

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2012

# IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



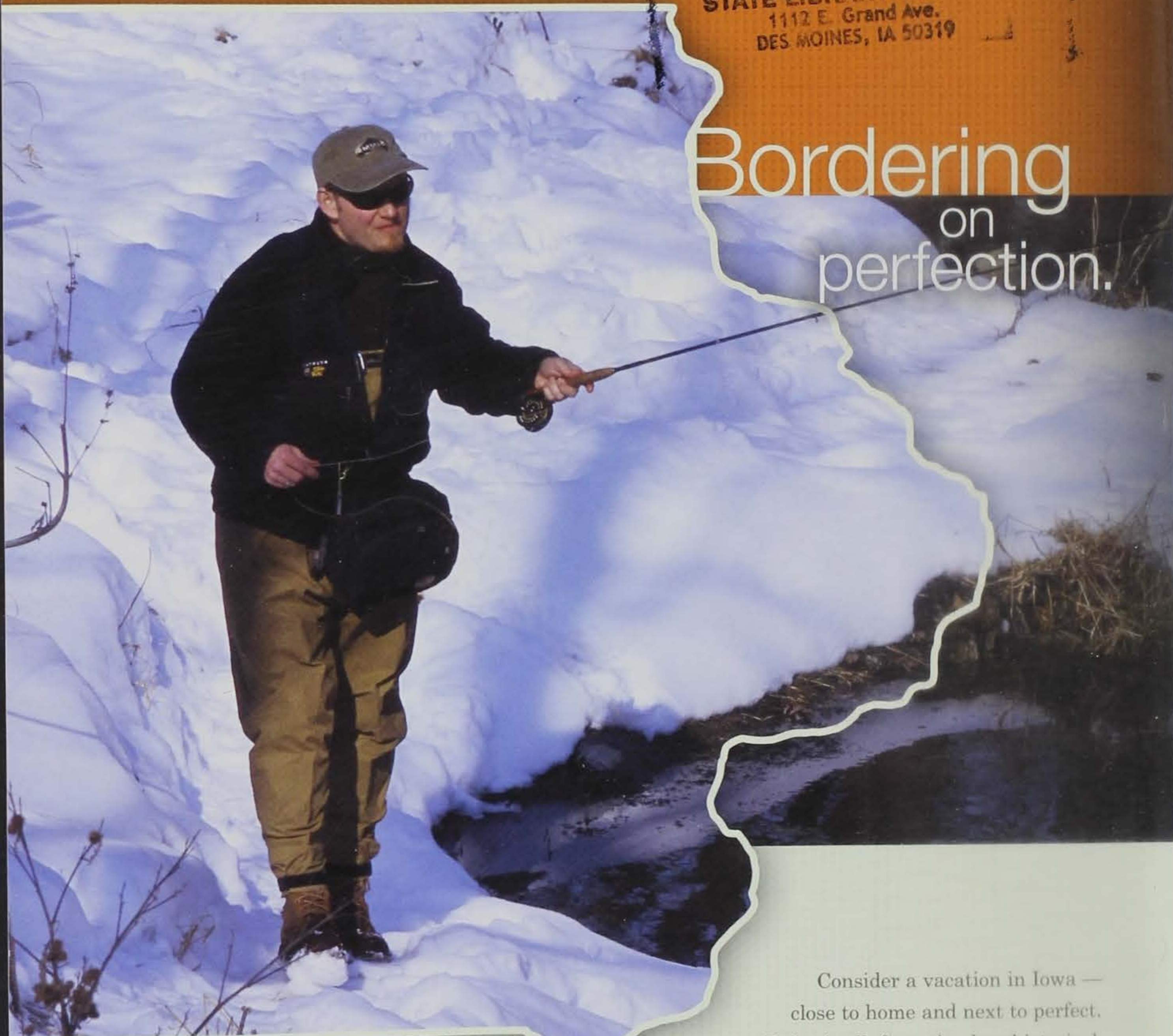
IN THIS ISSUE:

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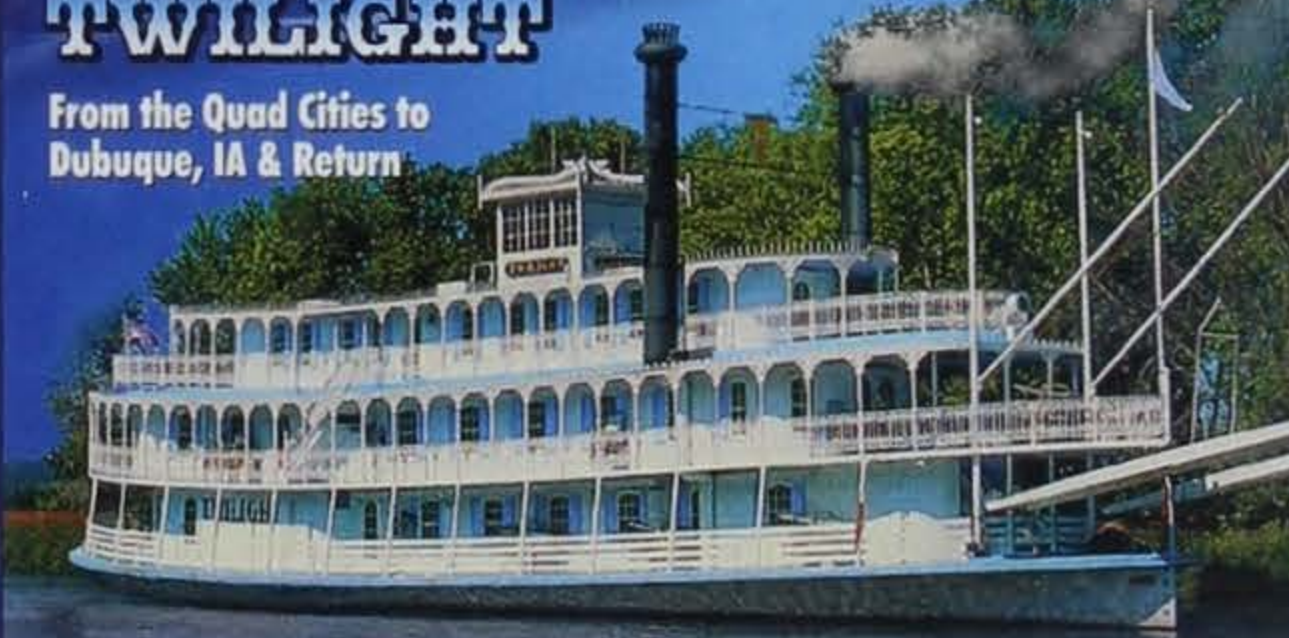
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When he's not braving the backroads of Iowa, **MIKE BUTLER** dodges falling silver maple tree limbs in the front yard and paddles whitewater streams in the flood-prone basement of his Des Moines

home. Keep up with his travels and travails at <http://web.mac.com/michaelabutler>



**ROGER HILL** Roger Hill has filmed and photographed wildlife and nature since 1962 when he started hunting big game animals from Iowa to Alaska. Although he has

photographed a wide array of big and small game, his passion is capturing Iowa whitetails, pheasants, prairie chickens and the very rare sharptail grouse in their natural settings. In the north country, he prefers pursuing wild sheep and grizzlies with his lens. His work has been published in countless state and national magazines. Roger lives on a farm with his wife, Marcia, near Roland.



**TY SMEDES** is a full-time writer and photographer from Urbandale. Published in more than 25 magazines, his work includes images of wildlife, wildflowers and

scenics, along with photography of Iowa's cultural events and attractions. He teaches photography classes and leads photo tours to the Eastern Sierras and Africa. His new book, "The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles," chronicles the raptor's incredible comeback and is sold at [iowan.com](http://iowan.com) or 1-877-899-9977 ext 211.

# IOWA OUTDOORS

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To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life for Iowans 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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Our website, [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov), is loaded with information for all ages and needs. Buy licenses, reserve campsites or learn more about our environment online. See our magazine television show at [iptv.org](http://iptv.org).





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#### ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Frequent *Iowa Outdoors* contributor Ron Hulse caught this female cardinal taking a mid-winter bath. Many birds overwinter in Iowa, requiring the same amenities as summer birds—food and water. Check out page eight for more winter bird facts.

#### ABOUT THE COVER

Nature photographer Ty Smedes didn't have to go far to capture this image of an adult red fox cruising for food on a cold winter day. For the 20 years he has lived there, foxes have always called his Urbandale acreage home. Get tips on winter wildlife photography, and view a stunning photo of two adult foxes fighting over prey, on pages 34-35.





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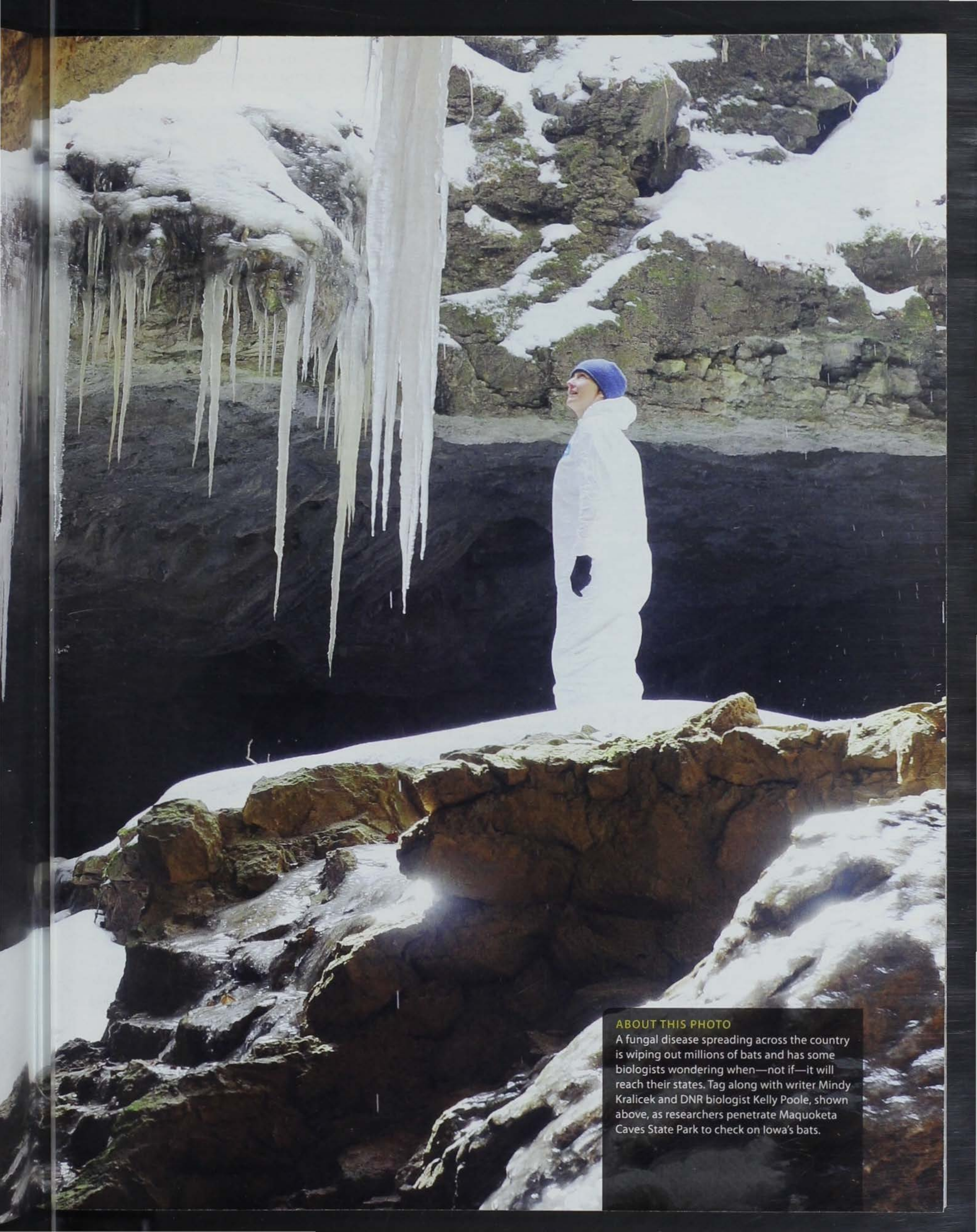
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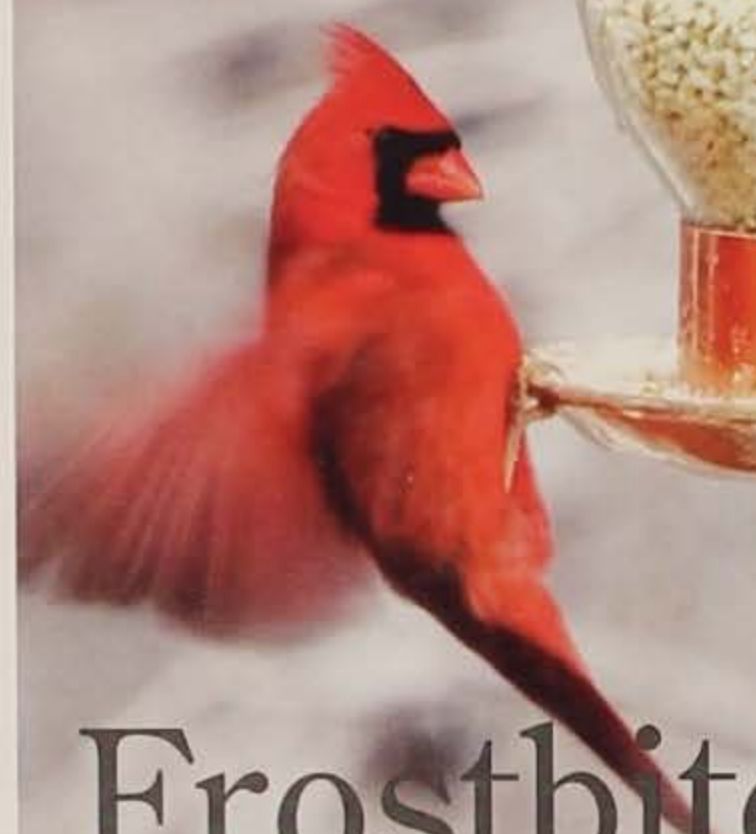


**ABOUT THIS PHOTO**

A fungal disease spreading across the country is wiping out millions of bats and has some biologists wondering when—not if—it will reach their states. Tag along with writer Mindy Kralicek and DNR biologist Kelly Poole, shown above, as researchers penetrate Maquoketa Caves State Park to check on Iowa's bats.



MYTH?  
or  
TRUTH?



## Frostbite is for the Birds?

Recently we have heard some chirping that in winter a bird's feet can freeze to metal perches during feeding. There are no claws to this myth (or talons either). The fact is birds lack sweat glands and do not produce moisture in their feet. Therefore, unlike the human tongue that immediately freezes when in contact with metal (come on, we know you have tried it), birds' feet do not produce the moisture needed to initiate the freezing process.

Birds' tootsies are well protected in winter. In addition to having no soft muscle and limited nerve endings, they have a naturally decreased blood flow to their lower extremities. Using a process called thermoregulation, birds can constrict blood vessels in their feet to reduce heat loss. In freezing weather, the core temperature of a bird might be 100°F, while its feet might be just slightly above freezing. Talk about a case of cold feet.

The rare exception to this rule is the mourning dove. Historically not a common winter bird in Iowa, the dove has recently expanded its winter residency and suffers greatly from frostbite. Other than mourning doves, the myth of birds' feet freezing doesn't fly.

### Ask The Expert

Michaela in Dallas County asks  
*"If a bird feeder is emptied, will the birds die?"*

While many of our feathered friends have departed for the winter, numerous species remain. Iowa's winter birds are those that can eat available seeds, dormant insects and smaller birds and mammals. Species that overwinter include birds of prey, crows, jays, song birds, upland game birds and woodpeckers among others. The needs of winter birds are similar to those of birds during other times of year, including adequate food.

A few people disagree regarding the advantages of feeding winter birds. Some claim birds become dependent on feeders as a sole food supply. While true that birds become accustomed to a reliable food source and will visit it regularly for convenience, they forage for food in many places. While consistency is desired (especially in harsh winters) if a feeder goes empty for whatever reason, regular visitors will adapt and find food elsewhere.

Because birds constantly forage for food to supply energy and survive the cold, winter birds are easily attracted to feeders. Properly maintained feeders substitute for the loss of eradicated natural habitats and food resources.

When determining food choices, research the birds you wish to entice. Use foods that attract them. Suet and peanuts are popular as are seeds and grains. When in doubt, use black oil sunflower seeds which contains more food value and is less expensive than striped sunflower seeds. Most winter birds are seed eaters and black oil sunflower seeds attract a variety of species.

In addition to the pleasure derived from the hours of educational entertainment of bird feeding, some bird watchers provide a valuable service by tracking species that visit their winter feeders. For example, Project FeederWatch, operated by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada, is a winter-long survey that tracks birds visiting feeders in North America from November through April. This data helps scientist determine broad scale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in distribution and abundance.

To participate in Project FeederWatch, visit [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/index.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/index.html).



## ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

# GO PRAIRIE SNOWSHOEING FOR GREAT BISON AND ELK VIEWING

Iowans have a unique area to relish winter's silence while watching bison, elk, raptors and coyotes amidst 8,000 acres of native tallgrass prairie and oak savanna at the sprawling Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge.

"We have guided snowshoe hikes twice a month," says Megan Wandag, visitor services specialist at the refuge near Prairie City in Jasper County. Visitors can also check out snowshoes anytime for non-guided outings. There is no cost, just bring a photo I.D. to borrow equipment.

For newbies, ranger-guided interpretive hikes begin with a quick overview of how to wear and use snowshoes. The modern-style gear uses lightweight aluminum frames with neoprene decking for ease-of-use and less bulk versus traditional wood and sinew models. "You get better flotation on the snow and it is easier to walk," says Wandag. Child and adult sizes are available.

As the easiest-to-learn winter sport and one that doesn't rely on sliding and speed, snowshoeing is a hoot at any age. Be social with a group or go solo for solitude, then set your pace from a leisurely stroll to intensive running workouts.

