



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

JAMIE LEWIS, 10, shoots an air rifle at the Lincoln Parks and Recreation shooting range at 10th and Military streets last Sunday.

Firearms instructors stress safety

By JONATHAN HOUGHTON
Staff Reporter

Children and guns may seem a bad combination to some people, but firearms instructors say training can help the two mix safely.

Bob Beaver, program coordinator for the Lincoln Parks and Recreation department, said education on how to use firearms can prevent accidents.

Classes at the Parks and Recreation shooting range, 10th Street and Military Road, have been designed with that objective.

"We make people more comfortable with guns," Beaver said.

Although classes are offered at the shooting range for all ages, many target children as young as 8 years old, he said.

Jack Magorian, an air gun instructor at the range, said that was a good age to start shooting because other interests take up children's time when they become teen-agers.

"Then they get interested in boys and girls and that kind of stuff," he said.

Beaver said the class's focus is to show children the damage guns can do if used improperly.

"One of our goals is teaching kids

what to do if they encounter a gun and their parents aren't around," Beaver said. "It happens every day."

But even though most parents should be relieved to have their children learn gun safety, Beaver said many parents are fearful of their children being around guns at all. He said denying a child's interest in guns might do more harm than good.

"If you're a parent, you can't bury your head in the sand," Beaver said. "Guns are here to stay."

The reason many people fear guns is that they don't consider shooting to be a sport, Magorian said.

But shooting is a sport, Magorian said, and must be played according to the sport's rules. People must play by the rules or not play at all, he said.

"We're not talking about water guns," he said. "These guns can be very dangerous." He said most accidents occur when people misuse guns.

"You've probably never heard of an injury at an organized pistol range," he said. "That's because they're run so strictly."

This emphasis on safety is true for all activities at the shooting range, Beaver said. In addition to classes, open shooting sessions are offered every week for rifles, pistols, and

airguns. The shooting range is open Wednesdays from 6 to 9 p.m. for rifle and pistol shooting, and Sundays from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. for air gun shooting.

People do not have to have a permit to shoot, Beaver said, but must follow rules and wear eye and ear protection.

These safety precautions have kept the range from having any accidents for the 10 years he has worked there, Beaver said. This is especially noteworthy, he said, considering the amount of use the shooting range gets.

When it is not being used for public programs, Beaver said, the shooting range is often rented out to various groups including the Boy Scouts and 4-H Club. Rochester, a local armored car company, recently rented the range to train its guards.

"That's the first time we've ever had that type of use," Beaver said.

In fact, the rifle and pistol range will be in use almost every day of the week through the first week of May, he said. The range reopens in October, he said, but will be closed during the summer.

"We find that when the weather gets better, the use goes down," Beaver said. "Plus, we don't have air-conditioning."

Man treasures mortality in bird population study

By JONATHAN HOUGHTON
Staff Reporter

Most people who find dead birds outside their windows would pick them up and throw them in the trash.

Not Thomas Labeledz. He studies them and finds the flattened, feathered corpses a valuable find.

For three and a half years, Labeledz, a collections manager at the University of Nebraska State Museum, has studied more than 600 dead birds killed on the UNL campus by crashing into windows. He published his study "Windows of Death: A Look at Bird Strikes" in February's "Museum Notes."

"I did the study out of curiosity," he said. "I handle a lot of birds, and I wanted to see the effect on population."

Labeledz fit the study in around his busy schedule, often making quick 45-minute trips around campus to find any new birds.

"See those people running around campus speed walking?" he said. "That was me with a bag in my hand."

He said the reactions of people were mixed, though many were supportive after learning about his study.

"Some are very curious," he said. "Some say, 'What?' But there were very few times when people thought it was revolting and left."

Several people helped Labeledz with his study, including Lynn Doser, chief of security at Sheldon Art Gallery. Whenever she found a dead bird outside the gallery, she said, she would call Labeledz so he could come and study it.

"Everybody has different interests, especially on a university campus," she said.

In addition, Labeledz had help from several students who have since graduated. He would even take his children "dead-bird shopping" on weekends.

“I still, on occasion, will make people realize their olfactory abilities.”

THOMAS LABEDZ
collections manager, University of Nebraska State Museum

He also got some unwanted help.

Labeledz said that on occasion people would send him dead birds in the mail. One particular helper sent a washing machine box full of bird carcasses, which caused quite a stir in the museum's mail room.

"It was in the mail for several days, and it was late July," Labeledz said.

He also said people would drop off things outside the door for him.

"I still, on occasion, will make people realize their olfactory abilities," he said.

Although these people were trying to help, Labeledz said, most did not make the notes necessary for his study. And, he said, these people did not realize they were breaking the law. It's illegal to possess dead birds without a permit, which Labeledz has.

When Labeledz did get a good find, he would make notes on its location and take the bird to his office at Nebraska Hall.

If a bird was of a rare species or not represented in the study, Labeledz would add it to the museum's collection, which includes more than 11,000 specimens of more than 1,000 species of birds.

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