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# THE COMMUNICATOR

NEWS FROM THE NEBRASKA COOPERATIVE FISH & WILDLIFE RESEARCH UNIT

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Volume 10, Issue 2

December 2014

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## New and Changing Faces

We welcome **Nathan Bieber**, **Nick Cole**, **Alexis Fedele**, **Brian Harmon**, **Amanda (Mandy) Lipinski**, **Dana Varner**, and **Lyndsie Wszola** to the Coop Unit.

**Nathan** is a master's student being advised by Craig Allen. He is working on otter distribution in Nebraska.

**Nick**, a Ph.D. student, **Alexis**, a master's student, and **Brian**, a master's student, are working on angler behavior in response to management actions on Nebraska reservoirs. All are advised by Kevin Pope.

**Mandy**, a Ph.D. student, is working on climatic constraints on bobwhite quail populations along their northern extent.

**Lyndsie**, is a master's student working on use and satisfaction of public hunting opportunities. Both are advised by TJ Fontaine.

**Dana** is the new science coordinator for the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture who will work primarily in Alma, NE and work Monday's here in Lincoln. ❖

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## Research Highlight

### *Otter Distribution and Abundance in Nebraska*

Through the 1880s, the American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) was a common sight in Nebraska's rivers and lakes. Towards the end of that century, however, unregulated trapping and habitat degradation took harsh tolls on otter populations throughout the Midwest. The species was considered extirpated in Nebraska in the early 1900s with the last recorded specimen occurring in 1916.

In an effort to begin restoring lost populations, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission began reintroduction efforts in 1986. One-hundred and fifty-nine release otters were obtained from around North America (primarily Alaska and Louisiana) and released at seven sites on the Platte, Niobrara, South Loup, Elkhorn, Calamus, and Cedar rivers. Early indications are that these reintroduced otters are increasing in number and range. With a recovering otter population, state managers must begin developing management strategies. In order to do so, more complete data are needed regarding otter distribution and abundance across the state's major watersheds.

Two field seasons will be dedicated to paddling Nebraska's rivers in hopes of documenting otter sign, primarily tracks and scats. The location data we obtain will be used in building models of otter occupancy across the state's major watersheds. We will also deploy remote cameras in order to bolster our likelihood of detection and to draw comparisons between active sign surveying by boat and passive surveying with cameras.



*Otter tracks found beneath a bridge.*

*Research Highlight continued on page 2*

For more information on the otter recovery efforts in Nebraska, visit the Nebraska Game and Parks website, [http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/wildlife/wildlife\\_species\\_guide/otters.asp](http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/wildlife/wildlife_species_guide/otters.asp).

**GOALS:** To determine river otter distribution and abundance across the state and to compare two methods of surveying for aquatic mammals.

**CURRENT STATUS:** The first field season was completed in September. We covered over 600 river miles and documented otter sign on the Platte, North Loup, Elkhorn, Niobrara, and Cedar rivers.

**GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT:** Nathan Bieber

**PROJECT COORDINATOR:** Craig Allen

**FUNDING:** Nebraska Game and Parks Commission ❖

## Outreach Activities

“Otters in Nebraska” was submitted to the Lincoln Journal Star by **Craig Allen**. It ran in the December 7 edition and enlightened Nebraskans about the history of otters in Nebraska, from extinction to reintroduction and finally to recovery. As the article says, reintroduction has been “A total and otter success!”

**Kent Fricke** and **Dan Uden** continue to participate in the UNL chapter of Upward Bound Environmentors program. They are serving as mentors for a high school student and assisting the student with conducting a science project on static electricity.

**Emma Brinley Buckley** was a volunteer at Waterfest, June 7 at Holmes Lake Park in Lincoln, NE. Volunteers assisted in educating the public about ways they can reduce pollutants in local streams and lakes through various activities.