### GET WOWED BY WINTER WILDLIFE

"There are so many animal tracks they almost blend together in the snow," says Wandag. Look for coyote, fox and mouse tracks. Bald eagles soar in from nearby Lake Red Rock. Catch dusk and dawn glimpses of short-eared owls, a grassland species endangered in Iowa. "By far, the best elk viewing is during winter," she says, since hiding spots near trees lack their leaves. The bulls carry their racks until early spring, so you'll get a great view. Observe bison swinging their massive heads side-to-side to push aside snow to get to grasses.

### POST SNOWSHOE AMENITIES

Warm up inside and get absorbed by exhibits and theater

films at the Prairie Learning Center. Pack picnic food and enjoy the indoor eating area. Finish by driving through the 740-acre bison and elk enclosure.

### TRAILS

Trails total eight miles and range from half-mile to two-mile loops, or go for extra fun and hit the open prairie using easy-to-traverse firebreaks.

### GET THERE

**HOURS** are 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. (Center closes during extreme winter weather.) Call 515-994-3400 or check [tallgrass.org](http://tallgrass.org) for times of guided snowshoeing and weather closings. The refuge is 18 miles east of Des Moines, on Iowa Highway 163. Follow the directional signs just south of Prairie City at exit 18. Travelers on I-80 use exit 155 at Colfax and follow signs about 7 miles south on Highway 117 to the refuge.

### STAY COMFORTABLE, COME PREPARED

Dress properly to shed layers when heating up and add layers when cooling off. Kids should wear snowpants.

**WEAR THE BASIC THREE LAYERS: WICKING:** Against skin wear silk or synthetic long underwear, to transfer moisture away from the body. Avoid cotton as it absorbs sweat and doesn't insulate when wet. **WARMING:** Over the wicking layer, wear fleece, wool sweaters or down jackets. **WIND/WET:** Top with a parka or outer shell layer to repel wind and snow.

**PACK EXTRAS:** Wear sunglasses to reduce glare. Wear thick, warm socks of wool or fleece and snow-proof boots. Bring warm hats and gloves, lip balm and water bottles insulated in a heavy sock to prevent freezing. A scarf or facemask helps cut the ever-present prairie wind.

Amanda Mullen and Scott Siepker, hosts of *Iowa Outdoors* on Iowa Public Television, explore the Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge on snowshoe. Equipment is free to visitors. (Find air times or watch online at [iptv.org](http://iptv.org).)





# Together

BY BRIAN BUTTON PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

## The Book for Eagle Lovers

Take part in the wondrous return of bald eagles in the new book, *The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles*, written and photographed by Iowa Outdoors contributor Ty Smedes. His 16 years of eagle photography and observation come to life in this work chronicling a conservation success story with facts, anecdotes, charts, statistics and a photo gallery used to illustrate bald eagle biology and the bald eagle's recovery in Iowa.

Declared our national bird in 1782, the bald eagle was on the brink of extinction during the 20th century until measures were taken to save it. In 1977, Iowa recorded its first bald eagle nest in 72 years and three decades later, 253 young were reared across 88 counties during 2010.

Over 200 spectacular color photographs, among the most incredible ever taken in Iowa and the United States, capture the power, grace and majesty of the bald eagle and its return to prominence in Iowa.

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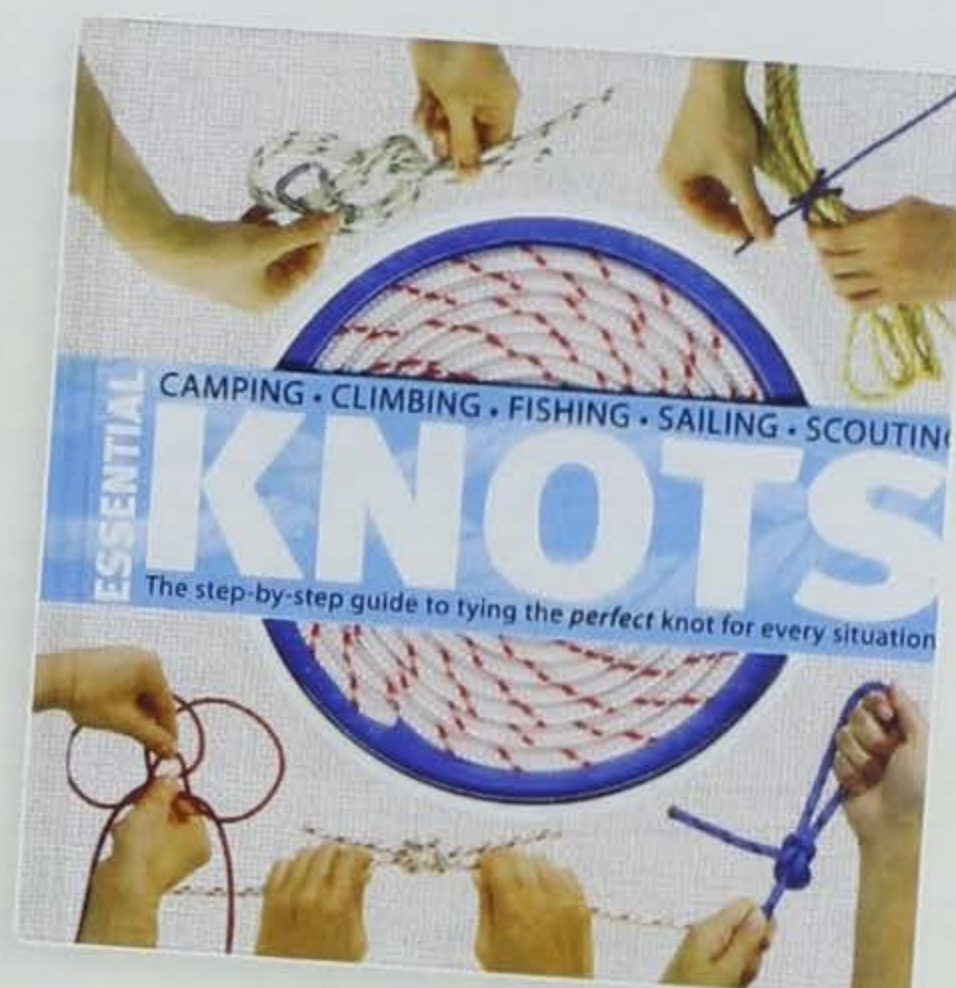
## Get Tied Up In Knots

After reviewing this book, a whole world opens up. Your mind will race with new projects, activities and uses around the home, truck, camp, backyard, boat and garage. From vital knots to decorative knots and rope tricks, this book is loaded with 85 of the best bindings, loops, bends, hitches, lashings and splices.

*Essential Knots: the Step-by-Step Guide to Tying the Perfect Knot for Every Situation* is a practical, colorful and easy-to-use guide to knots: how to tie them, when to use them and why a specific knot is the perfect choice.

Clear and concise instructions are illustrated with precise photos guiding the knot tyer, and additional text describes the variety of uses for each knot and provides alternatives for similar knots, while full-color photos show each finished knot in use.

The authors, Neville Olliffe and Madeleine Rowles-Olliffe, have run a small business of making and selling handmade items of knotting and rope work for 20 years.



Practice cord is included with the 144-page, hardcover book. 400 color photos. ISBN 978-1-59485-485-9. \$18.95. Order at 206-223-6303 or [www.themountaineersbooks.org](http://www.themountaineersbooks.org)



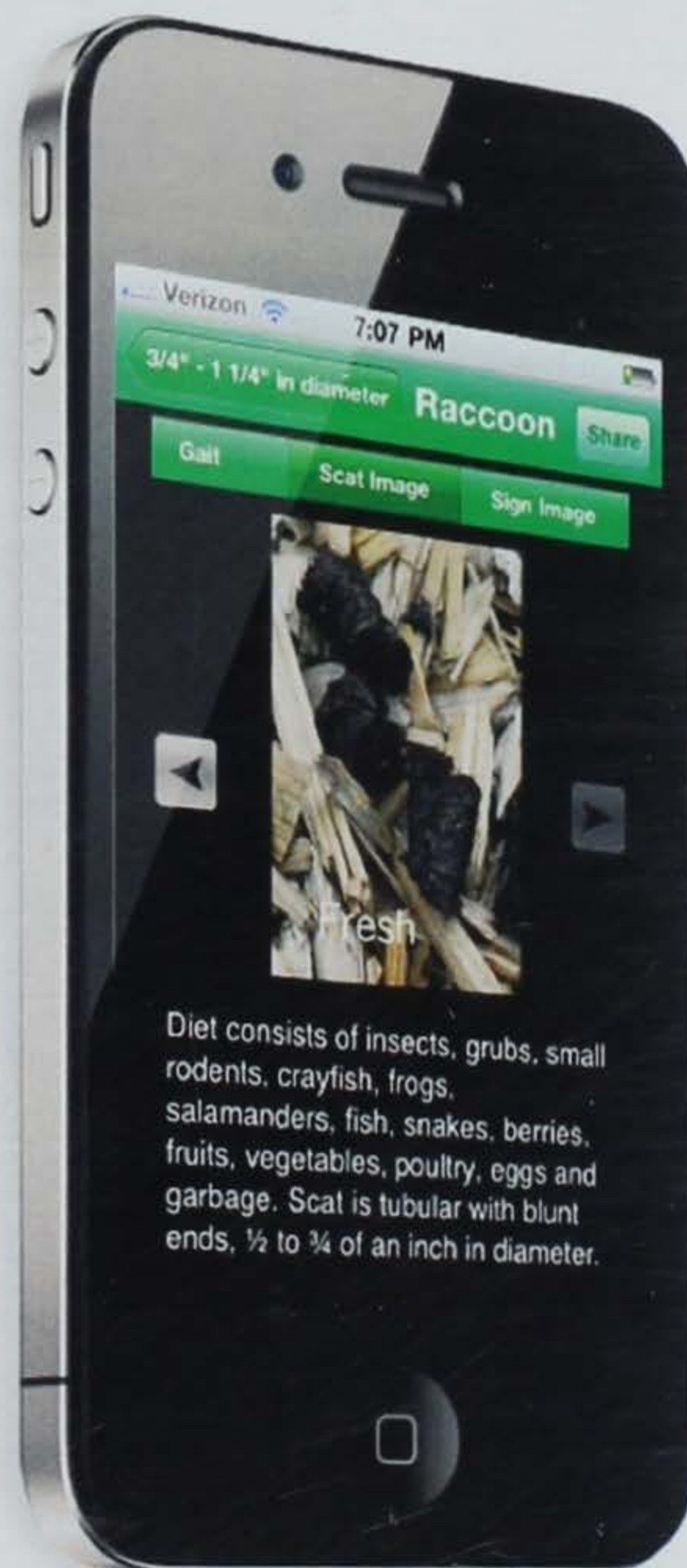
## Great Nature Apps For Nature Nerds

Identify animal tracks or scat and be an instant naturalist wherever you carry your phone. Once installed, the *MyNature Animal Tracks* app for iPhone or Android requires no phone connection or wi-fi to use.

With an intuitive, easy-to-navigate design, identify 48 animal species using either tracks or scat. The app guides users into narrowing down the species, beginning with six broad categories of illustrated track types based on number of toes, hoofs, bird-like, etc. Six illustrated scat categories are based on size and shape. The app narrows down choices and provides a description, illustrations and photos of the animal, tracks and scat, plus an illustration of the gait of the animal. A map shows the range of the animal in North America. Sound files feature vocalizations of the species.

Use the journal to record your notes such as habitat or weather. The app automatically fills in date, time and latitude/longitude. Add photos using your phone camera. Post your entry, including photos, to Facebook and Twitter and send via email.

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healthiest  
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## THE NUMBER ONE THING

BY TIM LANE

I propose a toast to everyone connected with Iowa's Healthiest State in the Nation campaign. As you may know the 2010 Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index ranks Iowa 19th in the nation when it comes to being physically, emotionally and mentally healthy. And that isn't good enough!

The governor and a wide assortment of public and private players feel that by 2016 we can be number one. I love setting the bar high and I hope we get there before 2016...and that to do so we pass 18 other states that are also upping their health status.

Part of the game plan is to adopt Blue Zone lessons. Blue Zones are places where people live healthy, happy lives well into their 90s and 100s. The term was created by *National Geographic* researcher Dan Buettner who studied these regions and found they had common traits.

For example, one trait deals with eating speed. The stomach is a slow communicator. Twenty minutes after you're full it finally lets your brain know. No instant messaging here. The result, especially when rushed, is overeating. One approach is to slow down. The other is to stop when you feel almost full.

This brings me back to the proposed toast and other body language. Recently, researchers have piled on studies about diet soda. It seems the more you drink, the more likely you are to be overweight. They don't know exactly why, but one theory suggests that aspartame and other sweeteners prevalent in the drinks further disrupt stomach-brain communication so the body becomes even slower in letting other organs know, "Hey...we are full here."

But it isn't just weight. One nine-year study at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine followed more than 2,500 people and found daily diet soda users were 48 percent more likely to have a heart attack, stroke or die from those events, versus those who rarely or never drank it.

The analysis, presented at the American Stroke Association International Stroke Conference, took into account a host of cardiovascular risk factors, including age, sex, smoking, physical activity, alcohol and calorie consumption, and pre-existing heart disease.

So as I suggested in my last article, choose a natural, cheap, healthy and ubiquitous drink—tap water! But in the spirit of full disclosure I can share that the Blue Zone studies did indicate that one to two glasses of wine daily, especially red, can add years to your life. The qualifiers here include other aspects of your diet and amounts of other alcohol consumed.

It also goes almost without saying that a huge part of Iowa's effort to be the healthiest includes physically moving in parks, trails and other outdoor activities. In addition to dropping any diet soda habits, I also suggest you add [www.iowahealthieststate.com](http://www.iowahealthieststate.com) to your favorites list. GO IOWANS!

**TIM LANE** is a nationally recognized authority on public health and physical activity. Last summer he and his buddies rode bicycles across Iowa, river to river, in 21 straight hours.

## But Why?

Helping adults answer children's nature questions

BY A. JAY WINTER

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

### GRACE, AGE 10, IN WINNEBAGO COUNTY ASKS: Why do bats hang upside down?

Unlike birds, bats have trouble with takeoffs from the ground. Their wings are not as strong as those of birds and they cannot run fast enough to build up flight speed. Bats have an easier time flying when they start already in the air. They use their front claws on their wings to climb to a high spot and launch themselves to achieve flight.

Another reason they hang upside down is because a bat's talons or back claws work opposite of most muscles. In fact, their knees face backwards. When they relax, special tendons lock the toes and talons in place, so they do not exert energy while hanging. Once their toes and legs are locked in place, their body weight and gravity keep them hanging. By flexing leg muscles, the toes and talons release and flight begins.

Humans cannot hang upside down as blood rushes to the head and tends to pool or collect. But the bat's compact, small size allows their heart to easily distribute the small volume of blood even when upside down.

Because of their unique physical abilities, bats can safely roost in places where predators cannot get them. To sleep, bats hang themselves upside down in a cave or hollow tree, with their wings draped around their bodies like cloaks. They hang upside down to hibernate and even upon death.

BAT PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH



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DNR

GRAY TREE FROG | BY KRISTIN FANKHAUSER



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



### HOT LIPS

Rub a stick of lip chap onto facial tissue or other paper before lighting. Under gusty or damp conditions, the burning wax helps to quickly ignite paper and tinder.

## Snowshoe Fixes on the Fly

When snowshoeing, carry a few repair items such as plastic zip ties or bailing wire to reattach decking to frames. Wrap several layers of duct tape around a snowshoe pole, water bottle or other gear to secure broken binding straps or patch puncture holes. You can also apply tape to hot spots on feet before a blister emerges. The slick tape surface reduces skin friction.



## Prevent Freeze-ups

Stay hydrated in dry winter air by preventing water bottles from freezing. Winter hikers, outdoor photographers, hunters, skiers and snowshoers need water. Here is how to keep water flowing on cold days:

- 1) Carry leak-proof water bottles upside down. If ice forms, it will form at the top, leaving liquid at the capped end. This also prevents lids and sippers from freezing shut.
- 2) In extreme cold, fill bottles with sports drinks such as Gatorade versus water. The electrolytes lower the freezing point and help quench thirst during lengthy, energy-intensive workouts. For non-strenuous activities, water is preferable as sport drinks contain plenty of calories.



## How to Avoid Camo Washout

Extend the life of your favorite camouflage clothes by turning garments inside out and handwashing in cold water and baking soda. For best results, soak overnight. Hang-dry to reduce color loss from abrasion and heat. If in a hurry, wash on delicate and use the shortest dryer cycle. Avoid over drying.



## ICE FISH FOR COLD CASH!

Hook into **\$50k in prizes** at one of the largest winter fishing derbies in the Midwest.

Spruce up the ice shack, dust off the ice fishing gear and dig out the family favorite chili recipe, the Council Bluffs Winterfest Ice Fishing Derby at Lake Manawa State Park is just around the pike. On Jan. 28 the 772-acre Missouri River oxbow lake is turned into a 1,000-plus community of hard water fans young and old. More than \$25,000 in cash and prizes are up for grabs, and another \$25,000 for anglers hooking specially tagged fish. Ice anglers can also win prizes for the largest fish by species, the best decorated ice shack or the tastiest bowl of chili. Prizes range from cash to equipment, such as ice shacks, augers, fish finders and GPS units. Bring the family for better chances at prizes in adult and youth categories. Registration is \$15 through noon Jan. 14, and \$20 through the day of the event. Pre-registrants enjoy a free raffle ticket for an Arctic Cat ATV, a chance at one of four ice shacks to be given away during the month of January and waiver of the early morning check-in. To register, fill out the form from the derby website.

For more information, check out [www.winterfestderby.com](http://www.winterfestderby.com), or call Lake Manawa State Park at 712-366-0220.



