

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

Summer 2003

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

www.scottcountyia.com/conservation/wapsi.htm

The Wapsi River Center is owned, managed and operated by the Scott County Conservation Board with programming and development assistance from the Clinton County Conservation Board.

The Lost and Almost Lost

by Bob Bryant

Wapsi River E. E. Center, Director

The Lost and Almost Lost is a series of articles on Iowa's game animals and how they have fared during the settlement of Iowa. The series is based on "A Country So Full of Game" by James Dinsmore (1994). This book is a comprehensive history of the interaction of man with Iowa's wildlife. Find out what species of wildlife we have lost, what species we could lose, and what species were lost but reintroduced.

When early explorers first encountered the tall grass prairies of the central region of North America, they were amazed. Joliet and Marquette are considered to be the first Europeans to set eyes on North America's prairie region when they emerged from the northern forests and entered the game-rich grasslands and savanas of the Mississippi River Valley in 1673. It may have reminded them of the meadows and grassy orchards back home in France. Marquette recorded *les belles pr eries* (the beautiful meadows) in his journal. The word "pr eries" was adopted and anglicized by the English to describe what appeared to be a vast sea of grass and flowers. P re (Father) Claude Jean Allouez, who later retraced Marquette's route down the Illinois River (1677), also was enthralled by the region and its wildlife: *We preceded, always along the great pr eries, which extend farther than the eye can reach. Trees are met from time to time, but they are so placed so they seem to have been planted with design, to make the avenues more pleasing to the eye than those of orchards. The bases of tree are often watered by little streamlets, at which are seen large herds of stags and hinds refreshing themselves, and peacefully feeding on the short grass...*

When the European settlers started colonizing the eastern part of North America along the Atlantic Coast,

they encountered the old-growth timber of the eastern deciduous forest. Even though they were familiar with the forests of Europe, such an untapped natural resource must have been overwhelming and probably seemed endless to them. As they moved westward, they found out the eastern deciduous forests gradually gave way to the tallgrass prairies. During the early settlement years (1800-1840), most of the Midwest settlers stayed close to the wooded areas along the rivers and streams, venturing out onto the prairie to hunt and for the occasional farming attempt.

Early attempts to plow the prairie met with limited success. The prairie sod, with its thick mat of grasses and thick root systems, was practically impenetrable to the plows of the early 1800s. In 1837, John Deere invented the moldboard plow. By 1850, the moldboard plow was readily available in the Midwest.

During the Civil War, westward expansion slowed dramatically. Following the Civil War, settlement west of the Mississippi River

accelerated with the expansion of the railroads. This westward movement, improvements to the moldboard plow and realization that the prairie soils were some of the most fertile in the world, led to almost total destruction of one of the earth's largest and most diverse ecosystems.

Prairies are not just an expanse of grassland, but a diverse ecosystem of plant and animal life. The great grasslands of the United States can be divided into three general prairie categories – tall, mixed and short grass prairies.



The tallgrass prairie, dominated by big bluestem, Indian grass and switch grass, was probably the most awe-inspiring. It was said that the grass could be so tall that a man riding on horseback could not see over it. At the time of settlement, the tallgrass prairie nearly covered the entire state of Iowa, the northern two-thirds of Illinois and stretched into southwestern Minnesota and northwestern Missouri. Even though Illinois is known as “The Prairie State”, Iowa had approximately 30 million acres, compared to Illinois’s 22 million acres. Over 99.9% of Iowa’s and Illinois’s prairies have been converted to corn and soybean fields or lost to towns and other development.

West of the tallgrass prairie was the mixed prairie, dominated by the shorter grasses such as little bluestem. This region is now commonly known as the Wheat Belt. Further west, one will find the shortgrass prairies.

Buffalo and other short grasses were the favored grasses of the American bison. This region is now mostly rangeland for cattle and sheep.

Even though Iowa and Illinois were dominated by the tallgrass prairies, other types such as hill, sand and limestone prairies, along with savannas and sedge meadows, were found. In the next installment, we will take a closer look at Iowa’s prairie types, their associated wildlife and the role of the “red buffalo”.

