

NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA



GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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NORTH
Dakota | Game and Fish
Be Legendary™



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Matters of Opinion

By Terry Steinwand, Director



About once a year I'll take a bit of a detour on this page to talk about something other than what readers will find between the covers of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*. This is going to be one of those times – and it will be the last time I do it.

I'm sure many of you know that I'm retiring at the end of July, focusing instead on a neglected honey-do list, but also hopefully spending more time fishing and hunting.

My full-time career of 39 years has had its share of peaks and valleys, as is the case with any job, but it's been gratifying and not an easy job to leave. It has been a privilege working alongside some of the most professional and passionate fish and wildlife people in the nation here at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. They truly care about fish and wildlife and the citizens of our great state because that's what they've been trained to do. While it's hard to leave these people, I know the public has nothing to worry about. They are in good hands.

In my very first Matters of Opinion as director, I talked about the importance of my upbringing and how I felt it helped me in getting to where I was at. I still believe that, but my immediate family also helped shape that future to a large extent, while enduring some sacrifices along the way.

When I was a field biologist there were times during the spring spawning season where I would be away from home for weeks, missing children's birthdays and other special events. As my responsibilities increased, those missed opportunities, unfortunately,

weren't remedied and it seems like I missed even more events as my children grew.

I'm not writing this with any regret or asking for sympathy since my family turned out fantastic in my opinion. The reason for bringing it up is that I've been equally passionate about all my jobs at Game and Fish and putting in extra hours and some sacrifice was simply part of it.

I've always felt like I have more than one family. While my biological family was and remains my priority, the Game and Fish family is a close second. We argue, we fight, but when the time to pull together arrives, that's exactly what we've always done – gotten the job done together. I'll always be proud that I had the opportunity to lead an organization such as the Game and Fish Department.

I've told many in the past month that I'll likely "go silent" for a period of time while I relax out fishing or walking across a field looking for a bird or two, but there is a part of me that says I can't stay silent forever. I'm not exactly sure what the next chapter holds for me, but I know it's going to include fishing, hunting and a little more time with my wife, kids and grandkids whether they like it or not.

One thing I do know is that I'm going to do what I've suggested at the end of every Matters of Opinion article and that's to go out and enjoy our great North Dakota outdoors. Thank you to my family, my Game and Fish family, and all the wonderful people of North Dakota who made my career at Game and Fish memorable.

Terry Steinwand

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NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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Front Cover

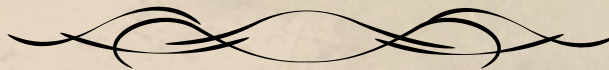
A redhead drake (back) and hen rest on a nest in a North Dakota wetland earlier this spring. Redheads, common nesters in North Dakota, likely didn't build the nest themselves as they are known to takeover nests built by other ducks, such as canvasbacks, scaup and mallards. *Photo by Sandra Johnson, Bismarck.*





MIKE ANDERSON (LEFT), DEPARTMENT VIDEO PROJECT SUPERVISOR, TALKS WITH AGENCY DIRECTOR TERRY STEINWAND ABOUT HIS LONG TENURE WITH THE GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT.

CHAMPION FOR STATE'S NATURAL RESOURCES TO RETIRE



TERRY STEINWAND, DIRECTOR OF THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT, ANNOUNCED HIS RETIREMENT EFFECTIVE JULY 31, AFTER NEARLY 40 YEARS WITH THE AGENCY.



Steinwand was appointed director in January 2006 by then-Gov. John Hoeven. He was reappointed by Gov. Jack Dalrymple in 2010 and by Gov. Doug Burgum in December 2016. Steinwand began his career with the agency in 1982 as a fisheries biologist for the Garrison Diversion Unit. He was named fisheries division chief in 1989.

"Terry has been a champion for North Dakota hunters and anglers for nearly four decades, spending the last 15 of those years leading a high performing team that has earned North Dakota a national reputation as a sportsman's paradise," Burgum said. "From expanding hunting access through the PLOTS (Private Land Open To Sportsman) program to growing the state's fishing opportunities to more than 400 managed waters with a world-class stocking program, Terry's love and respect for the outdoors shines through in his work every day. We are deeply grateful for his leadership and legacy of responsible, effective management of our state's fish and wildlife resources, and we wish him all the best in retirement."

North Dakota OUTDOORS staff interviewed Steinwand about his years with the agency and what lies ahead.

NDO: In your 39-plus years as a fisheries biologist and leader of the agency, what comes to mind when considering North Dakota's natural resources over time?

Steinwand: They change constantly. We can go from boom to bust in a real big hurry. When I took over as fisheries division chief in 1989, we were in the middle of a drought. And, of course, obligate species for water would be fish and not having a whole lot of water on the landscape, our fisheries weren't doing very well. There were only about 185 lakes and some of those were pretty shallow at that point in time, and we were just trying to keep some recreational fishing in those lakes. Fast forward to 2006 when I became director, we were actually in the middle of a wet cycle, there were 3.2 million acres of CRP on the landscape, and we were really ramping up on the recreational fishing side of things, but even more so on pheasants, grouse, white-tail deer ... they were doing fantastic, and we saw some tremendous hunting and fishing during that point in time. Since that time, we have lost about 2 million acres of CRP. We've seen some other challenges associated in managing the resource or producing

LOOKING BACK, STEINWAND SAID HIS LEGACY IS DEFINED BY THE QUALITY, PASSIONATE PEOPLE WHO (RIGHT) HAVE AND WILL CONTINUE TO MANAGE NORTH DAKOTA'S NATURAL RESOURCES. PROVIDING QUALITY WILDLIFE HABITAT (BOTTOM) ON THE LANDSCAPE, STEINWAND SAID, WAS AND WILL CERTAINLY REMAIN A CHALLENGE FOR WILDLIFE MANAGERS IN THE STATE.



ASHLEY PETERSON

that resource. Fisheries have continued to really climb though; our fisheries personnel have done a tremendous job. Over 400 lakes managed for recreational fisheries right now and I can't think of one that's not a great fishery at this point in time. And of course, our wildlife division has done a tremendous job of working our way back from a pretty low point in deer numbers. But again, one bad winter can set us back. We still need to continue working on the habitat issues.

NDO: Readers of NDO recognize that you've long been a champion of North Dakota and the hunting, fishing, trapping and other recreational opportunities available in the state. Why is that?

Steinwand: I got into this field because I love to hunt and fish. Everybody that buys a license evidently likes, but maybe doesn't love it like I do, but at least likes to hunt and fish and enjoy the outdoors. I cannot say enough about North Dakota's outdoors. I've ended every one of my Matters of Opinion columns with "enjoy the great North Dakota outdoors," or something pretty close. And I'm proud of that. I'm proud to be part of the process, part of the team, part of that whole community that provides that opportunity. I want my grandkids – I want everybody's kids and grandkids to enjoy what I've had the opportunity to enjoy. And if we can make it better, we should make it better.



NDO: During your 15 years as director, what were some of the biggest hurdles you and other agency leaders had to face in managing North Dakota's natural resources?

Terry: Well, habitat ... it's always going to be habitat. Is there enough water, quality water, to keep those fish alive and help them grow, which is one reason aquatic nuisance species are a priority for the Department and should be and has to be for the next number of years. Because zebra mussels, curly leaf pondweed, Eurasian water milfoil, silver carp, all of those have the real potential to make the resource decline. On the wildlife side, again, its habitat, winter habitat. We always have winter in North Dakota. And if these animals don't have a place to just have a little

WHEN STEINWAND TOOK OVER AS FISHERIES CHIEF DURING A STRING OF DROUGHT YEARS, THE DEPARTMENT MANAGED ABOUT 185 FISHERIES. TODAY, ON THE HEELS OF MOSTLY GOOD WATER YEARS, THAT LIST IS AT OVER 400 WATERS.