# Winterfest \$25,000 Ice Fishing Derby Saturday, January 28, 2012 7 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**OVER \$50,000 IN CASH & PRIZES**

Pre-registration is \$15 • Registration the day of is \$20

Lake Manawa State Park

Council Bluffs, IA (I-80/I-29, Exit 3, South)

Check the website at [www.winterfestderby.com](http://www.winterfestderby.com)  
for the latest info and to check on ice conditions.

Ice House contest sponsored by the Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce  
Chili cook-off sponsored by Doll Distributing





# Lost In Iowa

BY BRIAN BUTTON PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH



Ready this year by May 1, and making a winter debut in 2013, the Sherburne Cabin at Springbrook State Park in Guthrie County makes a perfect winter getaway for friends and families. A large 75-foot deck affords views of expansive timber, gateway to 920 acres of park forest. The cabin features bamboo and tile floors, full kitchen, hickory cabinets, three baths and sleeps 14. The sprawling dining table faces two oversized picture windows for mealtime views of deer, birds, fox, coyote and turkey.





# A GREAT FAMILY HIDEAWAY

Get ready to make reservations for winter 2013 when the once sprawling family home, now the Floyd Sherburne cabin, will open for its first winter. Available beginning May 1, it makes a spectacular stay for family get-togethers and winter adventure. Hand-built in the 1970s by Sherburne, before his passing, he sold the home and land to the DNR as a 10-acre addition to the heavily wooded Springbrook State Park.

"The cabin is off by itself in a very private, intimate setting," says park manager Carolyn Hack. "There is no noise or traffic."

Nestled in a wooded area on the park's west side, with a scenic overlook and great opportunities to view wildlife, this getaway is tailor-made for families and friends that love the outdoors. Take hikes to explore wintry quiet on the Guthrie County park's 12 miles of trail, go ice-fishing for crappies on the 17-acre spring-fed lake then burn off energy sledding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing or relax while bird watching. Afterwards, the cabin awaits with four spacious bedrooms, two living rooms, three baths and 3,700 square feet of cozy quarters.

Out the front door is a fruit orchard with grape

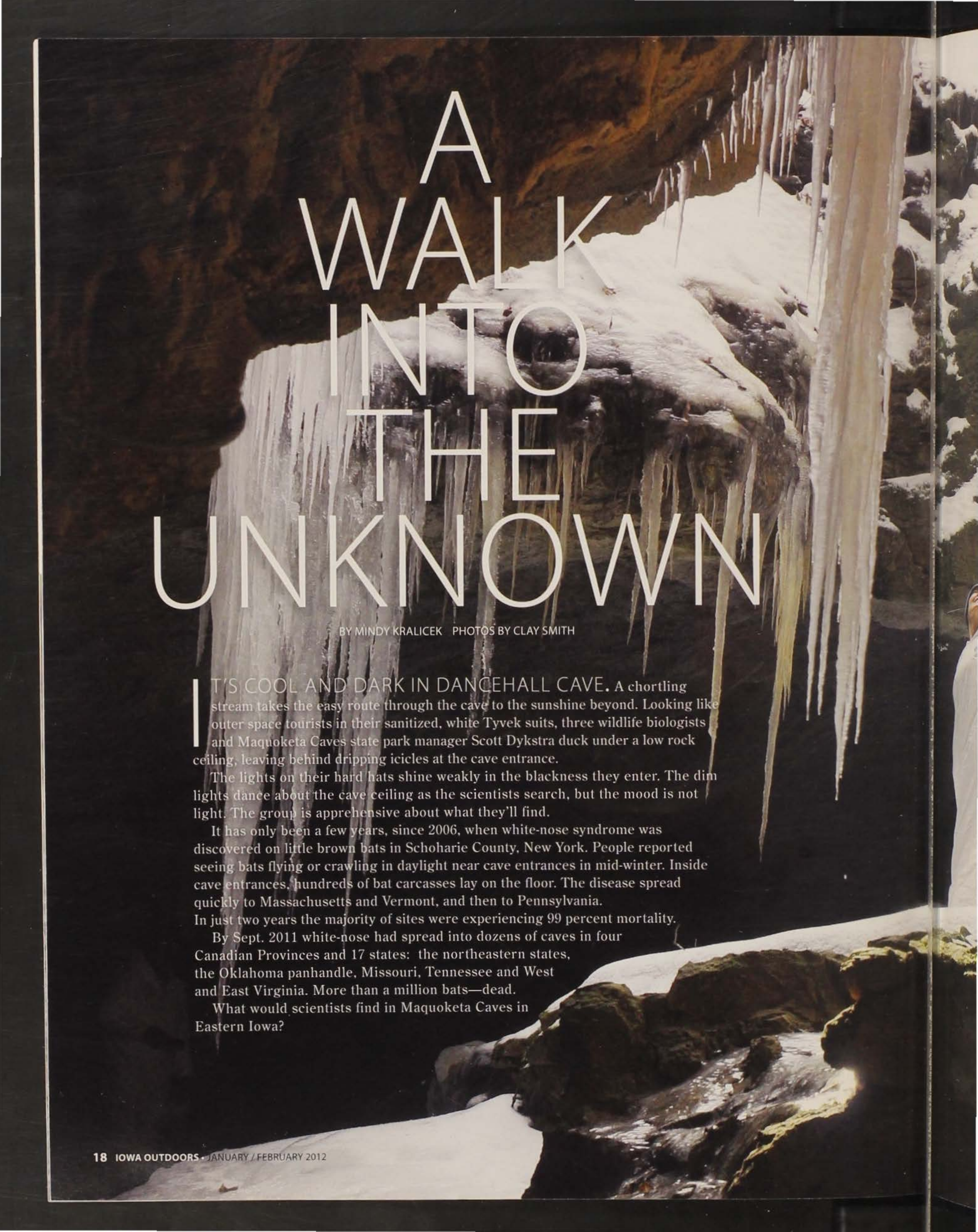
vines and apple, pear, plum and peach trees that attract songbirds and deer—easily enjoyed through several large picture windows. Wild turkey enter the yard from a sprawling timber. The backyard connects to 920 acres of state park woods and prairie where redheaded woodpeckers, jays, red and gray fox and coyotes play—all viewable from the expansive dinner table.

At night, stargaze crystalline dark skies from the vast deck, cook dinner on a 48-inch charcoal grill and listen to owls hoot. A benched outdoor seating area surrounds a fire ring for weenie roasts. Or prepare meals inside at the full-service, well-equipped kitchen with large refrigerator, island, dishwasher, oven and microwave.

Cap the night in the library room complete with board games, cards, books, DVD player and television.

*Located off county road F-25, west of the main park at 2437 160th Road, Guthrie Center. Rates: \$200 per night, two-night minimum stay (three-night minimum during holidays.) Make reservations for winter 2013 at 1-877-427-2757 or <http://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com>*





# A WALK INTO THE UNKNOWN

BY MINDY KRALICEK PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

IT'S COOL AND DARK IN DANCEHALL CAVE. A chortling stream takes the easy route through the cave to the sunshine beyond. Looking like outer space tourists in their sanitized, white Tyvek suits, three wildlife biologists and Maquoketa Caves state park manager Scott Dykstra duck under a low rock ceiling, leaving behind dripping icicles at the cave entrance.


The lights on their hard hats shine weakly in the blackness they enter. The dim lights dance about the cave ceiling as the scientists search, but the mood is not light. The group is apprehensive about what they'll find.

It has only been a few years, since 2006, when white-nose syndrome was discovered on little brown bats in Schoharie County, New York. People reported seeing bats flying or crawling in daylight near cave entrances in mid-winter. Inside cave entrances, hundreds of bat carcasses lay on the floor. The disease spread quickly to Massachusetts and Vermont, and then to Pennsylvania. In just two years the majority of sites were experiencing 99 percent mortality.

By Sept. 2011 white-nose had spread into dozens of caves in four Canadian Provinces and 17 states: the northeastern states, the Oklahoma panhandle, Missouri, Tennessee and West and East Virginia. More than a million bats—dead.

What would scientists find in Maquoketa Caves in Eastern Iowa?



A photograph showing three people in white protective suits standing at the entrance of a cave. The cave opening is dark and recessed into a rocky cliff. The surrounding landscape is covered in snow and ice, with icicles hanging from the rock formations. The person on the left is looking up at the cave entrance. The person in the center is leaning forward, and the person on the right is assisting them. The scene is set in a cold, winter environment.

Looking for signs of the deadly white nosed fungus on bat populations, scientific researchers move from icy conditions outside Dancehall Cave in Maquoketa Caves State Park to a warmer cave interior where bats hibernate. In the Jackson County cave complex temperatures hover in the low 50s°.



## The mystery of white-nose syndrome

Where did the fungus come from? Scientists are not sure, but there are reports of it widespread in Europe. The difference is bats do not die from the fungus in Europe.

This cold-loving, cave-dwelling fungus, scientific name *Geomyces destructans*, attacks bats as they hibernate in large numbers. It appears as fuzzy white patches on the nose and mouth. It can spread over their whole bodies, but when it's on the wings, it does severe damage. Carol Meteyer, a pathologist with USGS National Wildlife Health Center and a lead author of research on the fungus, says:

*"This fungus is amazingly destructive—it digests, erodes, and invades the skin—particularly the wings—of hibernating bats. The ability of this fungus to invade bats' wing skin is unlike that of any known skin fungal pathogen in land mammals."*

Scientists believe the fungus causes dehydration in hibernating bats, forcing them to wake during winter to find water and food. With no insects to eat, the underweight bats perish quickly in the cold. Bats that survive with fungus-damaged wings will not thrive during spring through fall and go into hibernation the next year in weakened conditions.

The little brown bat population has suffered the most, and could become extinct. The endangered Indiana bat has had its population cut in half. Tri-colored bats are suffering with the fungus. Big browns and long-eared bats appear to withstand white nose effects slightly better, but time will tell if they survive.

Daryl Howell, DNR zoologist, forecasts what they might find in Iowa caves. "The big browns will probably not have it. They don't travel as far as the Missouri caves where the fungus has been found. In the '80s, Indiana bats banded in a Missouri mine were captured during a summer survey in Iowa.

"In Iowa we have hundreds of little browns—not the tens of thousands other states have. We don't believe ours migrate long distances. That said, there is not a lot of migration information about bats. We know a lot about bird

migration, but bats don't attract the research funding that other species do."

The fungus moves from bat to bat (bats are very social creatures); but humans are not affected. The DNR closed state park caves to the public for the summers of 2010 and 2011 in the hope that if people were spreading the fungus by spore-contaminated clothing and shoes, that exposure route could be stopped.

## They see the bats

The first huddle of tiny, brown furry bodies is discovered on the ceiling, tucked into a crevice. The scientists huddle in a circle, each shining a flashlight on the group of about 25 bats. The bats' black forearms stick out like barrettes, and their ears guide the scientists to their faces.

"They're big browns. I don't see white-nose,"

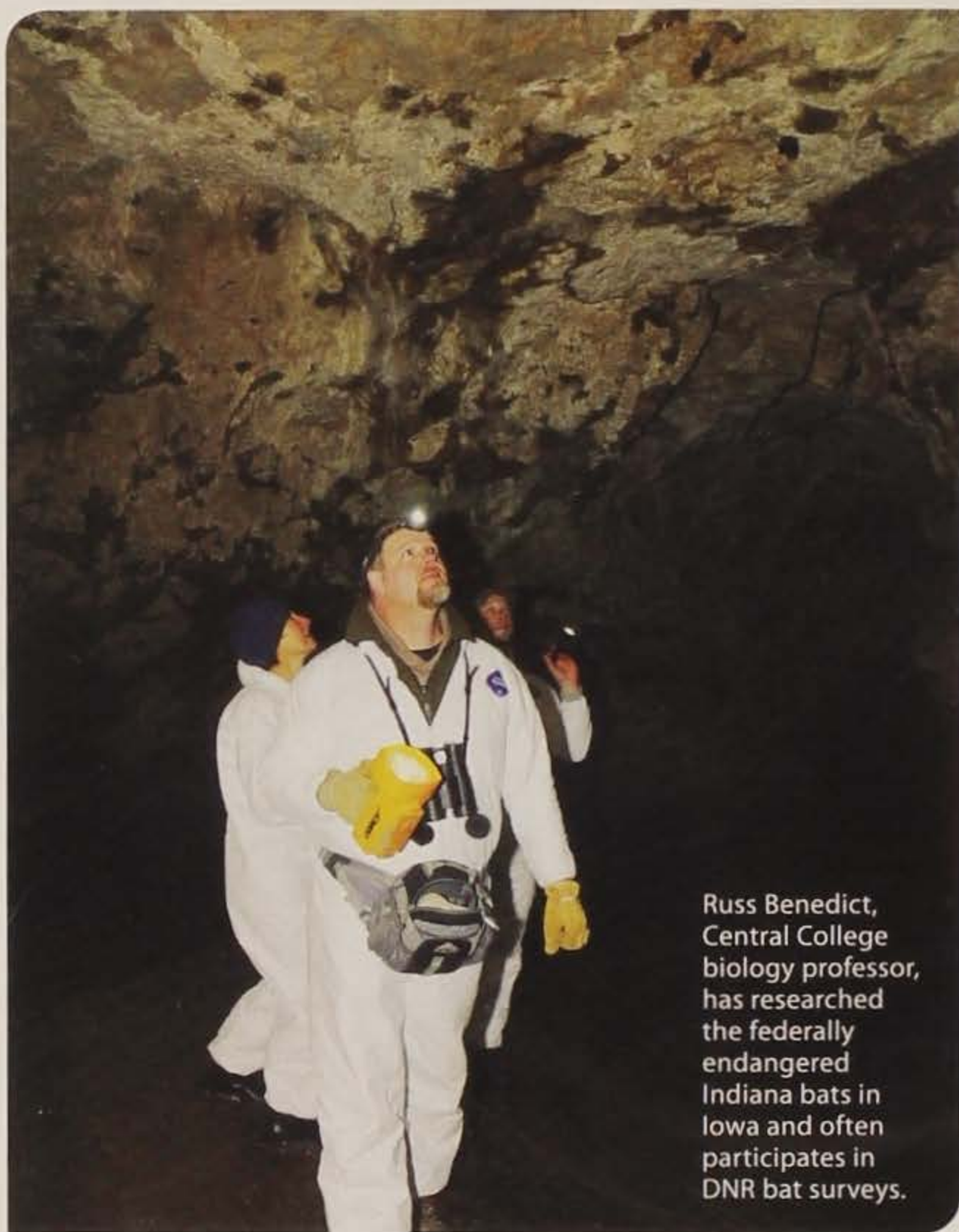
says Russ Benedict, Central College biology professor.

But the group knows that white-nose isn't always obvious. Bats have been known to carry it without showing symptoms.

Howell and Kelly Poole, another DNR wildlife biologist, count the bats. Howell has been monitoring the population of bats at Maquoketa Caves for several years. They take pictures to recount the bats later.

Flashlights scour the ceiling looking for more. Eight more groups are discovered and counted: 12 here, two there, another five, a group of 30. One bat, along the outside of its cluster, breathes very slowly. The others are motionless.

"See the red forearms," booms out Benedict excitedly. "These are tri-color bats. Look closely at their fur, the base and tip of each hair is dark and the middle is lighter."



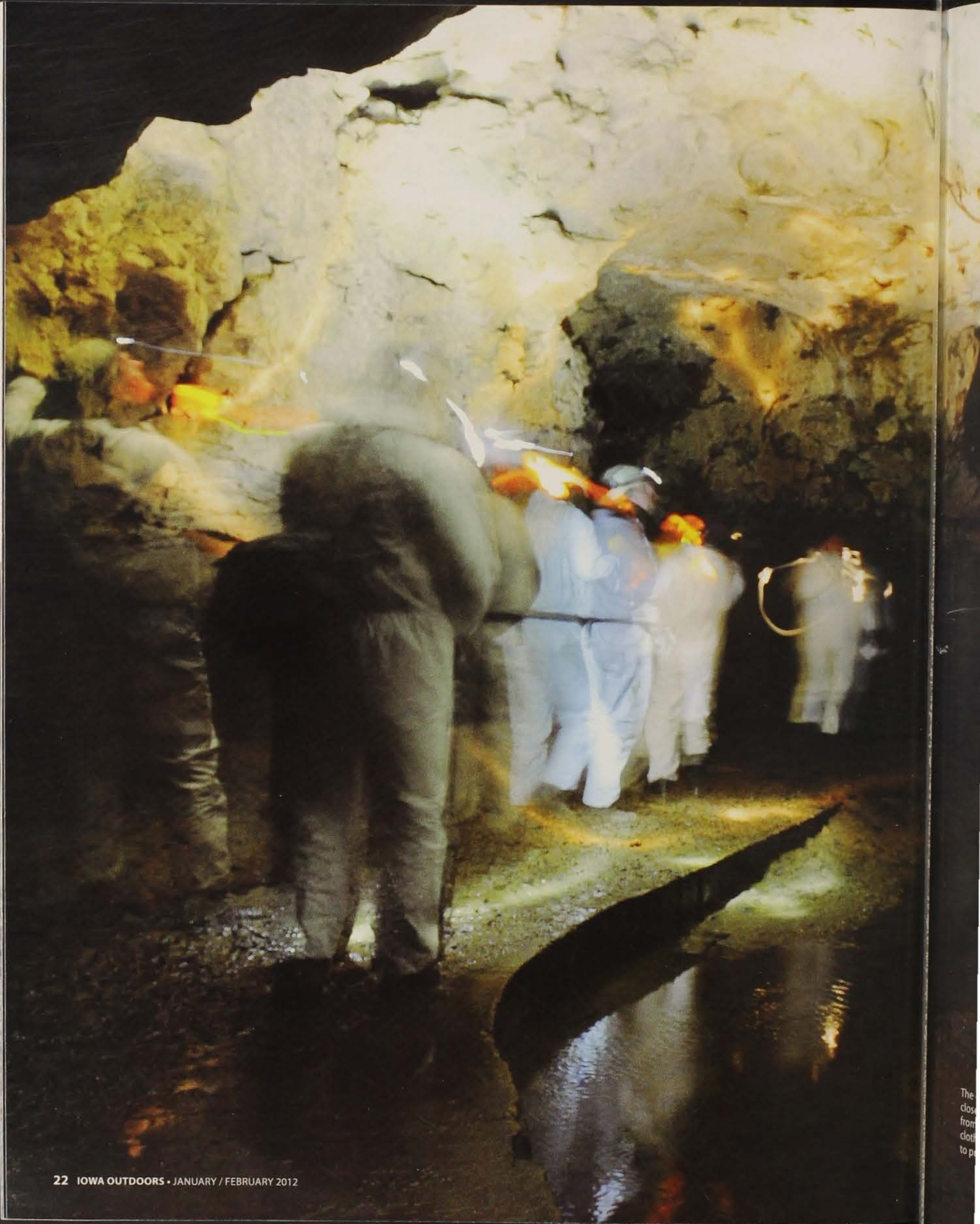
Russ Benedict, Central College biology professor, has researched the federally endangered Indiana bats in Iowa and often participates in DNR bat surveys.






Above, a group of little brown bats huddles together for warmth. Bats are the only mammals that fly, and, evolutionarily, they are a very old group with fossil records dating back 50 million years. The small flap on their ears probably has a role in their acute hearing and echolocation abilities.









**Why Save Bats?** As voracious predators of nocturnal insects, including many crop and forest pests, bats annually prevent an estimated \$1.76 billion in Iowa agricultural losses. A single little brown bat can eat up to 1,000 mosquito-sized insects in a single hour, while a pregnant or lactating female bat typically eats the equivalent of her entire body weight in insects each night.

The caverns at Maquoketa Caves State Park are currently closed to the public to prevent white-nose fungus spores from transporting from one cave to another on visitor's clothes. DNR scientists sanitize their shoes and coveralls to prevent cave cross-contamination.





At Maquoketa Caves State Park, researchers look for evidence of white-nose fungus on hibernating bats. More than 20 percent of the bat population in North America has recently died from white-nose syndrome. The fungus thrives in cool, moist conditions and erodes skin tissue, especially on the wings.



The hibernating bats slumber on, unaware of the interest they have stirred. The scientists will not disturb the bats; they are there only to report findings.

The group travels further into the cave. A half-eaten bat clings to a crevice on the wall. This is an opportunity for the scientists: a dead bat can be inspected for signs of the disease. Poole pulls on medical gloves and climbs on Benedict's shoulders. He lifts her up to reach the creature. Above a blood scrape on the wall, she begins to delicately pull at the half-eaten bat. It won't budge. Poole gets more aggressive and after a few minutes she dislodges it and Benedict lowers her to the ground. All lights are on the corpse (likely consumed by a raccoon or opossum). Benedict pulls a wing out to inspect it. No holes, no fungus. The bat is placed in a plastic bag for daylight inspection.

The final bat count for Dancehall Cave, confirmed by the photos, is 435 big brown bats and two tricolored bats.

### Wye Cave

Wye Cave has a warmer environment than Dancehall, and the scientists are anxious to check if bats could be affected differently in it. After a modest trek through the snow, the group steps down into a ravine and stops in front of a rocky hole in the ground. Poole, Benedict and Dykstra descend one at a time, toehold by toehold, into the darkness. Howell waits at the entrance.

The cave opens up in height and the three stand and shine their lights about, looking for bats. It is humid and several degrees warmer in this cave. Only a handful of bats are visible: tricolor and little brown bats, sporadically clinging to the ceiling, a couple are only a foot or two from the cave floor. One is glistening, its fur completely covered in condensation.

The three crawl into another hole that leads further downward. Benedict finds only three more. "I wonder if raccoons have been in here eating the bats," he ponders out loud.

It's time to head back. At the parking lot the four remove their Tyvek suits and place them in a plastic bag for disposal. As they sanitize their boots, the local news media and passersby ask what they've learned.

Howell tells them the bats look to be free of white-nose syndrome. "It's not if Iowa bats get white-nose; it's when," is his concluding statement. "We hope to keep it at bay long enough that a treatment will be developed."

Iowa's caves will likely remain closed to the public, with some exceptions for educational and research groups that take the precautions the scientists have taken. The fungus is the deadliest threat ever to these species.

### Stopping the spread of white-nose

Over 100 entities in the U.S. are involved in



### Get Involved

Learn to build bat houses or donate to help with research at Bat Conservation International. Visit [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org) or donate at 1-800-538-2287, extension 28.

researching and stopping the spread of white-nose symptoms. This is what is known so far: the fungus dies in temperatures near 100 degrees; it survives in indirect sunlight, but dies when exposed to direct ultraviolet light; and it can be killed with some disinfectants, such as Lysol.

One idea is to install a heat lamp at cave entrances.

Cave walls cannot be sprayed with a fungicide because amphibians and other members of the cave ecosystem may be hurt by the chemicals.

For now, one of the biggest obstacles faced by scientists is their lack of understanding how white nose syndrome works. If they can figure that out, maybe they can develop a way to stop it. 🦇



# Hunting Blind

Legally blind, 85-year-old Ruth Vandergriff is fishing, hunting and enjoying the outdoors in the company of good friends.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MINDY KRALICEK



**A**S MATT JOHNSON DRIVES his pickup along a tree-lined residential street in Fairfield, he sees Ruth Vandergriff already waiting in a chair in front of her garage. He's a few minutes early, but not too early for Ruth.

"It's easy to spot your house, Ruth. It's the only one in town painted John Deere green and yellow," Matt teases as he gets out of his truck.

Ruth's silver hair sticks out in tufts underneath a black ball cap. She wears a black windbreaker, black slacks and black gloves. It's been raining on and off all day and mist is in the air, but Ruth's spirit is not dampened. She stands up slowly with the aid of a cane. Matt takes her arm and walks

her to the open passenger door, placing a plastic stepstool on the driveway to help her climb into the cab.

"My husband said he didn't want a bright yellow house, but after the painter was done, he said he liked it!" she counters cheerfully.

Matt is a member of the Des Moines River Valley Chapter of Serve Outdoors in Keosauqua, a nonprofit, charitable educational organization that helps people with disabilities, youngsters and elders hunt and fish. Ruth tells the story of how their friendship began.

"I was attending a meeting of my vision-impaired group and Matt was our guest speaker. He talked about his club's program to help handicapped people enjoy hunting and





## Serve Outdoors

**THE BLIND:** A specially designed hunting blind allows persons with disabilities, youngsters and elders to enjoy the outdoors. The ramp slides inside for transport.

fishing. When his talk was over he asked us to raise our hands if we were interested. I was the first to raise my hand."

"I asked you which you were interested in and you said, 'Both.' Last weekend Ruth caught a 2 1/2-pound bass."

She nods appreciatively.

Their hunt is on Hazel Belle Baker's farm north of Libertyville. Hazel is Matt's stepfather's mother. Dogs abruptly greet the truck at the driveway, but their barking quiets as the truck drives past weathered farm buildings and into a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) field,

ablaze in the late afternoon with goldenrod and black-eyed Susans. The top of a rise reveals a clearing next to timber with a wooden, camouflage-painted blind built on a hay wagon. A soybean food plot, yellow-green, gold and brown, is 15 yards from the timber.

Matt stops the truck near the blind and helps Ruth out. She sits patiently on a folding chair as Matt opens the door into the back of the blind. A ramp topped with dirt-colored indoor/outdoor carpet provides traction and easy access for Ruth to enter the blind.





### Serve Outdoors

Serve Outdoors is a nonprofit, charitable educational organization that serves people with disabilities, youngsters and elders. The program is free to each participant with the exception that each participant must purchase their own hunting or fishing license. Fundraisers are held, grants are sought and contributions accepted to fund hunting, fishing, shooting and archery events and programs. Any business, civic organization, church, conservation organization, club, school, family or individual can host an event or experience. There is no membership fee. For more information, go to [www.serveoutdoors.org](http://www.serveoutdoors.org).

Contacts for the Des Moines River Valley Chapter in Keosauqua are Matt Johnson at **641-919-4211** or John Hamstreet at **319-288-0814**. This group has held fishing and hunting events for individuals as well as residents of Good Samaritan and Center Village care centers and the Southeast Iowa Visually Impaired Support Group.

Inside are three folding chairs, two benches for storage, a narrow horizontal window on each side and two narrow windows in front. A tripod is set up in the middle of the floor, to be used by hunters needing assistance to hold and aim a rifle or shotgun. Matt pulls the black-lined curtains to the side so Ruth can see out. He climbs back into his truck and drives it away from view on the other side of the rise.

Ruth looks up. The blind's ceiling is finished in a foam mattress pad painted black, a cheap substitute for acoustic foam panels. The walls under the windows are lined with black rubber to minimize sound and vibration from wheelchair bumps against the wall. At the base of the windows are black, foam-covered rods on which to rest shotgun barrels. Inside the benches are LED flashlights, drinks, extra black gloves and supplies for the cold.

Ruth is excited, like a kindergartner headed for the first day of school. She smiles tentatively and her hands move nervously. Her mind is jumping with memories of her two previous hunts with Matt, as a child helping her father prepare squirrels and rabbits for cooking that he had shot and plucking pheasants. There weren't deer back then. Her mind shifts to her children and grandchildren, and on to her husband who passed away four months before their 65th wedding anniversary. They would all enjoy being out here. But today, this adventure is reserved for her and Matt.

Matt climbs into the blind. "Could you see me walking

down the hill?" he asks Ruth.

"Yes. I could see movement so I figured it was you." As Matt gets her shotgun ready, Ruth reflects. "It happened a while back. I knew I couldn't see as well as I used to, but I still drove to work and around Fairfield. Then one afternoon my husband and I were watching our grandson play ball when gnats begin flying around my head." Ruth bats the air in front of her face with the back of her hand. "When I woke up the next morning, the gnats were still there. So my husband took me to the eye doctor. That was it."

"How do you like this new blind?" Matt asks as he mounts a 20-gauge youth shotgun on the tripod. It is loaded with 2 3/4-inch Remington rifled slugs and the safety is on. "We finished it and placed it here last night in the dark. The deer may not show because they're not used to seeing this parked here. We'll just have to see what happens."

"This is very nice," Ruth approves.

"It's a lot better than the pop-up we used last year when you got that doe. And it's more comfortable than climbing into a tree stand. When I was a kid I just sat on the ground against a tree and waited." He scoots Ruth's chair in line with the left window where he expects to see deer emerge from the timber.

At first there is a hushed silence. Leaves drift to the ground. Then a few birds call. A monarch butterfly persistently flutters about. From the shadowy interior of the timber a deer raises



its head and lowers it. They are there all right.

Ruth sets her right forefinger on the trigger guard. Her thumb rubs circles on the top of the shotgun above the receiver. Most of an hour passes.

Matt whispers and motions up with his hands. "Do you want to stand and stretch?" Ruth shakes her head no.

"This is it," Matt whispers as he points to his watch. "It's six o'clock. This is when they'll come out to feed."

Almost on cue, a doe emerges a few minutes later from the right end of the woods. She moseys out into a clearing.

"Are you sure you want a buck this time?" Matt asks softly. Ruth nods her head yes.

"There's two of 'em." Matt points to another doe standing just a few feet from the timber edge. Ruth shakes her head up and down. "I see 'em."

"Are you sure you want a buck?" he asks again. Ruth shakes her head yes, rubbing her thumb on the shotgun.

Then a buck emerges. He nimbly moves to the center of the clearing. He turns his head and looks straight at the blind, ears cupped toward it. It is a six- to eight-pointer, about 50 to 60 yards away.

Matt has jumped up and scooted Ruth so she is facing the front windows. He noiselessly moves the tripod so the shotgun barrel is pointing out the front window. He scoots Ruth some more, and the chair scrapes the

floor. He checks the aim and releases the safety. "He's a good-looking buck," he whispers excitedly.

The scraping has alerted the buck. He stares intently for a moment as Ruth prepares for the shot. Just before she can shoot he bounds into the CRP. Two more does dart from the timber. The five deer leap over the chest-high golden and green vegetation, the sun catching their white rumps and tawny legs until only their gray ears flash above the prairie and then they are gone.

"You almost had him Ruth. He may have been an eight-pointer. That would have been a great buck for your first one. If only I'd moved you into position when we first saw the does. But they stood there so long that I thought there wasn't going to be a buck. That was a great buck."

"It's okay. I'm having a good time just being out here," Ruth said looking into Matt's face, trying to make him see her earnest truth.

"That's the way it is. You sit for an hour or so and then everything happens in two minutes."

"Matt, the most important part for me is being outdoors."

"I know Ruth." He smiles at her. "That was a great buck. We'll get the next one."

Matt puts the safety back on and Ruth returns her focus to listening, remembering and waiting to see her next buck through Matt's eyes. 🐾

BELOW: Ruth Vandergriff of Fairfield keeps her finger on the trigger guard, ready for a buck to emerge from the woods. RIGHT: Matt Johnson with a buck from a previous hunting trip. BELOW RIGHT: (Left to right) Dave Brush and his son Mike helped Matt Johnson design and build the hunting blind used for the Des Moines River Valley Chapter of Serve Outdoors.





# Making Winter Wildlife Images

## *Tips to Improve Your Photos*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES



For photographers, winter conditions help tell a story and convey mood. Compared to the summer inset photo, a winter male cardinal is far more dramatic set on a highbush cranberry with falling snow. The harshness and challenges of his winter environment are felt while emotion is lacking in the fair weather photo.









Iowa's winter season, with those slippery driving conditions and extra work to clear driveways is dreaded by some. And when fall colors become a fading memory and short-sleeve weather is long-gone, some Iowans wish they could strike the words "winter" and "snow" from their vocabularies.

But these two words mean excitement to wildlife photographers as snow and ice bring wonderful photographic opportunities. Why watch wildlife on Animal Planet when you can be outdoors and creating great images yourself?

### Why stow the camera gear?

Many fair-weather nature photographers stow their camera gear, and outdoor recreation becomes a thing of the past until warm days return. But seasoned wildlife photographers know this is the time when many species are most visible and easiest to find. With a little care and preparation, today's camera equipment stands up well to cold weather.

### Snow creates spectacular settings

Snow is dynamic and turns a good photo opportunity into a great one. If you've anticipated well and have photographed a bird or mammal during a snowfall, you know it provides a great atmosphere and stunning setting. Snow falling around or on a bird or fur-bearer is special, adding mystique and power to images. Photographing a handsome animal with big snow flakes sticking to fur or feathers is a photographer's homerun.

### Birds and mammals have great winter coats.

Winter photography highlights the thickest, most luxurious fur or heaviest coat of feathers. Large mammals develop a dense fur an inch-thick or more. Birds showcase lavish coats of feathers underlain with soft coverings of warm down. On the coldest days, animals fluff up by shaking fur coats or lofting feathers to trap air and enhance insulation. This is why that tiny chickadee at your feeder looks like a puffy, round orb when temperatures are near zero; or why that neighborhood fox with the fluffy facial jowls looks larger than he did last summer. Winter inhabitants need all the insulating properties their coats can provide to survive. And when birds and mammals sport thick coats, they make great photographic subjects.

### Equipment preparations & protection

When teaching winter photography classes, the first question I'm asked is, "How do you keep camera batteries

from going dead in the cold?" I have spent hundreds of hours photographing during the coldest days, and have yet to experience drained batteries. It doesn't happen, especially with newer generation rechargeable batteries. Top-off rechargeable batteries right before you go outside—or at least the night before. Replace very old rechargeable batteries as they lose their capacity to hold a full charge.

The use of an anti-fog eyepiece, if available for your camera, may prevent your breath from fogging the viewfinder at the critical moment when that elusive fox bounds in front of your lens.

Most successful wildlife photography requires a telephoto lens of 300mm, with a 400- or 500mm lens even better. Digital single lens reflex cameras (DSLRs) use interchangeable lenses and are very versatile. Models with high-speed motor drives capable of five frames per second or faster provide more chances to capture a bird in flight or a running mammal at that perfect moment.

Use a tripod whenever possible, especially with heavy telephoto lenses. When hand-holding, the camera and lens weight can compress insulation in your gloves, resulting in stinging fingers. Frosty fingers can quickly cause your stamina to wane.

When photographing during a wet, heavy snowfall, be sure to prevent snow from melting and creating moisture around control buttons and knobs on the camera or lens. Bringing camera equipment directly indoors following a cold-weather shoot can cause damaging condensation. Before returning indoors, seal the camera and lens inside a plastic bag. Warm, moist air will condense outside the bag instead of on the electronic gear. Another option is to keep cold gear inside your camera bag and let it acclimate inside for two hours or more before opening.

### Winter photography techniques

There are several ways to capture winter wildlife images and perhaps the best and most comfortable is using your vehicle as a photo blind. Both birds and mammals become somewhat tolerant of motor vehicles over time, and I know many birders with excellent image collections obtained from a car. Approach wildlife by gradually slowing to a stop. Many subjects aren't apt to move when hunkered down in the cold or feeding vigorously along a roadway. Use caution and don't stop along a busy highway

with little or no shoulder. Safety should be the primary concern, with roadside photography done along infrequently traveled gravel roads.

Another comfortable method uses the window of your home. Place a backyard bird







ABOVE: Iowa has its share of big whitetails. This nine-point buck shows excellent behaviors while testing the air as he follows a doe nearing estrus. RIGHT: The same whitetail a month later. The snowy foreground and background contrasts with his heavy winter coat to create a different impression. LOWER RIGHT: Capturing a coyote photo can be an unexpected treat, and this is a good-looking animal. BELOW: In a much stronger image, the coyote shows plenty of action as he bounds through the powder, with snow-covered face and snow streaming from his front quarters. The deep snow illustrates the hardship animals endure during an Iowa winter.





For photographers, animal interaction creates drama and perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime photo. Here, two red foxes scuffle over food—a dead squirrel is nearby. A fast shutter speed captures snow kicked up in the melee, adding heightened drama. A rapid-fire burst of 20 images was taken in seconds to obtain this image.











feeder close to a window that opens. Use a piece of cardboard or plywood cut to the size of the open window to prevent cold air from entering. Last, cut a hole for the telephoto lens.