**Lucía Corral** conducted a workshop on camera trapping at Chadron State College on October 27. The workshop was part of a Wildlife Research and Management Techniques course offered by Dr. Teresa Frink. The objective of the workshop was to train students on camera trapping and on swift fox survey protocol. Chadron students will conduct swift fox surveys during the winter. This data collection is not only one of their final projects for the class, but the students are also assisting with gathering data for Lucía’s swift fox project during the winter months. ❖

## Graduate Student News

**Kelly Turek** successfully defended her thesis in March and graduated with a master’s degree in fisheries in May. **Jessica Laskowski** successfully defended her thesis in April and graduated with a master’s in wildlife in May. In July, **Ashley VanderHam** successfully defended her thesis and graduated in August with a master’s in wildlife.

Congratulations to recent Coop Unit graduate, **Lucas Kowalewski**, on being hired as an environmental scientist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks and Tourism. Luke graduated with his M.S. in May

M.S. students **Caitlyn Gillespie** and **Lindsey Messinger** will both defend their theses in December and will plan to graduate in May 2015. Ph.D. student **Danielle Haak** will defend her thesis in December and will plan to graduate in May 2015 as well. ❖

## Honors and Awards

**Emma Brinley Buckley** received two awards for a poster highlighting the Platte River Basin Time Lapse project at the 2014 Global Water for Food conference in Seattle, WA. She won first place in the Viewers’ Choice Competition as well as third place in the on-line competition.



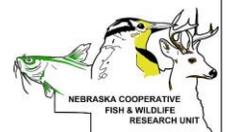
## ANNUAL MEETING

The 2014 annual Coordinating Committee of the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit was on Tuesday, September 30 at The Lodge at Wilderness Ridge. At the meeting, the Coop celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary which included signing a renewal of the Cooperative Agreement by our cooperators. Approximately 90 university, Coop alumni, and agency guests joined the Coop Unit scientists, staff and students to discuss unit progress and research programs. Research presentations were given by fifteen students. Following the meeting, there was networking, posters, and a dinner.

*Honors and Awards, continued on Page 3*

Editor, Caryl A. Cashmere  
Welcome to the Nebraska Coop Unit newsletter! The newsletter will be distributed two or three times a year.  
Questions or newsletter ideas can be directed to [ccashmere2@unl.edu](mailto:ccashmere2@unl.edu), or  
422 Hardin Hall, 3310 Holdrege, Lincoln NE 68583-0984.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

NEBRASKA COOPERATIVE FISH & WILDLIFE RESEARCH UNIT  
 University of Nebraska–Lincoln  
 422 Hardin Hall, 3310 Holdrege Street  
 Lincoln NE 68583-0984  
 402-472-0449, FAX 402-472-2722  
<http://snr.unl.edu/necoopunit/>

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Craig R. Allen<br>Leader<br>402-472-0229<br>allencr@unl.edu  | Kevin L. Pope<br>Assistant Leader<br>402-472-7028<br>kpope2@unl.edu                             | Joseph Fontaine<br>Assistant Leader<br>402-472-0339<br>jfontaine2@unl.edu                             |
| Valerie Egger<br>Admin.Asst.<br>402-472-0449<br>vegger1@unl.edu                                    | Caryl Cashmere<br>Staff Assistant<br>402-472-0559<br>ccashmere2@unl.edu                         | Dustin Martin<br>Post-Doc<br>402-472-0487<br>dustin.martin@unl.edu                                    |
| Allison Zach<br>Program Coord.<br>Invasive Species<br>402-472-3133<br>invasives@unl.edu            | Caroline Jezierski<br>Project Coord.<br>Wind and Wildlife<br>402-472-8188<br>cjezerski2@unl.edu | Chris Chizinski<br>Project Coord.<br>Creel Project<br>402-472-8136<br>cchizinski2@unl.edu             |
| Dana Varner<br>Science Coord.<br>Rainwater Basin Joint Venture<br>308-382-6468<br>dvarner3@unl.edu |   | Lindsey Messinger<br>Research Specialist<br>Hunter Survey Prog<br>402-472-7074<br>lmessinger2@unl.edu |

*Honors and Awards continued from Page 2*

**Danielle Haak** was one of seven recipients of the 2014-15 Presidential Graduate Fellowships. Graduate students across the University of Nebraska’s four campuses are eligible to receive the fellowship. The fellowships are awarded based upon high scholastic performance and personal accomplishments.