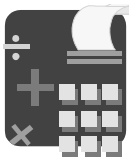


Wapsi Center Happenings

by Bob Bryant, Director

School Attendance

Approximately 5,589 students, teachers and parents participated in 90 field trips this school year. Two field trips were overnight using the Center’s dormitory. This was less than last year’s attendance record of 6,726, but still higher than the attendance of 5,143 from two years ago. This drop in attendance was due to two large schools that come every other year, a school closing, two cancellations due to bad weather and two cancellations for other reasons.



There was also a decline in the number of field trips this year. Informally, we had heard that field trips were being affected by school budget crunches, especially the cost for bussing.

As usual, spring was our busiest time. May continues to be the most popular month for field trips. If you would like to schedule a field trip next school year, do it as far in advance as possible. And don’t forget – *The Wapsi Center is a place for all seasons.*

Maintenance and Development

The Wapsi Center is using state REAP funds to catch up on some of the needed maintenance and development projects. A



contractor started in March and will be working at the Center through the summer.

Many of the projects are behind-the-scenes maintenance items which are not readily noticed by the public. One of the projects is renovating the maintenance garage and pole building using the storage cabinets, etc., received from Marycrest International University when they closed. Electricity, drywall and suspended ceiling were installed in Redtail Lodge’s ski room. New heating ductwork was run to the lodge’s main rooms and the kitchen trim was finished. Some of the more visible projects were removing a wall and rerouting the electric for the deer display in the Eco Center, putting a new roof on the pumphouse, and office entrance awning and carpeting. The Clinton County Conservation Board re-shingled the old shower house, which is being converted into the aquatic lab, and they also finished the Teams Course. A major project accomplished during the volunteer workday was staining the dormitory siding.

Wapsi Center Director Receives Leopold Environmental Education Award

At the spring conference of the Iowa Association of Naturalists, I was honored to receive the *2002 Aldo Leopold Environment Educational Award*. The award is sponsored by the Iowa Association of Naturalists and the Iowa Conservation Education Council and recognizes lifetime achievement in E. E. excellence and leadership. I would like to thank Greg Wolf (Clinton County interpretive naturalist) for nominating me for the award. I would also like to thank all those who have supported me and my conservation and education efforts for the last 28 years.



Living Green... by Renne Lietz

Cleaning our homes is something we all have to do, but it can be harmful to the environment and maybe even to ourselves. Next time you get a cleaning product out from under the kitchen sink or closet, read the label. Are the words *poison*, *danger*, *warning* or *caution* somewhere on the label? These products are not only harmful to our environment as they enter the water supply and the containers go to the landfill, they may be harmful to yourself and your family.

What are the alternatives? According to the Care2 website (www.care2.com), almost all household cleaning can be done with a few basic ingredients: baking soda, washing soda (sodium carbonate), white vinegar, lemon juice, and liquid soap or detergent. For example, an all-purpose spray cleaner can be made from 1/2 teaspoon washing soda, a drop of liquid soap and 2 cups hot water. Combine in a spray bottle, shake to dissolve, spray and wipe with a cloth or rag. Washing soda can be purchased at any grocery store. It costs around \$1.99 for a 3-pound box (which is recycled cardboard) and the only warning on the label is "Keep out of your eyes." There are many more cleaning recipes on the internet, at your public library, from your local extension service, or check out the article "Healthy Bodies in a Hazardous Home" in the Spring 1999 issue of *The W.R.E.N.*

Worried about germs? According to the Heinz Company, studies have shown that 5% vinegar (what you buy in the

grocery store) kills 99% of bacteria, 82% of mold and 80% of viruses. Keeping a spray bottle of vinegar to spray countertops, sinks and toilets is a healthy, natural way to disinfect and deodorize for pennies.