You can also shoot from a commercial or home-made blind placed along a trail or location that wildlife frequent.

### Tips to keep warm

Today's high-tech clothes are an incredible improvement to those available a few decades ago. Polypropylene long-johns and high-loft Thinsulate outer garments are among the best insulators, and boots should be insulated and rated for below-zero temperatures. Dress in three layers, and don't forget to take along chemical heat packs for hands and feet. These are helpful as sitting in a blind for hours at a time tends to be chilly compared to cross-country skiing, snowshoeing or hiking. Layers should include a synthetic wicking layer next to the skin

to transport moisture away. Next, wear a warmth layer of fleece, wool or down, and top with a waterproof and windproof outer shell.

### Properly exposure for snowy images

Images of snow can often appear slightly gray as exposure meters use an overall average for lighting conditions. You can meter snow (and only snow), then manually set your aperture and shutter-speed settings to add 1½ stops more light. But be sure to take your meter reading in the same direction as the picture. On a cloudy day add two f-stops of light, ensuring your camera's meter reading is in the same direction as the photo. In early morning or late in the day, snow will take on a blue cast, especially in low light. This is natural, so don't be surprised. You can remove some blue to suit your tastes with an image editor like Photoshop.

If you don't want to set exposures by shooting in



Cold weather plumage adds beauty to an image as these summer versus winter photos illustrate. **RIGHT:** On a single-digit February day, this chickadee lofts his feathers to trap air and maximize insulation. His plumage is uniform, and he has a rounded, handsome appearance. **LOWER RIGHT:** During summer, black-capped chickadee feathers cling tightly to the body to dissipate heat. The feathers are disarranged as well. **BELOW:** This rooster pheasant sports colorful plumage since it's the spring mating season and he's actively courting females. **LEFT:** On a cold January day with wind-chills below zero, a pheasant lofts his feathers to trap air and insulate himself from the elements. Even his head feathers are puffed up. His rounded shape makes him appear larger. His colorful and expanded plumage is striking contrasted against the white snow.



manual mode, correct the automatic exposure by simply changing the exposure-compensation setting to add light until the image on your LCD display looks correctly exposed. Be aware as the size of the animal, and the corresponding amount of bright snow, can change when the animal moves. This affects the camera's auto-metering algorithm and the camera will adjust the exposure—often incorrectly. Just remember that well-exposed snow looks very white, and only a small amount of detail needs to be retained to show its texture. Under-exposed snow will look sooty, gray or dirty.

### Respect the animal's welfare

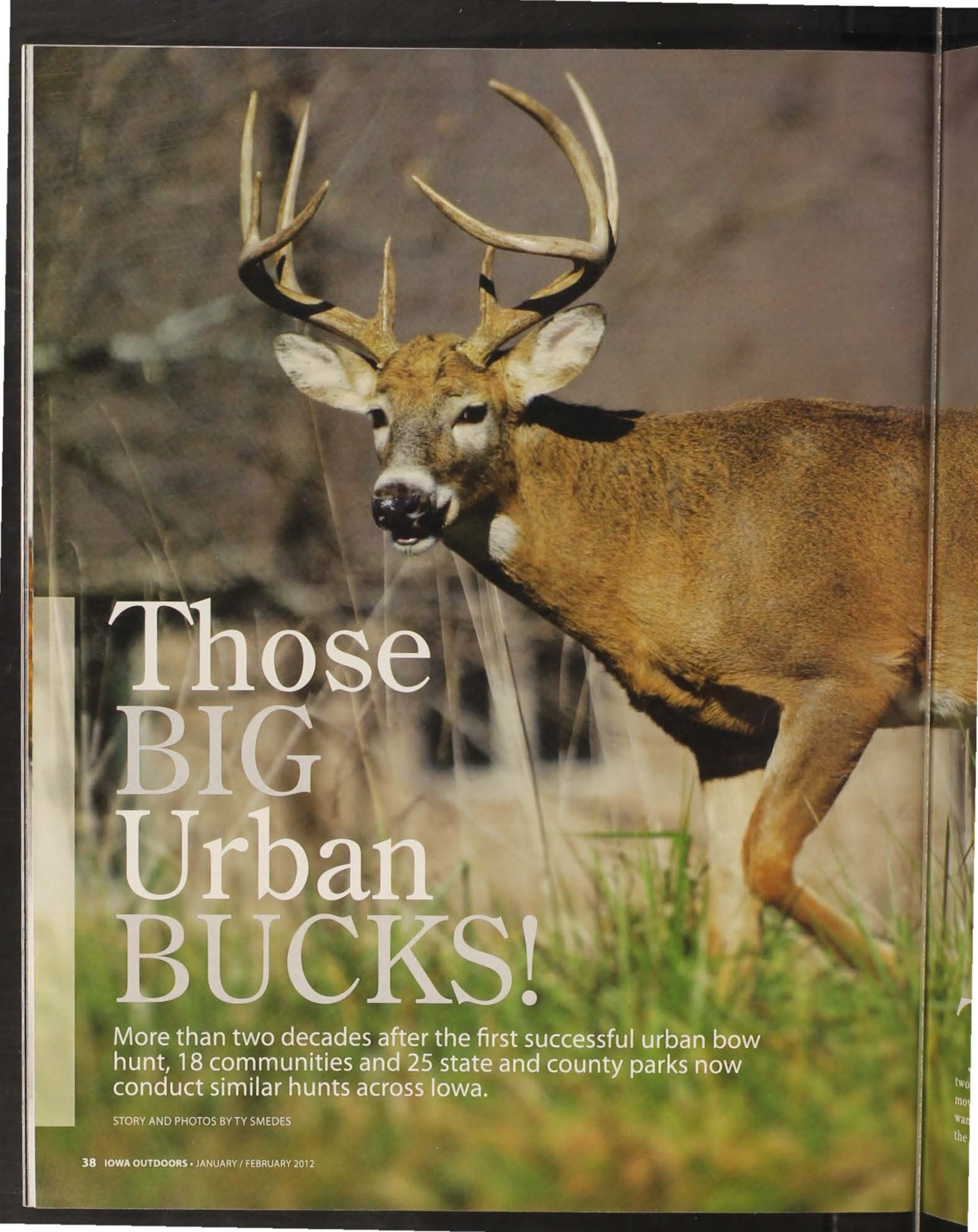
There's one special and very important consideration when photographing winter wildlife. Animals often face food scarcity caused by deep snow and deadly ice that sometimes covers food supplies. Consequently, the lack of consistent

food can make malnourished animals very vulnerable when precious energy is used to flee a well-meaning photographer. A prized photo isn't worth jeopardizing the well-being of the subject. Simply keep your distances to wildlife reasonable.

### Be organized

When photographing in cold weather, above all, be organized right down to wearing proper clothing, as well as knowing where your equipment is packed. Anything you forget, especially clothing and chemical heat packs, could turn out to be a critical error. Make a checklist, pack equipment, and organize clothing the night before your winter excursion. Winter photography preparations by their very nature are more detailed and time consuming. Good forethought and planning are vital to a successful and comfortable photographic excursion. 🐾



A large buck with impressive antlers stands in a field of tall grass. The buck is facing left, looking towards the camera. Its antlers are large and multi-tined, with a light brown color. The buck's coat is a mix of brown and tan, with a white patch on its neck. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grass and some trees in the distance.

# Those BIG Urban BUCKS!

More than two decades after the first successful urban bow hunt, 18 communities and 25 state and county parks now conduct similar hunts across Iowa.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES



RIGHT: On a ridge above an Urbandale street, a dominant nine-point buck shadows a doe that is nearly ready to mate. He will stay with her until the time is right.

BELOW: The doe moves away and the big nine-pointer follows her across a hillside with suburban housing in the background.



**T**HE BIG 11-POINTER IS in hot pursuit, and his girlfriend is playing hard-to-get. The dominant buck's nose tells him this doe is nearly ready to mate, and followed by two smaller subordinate bucks, he shadows her every move. Although not actively challenged by the smaller wannabes, they stay close to the action. It was Nov. 9 and the rut was underway.

Bowhunters routinely witness this annual ritual nestled deep in Iowa woodlands, but this scene unfolds just outside the window of my suburban home and office. Our Urbandale acreage is heavily wooded, with a rough embankment overlooking the street. And when combined with several neighboring acreages, our little piece of suburban deer habitat is large enough for the neighborhood herd to not only survive, but thrive.



As a photographer, I watch the pre-rut activity from my window, and when I see the scene unfold, I grab my camera. As long as I move slowly and in a non-threatening manner, I can usually shadow a buck with love on his mind to within 50 to 100 feet. A buck will run himself ragged during the rut and they are on the run night and day. Last fall, I followed a beautiful 11-pointer and photographed him for more than an hour. He became so accustomed to me that he began dozing on his feet. It took a light clapping of the hands to snap him to attention for a photograph so he looked like the wild deer he truly was. It was easy to fill a compact-flash card with hundreds of images of this magnificent trophy-sized animal.

### Managing the Urban Herd

Whitetails have adapted well to urban living. Ask any property owner whose yard they frequent and you will hear plenty about the lilies, hostas and even rose bushes that disappear. When urban deer populations go unchecked, some eventually become traffic statistics. From 2001 through 2009, 158 deer/vehicle crashes were reported in Urbandale, including one fatality.

"Most people do understand and agree our suburban deer herd needs to be controlled, because there are no natural predators. We don't want to eliminate all deer, but need to keep their numbers in check," says Urbandale police officer Jeff Casey, who heads the city's deer management program.

In 1990, the first deer management zone hunt was conducted at Springbrook State Park in Guthrie County. This followed several years of concern

about herd impacts on nearby crops and vegetation in the state park and surrounding area. Soon after, the city of Waterloo adopted a controlled bow hunt within city limits. The effort successfully reduced deer numbers, and consequently, complaints regarding deer. Now, more than two decades later, 18 communities and 25 state and county parks conduct controlled hunts across Iowa.

"I am very happy with the results we've achieved, but I would like to expand the program," says Casey. He'd like more private property owners to participate in areas where herds exceed the DNR recommended 20 to 30 deer per square mile. Since Urbandale's program began in 1999, 503 non-antlered deer were harvested within city limits.

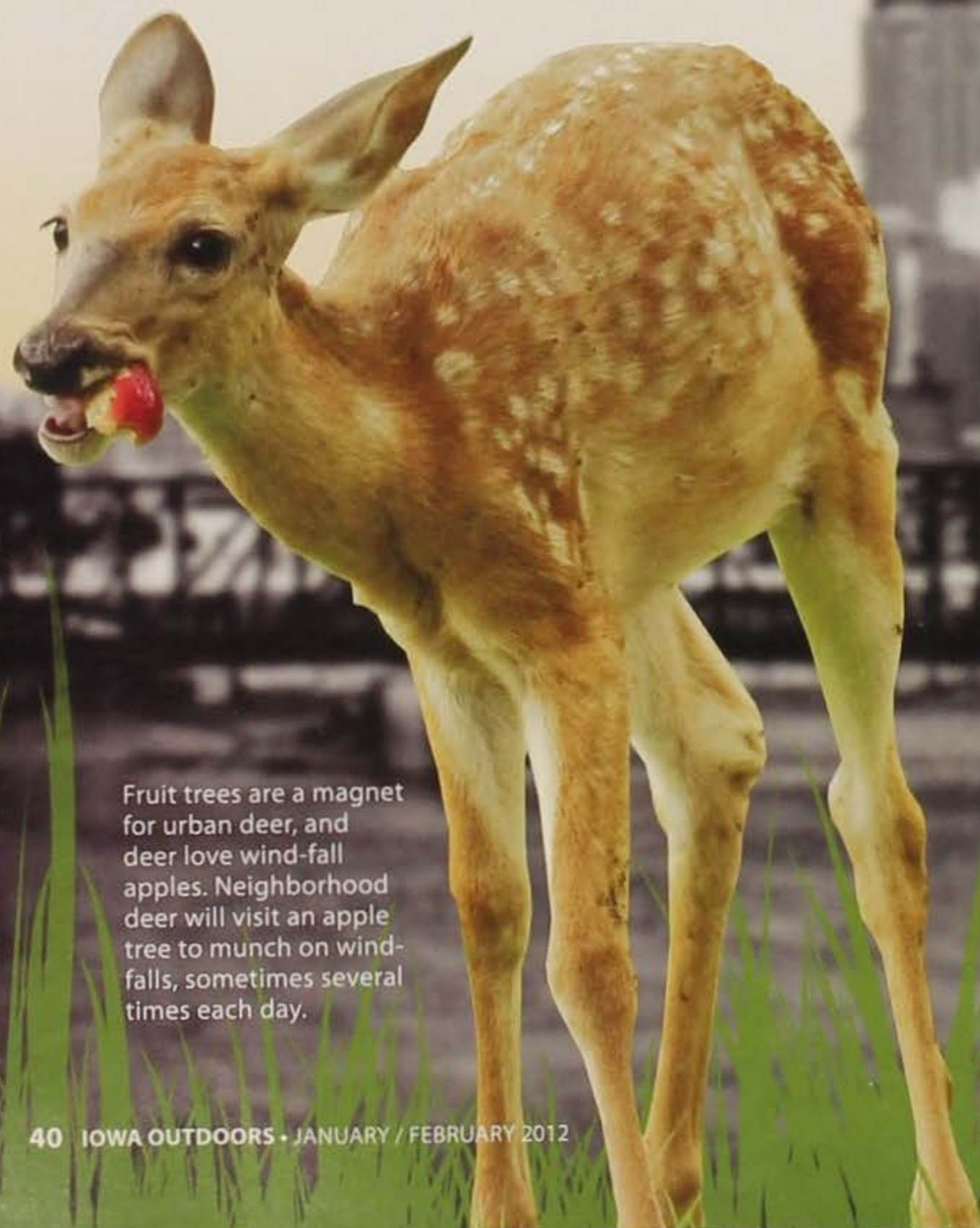
While some bowhunters want the chance to harvest a trophy buck, emphasis is placed on harvesting does.

"Our city requires a hunter to harvest two non-antlered deer before his name is placed into a lottery for a buck tag," Casey says. "And once a hunter has harvested five non-antlered deer, his lottery odds are increased. Last year 15 individuals qualified for a buck incentive tag for next year."

### The Urban Bow Hunt

In the 20 years at our Urbandale acreage, I've seen no shortage of trophy-sized deer. Our property has hosted nine-, 10- and 11-point deer that would easily score around 150, with plenty of bucks in the 130 and up range. Just a year ago a procession of five bucks walked through the yard, ranging from a small six-point to two large nine- and 10-point bucks.

Hunters will find that during the rut, the biology of urban deer is the same as it is anywhere. Does come in heat during early



Fruit trees are a magnet for urban deer, and deer love wind-fall apples. Neighborhood deer will visit an apple tree to munch on wind-falls, sometimes several times each day.



### Controlled Urban Deer Hunts

Many communities have expressed a need to deal with excessive deer numbers and their impact upon yard plants and shrubs, as well as vehicle encounters. Consequently, management hunts have been employed in cities and parks across the state. Check the DNR website for a list of cities or entities participating in Deer Management Zone hunts at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov). Many have different seasons, requirements and restrictions, so check with the local contact listed for the desired hunt.




Urban deer have the same habits as their country cousins. Just ask any city property owner who has experienced the loss of a small tree due to a buck rub. This stout 11-point buck is putting on muscle by working out, just like a body builder. Only the strongest, most dominant bucks earn the privilege to mate.







A photograph of a suburban deer buck standing in tall grass. In the background, an abandoned green John Deere tractor is visible, partially obscured by foliage. The scene is set in a suburban area with trees and shrubs in the distance.

THE JOHN DEER BUCK. An abandoned John Deere on this acreage makes an interesting backdrop for a suburban buck. Urban deer know their neighborhoods well and are comfortable within small pockets of suitable habitat.



November, and bucks create rubs and scrapes just as they do in the country. They also stick to favored trails or routes along embankments and linkages between properties. So a bow hunter can set up a stand just like the deep woods, as long as it complies with city rules.

Bow hunting for suburban deer is a bit different than hunting the Iowa countryside, but many hunters find it a great attraction. The hunter who lives and hunts within a city doesn't have to drive far, and it doesn't take long to tote the deer back to the vehicle.

Hunter participation in Urbandale started slowly, with just 10 deer killed during the 1998-99 season. But following an increase in hunter and landowner participation, 20 registered hunters bagged 91 deer during the 2010-11 season.

"Several hunters have harvested multiple animals, and one hunter bagged 26 deer," says Casey. "The largest trophy buck taken was during 2009 when a huge buck that scored 200 4/8 was bagged on private property near Living

History Farms. This buck was known to be in the area and attracted the attention of out-of-state hunters.

"With knowledge of deer like this, we've had reports of poaching, and we do our best to respond to tips and complaints," he adds.

Iowa's urban deer program is working quite well. For bow hunters who like to try something different, it is a great way to keep urban deer populations balanced and perhaps harvest a trophy buck.



### Tips to Avoid Plant Damage

Deer are attracted to a variety of plants, and property owners can avoid depredation several ways. Certain favorites—like hostas, lilies and roses—can be avoided or protected with fencing. American Holly, barberry and butterfly bush are rarely targeted by deer.