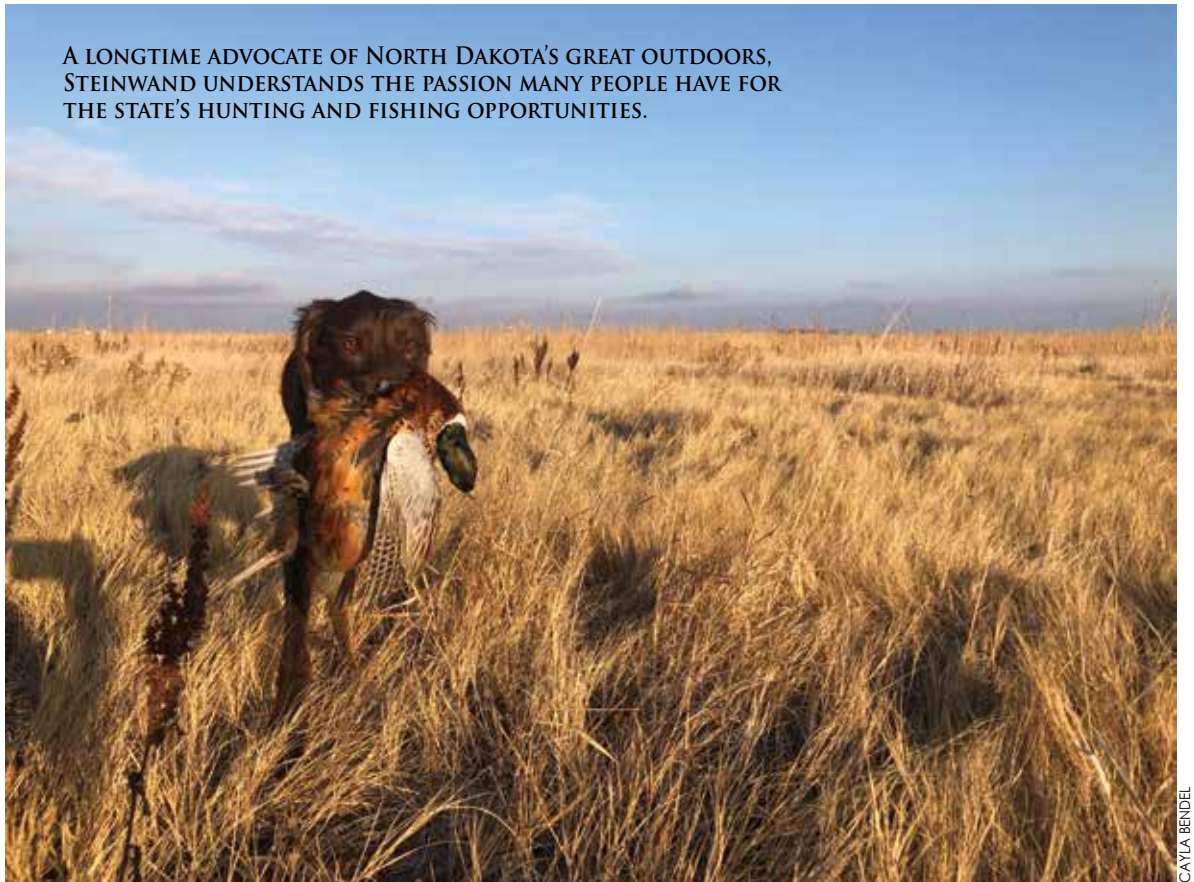
thermal cover, they're not going to make it through winter, whether it's a rooster pheasant or it's that nice buck or those little fawns, which are the first to succumb to tough weather because they just don't have the body reserves. Those are always going to be the challenges. Here at Game and Fish, we're always looking at it like it's never good enough, but we understand that we have to work with a lot of private landowners to get that. And private landowners across the state have been fantastic. Everybody that has hunted in North Dakota is aware of our PLOTS land, Private Land Open To Sportsmen program. That couldn't happen without the cooperation of a whole pile of private landowners out there. We're all part of a family here in North Dakota and it comes down to family working with family to get things done. Again, we don't feel it's ever going to be good enough unless we can get everybody who wants to go fishing has access to that lake, or everybody who wants a deer license gets a deer license. And again, that's all habitat related. Will we ever get there? You know, that's always going to be the goal. I'm not really sure we're ever going to get there, because

once you get there, you're going to want to move that goalpost just a little bit farther. I want to keep the hunting and fishing heritage alive in North Dakota.

NDO: Was the electronic posting bill also one of the biggest challenges?

Terry: I wouldn't say the electronic posting bill was a challenge. Hunting access and how hunters are able to access that land was the issue. A very, very contentious issue for years. This issue has been around for a long time and I can say in my eight legislative sessions as director, it came up in almost every one of them. I can't put Game and Fish at the forefront in this because it was a real group effort between the conservation community and private landowners doing what needed to be done to make it work. And some people call it a compromise. I would rather call it a collaborative solution because the people got to know each other. They got to understand each other. And they said, "Yeah, we can make this work, this can work, and it's going to change to some extent in the future." This to me, if you want to look at in terms of a human life, this thing was just born. And, actually, the idea came out four years ago, it was just too early at that

A LONGTIME ADVOCATE OF NORTH DAKOTA'S GREAT OUTDOORS, STEINWAND UNDERSTANDS THE PASSION MANY PEOPLE HAVE FOR THE STATE'S HUNTING AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES.



point in time. The technology wasn't necessarily totally there. In the 2019 session, it started building itself and it was born this year, and it's going to have to crawl a little bit before it's able to walk and run. So, I fully expect it will because it had good support and detractors from both sides ... some hunting groups, or hunting people, and some private landowners still don't agree with it. And we're probably going to see some, hopefully minor, glitches in it, but it'll get better and better and better. And again, it's a process I'm proud to be a part of as we are first in the United States to have electronic posting. Again, it's just an option. Not everybody has to electronically post, you can still physically post, but you can electronically post also. Honestly, I'm going to try it out with our land and I'm going to put posters out there, too,

because being the first year that it's absolutely in effect, there's going to be some mistakes made and we have to deal with that, too. And I hope private landowners understand that.

NDO: Are there any misconceptions that people might have about the North Dakota Game and Fish Department that you want to clear up?

Terry: I guess it would be the perception that we have all this authority, that we have all this power. We have some authority, but we have so much less than a lot of people think. Gosh, I remember in my early days as director, we were working on some elk issues with western ranchers, and they felt that we had the authority to do this and just bang do it. No, we didn't and still don't. It took a number of meetings for them to understand it, but they

actually joked about it towards the end. I don't have the authority and the Department doesn't have the authority that a lot of people think, so to me that is the biggest misperception out there. And I don't know if we'd want that kind of authority because you got to have that balance.

NDO: What are you most proud of, what do you want to hang your hat on from your 15-year run as Game and Fish Department director?

Terry: I'd say the people we've hired over the years. I've been asked, well, what's your legacy? I never came into this job with an idea or a goal of leaving a legacy, that never even crossed my mind. But in thinking back on it, the biggest legacy in it is the people I'm leaving here who can do the job. Employees of the Game and Fish, division chiefs, section leaders, they've made this job relatively easy. We've done a great job of hiring the right people, the passionate people, the very smart people. And to me, that's the best legacy anybody can have, because the public can be rest assured that although Terry Steinwand is gone, and I'm sure some people are glad Terry Steinwand is going to be gone, things aren't going to change in terms of management of the fish and wildlife resource. You know, the person sitting at that seat next is going to recognize that we have a great team. Don't mess with it too much.

NDO: A year from now, what are some of the things about Game and Fish that are going to pop in your head?

Terry: It'll probably be that, gee whiz, it's continually changing because there are a lot of retirements on the horizon. There's no doubt about it. It's changed a lot since I first started. I was a young

pup and now I'm the old guy. What will pop into my mind? It will probably be something like, gosh, they're doing a good job. I promised myself I'm not going to be the annoying ex-employee who says, well, "How come you're not doing this? How come you're not doing that?" No, I'm not doing that.

NDO: What is on your agenda now?

Terry: Once my boat is fixed, I'm going fishing. And when fall comes around, I'm going hunting. And I got a lot of fixing up as the honey-do list has gotten pretty long in the last 15 years. But I'm going to miss the people and I'm going to have to stay busy so I don't totally miss the people. But yeah, hunting and fishing are going to be my priority. I have four grandkids from 1 to 5 years, not very old yet, and I want them to have the same love of the outdoors that I gained. Granted, I had a little different upbringing on a farm and was able to do stuff that they aren't able to do right now. Even so, I want to give them that opportunity. Let's go out shore-fishing at a little lake. Let's go walk in the pasture. I want to show them what I was able to do as a kid.

NDO: Before you walk out the door, what advice do you give the person filling your seat?