What is the difference between soap and detergent? Soap is made from natural ingredients and detergents are primarily synthetic. A good liquid soap can do most cleaning jobs. However, if you have hard water, detergent is the only thing that won't leave a soap scum. So, if you have hard water, look for a biodegradable detergent with no phosphates. These can be found in health food stores and sometimes in large supermarkets.

And one last point... If you use rags or dishcloths to clean, they can be washed and used over and over. Using paper products or those convenient throwaway wipes are only wasting trees and adding to the landfill.

For a complete report on "green" cleaning, check out the website www.greenseal.org. Green Seal is a consumer watchdog organization that reports on environmentally friendly products of all types. So, let your fingers do the walking before tackling that summer cleaning. That way your house will not only be fresh and clean, but your family will be safer and your environment will be greener!

Renne will be happy to speak to your club or organization about "Living Green". Call the Wapsi River Center for contact information.



O utdoor A dventures A wait!

Calling all 11- & 12-year-old adventure seekers! Come join us for an overnight of experiences you'll never forget. Our adventure will begin on Wednesday, July 30, with a day of preparation as we develop group skills and respect for the great outdoors with help from the Putnam Museum and the Fejervary Children's Zoo. The outdoor fun begins on Thursday, July 31, as we leave the Putnam and head to the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center for a day of canoeing and overnight fun. Our evening program will include a campfire dinner, stargazing and owl calling. On Friday, August 1, we will head to Fejervary for a day of eating Happy Joe's pizza and bunging by the pool. Don't miss this exciting adventure!

Cost for the camp is \$65.00.

Register by calling the Davenport Parks and Recreation at (563) 326-7812 by Wednesday, July 16.

*Hours for the camp: Wednesday, July 30 ~ 9:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M. **

Thursday, July 31 ~ 9:00 A.M. - overnight

*Friday, August 1 ~ overnight - 4:00 P.M. **

** extended hours available 7:30 A.M. - 5:30 P.M. for an additional \$10.00*

June

23rd - 27th ~ Nature Week ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~
This is one week where you can actually camp out under the stars for one night! Enjoy lots of nature crafts, hikes, learn about deer and other wildlife in the park, plus take a trip to the Wapsi River Center. This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Contact Tara Youngers at (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

24th ~ Floating N. E. Iowa's Rivers and Potluck Dinner ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~ Join Chuck Jacobsen for a visual canoe float through Iowa's most scenic rivers. Bring a dish to pass and your own table service. A \$2 donation is requested per adult (non-SENC members). Proceeds will go towards maintaining the SENC.



24th & 28th ~ Hunter Safety Education Course ~ 6:30 - 9:00 P.M. (Tue) & 8:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M. (Sat) ~ Clinton Izaak Walton League ~ Call Loren Zaruba at (563) 659-5383 for required sign up.

26th ~ Kids' Fishing Tournament ~ 5:30 - 8:30 P.M. ~ Malone Park ~ Kids, ages twelve and under, are invited to test their angling skills. Sunfish are thick in the 10-acre lake, with bass, bullheads and catfish in good numbers. Plaques will be awarded for the greatest weight of fish in two age groups, ages 10-12 and ages 9 and under. There will also be door prizes. Registration starts at 5:30 P.M., with fishing from 6:00 to 8:00 P.M.; weigh-in and casting contest will follow.

27th ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Dr. Mitchell, Director of the Monsignor Menke Observatory, for a tour of the summer sky. Please call (563) 333-6141 on the day of the event to find out if the weather conditions will permit viewing.

28th ~ Campfire Celebration ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Rock Creek Marina and Campground ~ Meet at the fire ring near the pavilion and join our naturalist for music and stories of boating our area rivers, bring your own and add to the fun.

July



5th ~ Fern Hike ~ 9:30 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Bob Bryant will share his knowledge of these interesting plants on an easy stroll through the Wapsi River Center. A variety of ferns can be found here, including maidenhair, interrupted, lady, Christmas and walking ferns.

