

Briefs: State Parks Have Record Spring Camping

PIERRE — Unseasonably warm weather has people in the camping mood a little early this year in South Dakota. And with 80 degree days in March, campers have already been spending their weekends in the parks.

Campgrounds in southeastern South Dakota are seeing large increases in the number of campers compared to previous years.

“In 11 years at the park, I have never seen a busier March,” said Shane Bertsch, park supervisor at Lewis and Clark Recreation Area in Yankton. “We usually get a couple of campers in early spring, but we had over 50 campsites filled last weekend. That’s unheard of.”

Nice weather is allowing state parks to open comfort stations and dump stations earlier this year. Many have already opened, drawing in more campers. According to Bertsch, comfort stations usually don’t open until the first or second week in April at Lewis & Clark Recreation Area, and not until May at other parks. Camping at state park and recreation areas in South Dakota is open year-round.

Camping is available on a first-come, first-served basis until May 18, when campsites can be reserved. Reservations for the summer camping season can be made 90 days prior to arrival online at www.campsd.com.

Second Annual S.D. Birding Festival Planned

The Second Annual South Dakota Birding Festival will be held in the Fort Randall Dam area on May 18-20.

The area offers a unique setting for bird watchers, who will be able to witness a variety of species migrating north. The Fort Randall location in central South Dakota includes the Missouri River, Lake Andes National Wildlife Refuge and Karl Mundt National Wildlife Refuge, which are all a major flyways for migrating birds.

Birders will see a wide variety of bird species in a short period of time. During the 2011 festival, birders sighted 136 different species, including green heron, hooded merganser, still sandpiper, Eastern screech owl, red-bellied woodpecker, Bell’s vireo, palm warbler and many more.

The festival will offer a full schedule of birding activities, beginning at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 18, at the Rainbow Room in Pickstown. Registration, a social gathering and refreshments are scheduled, with a presentation on bird identification at 7:15 p.m. CDT by Dr. Dave Swanson of the University of South Dakota Department of Biology.

Activities on Saturday, May 19, will begin at 6:30 a.m. at the Lake Andes National Wildlife Refuge with a bird-banding workshop. Continuing during the day will be birding field trips; a basics of photography workshop by South Dakota nature photographer Roger Dietrich; an owls of South Dakota program by Nancy Drilling, who is South Dakota projects coordinator, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory; children’s program; a banquet; and an owling field trip at 9:15 p.m.

Sunday will begin with a bird-banding workshop at the Lake Andes National Wildlife Refuge at 6:30 a.m., followed by a birding field trip led by Mike Bryant of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Karl Mundt National Wildlife Refuge at 7:45 a.m.

For an event schedule and registration form, go to www.sdgreatlakes.org/greatoutdoors/birding-info or call 605.384.3741.

Nebraska Walleye Egg Collecting To Begin Early

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska officials will be collecting walleye eggs earlier this year because of the recent warm weather.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission says staffers will begin collecting walleyes Monday night at Sherman Reservoir, when the dam is closed, and then during that week at Merritt Reservoir and Lake McConaughy (muh-KAH-nuh-hay).

Anglers and boaters must avoid Game and Parks boats and nets at all three reservoirs.

At Lake McConaughy, a portion of the face of Kingsley Dam will be closed to fishing from sunset to sunrise. The northern third of the dam will be barred to bank and boat anglers.

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

It’s Time To Look For ‘Sheds’

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

The weather last winter was pretty mild, with the weather leading into spring being unbelievable, with many of us ready to get outdoors and enjoy the spring.

Fishing is picking up and it’s that time of the year when shed hunting is getting into full gear.

Most deer hunters, spend the majority of their time in the field and woods in the early fall and winter.

This is the time of the year when white-tail bucks are or have shed their antlers, when you’ll have a good opportunity to spend time in the area you hunt.

Many hunters really get fired up when bucks begin growing their antlers, as it’s an excellent opportunity to see which bucks survived the winter.

It’s an excellent way to get a huge set of antlers for your wall without having to take the buck.

To some of us, shed hunting isn’t just another outdoor activity; it’s an obsession, an annual event, giving us an opportunity to get out to search the hills and valleys looking for what the bucks have discarded.

These treasures, the shed we’ll find, will be used to decorate our homes, offices and man caves. They’ll also give us an idea as to which deer survived the winter, allowing us to begin making plans for next fall’s deer season.

Generally a deer’s antler growth will begin during March or April and by August or early September are fully-grown

The racks of a deer are quite extraordinary, as deer antlers are among the fastest growing tissues known to man, growing as much as a ½ inch per day during peak development, which can vary greatly depending on the genes and nutrition of each deer.

Growing antlers are covered with a living tissue, called velvet. During the velvet stage, deer’s antlers are very delicate. This is when most antler damage or breakage will happen.



Gary HOWEY

Why is it important for bucks to loose their antlers each year and grow a new set? One is that a buck’s antlers take a beating in the late fall and early winter. They need a healthy set of headgear each year in order to defend their territory and to be first in line when the breeding season, the rut begins.

During the fall bucks will spar, setting up a pecking order. They’ll use their racks, prior to and during the rut to fight off intruders, the other bucks that wander into their territory.

It’s the larger, dominant bucks that are the king of the hill. These battles between bucks, many times are to the death as each year there are bucks found locked together and were unable to unhook their antlers after they’ve become entangled during these battles

When a buck has the genetics and can obtain the needed minerals, their racks will increase in size each year until they grow older, when nearing the end of their life cycle their racks will start to degrade.

When the bucks shed or loose their headgear, it’s hard to distinguish them from the does and as the daylight hours increase, new headgear will once again begin to develop.