A variety of deterrents run from standard and electric fencing to spray repellents. After deer browsed our hedge, two applications of a liquid deer repellent convinced the deer to give it up. 🐾

## Home gardeners can avoid or reduce deer damage by careful plant selection

List from Iowa State University Extension

### Plants Rarely or Seldom Severely Damaged

Common Name	Botanical Name
Barberry	<i>Berberis spp.</i>
Redosier dogwood	<i>Cornus sericea</i>
Forsythia	<i>Forsythia spp.</i>
Honeylocust	<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>
Beautybush	<i>Kolkwitzia amabilis</i>
Norway spruce	<i>Picea abies</i>
White spruce	<i>Picea glauca</i>
Colorado spruce	<i>Picea pungens</i>
Mugo pine	<i>Pinus mugo</i>
Austrian pine	<i>Pinus nigra</i>
Scotch pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>
Common lilac	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>

### Plants Occasionally Severely Damaged

Common Name	Botanical Name
White fir	<i>Abies concolor</i>
Red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>
Silver maple	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>
Sugar maple	<i>Acer saccharum</i>
Common horse chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier spp.</i>
Cotoneaster	<i>Cotoneaster spp.</i>
Common witchhazel	<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>

Rose of Sharon	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>
Hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea spp.</i>
Privet	<i>Ligustrum spp.</i>
Eastern white pine	<i>Pinus strobus</i>
Potentilla	<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>
Douglas fir	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>
White oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>
Northern red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>
Willows	<i>Salix spp.</i>
Anthony waterer spirea	<i>Spiraea x bumalda</i>
Bridalwreath spirea	<i>Spiraea prunifolia</i>
Persian lilac	<i>Syringa x persica</i>
Japanese tree lilac	<i>Syringa reticulata</i>
American linden	<i>Tilia americana</i>
Canadian hemlock	<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>
Old-fashioned weigela	<i>Weigela florida</i>

### Plants Frequently Severely Damaged

Common Name	Botanical Name
Norway maple	<i>Acer platanoides</i>
Eastern redbud	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>
Clematis	<i>Clematis spp.</i>
Corneliancherry dogwood	<i>Cornus mas</i>
Winged euonymus	<i>Euonymus alatus</i>





This big 11 pointer follows a doe near a chicken coop. Although this group of small Urbandale acreages is ringed by new houses, it offers ideal habitat for suburban deer.

**OPPOSITE:** This buck leaves his signature at a neighborhood scrape. The pre-orbital or lachrymal gland secretions by deer aid in lubricating and cleansing the eye. However, bucks are readily observed rubbing this gland on twigs, limbs, and branches during scrape and rub activity. The habits and biology of suburban deer are no different than those of rural whitetails.





# IT HAD TO BE DONE

From the CCC, WWII and the Fisheries Bureau, Ray Mulholland looks back on a full life outdoors devoted to making Iowa a better place.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MIKE BUTLER

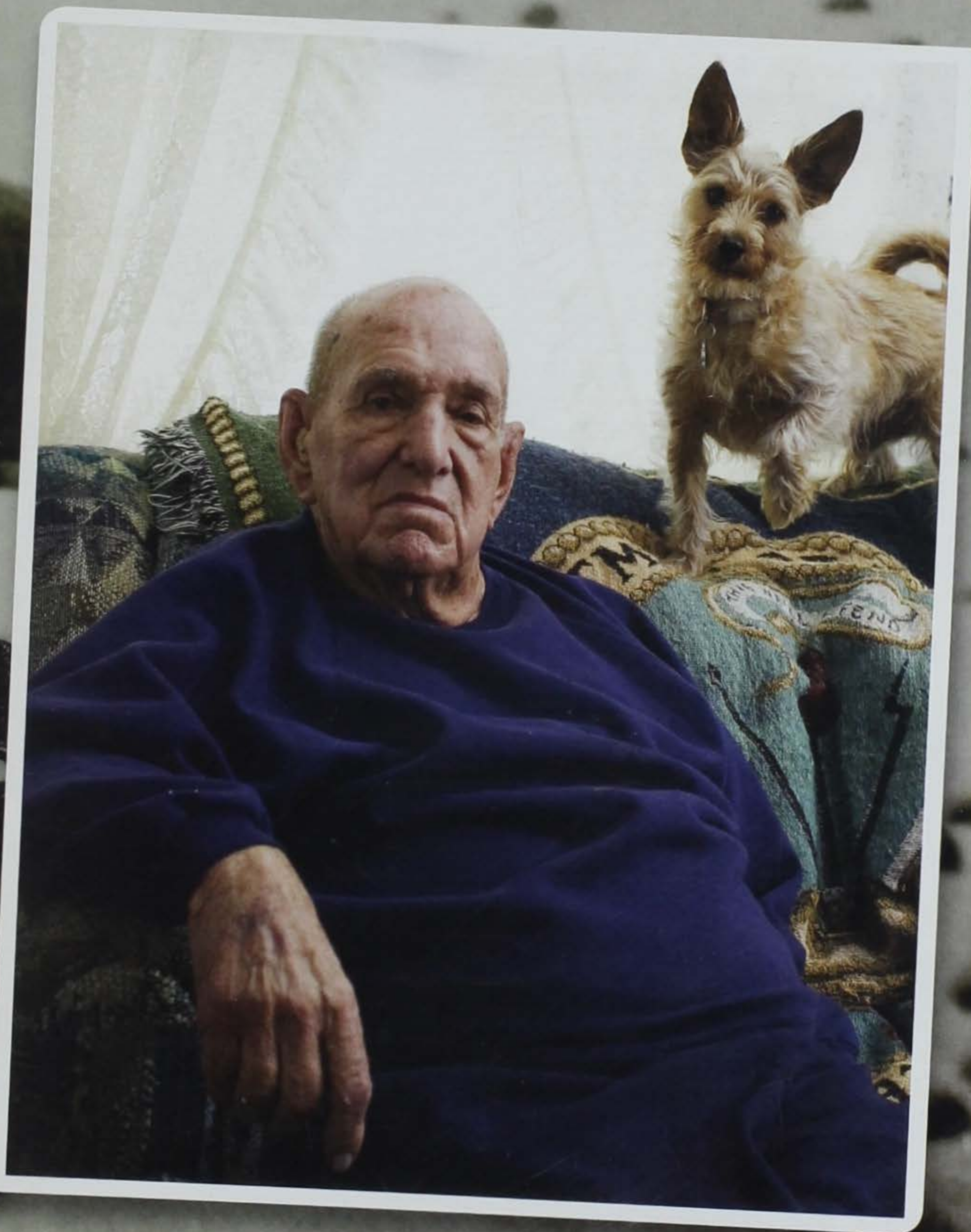
**A**T 91, RAY MULHOLLAND has seen the worst of Mother Nature in Iowa: calamitous flooding, destructive tornadoes, and fearsome blizzards. But Ray has more good memories than bad of a life lived mostly outdoors. Old age has a way of bringing pleasant, not-so-extreme experiences to mind. Like that fine spring afternoon when a carefree kid on a bike raced up and down the brick streets of Lansing in Iowa's northeast corner. Or that perfect, endless summer night when a rebellious teenager splashed in the shallows of the Mississippi River. And that brilliant autumn morning when a young man, profoundly humble and grateful after seeing the worst of human nature during World War II,

walked among ancient effigy mounds.

Ray lives up to his nickname, "Bear," physically and—sometimes in winter—emotionally. Unable to go outside much when the snow piles high, he growls and paces and stares out the windows of his comfortable New Albin home. A hefty slice of one of wife Bonnie's homemade fruit pies—lard crust, of course, plus a scoop of ice cream—eases the cabin fever.

Flipping through the scrapbooks helps, too. Crammed full of personal snapshots and yellowed newspaper clippings, the albums trace the arc of Ray's life in the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Army, and Iowa Fisheries. He scrambles down the hall to his bedroom





ABOVE: Ray "Bear" Mulholland and his dog, Little Bear, at home in New Albin. From building trails during the Great Depression to enduring harsh winters of WWII, his life outdoors includes 37 years of fisheries work with the DNR until retiring in 1983.



to fetch the scrapbooks. Ray gets along fine with the help of a cane, but you can tell those 15 jumps he made as a paratrooper have taken a toll on his knees.

## Rolling on the River

As with many members of the Greatest Generation, Ray knew money was scarce when he was growing up. But he never felt poor. His dad could always find work as a carpenter, but everything went to keep a roof over Ray's head and those of his eight brothers and one sister. During Prohibition, certain entrepreneurs would pay Ray and his friends a nickel for any whiskey bottles they found that had been thrown into the river or roadside ditches. Ray could also make 50 cents a week or so selling freshwater mussel shells to the Lansing Button Factory. (Several pearl button factories sprouted and boomed on the banks of the Mississippi River in Iowa early in the 20th century. Before then, most buttons used in America had to be imported.) "You could see right through the water in those days," Ray recalls. "We called it pollywogging."

When Ray graduated high school in 1938, the Great Depression droned on and there simply were no jobs to be had for young men. Fortunately, the CCC, begun in 1933 by Franklin Roosevelt, was going gangbusters. Ray signed up for a six-month term at the McGregor Camp

that fall and liked it so much he re-enlisted for three more. "That was the good life," says Ray. "We made \$30 a month and sent \$20 home." Plenty of money, considering that a movie in town on Saturday night cost 10 cents. It cost another dime to treat a girl you were sweet on to ice cream. "I'll never forget the first meal I had in the Corps," Ray says. "We had pork chops. I didn't hardly know what a pork chop was. We ate real good and slept real good."

Ray spent his days on a survey crew, crucial to the work that followed: cutting trails and constructing the beautiful stone buildings that still sparkle like jewels in many Iowa state parks. (Iowa had 49 CCC camps at the height of the program, with about 200 men in each camp.) But "conservation" was the project's middle name, and some of the most important work consisted of planting trees, controlling flooding, and preventing soil erosion by helping farmers create contours and terraces.

"Roosevelt's Tree Army" ran with military precision and this had an unintended benefit for a nation on the eve of World War II. The 2.5 to 3 million men who had passed through the CCC were physically fit, accustomed to following orders, used to hard work outdoors and versed in working together for a common purpose.

## Over There

A stint working inside the Lansing Button Factory after leaving the CCC temporarily clogged Ray's lungs with dust. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Ray volunteered for the Air Force, but doctors mistakenly thought he might have tuberculosis. Drafted a few months later, Ray stood before a beleaguered Army induction doctor who wasn't going to send a ruddy, strapping Irish kid from Iowa anywhere other than boot camp.

Ray and every other G.I. assigned to the 101st Airborne was on a rendezvous with destiny. Some units played critical roles in the D-Day invasion. Others, including Ray's battalion, distinguished themselves in the Battle of the Bulge. Fittingly, the Screaming Eagles were also there in Berchtesgaden to secure Hitler's "Eagles Nest" and end the war in Europe. The division's exploits were celebrated in the classic films "The Longest Day" and "A Bridge Too Far." A new generation of Americans came to know Easy Company, of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, through Stephen Ambrose's book "Band of Brothers" and the HBO miniseries of the same name.

In December 1944, 101st soldiers were put squarely in the way of the Germans' last-chance Ardennes offensive and took heavy casualties defending the strategic city of Bastogne, Belgium, in the days leading up to Christmas. They endured withering artillery fire in bitter cold, snow and fog, which prevented planes and gliders from providing support and dropping supplies. It was eight divisions against one. The Germans, who had surrounded the town, had so much of an upper hand that they demanded surrender. To that, acting 101st commander General Anthony McAuliffe

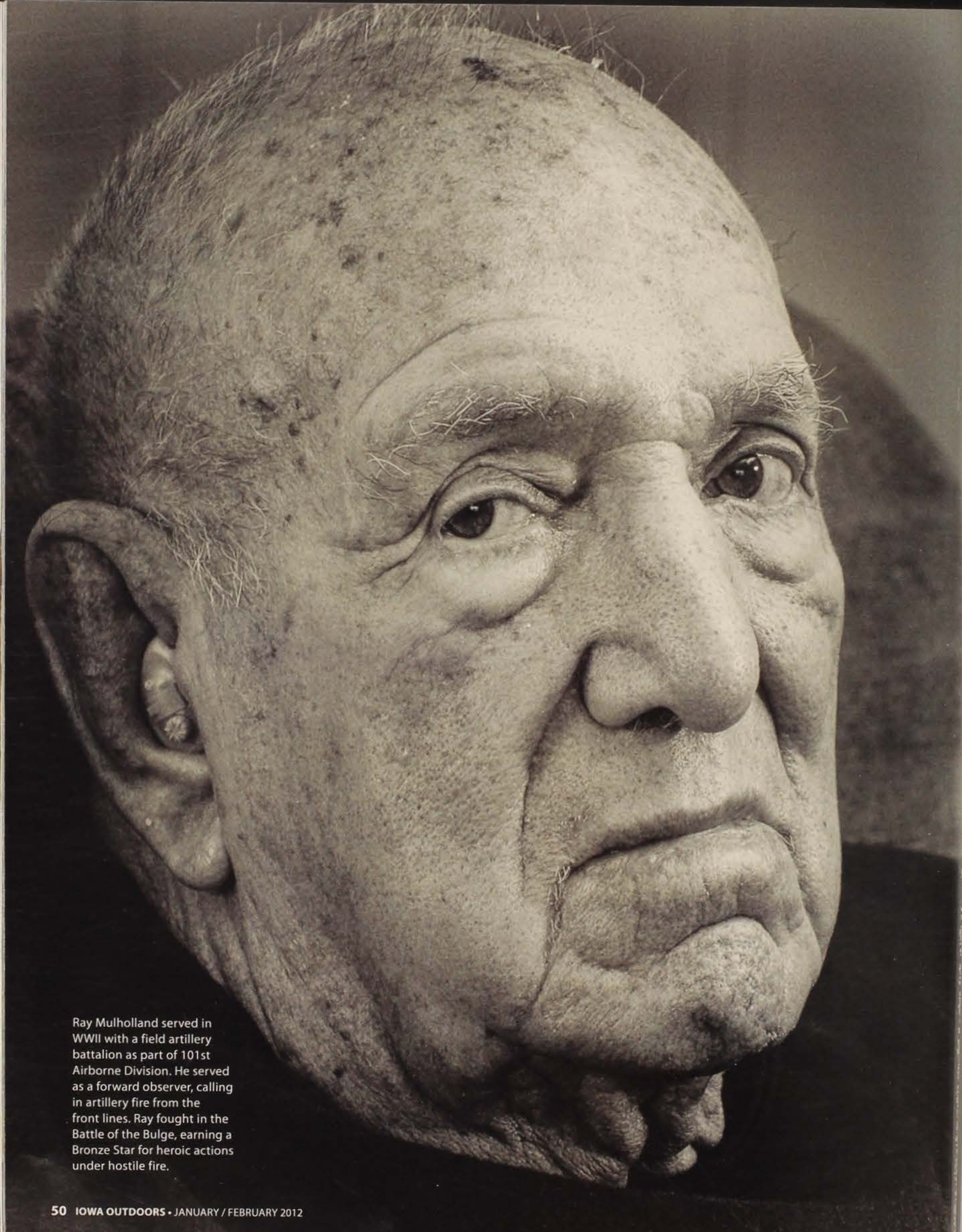






After the war, Ray Mulholland, shown above, began work at the Lansing fish station. The station hatched and delivered millions of northern pike and walleye to lakes statewide until the unit closed in the early 1970s.





Ray Mulholland served in WWII with a field artillery battalion as part of 101st Airborne Division. He served as a forward observer, calling in artillery fire from the front lines. Ray fought in the Battle of the Bulge, earning a Bronze Star for heroic actions under hostile fire.

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famously replied: "Nuts!" The Germans came back with a grim, four-letter word of their own: "Fire!"

As the day before Christmas Eve dawned, skies finally cleared and much-needed ammo and rations dropped out of the sky. Reinvigorated, the 101st began turning the tables. Then, the day after Christmas, elements of General Patton's 3rd Army shot their way into town and broke the enemy ring for good. "Seeing all those dead friends on Christmas Day—that was the worst of it," says Ray.

Although the siege of Bastogne was over, the Battle of the Bulge raged on.

PFC Ray Mulholland's duty as a forward observer in the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion was to sneak up on the enemy and radio back so gunners could accurately fire against Panzer tanks. On a hellish Jan. 3, Ray was doing just that when his batteries fizzled. He had already seen his lieutenant shot dead. He wasn't sure where his sergeant was with the other radio—or if he was dead, too. Ray knew where he could get fresh batteries, but it would require a sprint of more than 100 yards across fire-swept terrain in full view of the enemy. Dodging tank, mortar, machine-gun and small-arms fire, he snatched the batteries and returned unscathed to his position. Incredibly, his microphone then went on the fritz, requiring Ray to repeat the mad dash. He earned a Bronze Star for his bravery that day. "I was pretty scared, to tell you the truth, but it had to be done."

## Home Again on the River

Newsreels at war's end often contained flickering scenes of exuberant G.I.s from Europe and the Pacific kneeling and kissing the ground as they landed on home shores. Ray sympathized with that sentiment, especially when he saw his beloved river again. How reassuring it was to ascend the bluff in Pikes Peak State Park, on a trail he helped build, and see the Wisconsin River pouring into the Mississippi. Fishing and duck hunting helped Ray orient himself and put the war behind. So did hiking the mounds and forested overlooks soon to become Effigy Mounds National Monument in 1949.

Ray says he felt lucky to land a job at the Lansing Fish Station in 1947. They were going to pay him good money—a fortune compared to the CCC and Army—for working outside and fishing? Managed by the Iowa Conservation Commission, forerunner of the DNR, the busy Lansing station hatched and delivered millions of northern pike and walleye to lakes all over the state until the unit closed in the early '70s.

Every cold and blustery March, right after ice out on the river, Ray and his four fellow "river rats" pulled

up 50 nets a day full of spawning fish. The men usually ate a quick lunch on shore around a campfire. Working from wooden launches made by a boatwright in Lansing, the crew also netted catfish, crappie and bluegill needed for myriad state lakes and streams every season. Ray says they often dumped truckloads of bullheads into city park ponds too, much to the delight of youngsters just discovering the joy of fishing.

Although Lock and Dam 9 below Lansing relieved most of the annual flooding, there were still some years when great schools of fish needed to be rescued after high waters receded. Another small but important job of the Lansing station for many years: stock those very popular aquariums at the state fair pavilion. Ray says the pace



slowed in late fall and winter. He and the others mended and knitted new nets by hand in the hatchery "dungeon."

"We had some good times," says Les Stahl, who worked with Ray in the '50s and '60s and became a close friend. "I could kind of tell he'd seen a lot of bad stuff in the war, but he kept quiet about it. Most guys did. We hunted a lot together. Ray was a pretty fair shot."