Terry: Listen, listen, very carefully. Listen to what's being said. Balance the interests. When I was hired by then-Governor Hoeven, he

gave me some real good advice: balance the interests. And I will guarantee you that's going to be the toughest thing you have to do. Because, again, coming from a farm background, I understand what farmers and ranchers are going through, it's tough times out there. They can get some boom times, but for the most part, it's pretty tough. But I also understand what my responsibility was as Game and Fish director and, of course, that's the agency trying to get those populations sustainable and growing. Balancing interests has always been the toughest job for me and will remain so for the next person. You know, this has been the greatest job in the world, working with the greatest people in the world. I'm going to miss the people, but I'm not going to miss the stress.



A NATIVE SHARP-TAILED GROUSE FOR A HUNTER'S BAG.

CAYLA BENDEL

FUTURE WILDLIFE PRO

Prairie

A bird that followed in the dusty wash of homesteaders to North Dakota more than 100 years ago and once thrived in the collage of newly planted crops and age-old native grasses, continues to scratch out an existence today in the eastern part of the state.

While their numbers are nowhere near what they once were, greater prairie chickens (formerly called pinnated grouse), and the more abundant native sharp-tailed grouse, gather in spring on specific chunks of prairie that have been long used by generations of birds.

This showy and pleasingly noisy assemblage of prairie chickens and sharptails in courtship mode is lost on most passersby, with vehicle windows rolled tight against the cool early spring temperatures.

Yet, there are some people – students with keen eyesight and hearing – bent on locating these birds, differentiating between species and counting heads as they shuffle about on ancient booming and dancing grounds.

To get a firmer handle on prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse populations in Grand Forks County, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department partnered with the University of North Dakota to survey both species during spring mating rituals when the prairie birds are easiest to observe and tally.

Jesse Kolar, Game and Fish Department upland game management supervisor, said

this spring marked the third year of a three-year rotating program with UND where university students searched for and counted the harder-to-find prairie chickens and sharptails.

“UND came into the picture a few years ago, which was perfect because we don’t have a lot of staff this far east in the state and the staff we do have we are asking them to survey other species like ruffed grouse in the Pembina Hills,” Kolar said. “Historically, we contracted out these prairie grouse, prairie chicken surveys, but the biologist who did it for 15 years passed away three years ago, so we switched to an agreement with UND.”

Susan Felege, associate professor of wildlife ecology and management at UND, said the university and Game and Fish both benefit from this alliance.

“Hopefully, the Game and Fish Department gets really valuable data, particularly annual trends in what’s going on with both the prairie chickens and the sharp-tailed grouse,” she said. “But another real significant benefit is the assistance in training the next generation of wildlife professionals. The students get valuable experience out here on the ground counting birds, tallying up the data and helping to communicate that information back to the Game and Fish Department.”

Cailey Isaacson, a junior in UND’s fisheries and wildlife biology program, is in her second spring of early mornings surveying birds.

PROFESSIONALS MONITOR

Grouse

By
Ron
Wilson

PRAIRIE CHICKENS GATHER
IN SPRING ON SPECIFIC
CHUNKS OF PRAIRIE THAT
HAVE BEEN LONG USED BY
GENERATIONS OF BIRDS.



*A prairie chicken/sharp-tailed
grouse hybrid in early spring
in Grand Forks County.*

JESSE KOLAR

"I had never seen a prairie chicken before coming out here and I was unaware of their conservation status in the state," she said. "I would say that I'm very fortunate because a lot of students don't get this opportunity."

In the early 2000s, the Game and Fish Department had limited prairie chicken seasons in the survey area and in southeastern North Dakota, the first in 2004.

That year, biologists estimated a population of about 1,200 birds in the Grand Forks area. Today's population is probably fewer than 100 breeding individuals. (Biologists estimate a 1:1 male to female sex ratio and double the total count of males on known booming grounds to get a conservative population estimate.)

"Such little things can impact prairie chickens ... they are kind of a sensitive species," Kolar said. "They rely on expansive areas of tall grass prairies, so even Russian olive or cattail encroachment over the long haul shifts the scales in favor of sharptails instead of prairie chickens. And that's what we are seeing here in Grand Forks County, which is not necessarily bad because the sharptails are doing well."

If you've read historical accounts, there were once an untold number of prairie chickens in North Dakota, something that is likely difficult for today's biologists and students alike to wrap their heads around.

"I would think it would be one of the most amazing experiences if you ever had the chance to be on a prairie chicken booming ground back then, and especially if you were there before



Susan Felege, associate professor of wildlife ecology and management at UND, discusses during an interview the working relationship between the university and the Game and Fish Department.

sunrise and you start to hear the booming sounds the males make that is just absolutely incredible," Felege said. "If they were as abundant as some of the historical records define, I can't even imagine what that sounded like and what feelings and emotions that would rise in someone sitting out watching the prairie come alive."

Felege and her students start their survey efforts about March 15, driving designated routes on backroads, stopping every half-mile for 3-5 minutes and listening for both the booming chickens and the clucking sharptails.

"And then, starting on April 1, they actually go back to all the places where they've located these dancing grounds or booming grounds and they'll count them, and they'll go out and they'll see how many of each species are there," she said. "Students are also looking to see how many males versus females are there. Because what we're actually tracking is the number of dancing sharptail males or booming prairie chicken males."

Biologists say females do not show up consistently at the booming grounds, so it's not practical to get a count on all females. Males provide a more reliable population barometer.

Isaacson said it's easy to discern the sharptails from the male prairie chickens during courtship.

"When the prairie chickens are on their booming grounds and they are making the noise, doing their display, you'll actually see the bright orange air sacks on their necks. They get really big and kind of look like they're being filled up with air," she said. "And they have pinnae feathers that stick up from the back of their head that almost look like giant ears. And they bob their heads up and down and while making this oohing sound over and over. It's just a really deep sound that carries for miles. When you get close, you can feel it in your chest ... it's a unique experience."

As is the case with prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse in Grand Forks County, it's not uncommon to



A prairie chicken (left) and a sharp-tailed grouse (right) square off in early spring on native prairie in Grand Forks County.



Prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse occupy much of the same real estate during spring courtship in Grand Forks County. Understanding this, biologists are seeing some hybrid prairie chickens (left) as a result. A native sharptail is pictured on the right for comparison.

see the two species sharing a lek in spring. It's not unheard of, either, to view birds that just don't look entirely like they should.

"The greater prairie chicken that came into a booming ground I sat on this morning sounded different. It had a more of a slur to it than normal," Kolar said. "And when I looked at it, I could tell it had speckling on the belly, which wasn't right because prairie

chickens are really barred across the belly.

"But this one had barring on the top of the breast, but then toward the belly it got more spotty and speckled like a sharptail grouse," he added. "This is not uncommon. Sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chicken hybrids are reported most years in North Dakota where they overlap."

Turns out, having a working relation-

ship with UND and future wildlife professionals isn't that uncommon, either.

"It's good for Game and Fish to have a working relationship with UND and other universities," Kolar said. "A large part of what the Game and Fish does focuses on research for game management. And so, having a tie to a local university is really suitable."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