**Lindsey Messinger** was recently elected as the secretary for the Early Career Professional working group for The Wildlife Society. In September, Lindsey was also elected to the Editorial Advisory Board, as the wildlife professional for The Wildlife Society Central Mountains and Plains section.



**Dan Uden** was awarded the 2014-15 University of Nebraska–Lincoln Othmer Fellowship. Dan also received two other awards for 2014-2015: the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Center for Great Plains Studies Fellowship and a National Science Foundation IGERT assistantship. ❖



## Conferences, Meetings, and Workshops

“Linking resilience thinking and structured decision making for natural resource planning and management” was the presentation Noelle Hart gave at two conferences: May 4-8 at the Resilience 2014 Conference in Montpellier, France and May 28-30 at the Adaptive Management Conference Series in Fort Collins, CO.

Lucía Corral participated in swift fox training coordinated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s northwest district, May 21 in Chadron, NE.

May 18-24, Emma Brinley Buckley attended the Joint Aquatic Science Meeting in Portland, OR. Emma’s poster was titled “An introduction to the wet meadows of the Platte River and the habitat complexity and biodiversity they support.”

In June, Dan Uden traveled to Uppsala, Sweden with Craig Allen to collaborate with Dr. David Angeler from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) on the topics of adaptive management and spatial resilience in social-ecological systems.

*Conferences, Meetings, and Workshops continued on page 4*

“Bats of Nebraska” was the title of a presentation Mike Whitby gave at Mahoney State Park in Ashland, NE in July.

Hannah Birgé and Kent Fricke attended the Soil and Water Conservation Society annual meeting July 27-30 in Chicago, IL. Hannah organized a special session titled "Adaptive management for ecosystem services" and gave an oral presentation titled "Adaptive management for soil ecosystem services." “Adaptive management of invasive species to promote ecosystem services” was the title of Kent Fricke’s presentation.

Emma Brinley Buckley gave a presentation titled “Pulse of the Platte—patterns & phenology” at Audubon’s Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, NE in August.

August 27, Lindsey Messinger attended the joint meeting of The Wildlife Society, Wyoming Chapter and Central Mountains and Plains Section annual meeting in Sheridan, WY.

Dan Uden attended a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission planning meeting in Chadron, NE for the Pine Ridge Biologically Unique Landscape (BUL) where he initiated an environmental scenario planning exercise for the Pine Ridge BUL on September 17.

“Stopover decisions in a vanishing landscape” was the title of Caitlyn Gillespie’s presentation at the joint meeting of the American Ornithologist Union, the Cooper Ornithological Society, and the Society of Canadian Ornithologists September 23-28 in Estes Park, CO.

October 5-10, Dustin Martin and Lindsey Messinger attended the Pathways to Success conference in Estes Park, CO. Dustin’s presentation was titled, “Perceptions of the conservation reserve program: Is it time for a change?” Lindsey’s presentation was

titled, “Hunting in a modern landscape: Public access lands as regional networks.”

Noelle Hart attended the Collaborative Adaptive Management Network Rendezvous October 6-8 in Weaverville, CA.

October 8-9, Lucía Corral and Dan Uden attended the Nebraska Natural Legacy Conference in Gering, NE. Dan led a workshop on the development and refinement of environmental scenarios for the Pine Ridge BUL in northwestern Nebraska. Lucía gave a presentation titled, “Canid community composition and distribution in western Nebraska: A project update.”

In October, Kent Fricke organized a discussion panel for students at The Wildlife Society’s annual conference in Pittsburgh, PA titled “Uncertainty of an undergrad: Navigating the maze of employment and career opportunities.”

“Communicating complex systems to a public audience through time-lapse imagery” was the title of Emma Brinley Buckley’s poster at the Water for Food conference in Seattle, WA, October 19-22 that won two awards.

October 22-25, Mike Whitby attended the North American Symposium on Bat Research in Albany, NY. “Evaluating the effectiveness of three acoustic monitoring techniques for bat population monitoring” was the title of his presentation at the symposium. ❖

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## *Our Mission*

*Train graduate students for professional careers in natural resources research and management*

*Conduct research that will create new information useful for management of natural resources*

*Provide technical assistance to cooperators*

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### OUR COOPERATORS