Ray might be thinking about ducks and pheasants now as finches and sparrows attack the feeder outside. One of his living room walls is devoted entirely to World War II: photos, citations and souvenirs. It's an impressive display. He suddenly heads back to the bedroom and returns with the service award the fisheries staff gave him when he retired after 35 years. The simple plaque is one of the first and last things he sees each day. He beams. "I think being outside all my life helped me live this long. I loved it. I've been really lucky." 🐾



# THE TUNDRA SWAN

## *An Iowa Visitor*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES



On its puzzling journey from arctic nesting grounds to east coast wintering grounds in North Carolina, the tundra swan makes its annual stopover in northeast Iowa along the Mississippi River.


**A**long a quiet and narrow road just north of Harpers Ferry, a sheltered bay along the Mississippi River hosts hundreds—and often thousands—of migrating tundra swans making their annual November appearance. With their haunting primeval vocalizations, these swans sound nothing like the trumpeter swans Iowans have come to know over the past two decades. Traveling along a unique and somewhat baffling migration route, these arctic residents visit northeast Iowa where they congregate along the extreme southern edge of a migration funnel used by tens of

thousands of swans. They then swing almost directly east through Pennsylvania before arriving at their wintering grounds along the east coast. This round-trip journey from the arctic tundra, through northeast Iowa, ending in North Carolina—and back again—may cover as much as 3,700 miles.

### Tundra not Trumpeter

Iowans are most familiar with the trumpeter swan, a similar species that was initially reintroduced to Iowa some 20 years ago through the DNR's successful





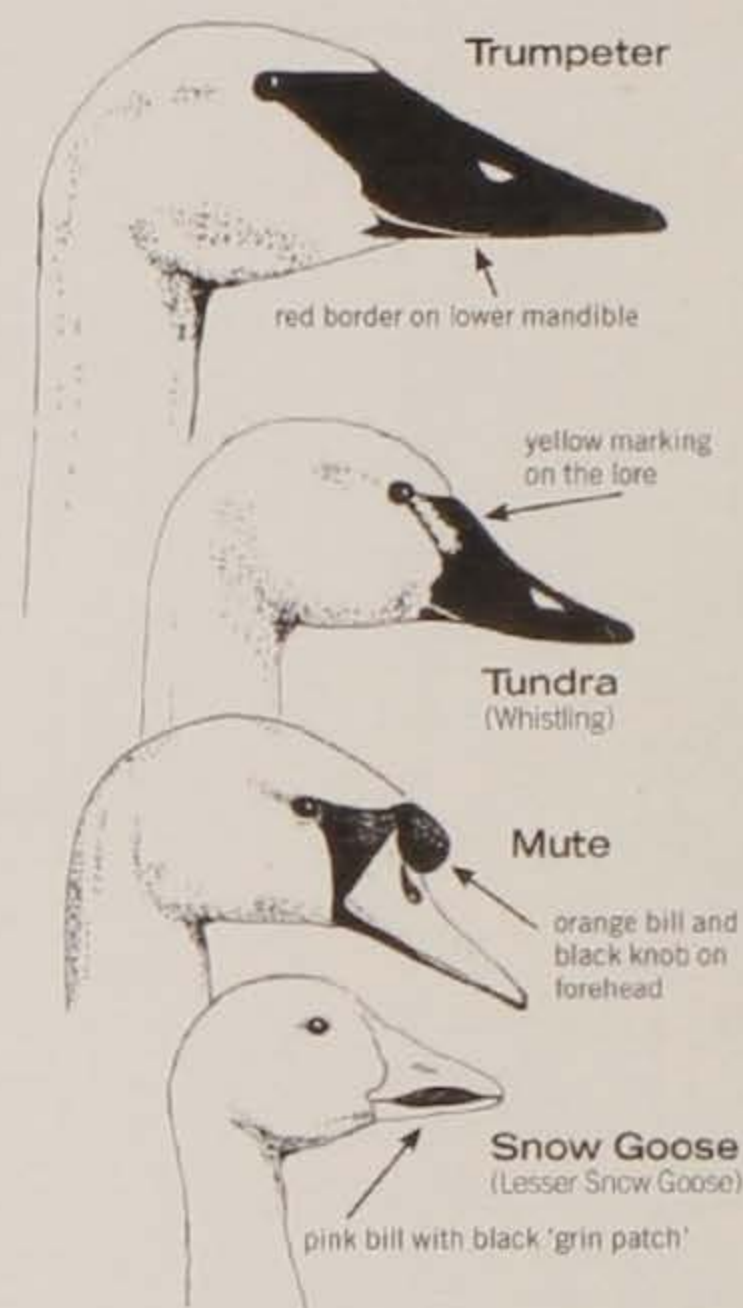
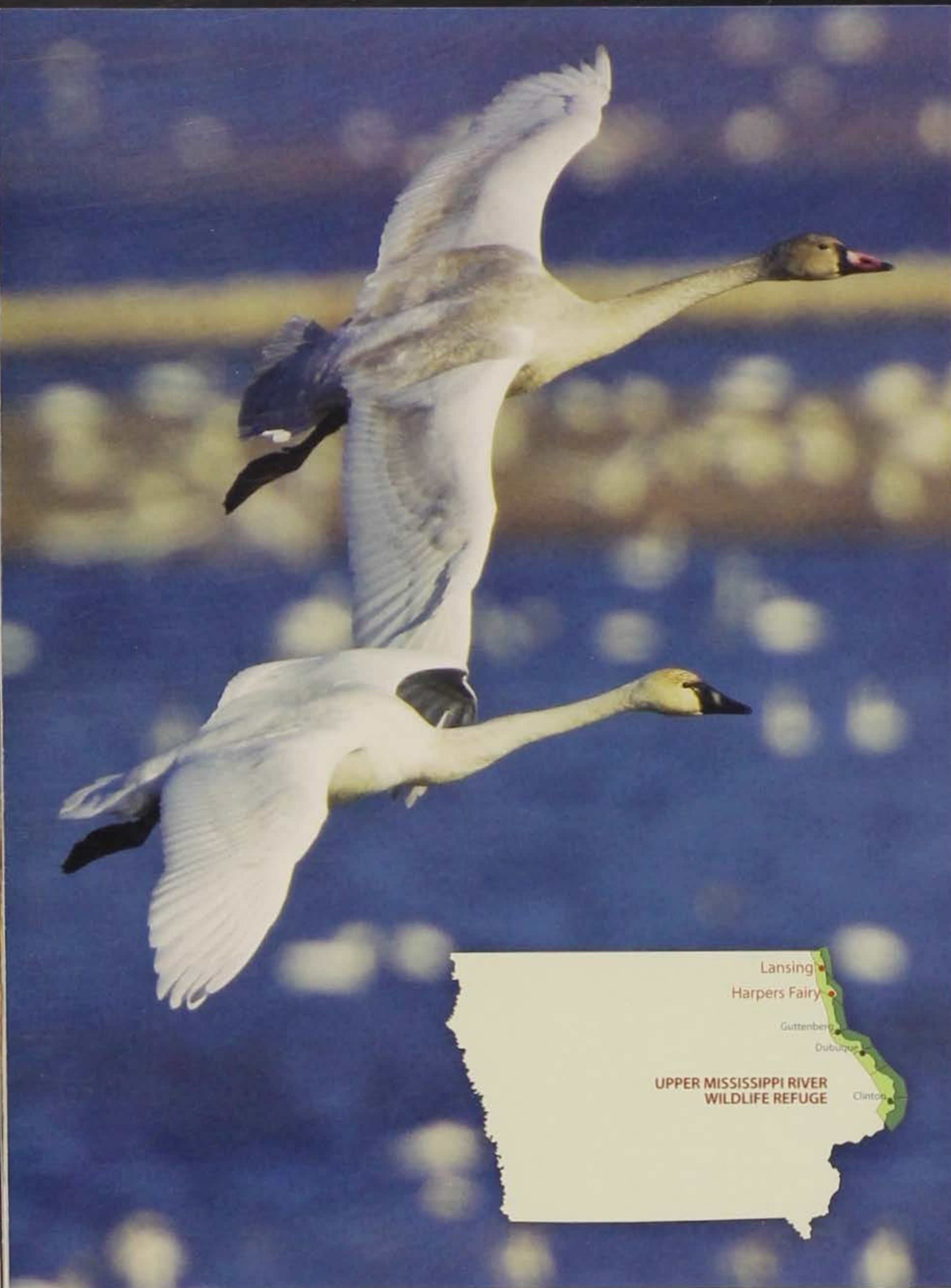
**FREQUENT FLIER REWARDS:** Tundra swans migrate nearly 3,700 miles with a layover in northeast Iowa. An adult tundra swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) is followed closely by two cygnets as they fly along Red Oak Road north of Harpers Ferry in Allamakee County.

breeding program. The tundra swan—or whistling swan named for the sound made by the slow, powerful beating of its wings in flight—is often confused with its larger trumpeter swan cousin. Indeed, the two species are very similar in appearance, the difference being the tundra swan's calls and noticeable yellow spot displayed by adults along the upper portion of their bill and close to the eye.

**A Unique and Puzzling Migration Route**  
Biologist Jon (Hawk) Stravers has lived and worked along

the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge for many years, conducting avian studies for Audubon. He has come to know the tundra swan migration well. "There is no other migration quite like it," says Stravers. "The eastern migration begins in the high arctic and funnels into the Mississippi River Flyway, like many other waterfowl migrations. But when the swans reach the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge, a peculiar thing happens—the migration turns directly east, following a route through Wisconsin, Michigan, northern Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, before angling southeast across





(Graphic courtesy The Trumpeter Swan Society.)

ABOVE: The differences between tundra swans and similar large waterfowl are found near the bill. Tundra swans have a yellow marking along the top of the bill just below the eye. LEFT: With hundreds of swans in the background, this adult and cygnet pair make their way across the secluded bay along Red Oak Road just north of Harpers Ferry. OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT: A young swan watcher takes advantage of a warm fall day to view the birds on their Iowa layover. BOTTOM RIGHT: These three swans are most likely in a territorial skirmish. Fights usually end quickly with no injuries. BOTTOM LEFT: Tundra swans, sometimes called whistling swans, have a high-pitched cooing sound. They are particularly vocal when foraging in flocks during migration and when on their wintering grounds.

Pennsylvania and ultimately to their primary wintering grounds along the east coast." North Carolina is the primary destination where 65,000 to 75,000 swans will winter along its lakes, coastal sounds and farms. Another 25,000 swans spend their winter in Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and New Jersey, just to the north.

### The Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge: a Refueling Stop

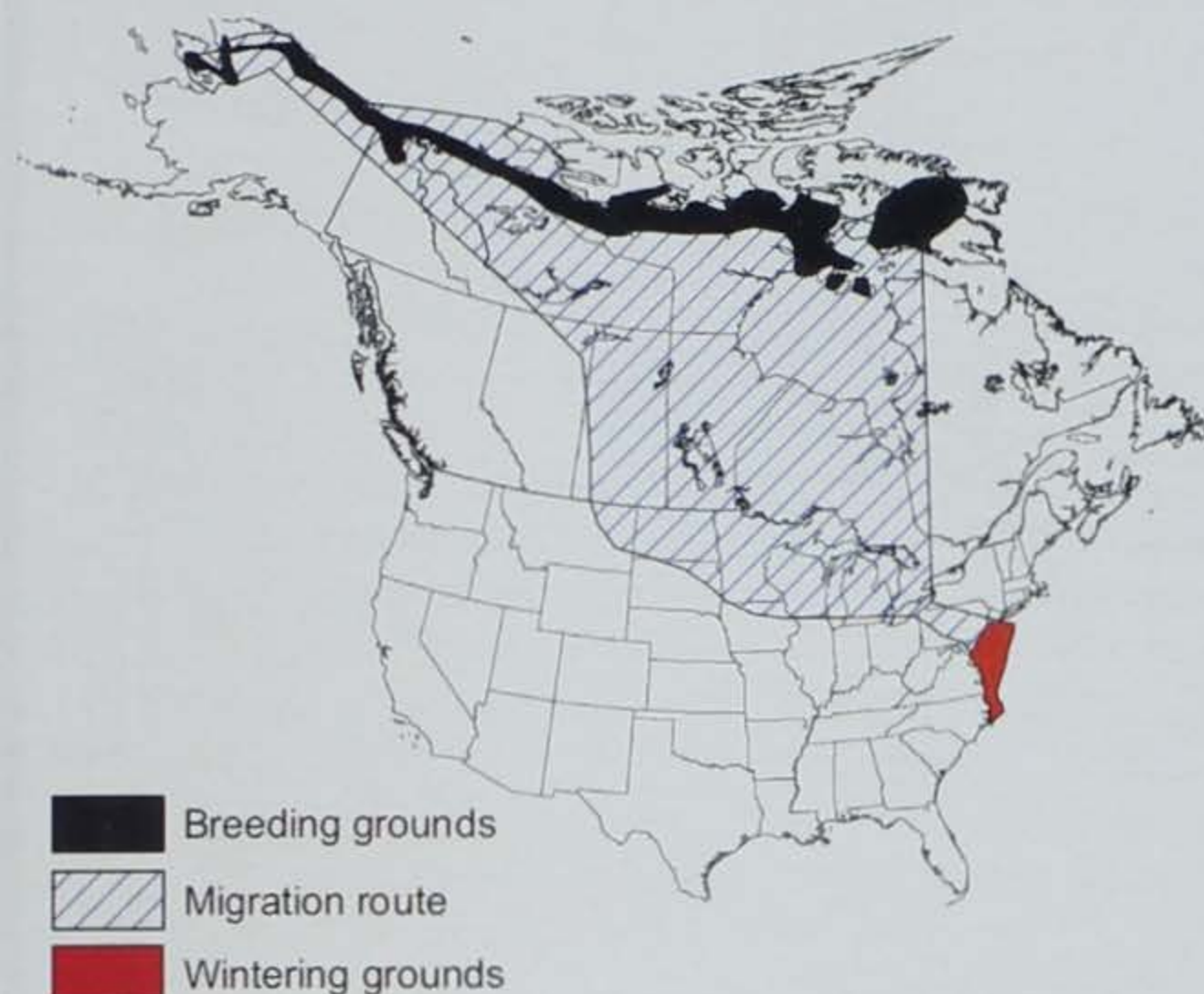
Stopping in Iowa along the upper Mississippi River wasn't always an annual phenomenon. "Thirty to 40 years ago the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge just didn't attract swans," says Lansing resident and well-known

birder and researcher Ric Zarwell. "It's amazing how it's evolved into a major stopover for the migration."

Jim Nissen, district manager for the refuge agrees with Zarwell's observations. "The most recent study shows that 27 percent of the tundra swans utilizing the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge during the fall migration use Pool 9, which extends northward from Harpers Ferry."

Why? "The construction of the locks and dams along the river eventually caused siltation and shallow conditions that favor aquatic plants that swans and other waterfowl feed upon," says Stravers. "Wild celery (*Vallisneria americana*) is a favorite food of swans and other waterfowl like the





Tundra swans breed in the high arctic, along the northern coast of the North American continent. Their fall migration route includes northeast Iowa, with the highest concentration along the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge, just north of Harpers Ferry. When the swans leave Iowa waters they embark upon a puzzling journey which takes them almost directly east, where they winter from Chesapeake Bay to North Carolina.

(Graphic courtesy U.S. Geological Survey.)



canvasback duck."

Stabilization work to fend off erosion has also benefitted and attracted swans.

"The large open pools created by the dams fostered wave erosion which began breaking down the islands. This degradation continued until the Corps of Engineers began reconstructing and reinforcing them," says Sharonne Baylor, environmental engineer for the Upper Mississippi River Refuge. Rip-rap was installed to protect the islands from wave action, and sandy dredge material was used to rebuild them. The islands were topped with rich, black backwater soil to foster tree and plant growth. Island construction will continue this year, as will

reinforcement at Capoli Slough in Pool 9—a tundra swan resting area five miles downriver from Lansing. Funded under the federal Environmental Management Program and administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the project will create nine islands and protect 10 existing ones. The 19 islands will cover about 49 acres, compared with 74 acres of islands that existed just after Lock and Dam 9 was built in 1940. The Capoli Slough area is just a few miles north of Red Oak Road, which offers a great view of one of Iowa's best tundra swan resting and feeding areas.

"The reconstructed shape of each island fosters improved aquatic plant growth along the leeward side,



drawing swans and other water birds which feed upon the renewed growth," Stravers believes. And as the water bird population has increased, so have the bald eagles which prey upon many birds species, like the American coot.

### What do Swans Eat?

An off-shoot of the work that has no doubt attracted more bird life is an increase in desirable aquatic plant species.

"Waterfowl, including the tundra swan, feed upon many of the plants that take root along the downstream side of the rebuilt islands and in the backwaters," Nissen

says. "Arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*), sago pond-weed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*) and coon-tail (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) are consumed, although wild celery is a favorite of both the swans and several hundred-thousand canvasback ducks which also pause at the refuge during their fall migration."

The swans feast on the tubers—the root structure of the plant attached to the river bottom. Swans use their large claws to scratch like a chicken in the shallows and can eat up to 6 pounds of tubers per day. Harpers Slough has a large wild celery bed and swan pits, or large areas where they





have scratched up tubers, that can be seen from the air.

"We also initiate water drawdowns each summer, which enhances aquatic plant growth throughout the refuge," Nissen says. "The drawdowns also create mudflats which benefit shorebirds during migration."

### Swan Infatuation

Arnie Fredrickson is a retired chemical engineer who loves tundra swans. Around 20 years ago he and some friends took a trip to the refuge and discovered the swans. "Since that time I have visited every year—

sometimes four to five times," he says. "A number of years ago I began hiring a plane to fly me up and down the river to photograph and observe the swans. I've probably made 15 to 20 flights over the years."

His infatuation doesn't end there. In December 2000 he decided to see where the swans spent their winters, so he followed them to the east coast and ultimately to Chesapeake Bay.

"Eventually I visited their primary wintering grounds in North Carolina. They love to rest on the big lakes there and feed in the corn fields during the day. I thought



A pair of adult tundra swans and four gray cygnets—the young of the year—leave the bay on Red Oak Road and head for the open Mississippi River.