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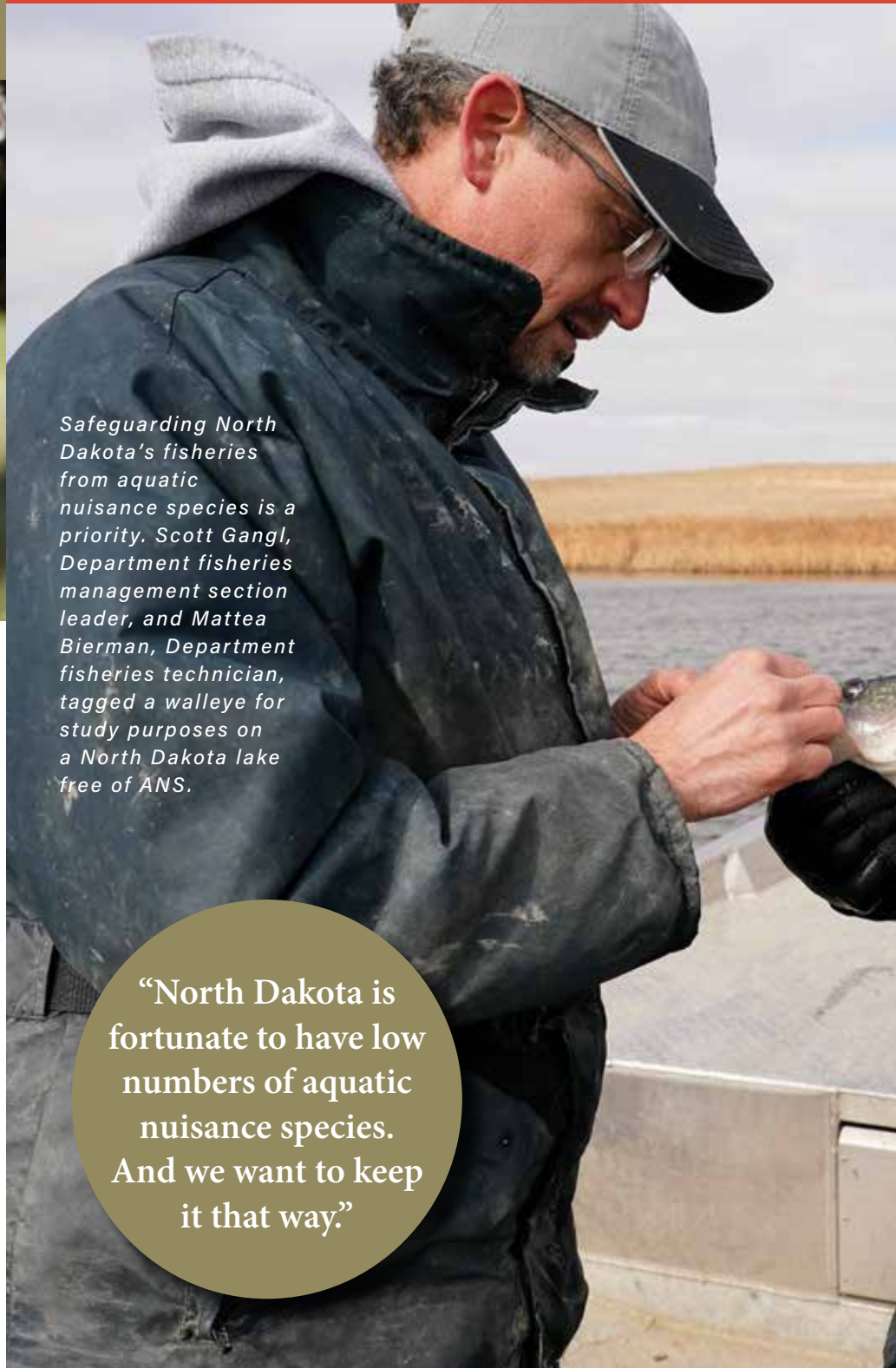


By Ron Wilson

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's effort to stop the introduction and spread of aquatic nuisance species in waters across the state is ongoing and getting stronger.

Ben Holen, Department ANS coordinator, said that while Lake LaMoure was added in 2020 to a short list of waters with zebra mussels in the state, North Dakota is fortunate to have low numbers of aquatic nuisance species.

"And we want to keep it that way," Holen said. "We have great water resources here in North Dakota, but we stand to lose some of that if aquatic nuisance species spread into our lakes and rivers."



Safeguarding North Dakota's fisheries from aquatic nuisance species is a priority. Scott Gangl, Department fisheries management section leader, and Mattea Bierman, Department fisheries technician, tagged a walleye for study purposes on a North Dakota lake free of ANS.

"North Dakota is fortunate to have low numbers of aquatic nuisance species. And we want to keep it that way."

e ANS Effort



And more than just fishing and hunting opportunities are lost if aquatic nuisance species go unchecked.

"We have good water infrastructure and aquatic nuisance species can cut off water supply to farm fields, municipalities and hydroelectrical facilities," he said.

Other than zebra mussels, North Dakota has just a few aquatic invasive plants and animals including curly leaf pondweed, Eurasian watermilfoil, big-head, silver and common carp. Curly leaf pondweed can be found throughout the Missouri River System, Lake Metigoshe, the Sheyenne River in Barnes County, and a few small reservoirs.

ASHLEY PETERSON

*A waterless
ANS cleaning
station at Lake
Ashtabula.*

*(Far right) Ben
Holen, Depart-
ment ANS
coordinator,
with a mobile
ANS decon-
tamination
unit.*



ASHLEY PETERSON



ASHLEY PETERSON

In the last five or six years, Eurasian watermilfoil has only been documented in the Sheyenne River in Barnes County. Bighead and silver carp are only found in the James River, while common carp are widespread and are found in many waters across the state.

New in 2021 in the continued campaign against ANS is a Game and Fish Department digital marketing campaign, targeting many of the state's bigger waterbodies and high risk ANS infested waters.

"At those ANS infested waters, anglers and recreational boaters will be seeing an increase in watercraft inspectors," Holen said. "We're greatly increasing our watercraft inspection force and getting more people on the landscape to catch aquatic nuisance species."

Holen and Grant Kapaun, Department ANS biologist, supervise 11 full-

time watercraft inspectors. Additionally, another six seasonal employees will be conducting watercraft inspections this summer.

Boaters should expect to see inspectors at: Devils Lake, Stump Lake, Lake LaMoure, Lake Ashtabula, Lake Oahe, Lake Sakakawea, Lake Audubon, Lake Metigoshe, Red River, Alkaline Lake, Lake Tschida and possibly other waters depending on boater traffic.

Holen said the boat inspections take less than 5 minutes.

"The inspectors will ask a series of questions to assess the risk of your watercraft and from there, inspect your watercraft and remove any high-risk scenarios so that your biological risk of your watercraft is low when exiting or entering a water body," he said.

The boat inspections are, in part, another way to educate water users

on the threat of aquatic nuisance species.

"That's one of our main priorities," Holen said. "Boaters should feel free to ask the inspectors any questions ... it's just an overall good way to learn more about aquatic nuisance species."

Also new this year at Grahams Island State Park on Devils Lake, Lake Ashtabula and Lake LaMoure are virtual inspection/voice audio playing devices, or ILIDS, at boat ramps to help stop the spread of ANS.

Holen said once a vehicle/boat is in range of the inspection devices, a magnetic sensor is tripped.

"When the sensor is tripped, the ILID will look for motion and if motion is detected, then record video," Holen said. "The video is sent to a website where I, or wardens, can review it. Also, when the magnetic sensor is tripped, an audio recording will play a short message to remind boaters to

drain all livewells and ballast tanks.”

Boaters are also remind about the Department-installed boat cleaning station near the Red River in Grand Forks and at Lake Ashtabula and Lake Metigoshe.

The self-serve, waterless CD3 units are free and open to the public and include a high-powered air hose, broom, wet/dry vac, a tool for removing vegetation from underneath boat trailers and flood lights to illuminate the cleaning process in low light.

“Wash stations are also available at Lake Tschida for public use. The Lake Lamoure wash station is nearly complete and there are plans to have a set of wash stations available at Jamestown Reservoir,” Holen said. “The Game and Fish Department also has a mobile decontamination unit that is used for high-risk commercial equipment and mussel-fouled boat decontaminations.”

Earlier this spring, Holen deconned the first mussel-fouled boat of the season coming off Lake Ashtabula.

“We also have clean, drain, dry stamps and stencils on ramps that remind people to clean, drain, dry whenever they come off the water,” Holden said. “All of these things are in place to lower the risk of aquatic nuisance species in our lakes and rivers and to keep our lakes and rivers good for a long time.”

Part of this strengthened effort against ANS also includes the Department’s continued sampling of many waters around the state.

“We sample over 140 waterbodies ever year for zebra and quagga mussels,” Holen said. “And we do vegetation sampling ... we’re looking for many other aquatic nuisance species.”

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

Preventing the Spread of Aquatic Nuisance Species

North Dakota anglers, water recreationists and anyone working in lakes or streams are reminded to follow these simple regulations to help prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species.