My first deer shed wasn’t big, heck it was actually pretty darn small, the rodents had worked on it, but to me, it was pretty cool, as I’d spent hours in the woods and this was the first shed I’d come across.

Just a small two pointer, with the base pretty much gone, as some critter had found it long before I did, and must have needed the calcium it contained.

If I’m traveling this time of the year, I keep an eye out for sheds and have found them in Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming, with many mule deer, whitetail deer and elk sheds decorating our office in Hartington.

With the popularity of shed hunting, a North America organization has been formed: the North American Shed Hunters Club (NASHC) www.shedantlers.org/ that’s dedicated to shed hunting. This organization keeps track of world records for sheds, which includes non-typical single antler, non-typical matched sets, typical single antler and typical matched sets.

Getting started is the toughest part of shed hunting as you can spend a lot of time wandering around aimlessly if you don’t have a plan.



PHOTO BY DUSTIN LUTT
Shed hunting is an excellent way to do some pre-season scouting for turkeys and at the same time for deer as sheds found in the spring indicate the deer it came from made it through the winter.

Unless you’re searching on public land you’re going to need permission from the landowner, which isn’t a big problem as long as you don’t get off the trails and close the gates behind you.

When there’s plenty of snow on the ground or the ground is wet the best way to find a place to hunt sheds is to drive the backcountry looking for well-used deer trails in the snow or in the muddy ditches and fields. Once you’ve located them, simply follow them, as they’ll be heading to or from bedding or feeding areas. Locations where trails cross a fence are excellent places to find a shed. Once the bone begins to deteriorate, it doesn’t take much of a jolt to break them off, many times, when a deer hits the ground after jumping a fence will cause many of them to end up on the ground.

Another excellent spot you’re likely to find sheds are areas where they feed, especially if they’re feeding on bales or haystacks. When the buck ducks its head to feed, its antlers hit the hay, which will

KSU Researcher Takes New Look At Prairie

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Kansas State University researcher and former National Park Service ranger Tyra Olstad is studying the aesthetics of landscapes — particularly the open spaces of prairie — in order to develop new ways to promote and celebrate Kansas tourism, history and geography.

Olstad, a 30-year-old doctoral student in geography who grew up in North Tonawanda, N.Y., said the prairie project didn’t sprout from her research work at the university but from her personal experiences tied to the prairie.

Her first time to see the prairie came the summer after her high school graduation when she and her father were in a plane flying over Nebraska.

“I’d never seen so much space before,” she said. “I fell in love with the space in the West. I was intrigued by the sense of place and why people become attached to it and why others see it as desolate.”

Olstad earned an undergraduate degree in folklore, Earth studies and Russian in 2004 at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and a master’s degree in geography and environment/natural resources in 2007 at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

Over the past 10 years, in between her studies, she has worked as a paleontologist for the National Park Service in such places as the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona, Badlands National Park in South Dakota, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in Colorado and Fossil Butte National Monument in Wyoming.

Olstad, who came to K-State in 2008, said she became interested in the pejoratives that people assign to prairie landscapes.

“I wanted to study how we psychologically interact with places and what this interaction means for the different places,” she said. Olstad’s research included scientific analysis, ecology and environmental history. She traveled throughout Kansas and visited the Konza Prairie Biological Station, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Mount Sunflower and other landmarks.

She took photographs and wrote about her own experiences with the prairie. By applying the same artistic techniques used in photography, literature and visual arts, she was able to discover new, positive perceptions of the prairie

landscape.

Olstad said the conventional definition of beautiful scenery includes mountains, forests, seashores — not the open spaces of the Kansas landscape. Consequently, it is difficult to persuade people, including Kansans, that the prairie is anything but flat and dull.

If Kansans learn to celebrate the beauty and rhythm of the prairie landscape in new ways, she said, they can deepen their own sense of place and promote pride and tourism in rural communities.

In many instances, eco-tourism involves visiting a site, snapping a photo and then continuing on one’s trip. But to appreciate the prairie, Olstad said, one must witness the rhythms and cycles that take place over time — at sunset, when there’s a storm, during burning season or when wildlife is visible.

“People have to experience the prairie and something has to spark their interest to come,” she said. “I couldn’t imagine what the prairie looked like until I was standing in the middle of one.”

Madison Girl Wins Duck Stamp Contest

SPEARFISH — Madison High School student Rebecca Froehlich was awarded the Best of Show for 2012 in the South Dakota Junior Duck Stamp Contest, at the judging March 24 in Spearfish.

Froehlich’s winning stamp, a depiction of a Northern Pintail entitled “Autumn Reflections,” will now go on to Washington D.C. to be judged in the National Contest.

Deann Jelsma, a 13-year-old in the Bon Homme School District, won the conservation message award with the message, “Conserve natural resources so our children will enjoy nature in the future.”



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Madison High School student Rebecca Froehlich won Best of Show for this painting in the S.D. Junior Duck Stamp Contest at the judging on March 24 in Spearfish.

On Hand Economic Development is seeking candidates for the position of executive director.

This exciting opportunity assists in the recruitment, retention, and/or expansion of businesses in the Miller and Hand County area, as well as promoting the area through speaking engagements, planning educational sessions, and civic involvement. Building and maintaining a network of collaborative partnerships with business, development, chambers, education and governmental stakeholders is essential. Experience is preferred but not required, in economic development, communications, finance, or retail. A passion for the Miller area is a must! Starting salary based on qualifications. Position open until filled, for best consideration apply early. Interested candidates may access the job description from www.millersd.org.

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