Tundra swans resemble a slightly smaller version of their cousin—the trumpeter swan. The tundra swan has a yellow mark along the upper portion of the bill just below the eye. A trumpeter's voice is resonant, deep, loud and trumpet-like. A tundra's call is more mellow, rich and bugle-like.

about tracing their complete migration route, but it would have meant hiring a pilot to fly me to the arctic coast of Nunavut, the northern most Canadian territory, where most of the swans nest," Frederickson says. "I decided it would be too expensive."

### Tundra Swan Viewing

Allamakee County's Red Oak Road continues to be Iowa's top tundra swan viewing spot. The road can be accessed at its northern end by turning east off the Great River Road (County road X52) opposite Wexford Catholic Church. Red Oak Road then winds southeast

and follows the valley of Wexford Creek along the base of the Mississippi River bluffs. The road can also be accessed by traveling a little more than two miles north of Harpers Ferry on the Great River Road. The junction with Red Oak Road is opposite Mohn Fish Market.

This quiet and narrow road is often no more than a single lane, but cars pass by slowing and pulling to the side. The main attraction is a sheltered bay that offers the swans respite from cold fall winds. Its shallow waters are also home to the aquatic plants upon which the swans vigorously feed. Along with the swans, there are usually several species of ducks and geese often in flocks





numbering in the hundreds of birds. Swan viewing along Red Oak road is a real treat and the elevated roadway will put you within great viewing distance. Exceptional viewing can be had with a pair of good binoculars or a spotting scope. It is truly nature-watching at its best.

As one travels north along the river highway and into southeastern Minnesota, the number of swans grows. Swan numbers are typically greatest near Brownsville, Minn., and viewing from either of the two river overlooks is excellent. To see swans up close and personal, the Lansing-area-based Mississippi Explorer ([877-647-7397](tel:877-647-7397) or [mississippiexplorer.com](http://mississippiexplorer.com)) offers weekend boat excursions

into mid-November when swans are usually present. The number of swans, ducks, geese and bald eagles can only be described as breath-taking.

### Looking to the Future

The future looks strong for migrating tundra swans that use the Upper Mississippi River Refuge. "We plan to continue with island restoration in pool 9 near Harpers Ferry in 2012, and our management plans will continue to include work that will enhance the aquatic plant growth the swans depend upon, Nissen says. "I believe the future looks bright for migrating tundra swans." 🐾



# BAT SHACK

Give this friend of farmers and city dwellers a home



One brown bat can capture more than 1,200 mosquito-sized insects in a single hour. Bats also help control populations of Japanese beetles, moths, leafhoppers, wasps, beetles, lacewings, gnats, midges and mayflies. That makes this pest-eating species not only beneficial to agriculture, but homeowners as well.

One of the most effective and environmentally friendly ways to reduce mosquito populations at home is to install a bat house. Most North American bats prefer to live in groups, called colonies, so a mid-sized bat house is recommended.

Bats especially like insects with an aquatic life stage, such as mosquitoes, so they prefer to roost near water. A bat will eat half of its body weight in insects per night. Lactating females eat more than their body weight per night. Fortunately, West Nile Virus cannot be passed on to bats by eating infected mosquitoes.

## Get Involved

For success, make sure any purchased bat house, kit or plan is certified by the North American Bat House Research Project, part of Bat Conservation International. These house designs are backed up with research to provide structures that are the most effective, safe and suitable for bats. Research-based siting locations are also included. Go to [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org) to learn more about bats, bat houses and protecting bats from predators.

A free plan is available from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at [www.fws.gov/Asheville/pdfs/beneficialbats.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/Asheville/pdfs/beneficialbats.pdf).

The website [batmanagement.com](http://batmanagement.com) has details about managing bats and building and locating bat houses.

The DNR has a bat house plan in "A Guide to the Bats of Iowa," available for \$4 at [515-281-5918](tel:515-281-5918).

Many insects can hear bats up to 100 feet away and will avoid areas occupied by bats. As effective insect eaters, bats diminish the need for pesticides that harm not only pests, but natural predators and other species.

## PLACING THE BAT HOUSE

A bat house may be mounted on a tree, pole or building. However, bat houses placed on poles or buildings tend to have slightly higher occupancy rates. Wood or stone buildings are best, and bat houses should be located under the eaves with some sun exposure. Mount the bat house 15 to 20 feet above the ground away from bright nighttime lights. Locations less than a quarter mile from a lake, stream, pond or river

are most successful.

Temperature is a critical consideration. In Iowa, place the bat house where it will receive at least six to eight hours of sun daily.





## Power Cookies

Satisfy appetites with these easy-to-make snacks, perfect for adding energy to outdoor pursuits. The protein and carbohydrates in peanut butter provide healthy energy and the fats are mostly beneficial monounsaturated fat. Use spelt flour, which is higher in protein than other grains. It is also rich in soluble fiber to help lower cholesterol. If using other flour, insist on whole grain.

After you've made your first batch, feel free to mix and match grains, or add items such as sunflower seeds, flax seed and other healthy, nutritious morsels.

Variations on this recipe are good ways to clear the cupboards of small amounts of leftover nuts, grains and fruits.

**¾ cup whole grain flour such as spelt, whole wheat, multigrain or rye**  
**¾ cups rolled oats**  
**½ teaspoon salt**  
**½ teaspoon soda**  
**1 cup natural peanut butter**  
**½ cup honey**  
**⅓ cup applesauce**  
**1 egg**  
**2-3 tablespoons candied ginger or candied orange peel, chopped (optional)**  
**2 teaspoon vanilla**  
**2-3 ounces chopped dark chocolate bar**

**with 72 percent cocoa solids**  
**¼ cup chopped dried fruit such as dates, blueberries, apricots, etc.**  
**¼ cup chopped pecans, pistachios, walnuts or almonds**

Mix wet and dry ingredients in separate bowls, then combine both and mix thoroughly. Mix in chocolate and fruit.

Preheat oven to 375°. Drop heaping teaspoons of batter on a parchment-lined cookie sheet. Either leave as a clump or slightly flatten. Bake for 8 to 12 minutes. When done, the edges will brown slightly.



# Wild Cuisine *Kitchenside*

BY ALAN FOSTER PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH



Seared duck breast with warm apple and radicchio salad



Head chef Tony Joos



In an era of epic downtown revitalization, few Iowa cities are doing more than Dubuque. With riverfront attractions, a bustling downtown and abundant natural beauty, Iowa's Oldest City has reconnected citizens to the river and recaptured the city's mantra as Masterpiece of the Mississippi. After a day along the river, a must-stop is L-May Eatery on Main, where New England culinary chef Tony Joos' Italian background is evident from appetizers through dessert.

Pan-fried pecan-coated walleye





# New Twists On Old Favorites To Dress-up Any Meal

**DOWNTOWN DUBUQUE EATERY L-MAY DISHES UP ECLECTIC FUSION CUISINE AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE**

*Despite its distinctive lean toward Mediterranean cuisine, defining the culinary style at L-May Eatery in downtown Dubuque is difficult. Here you can sit down to the Italian standby osso bucco, or belly up to a good old-fashioned meatloaf "sammich." But ask Lea Droessler, who co-owns the eatery with her brother EJ Droessler, and she'll tell you chef Tony Joos leans heavily toward gastropub offerings, which she defines as "great comfort food."*

*A relative newcomer on the culinary scene, gastropub fare refers to high quality, innovative ingredients and dishes served in a pub setting. L-May is a place where one can eat their way around the world, starting with caprese bruschetta, followed by Chilean sea bass and finished with a large helping of orange roll bread pudding.*

*The following two recipes are chef Joos' favored ways of preparing two Iowa favorites.*

## PAN-FRIED PECAN-COATED WALLEYE WITH SWEET POTATO FRIES AND RED PEPPER HORSERADISH SAUCE

### WALLEYE

1 cup milk mixed with one egg

Flour to coat

1 cup chopped pecans mixed with one cup panko bread crumbs

Dredge fish in flour, dip in egg bath and coat with pecan/bread crumb mix. Fry until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes per side.

### RED PEPPER HORSERADISH SAUCE

4 ounces roasted red peppers, puréed

1 cup mayonnaise or sour cream

Zest and juice of half an orange

2 tablespoons horseradish

Combine and season with salt and fresh ground pepper.

## SWEET POTATO FRIES

Slice washed sweet potatoes into fries. Coat to taste with olive oil, cayenne and black pepper, salt and cinnamon. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes.

As eclectic as the food choices are at L-May, so is the atmosphere. Dig into sinful lobster lasagna in champagne sauce in the classic bistro-style dining area, or grab a stool at the stunning copper-plated bar and order a Cuban sandwich and cold ale from the Potosi Brewing Company, a local favorite. Grab some friends and reserve the downstairs where the party atmosphere rivals that of a classic Prohibition-era Chicago speakeasy.

Ask about the numerous gluten-free offerings, including their six signature pizzas, ranging from the ever-popular supreme to bacon mac'n cheese.

## SEARED DUCK BREAST WITH WARM APPLE AND RADICCHIO SALAD

2 4-ounce duck breasts

1 Granny Smith apple, sliced half-inch thick with skin on

½ head of radicchio, sliced

2 ounces brandy

Juice of half an orange

1 tablespoon butter

Salt and pepper

Score skin of duck breast and sauté until skin is crisp. Flip and cook flesh side for 2 minutes. Remove from pan and let rest. Add radicchio and apple to pan and sauté until caramelized. Add orange juice

and brandy and reduce 1 to 2 minutes. Add butter and serve.

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## HOURS:

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Reservations appreciated and recommended

## FIELD TIPS:

Care in the field and kitchen dictate if wild game or fish is a dinner knockout. Upon capture, fish should be kept alive or iced immediately for best results. Field dress wild game as soon as possible to help cool the meat. Because of low fat content, cook wild game medium to medium rare, or braise. Cook fish until the flesh is white and flaky.





BY ERIKA BILLERBECK



## A Watched Pot...

A watched pot never boils, or so the saying goes. Sometimes I wonder if the person who came up with this adage ever experienced sitting in a field in the middle of the night waiting for a spotlihter.

Scenes from television shows usually depict surveillance as a riveting activity. At any moment a criminal could come around the corner causing the vigilant cop to leap from a squad car and give chase. The scene ends with the cop performing a heroic face-planting tackle to the pavement. What TV shows don't bother illustrating are the numbingly boring hours the cop had to sit before the criminal decided to show up. And I assure you, there are plenty of those.

Usually it is sometime in November when I start receiving spotlighting complaints. In Iowa, many people enjoy driving around at night shining fields with spotlights, headlights or even flashlights, looking to catch deer in the beam of their artificial light. Spotlighting is legal unless the person has in his or her possession a gun, bow or other device capable of killing an animal. So, when I receive calls about late-night gunshots and spotlighting, I know it is time to start some surveillance.

I'll be quite honest with you—surveillance is a challenge for me. My patience has vastly improved since starting this



job, but like fishing, if something doesn't happen within the first hour or so, my mind tends to stray a bit. Nevertheless, my expectations were high this fall after receiving a very detailed complaint from a landowner. Not only did the informant have a description of the suspect's vehicle, but he also told me exactly where to park in his field for the best view. He all but promised that a spotlihter would shine the field sometime between midnight and 2 a.m.

Just to be on the safe side, I decided to arrive at 11 p.m. and stay until 3 a.m. I parked my truck in the field and began my watch. I watched. And watched. And watched. But eventually, my mind began to stray...to the temperature. Frigid air was beginning to creep into my truck causing goose bumps

on my legs. November is cold. In the middle of the night it is very cold. I know what you are thinking...why didn't I just turn on the heat? The answer is that it's best to keep the motor off and the windows open to better hear gunshots or vehicles approaching. Therefore, I tried my best to ignore my discomfort while I stared out the window and listened. And stared and listened. And stared and listened.

I spent the next hour trying to discern the source of a light that kept moving back and forth across the horizon. My





initial thought was, "Aha! I've got you now... just come a little closer!" Eventually it dawned on me. I was watching the headlights of a distant combine picking its way through a field. That disappointing revelation was accompanied by the unfortunate realization that I needed a bathroom break. I say unfortunate because cornfields don't usually come equipped with heated women's rooms stocked with Charmin. It is also unfortunate because I knew from experience that the moment I gave into the urge would be the precise moment when a vehicle would pass by. Instead, I opened my "surveillance survival kit" and pulled out a distraction in the form of a king size bag of M&Ms. I ate them one by one as slowly as humanly possible.

Though my candy was gone, my need for the bathroom wasn't. I knew that it couldn't be put off any longer. This simple bathroom task isn't quite so simple when wearing a heavy coat and gun-belt, but I finally wrestled everything off and made my way to the back of the truck. It was cold. Very cold. And, sure enough, at the most inopportune moment I heard the tell-tale popping of tires rolling over gravel. I scrambled back to the cab of the truck, strapped my gun belt back on, and jumped in just in time to watch a Schwan's truck drive past. I have no idea what it was doing out at 1 a.m., but the important thing was there were no spotlight beams coming from its windows. As I settled back into position, I pondered whether there would be room for a deer alongside the ice cream in the truck's freezer.

With my adrenaline still pumping from the whole bathroom break fiasco, I vowed to myself that I'd remain alert. I kept my promise for an impressive amount of time. But then I made the mistake of glimpsing at a photo of my young children posted on my dashboard. This slight interruption derailed my focus. Suddenly I became obsessed with worry that my husband had forgotten to do something very obvious—like feed the baby. Although I knew it was irrational, I couldn't risk it and I made a quick call home. After waking both my husband and the baby, and somewhat angering my husband (ok, angering him a lot), I returned to the task of watching and listening. And watching and listening. And watching and listening.

By this time I was tired and needed to find something to keep myself awake. Since my emergency supply of M&Ms was gone I decided, as a last resort, to sing. Be thankful you weren't riding with me that night because I couldn't get the tune "I'm a Little Teapot" out of my head. I sang it over and over, substituting words I couldn't remember with "la la la." Finally, after about 200 verses, the clock struck 3 a.m.

I wished myself better luck tomorrow night and began heading for home. Just as I pulled into my driveway, the phone rang. It was the informant. He was so excited it was a little hard to decipher what he was telling me.

"Did you see them?! They just shined your field!"

"The spotlighters?" I asked wearily. I already knew the answer.

I took my eyes off the pot. It boiled. 🐷



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## RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*)

With excellent vision, acute hearing and crafty camouflage, the ring-necked pheasant is one of Iowa's most challenging birds to hunt. When threatened they can run well, stay low and weave right and left to evade pursuers. As a last resort they explode airborne with a loud cackle and in seconds reach speeds of 35 to 40 mph.

### LOW FREQUENCY OR GOOD VIBRATIONS

Pheasant can hear low frequency sounds and vibrations which makes it difficult to startle. During World War I, pheasants crowed upon detecting footfalls of distant armies long before human ears could. As the British navy met German Admiral Hipper at the Battle of Dogger Bank in 1915, pheasants shrieked themselves hoarse to raise alarm over the naval battle 216 miles away.

### NATIVE OF ASIA, BUT A WORLD CITIZEN NOW

In 1881, 30 wild pheasants from China were released in Oregon. Iowa's were introduced accidentally in 1900 when a windstorm wrecked game breeder William Benton's pens in Cedar Falls and released 2,000 birds. His birds came from Tacoma, Wash, but it is unclear if they were wild Asian birds or from Oregon. Today, pheasants are found worldwide.

### STUD SERVICES

Roosters don't help raise the young, but keep harems of five- to 10 hens to mate each spring. Hens will seek several roosters for breeding. A hen can lay a fertile egg a day for three weeks, but won't incubate until all are laid so hatch times are similar. First nests have 10 to 12 eggs.

### DETERMINED NESTERS

Hens pump out almost their bodyweight in the first clutch of eggs—an energy demand that partly explains a short lifespan especially after snowy winters. Hens hatch one nest per year. If the nest is destroyed, she'll renege with fewer eggs. A brood with different sized chicks results when separate broods meet and some chicks follow the wrong hen.

### GIZZARD GRIT

To help their gizzard grind food, pheasants pick up grit in fields. A hunter in Burma noticed a precious stone in the gizzard of his recent kill. Inspired, he searched for where the pheasant picked it up. He found an emerald mine!

### SHORT BROAD WINGS

Powerful wings make for quick escapes with three beats per second (ducks have two beats).

### WET GRAVES

The average pheasant life-span is 9 months, although some live three years. Normally, 30 percent of the population survives one year to the next. In Iowa, if spring rainfalls exceed 8 inches or winter snow totals more than 30 inches, pheasant mortality skyrockets. All five years from 2007 through 2011, snowfall totals were greater than that tipping point and spring rains in four of the five years exceeded the tipping point—that explains why populations are low.

### SPURS

Used in spring territorial battles, leg spurs on roosters grow with age. Juveniles have less than 3/8 inch spurs, while old roosters can reach an inch.



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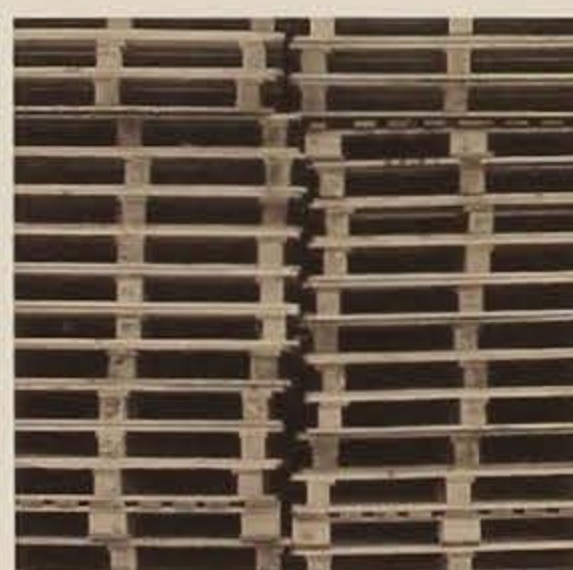
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