Know the laws, as each state and province have their own rules and regulations. North Dakota regulations include:

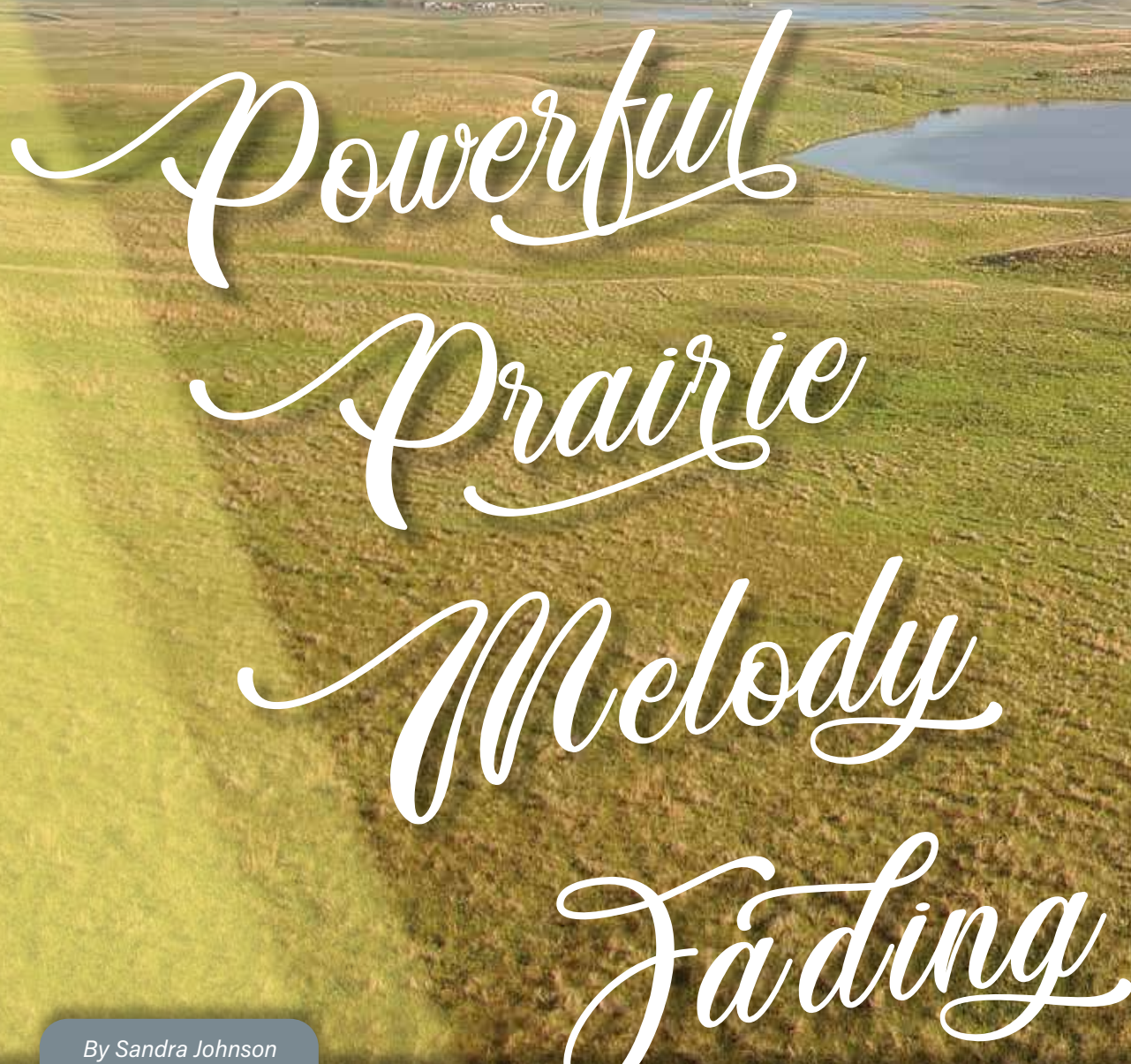
- Do not import live aquatic bait.
- Use only legal bait species.
- Transport live bait in containers of five gallons or less.
- Properly dispose of unused bait.
- Drain water and remove vegetation from all equipment when leaving a waterbody.
- Remove drain plugs and keep out or open during transport.
- Anglers may not transport live bait in water away from any Class I ANS infested water (currently the Red River, Lake Ashtabula, and the Sheyenne River from Lake Ashtabula downstream to the Red River).



- Clean, drain and dry any equipment (recreational or commercial) that is used in any waterbody.
- **Clean:** remove plants, animals and excessive mud from trailers, hulls, motors and other equipment such as fishing gear and watersports equipment.
- **Drain:** drain all water, including bilges, livewells and bait buckets.
- **Dry:** allow all equipment to dry completely or decontaminate before using again. If necessary, use sponges or towels to remove excess water and allow compartments to dry.
- Report any plant or animal that seems out of place.
- Visit the online reporting form at the Game and Fish website, gf.nd.gov.

Also, North Dakota boaters who are traveling to or through other states or Canadian provinces, are reminded to check the aquatic nuisance species regulations of their destination, to make sure they are in compliance.

Mandatory boat inspections may be required along highways or at lakes based on destination or route taken. In general, to ensure compliance, boaters are encouraged to clean, drain and dry equipment.



Powerful Prairie Melody Fading

By Sandra Johnson

How much do you know about the Western meadowlark? When you were in elementary school, you learned it's the state bird of North Dakota. You also know it's one of our earliest migrants, appearing on fenceposts and roadsides in mid-March, about the same time snow geese fill the skies and pasque flowers are ready to burst. You know the meadowlark's unmistakable song, a sweet and powerful melody that never gets tiresome. Just thinking about the song makes it start playing in your head, right?

Now, let's see how much you really know about meadowlarks with this short quiz.

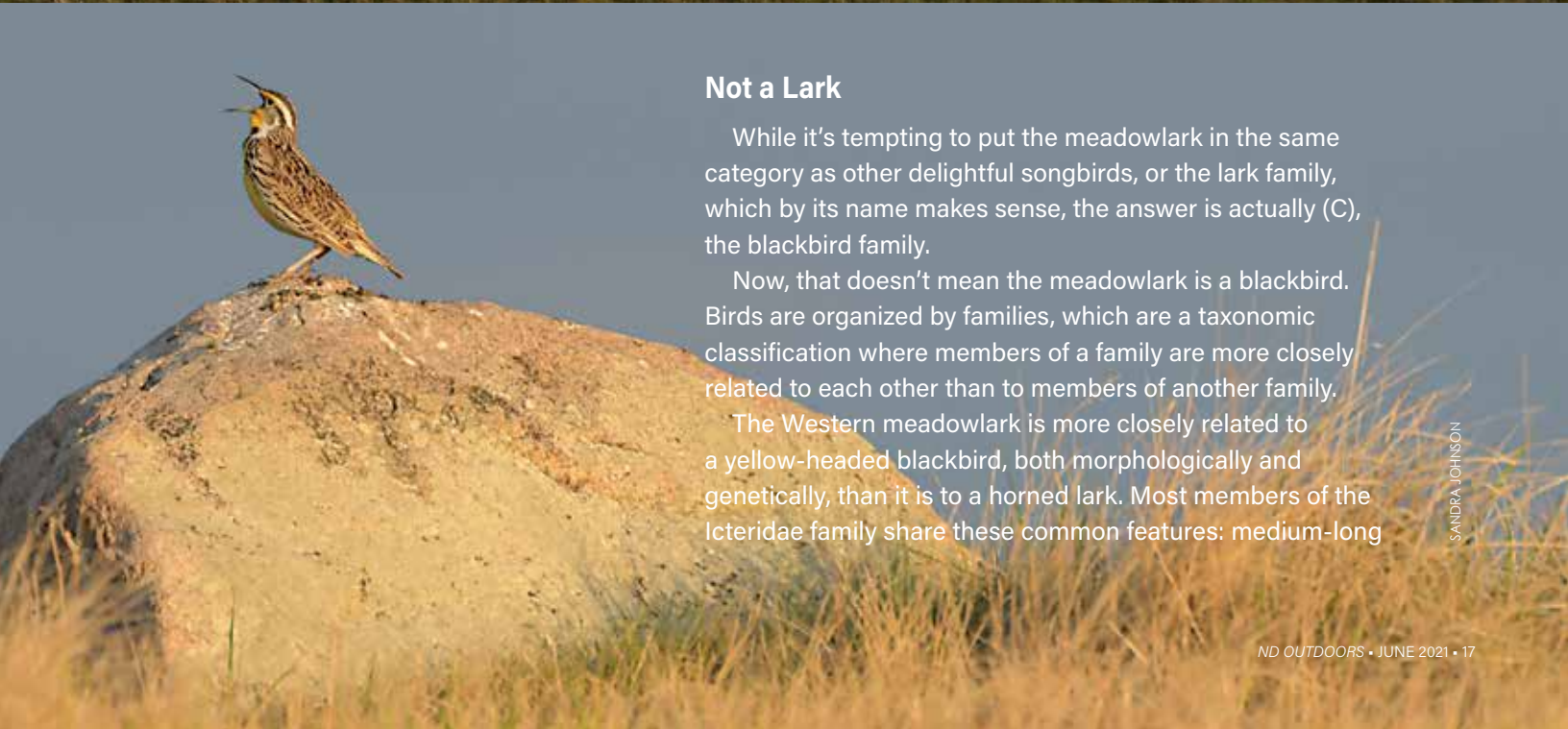
1. The Western meadowlark is a member of which bird family?