7th - 11th ~ Wild West Week ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~
Spend a week doing what the cowboys and cowgirls did. We will visit the buffalo at Cody Homestead and tour the Buffalo Bill Museum in LeClaire, IA. Welcome a visit from the Wapsi

SUMMER

Wranglers and take a pony ride. Enjoy many fun crafts, games, plus much more! This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Contact Tara Youngers at (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

7th ~ Birds of Prey ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~ The Clinton County Conservation Board will present a program on Iowa's Raptors featuring a live screech owl, kestrel and peregrine falcon, the world's fastest animal. Great up-close experience for the kids!



8th ~ Bluebird Surprise ~ 2:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come and learn about the eastern bluebird, the country cousin of the robin. We will share the life history of the bluebird, then we will check boxes along the Wapsi River Center's bluebird trail and place some new experimental boxes. Insect repellent is recommended.

8th ~ Mississippi River Backwater Float ~ 4:00 P.M. ~ Bulger's Hollow ~ Meet at the picnic grounds for a canoe trip along the eastern shore of Lake Clinton. Experience life in the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge.

10th ~ Wapsi River Canoeing ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Sherman Park ~ This trip will cover 5.5 miles of the Wapsipinicon River from Syracuse Wildlife Area to Sherman Park. Call (563) 847-7202 to reserve a free canoe.



10th ~ Nocturnal Photography ~ 8:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Mike Granger, Wapsi River Center naturalist, for a lesson on nocturnal creatures. Learn how homemade camera traps can illuminate the activities of nocturnal animals.

11th ~ Frog Survey ~ 8:00 P.M. ~ Nahant Marsh ~ This is the last call to be a part of the frog and toad surveys conducted at Nahant Marsh for this summer. A short training session in survey techniques prepares you to help collect this important data. Don't miss this opportunity that's sure to be fun for all. Bring your bug spray and boots and join us!

12th & 13th ~ Women In The Wild ~ 7:30 A.M. (Sat) - 4:30 P.M. (Sun) ~ Wapsi River Center ~ The goal of the workshop is to introduce a variety of seasonal activities and topics to women of all ages (must be 12 years of age by the workshop date). The two-day, overnight workshop events include: canoeing, fishing, tour of pearl button museum, astronomy, night hike, eco-tourism, packing light, preserving memories and much more. Space is filling up fast, so check your

EVENTS

calendars and call (563) 328-3286 for further information ~ ask for Lisa.

12th ~ Campfire Celebration ~ 8:00 P.M. ~ Eden Valley Refuge ~ Join Naturalist Greg Wolf as he fills the night air with the sounds of laughter and music. Relax and have fun singing and telling stories as you settle around a roaring campfire! This event is geared toward the whole family.

14th - 18th ~ Native American Week ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Visit the Hauberg Indian Museum, discover Indian sign language, make a mandella and dreamcatcher, plus many other crafts. Learn Indian dance and experience a powwow. Also take a canoe ride at West Lake Park (life jackets provided)! This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Contact Tara Youngers at (563) 328-3283 for registration information.



18th ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Dr. Mitchell, Director of the Monsignor Menke Observatory, for a tour of the summer sky. Please call (563) 333-6141 on the day of the event to find out if the weather conditions will permit viewing.

19th ~ Canoeing & Campfire ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Rock Creek Marina and Campground ~ Meet at the fire ring near the pavilion and join our naturalist for canoeing, a fire and music.

21st - 25th ~ Laura Ingalls Wilder Week ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Learn what life was like for Laura Ingalls. Experience how she lived by spending time in an 1830s cabin and a one-room schoolhouse. Enjoy making crafts such as soap, candle dipping and much more. This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Contact Tara Youngers at (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

22nd ~ Spelunking ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Eden Valley Refuge ~ Mud & bats & rocks! Oh, my!! Old clothes, flashlight and pre-registration are a must. Call (563) 847-7202 to reserve your hard hat! We will meet at Eden Valley Nature Center.



26th ~ The Scum of the Earth ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ The scum found on ponds and other bodies of water or the green hairy stuff you see growing on underwater objects is algae. