onions, parsley and hot sauce.



## Notes From the Field

BY JEFF SWEARINGIN



# URBAN DEER "HUNT"

Iowa is well known throughout the United States for its deer herd. The Hawkeye State produces trophy deer that attract hunters not only from Iowa, but across the nation. Some people may not realize how many deer—sometimes big deer—reside in our urban areas. Many communities hold urban hunts to control these populations. Typically archery only, they are highly regulated with many cities requiring archery safety courses and shooting a qualifying score at a local archery shop. Hunters then must have permission from willing property owners. Some places have held these hunts over 20 years. They have proven safe and effective in keeping urban populations in check.

This is not a story about one of those urban hunts, but rather, an illegal urban hunt.

Talk with any conservation officer and they will tell stories about deer poachers. (Take any activity, and there are some that will cheat.) Some are crimes of opportunity, some are highly planned and some, well ... are just strange. One of these strange poaching cases happened in my territory in an urban area.

I was on patrol one fall afternoon several years ago when I was a field officer. I received a call from dispatch about a man in camouflage armed with a bow and a gun belt with pistols, jumping fences, chasing a deer through a very nice urban neighborhood. As I drove closer, I received another call. The man was standing over a dead deer with his arms upraised, yelling. That's a call you don't get every day.

I pulled into a neighborhood filled with majestic houses and wooded ravines and found a city police officer talking with a man wearing camouflage. This had to be the guy. I stopped behind the patrol car, got out and introduced



DEER PHOTO BY ROGER HILL; BOW PHOTO, DUNISE PETERSEN



myself. The officer told me "Sam" had killed a deer.

As it turns out, we were in front of Sam's home, so we walked to the front porch to talk. In addition to the camo clothing, Sam had green grease paint streaked across his face. I noticed Sam was not carrying a bow and was lacking the pistol belt I had been told about. I asked where they were located. He told me that in the heat of chasing his deer, he tired and discarded his weapons. I failed to mention that "Sam" was a pretty good-sized man. I asked where they were, and he said, "somewhere in a back yard."

*He left a bow and loaded weapons in someone's yard!*

Now it was urgent to find those weapons before some child stumbled across them. (I found the weapons pretty quickly—more about that later). As we walked and looked, I asked him to tell me about his deer hunting that afternoon, expecting to hear some wild story. It didn't disappoint.

Sam was relatively new to hunting, and had yet to see many deer. That afternoon, he was standing at his kitchen sink, washing dishes. He looked out into his backyard and saw the "Greatest deer that I had ever seen!" At that minute, Sam decided he had to have that trophy. He ran to get his hunting gear and decided he had better get his camo on too. He got dressed, slapped on some of his green camouflage face paint and checked out the window to make sure his quarry was still in the yard. Sam put on his gun belt with pistols, grabbed his bow and started his stalk.

He carefully opened his garage door and started to sneak beside his house to the back yard where his trophy was waiting. As he got to the back of his house, he checked and the deer was still there. Sam drew his bow, took careful aim and let his arrow fly. Unfortunately, for all involved, Sam made a hit on the deer, but shot it in the back of the hind leg, hitting an artery. The deer instantly ran, with Sam in hot pursuit.

He told about chasing the deer and climbing over fences. He must have tired pretty quickly because his pistol belt was in the yard next to his. Unbelievably, he had two fully loaded .357 revolvers in holsters on the belt. I located his bow a short distance away, leaning against a tree. After securing the weapons, it was time for Sam to take me to his deer.

I had been a conservation officer for a while, and had seen some really big deer. The metro area held some very impressive deer with massive antlers. Sadly, I expected one of these old giants had fallen to a poacher's arrow. When he took me to the deer, I was amazed. The deer was an 11 point buck, but it may have been one of the smallest 11 point deer that I have ever seen. The rack was pencil thin and not tall or wide, at all. It was just a very young deer that made the mistake of wandering into the wrong yard that fall afternoon.

Sam told me he would give a written statement and accept any penalty he had coming if I would let him have a picture with his deer. I needed a picture for evidence



anyway, so a picture with the man that poached the deer was even better. As I took several pictures of the man with his ill-gotten deer, he began to cry. I still do not know if it was tears of joy in killing the "Greatest deer that he had ever seen," or because he got caught. I did ask him about standing over the dead deer and yelling. He told me it was a victory yell—he had killed his first deer.

Sam received several citations that evening related to killing that little deer, plus the judge in the case assessed liquidated damages for the poaching. True to his word, he did not fight the charges. The local police took care of the pistols. It turns out Sam only had an antlerless license for a different county, but the allure of the "big" buck was too much for him to pass up. Many hunters take part in urban deer hunts legally, and do a great service in controlling local herds.

Unfortunately, Sam was not one of them.



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