- (A) New World sparrows (Passerellidae). Birds include American tree sparrow, song sparrow and spotted towhee.
- (B) Thrushes (Turdidae). Birds include Eastern bluebird, Swainson's thrush and American robin.
- (C) New World blackbirds (Icteridae). Birds include yellow-headed blackbird, Baltimore oriole and common grackle.
- (D) Larks (Alaudidae). Just one other bird in this family, the horned lark.



An aerial view of Western meadowlark habitat in northern Burleigh County. A Western meadowlark (below) announces its whereabouts to other birds in the area.

ASHLEY PETERSON



Not a Lark

While it's tempting to put the meadowlark in the same category as other delightful songbirds, or the lark family, which by its name makes sense, the answer is actually (C), the blackbird family.

Now, that doesn't mean the meadowlark is a blackbird. Birds are organized by families, which are a taxonomic classification where members of a family are more closely related to each other than to members of another family.

The Western meadowlark is more closely related to a yellow-headed blackbird, both morphologically and genetically, than it is to a horned lark. Most members of the Icteridae family share these common features: medium-long

SANDRA JOHNSON

and sharply pointed bills; long, pointed wings; plumages are predominantly either black or brown, with some having patches of red, yellow, orange; and songs composed of clear, liquid notes.

From that description, it's clear meadowlarks, orioles and even the blackbirds, have a lot in common.

2. True or False. A male meadowlark will have two mates at one time.

Two Times the Work

True. Some males may have one mate, but many others will have two or even three mates at the same time. Males are the first to arrive on the breeding grounds in North Dakota, around mid-March, having left the warm wintering grounds in the southern Plains states and northern Mexico.

Have you noticed squabbling meadowlarks shortly after they arrive? One male meadowlark will be lounging on his fencepost when another male, uninvited, approaches his territory. First, he gives him the bill-tilt. His posture alert and feathers held tight, the bill is quickly snapped upward, and the wings and tail are flashed.

If that's not intimidating enough to scare off the trespasser, he'll execute the jump-flight, by leaping 3 feet into the air and flying a short distance, with his wings dramatically fluttering, legs hanging, and tail raised. The trespasser does the same and an aerial combat ensues. The winner, of course, gets to claim the territory and waits for females to arrive, a few weeks after the males.

Upon arrival, the female almost immediately instigates an aerial chase with a male in his territory. If a female has already paired with that male, all three will participate in the aerial spectacle.

After the necessary relations, the female chooses a nest site on the ground, in fairly dense grass. Meadowlarks rarely choose to nest in cultivated fields, that's why our North Dakota



SANDRA JOHNSON

A Western meadowlark nest constructed on the ground with young inside.

grasslands – such as native prairies, pastures or rangeland, and reconstructed grassland (CRP) – are crucial to maintaining their population.

The female alone builds the nest, interweaving with fine grasses to the surrounding vegetation on the ground. She may construct a roof of grasses, producing an ultra-concealed nest that's difficult for predators or human eyes to find. She will lay 5-6 eggs and incubation lasts 13-15 days.

The young usually all hatch on the same day and remain in the nest for 10-12 days. The male does most of the hunting for spiders, grasshoppers, beetles, caterpillars and other insects to feed the nestlings at one, sometimes two nests. While in the nest, each nestling will consume 155 grams, or a third of a pound, of insects.

Understanding this, we not only need grasslands to maintain meadowlarks, we need healthy grasslands that are moving and buzzing with life. That's where cattle do a great job of adding diversity to grasslands, by creating heterogeneous grasslands by grazing and

replenishing nutrients that spur insect populations.

3. True or False. Theodore Roosevelt described the meadowlark as "the prince of them all, the Missouri skylark" but admitted they were "very good eating."

Not for Consumption

False. When you read the June 2020 issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*, you learned the Sprague's pipit is the bird Roosevelt referred to as the "prince of them all." If you've read "Hunting Trips of a Ranchman," then you know the long-billed curlew is the bird Roosevelt described as "very good eating." Recognize when Roosevelt harvested a curlew, there were no protections on the birds. So please do not attempt eating a curlew today.

4. The Western Meadowlark was formally described by:

- (A) Merriwether Lewis
- (B) John James Audubon
- (C) George Bird Grinnell
- (D) Theodore Roosevelt

Look Alike, Sound Different

John James Audubon. In spring 1843, Audubon journeyed from St. Louis, up the Missouri River to the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, in what is now North Dakota. He was on a quest to collect and describe the "Quadrupeds of North America." His journal, and his companions, noted seeing many 'Meadowlarks' whose songs and single notes were quite different from the meadowlarks of the Eastern states.

The first specimens were collected on May 24, 1843, in what is now South Dakota, and were difficult to distinguish visually from the Eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*). However, Audubon and his companions determined this abundant bird on all the prairies be considered a separate species, the Western meadowlark.

Audubon gave it the scientific name *Sturnella neglecta* (the Latin word for neglected or ignored), since it had been vastly overlooked by earlier settlers, even Lewis and Clark, who had presumed it was the same species as its eastern counterpart.

There are few reports of Eastern meadowlarks being observed in North Dakota. However, most people would not know if they saw one, because they are nearly identical in outward appearance to our Western meadowlarks. The surefire difference is in their song, with the Eastern's being flutelike, but plainer, and rather unremarkable when compared to a Western meadowlark. The ranges of the two species overlap in parts of the central United States, but both being very territorial, they do not share the same space. Therefore, hybridization is very rare.

5. Fill in the blank. The last time you saw or heard a meadowlark was_____.

Fading, but not Gone

So, when and where was the last time you saw or heard a Western meadowlark? If you live in an area of the state where there are still a good number of cattle ranches, meadowlarks might be a common sight and sound in your daily life. For others who live in a large city or in places where few cattle producers remain, it has likely been awhile since you were in the company of a meadowlark?

Sadly, North Dakota's state bird is declining at a rate of about 1.3% annually. Is it just a coincidence the meadowlark is declining at roughly the same rate as the number of cattle operations in the United States, about 1% per year? The reduction in grass reconstruction programs, like CRP, also equates to fewer meadowlarks. Bottom line: without working ranches keeping pastures and rangeland green side up, there will be far fewer meadowlarks in our state.

If you haven't seen a meadowlark in quite some time, now is the time to change that. Take a drive in the country and where there are grasslands and pastures, look for meadowlarks on fenceposts. You may hear them before you see them, even with the windows up. View them safely from the side of the road, don't enter private land without permission. But if you do cross paths with the landowner or rancher, remember to thank them for the meadowlarks.

SANDRA JOHNSON is a Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.

North Dakota Meadowlark Initiative RCPP Grant Selected

After engaging and enlisting partners and stakeholders last spring and summer, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department initiated the Meadowlark Initiative, a new statewide strategy to combine the efforts of conservation, agriculture and industry partners to enhance, restore and sustain native grasslands in North Dakota.

Last November, the Game and Fish Department and 13 contributing partners submitted a USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant proposal (MI-RCPP), seeking to leverage over \$12 million partner contributions with \$10 million of USDA-NRCS funding to "kick start" collaborative work toward goals and objectives, encompassed in the Meadowlark Initiative.

In late April, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service announced that North Dakota's Meadowlark Initiative RCPP was selected as one of 85 successful projects nationwide.

Together the collaborative effort focuses on two goals: 1) improve, increase and connect wildlife habitat and 2) support the sustainability of new and existing livestock ranches by offering incentives and programs to promote holistic grazing with grass-based livestock operations.



SANDRA JOHNSON



BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



TY STOCKTON

Spring Mule Deer Survey Complete

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department completed its annual spring mule deer survey and results indicate western North Dakota's mule deer population is similar to last year and 21% above the long-term average.

Biologists counted 2,671 mule deer in 306.3 square miles during this year's survey. Overall mule deer density in the badlands was 8.7 deer per square mile.

Big game management supervisor Bruce Stillings said he is encouraged with current mule deer densities across the badlands.

"But we are concerned that mule deer are beginning the summer with poor rangeland conditions due to the extreme drought across the western part of the state, which could negatively affect fawn survival," Stillings said.

The spring mule deer survey is used to assess mule deer abundance in the badlands. It is conducted after the snow has melted and before the trees begin to leaf out, providing the best conditions for aerial observation of deer. Biologists have completed aerial surveys of the same 24 study areas since the 1950s.

Drought Likely to Impact Duck Production

Very dry conditions, along with a decline in numbers of breeding ducks compared to last year, were found during the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 74th annual breeding duck survey.

The 2021 May water index was down 80% from 2020, and nearly 68% below the 1948-2020 average. The percentage-based change in the number of wetlands holding water is the greatest seen in the history of the survey.

Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird management supervisor, said 2020 was the sixth wettest year and 2021, according to the survey, is the fifth driest in 74 years.

"That's an indication of how dynamic this system is that we work in," he said. "We essentially have no temporary and seasonal basins holding water on the landscape right now. And that has huge ramifications for duck production in the state."

A drastic decline in areas for ducks to establish pair territories and for hens to find high quality forage for egg production doesn't bode well for whether ducks will decide to nest.

"If a hen sees an area with poor or declining wetland conditions, she's going to work under the assumption that there's no place to raise a brood later," Szymanski said. "Even though we counted a fairly large number of ducks (2.9 million) on our survey, most of those ducks are not going to nest unless we have a very, very dramatic change on the landscape."

While this year's breeding duck index was down nearly 27%, it was above the 73-year average by about 19%, and the 48th highest on record.

Indices decreased for all primary species from 2020, including mallards (-48.7%), representing the 28th highest count on record, but the lowest since 1993. Some of North Dakota's other common species dropped below their long-term averages, most notably pintails (-68%), with their lowest count since 1991.

The exception was a 47% increase in the gadwall index from 2020.

"We have seen these oddities in the gadwall index when coming abruptly from wet conditions to rather dry conditions," Szymanski said. "Being a late-nesting species, gadwall that won't breed this year are still in the process of aggregating for departure to more secure molting habitats."

Szymanski said typically it's probably too early to make any big predictions about the coming fall hunting season. Yet, based on how things are playing out in North Dakota and much of the Prairie Pothole Region, it's likely going to be tough hunting without a lot of young birds in the air.

"Of course, we'll do a duck brood survey in July to get another handle on habitat conditions and what we see for production," Szymanski said. "But based on social mannerisms of ducks right now, it seems like there is very little breeding activity happening."



LARA ANDERSON

Record Count on Bighorn Sheep

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2020 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in early spring, revealed a record 322 bighorn sheep in western North Dakota, up 11% from 2019 and 13% above the five-year average. The count surpassed the previous record of 313 bighorns in 2008.

Altogether, biologists counted 97 rams, 170 ewes and 55 lambs. Not included are approximately 40 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and bighorns recently introduced to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation.

Brett Wiedmann, Department big game biologist, was pleased to see an increase in the survey for the third consecutive year.

"The increase in the 2020 count reflects lessening effects of bacterial pneumonia that was detected in 2014," he said.

The northern badlands population increased 13% from 2019 and was the highest count on record. The southern

badlands population declined again to the lowest level since 1999.

"We were encouraged to see the count of adult rams increase after declining the last four years, and adult ewes were at record numbers," Wiedmann said. "Most encouraging was a record lamb count corresponding with a record recruitment rate."

Game and Fish Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recount lambs the following March as they approach one year of age to determine recruitment.

Department staff, in conjunction with biologists from the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division, also reported that the bighorn sheep that were translocated in January 2020 from Rocky Boy's Reservation in Montana to the Fort Berthold Reservation performed exceptionally well their first year in the state. Only one adult ewe died but 19 lambs were recruited. Consequently, the population increased from 30 to 48 in the first year.

There are currently more than 400 bighorn sheep among populations managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, the National Park Service and the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division. Wiedmann said the last confirmed native bighorn sheep in North Dakota was killed in 1905, and Theodore Roosevelt reported that bighorns were scarce by the time he hunted them during the 1880s.

"So, it's likely there are more bighorns today than before North Dakota's statehood in 1889," he added. "It really illustrates the historical significance of this year's count."

A bighorn sheep hunting season is tentatively scheduled to open in 2021. The status of the bighorn sheep season will be determined Sept. 1, after the summer population survey is completed.

Game and Fish issued six licenses in 2020 and all hunters were successful in harvesting a ram.

WildLIFE CROSSINGS



NDGFD PHOTO



NDGFD PHOTO

Wildlife crossings in western North Dakota along a busy U.S. Highway 85 are doing as designed, moving some big game animals safely underneath passing traffic. Trail camera photos captured earlier this spring showed a moose (right) exiting an underpass near Williston and heading to cover on the 12,000-acre Lewis and Clark Wildlife Management Area, while the mule deer (left) are pictured in the underpass constructed just south of the entrance to the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park near the Long X bridge. While the latter underpass was built in large part to safely move bighorn sheep from one side of U.S. Highway 85 to the other, other big game animals, as wildlife biologists had anticipated, have taken to the crossing.

Plan Before Hitting the Water

With some access sites unusable because of low water levels, boat ramps are likely to be more congested than usual this year. With that in mind, boaters are reminded to plan accordingly when heading to a lake or river this summer.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department receives complaints every year about overly aggressive behavior at boat ramps. A few simple reminders will help ensure a fluent transition when launching and loading a boat.

Launching

- Don't pull onto the ramp until your boat is ready to launch.
- Prepare for launching in the parking area. Remove covers, load equipment, remove tie downs, attach lines and put in drain plug before backing onto the ramp.
- When ready, pull into line to launch. Wait your turn. Be courteous.

Loading

- Don't block the loading area with your boat until your tow vehicle is ready to load. Wait until you are clear of the launch area to unload gear.
- As soon as your trailer is in the water, load and secure your boat to the trailer.
- Remove boat and trailer from the water as quickly as possible.
- Get clear of the ramp. Pull into the parking area to finish securing your boat, unloading gear, draining all water and inspecting for and removing any vegetation. Remember to leave plugs out when transporting your boat.



White Suckers Only Legal in Bois de Sioux, Red Rivers

The state Game and Fish Department reminds anglers that live white suckers are not legal baitfish anywhere in North Dakota, except in the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers.

Although anglers can use live white suckers on the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers, and tributaries up to the first vehicular bridge, they are illegal elsewhere.

Fathead minnows, sticklebacks and creek chubs are the only legal live baitfish outside of the Bois de Sioux and Red rivers. Dead white suckers, which have been preserved by freezing, salting or otherwise treated to inactivate reproductive capabilities are legal bait.

Transportation of live white suckers, other than in Richland, Cass, Traill, Grand Forks, Walsh and Pembina counties, is illegal.

Illegal to Import Live Aquatic Bait

Anglers are reminded that it is illegal to import minnows and other forms of live aquatic bait into North Dakota.

Anglers must buy bait from a licensed North Dakota retail bait vendor. Bait vendors can properly identify species and ensure all bait is clean of any aquatic nuisance species.

For more information, refer to the 2020-22 North Dakota Fishing Guide, available at license vendors or online at the state Game and Fish Department website, gf.nd.gov.

Leave Baby Animals, Watch for Deer

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department offers a simple message to people who want to pick up and rescue what appear to be orphaned baby animals this time of year – don't touch them. Whether it is a young fawn, duckling, cottontail rabbit or a songbird, it is better to just leave them alone.

Often, young animals are not abandoned or deserted, and the mother is probably nearby. Young wildlife are purposely placed in seclusion by adults to protect them from predators.

Anytime a young wild animal has human contact its chance for survival decreases significantly. It's illegal to take wild animals home, and captive animals later returned to the wild will struggle to survive because they do not possess learned survival skills.

The only time a baby animal should be picked up is if it is in an unnatural situation, such as a young songbird found on a doorstep. In that case, the young bird could be moved to the closest suitable habitat.

People should also steer clear of adult wildlife, such as deer or moose that might wander into urban areas. Crowding stresses animals, and this could lead to a potentially dangerous situation.

In addition, motorists are reminded to watch for deer along roadways. During the next several weeks young animals are dispersing from their home ranges, and with deer more active during this time, the potential for car deer collisions increases.

Put Garbage Where it Belongs

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department reminds outdoor recreationists to keep it clean this summer by packing out all trash.

All garbage, including used fireworks, should be placed in a proper trash receptacle. If trash cans aren't available, or are full, take the trash and dispose of it at home.

It is not uncommon to see garbage piling up around full trash containers. Styrofoam containers are not biodegradable, but are often found wedged in cattails, drifting, or washed up on shore.

Tires, mattresses and kitchen appliances have found their way to public use areas. This illegal dumping is costly to clean up and takes a significant toll on the environment. Not only does it spoil the beauty of the land, it destroys habitat, has the potential to pollute North Dakota waters and can injure wildlife.

Littering violations should be reported by calling the Report All Poachers hotline at 701-328-9921.



State Archers Shine at NASP Nationals

Much like 2021 National Archery in the Schools Program State Tournament, the NASP National Tournament was also held virtually this year. North Dakota had a record number of archers participating in nationals at 257, more than double the number representing the state.

North Dakota was represented well with 11 top 10 placements.

Bulls-eye

Shayle Zimbleman, Oakes, 2nd place, middle school girls; Hunter Genre, New Rockford, 8th place, middle school boys; Isiah Wertz, Oakes, 10th place, middle school boys; Gracie Gunderson, Medina, 2nd place, high school girls; Mason Kamnitz, Oakes, 3rd place high school boys; and Casey Everson, Barnes County North, 9th place, high school boys.

3-D

Shayle Zimbleman, Oakes, 5th place, middle school girls; Hunter Genre, New Rockford, 2nd place, middle school boys; Braysen Sagert, Oakes, 9th place, middle school boys; Gracie Gunderson, Medina, 10th place, high school girls; Clancey Zimbleman, Oakes, 4th (tied) place, high school boys; and Mason Kamnitz, Oakes, 4th (tied) place, high school boys.

Varsity Archery Tournament Top Finishers

Octavia Ralph-Martinson, a junior at Griggs County Central, took top honors in two disciplines in the 2021 Varsity Archery State Tournament.

Varsity Archery is a spin-off of the National Archery in the Schools Program and is open to only high school-aged kids. While formatted similarly to the popular NASP, Varsity Archery allows its participants to use fully equipped bows and the distances to the targets can be greater. There is also greater variation in the type of targets the kids might encounter in their classroom or at a tournament. This gives archers coming out of NASP a taste of what archery has to offer outside of the gymnasium.

Octavia took the overall championship by taking top honors in both disciplines, shooting a 296 in the bulls-eye, or Olympic style competition, and a perfect 300 in the 3-D competition.

Here's the top 3 boys and girls for the Varsity Archery State Tournament:

3-D

Boys

- First – Joshua Wiebusch, Wahpeton
- Second – Jordan Carlson, Barnes County North
- Third – Clancey Zimbleman, Oakes

Girls

- First – Octavia Ralph-Martinson, Griggs County Central
- Second – Rylee Suhr, Griggs County Central
- Third – Melonie Lee, Barnes County North

Bulls-eye

Boys

- First – Alex Lee, Barnes County North
- Second – Clancey Zimbleman, Oakes
- Third – Jordan Carlson, Barnes County North

Girls

- First – Octavia Ralph-Martinson, Griggs County Central
- Second – Rylee Suhr, Griggs County Central
- Third – Brooke Bundy, Barnes County North

STAFF NOTES



Tim Larson

Longtime employee Tim Larson, Turtle Lake, retired in April after 42 years with the Game and Fish Department. Larson, a Department game warden for the entirety of his career, started in July 1979.

"Tim has dedicated 42 years to protecting the wildlife of North Dakota as well as making sure the public has a safe, enjoyable experience in the North Dakota outdoors," said Scott Winkelman, Department enforcement division chief. "Tim's knowledge and experience, both as a district game warden and a law enforcement instructor, will be missed. I wish Tim the best in his retirement."

BACKCAST



By Ron Wilson

Three of us are sitting in a portable wildlife viewing blind designed for two somewhere in Grand Forks County. It's mid-April and there's still a bit of snow on the ground, enough of it to remind us that while we're over winter's hump, the potential of more weather is real.

We have all the windows open in the blind, some of which are the shape of the inverted triangular yellow PLOTS signs that mark the land we are sitting on. This means nothing, of course, and I don't know why I even bother to draw the comparison. What I do know is that I would love to zip the windows shut, maybe just for a bit, to give ourselves a break from the wind.

To do so, this close to sunrise, would be a mistake with the promise of birds arriving on this piece of prairie at any minute pretty good.

We'll see sharp-tailed grouse, certainly, which is never a bad thing. I've yet to tire of the bobbing and strutting of the males during this time of courtship. Teamed with the cooing and the loud, clicking-like sound the birds make while rapidly stomping their feet on the prairie, their performance is always worth what you pay in lost sleep to be in attendance.

What we're here for, cold fingers crossed, are prairie chickens. What I know about these birds I've read, plucked from knowledgeable biologists or watched on video. None of this matters much, at least to me, without viewing the birds up close, doing their thing in spring as they are seemingly driven without thought, but steered by an unmistakable desire to parade around and make noise.

During the good prairie chicken years, say, from 1900 to 1930, prairie chickens could be found, many times in great abundance, in most reaches of North Dakota except the rugged badlands.

In "Feathers from the Prairie," a Game and Fish Department publication, it is written: *"Our grandparents knew him for his reverberating courtship booming, exorbitant numbers, and fine-flavored meat at the dinner table."*

Old-timers called this bird that followed on the heels of settlers to North Dakota yellowlegs, fool hen, kettle drummer, boomer, the list goes on.

"When I came to our homestead nine miles south of Jamestown in 1892 there were prairie chickens everywhere. The 'broad-tails' were thick from the 1890s to 1930s," said Ben Baemen, Jamestown, in "Feathers."

"I remember during the drought and Depression years the Red Cross passed out rough type flour called Red Dog. It made fairly good bread and we ate lots of jackrabbits and prairie chickens with it. If it hadn't been for the wildlife during the Depression, we would have starved and so would lots of other people," said Charles Wenz, New Rockford, in "Feathers."

While I certainly don't long for the hardship and heartache of that era, it would have been something to see prairie chickens in great numbers. To hear the booming vocalization, reportedly from a distance of 2 to 3 miles on a windless morning, of the males in heated courtship.

The birds have arrived, almost all at once, as if they were summoned by a starter's gun that only they can hear. Even in the confusion of stamping, darting and pairs and pairs of outstretched wings cutting quickly through prairie grasses, it

appears that of the 18 to 20 birds in attendance, all are sharp-tailed grouse.

Maybe we're missing something. Maybe it's the low light. Maybe the prairie chickens are running fashionably late.

Maybe. Maybe. Maybe.

Yesterday, on an equally dreary day, but with more wind, Susan Felege, associated professor of wildlife ecology and management at the University of North Dakota, described, with great animation, male prairie chickens on their booming grounds.

"Then you see the big, beautiful, bright orange air sacs on their neck ... and they put their wings out and make this booming sound that, when you're sitting there, you feel the boom," she said.

Until next spring, I'll have to take her word for it.

RON WILSON is editor of North Dakota OUTDOORS.

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An underwater view of some of the 14,000-plus brown trout stocked in the Missouri River in spring. Nearly 15,000 rainbow trout were also stocked, which is the typical number stocked for both species most years in the river. Jerry Weigel, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries production/development section supervisor, said the trout are released about 5 miles downstream

of Garrison Dam to avoid predation from cormorants and pelicans. Trout fishing below the dam in the Tailrace is outstanding for trophy fish feeding on smelt flushed through the dam, but likely underutilized. All state records for salmonids have come from the Tailrace, including brown trout (31 pounds, 11 ounces) and rainbow trout (21 pounds, 4 ounces).



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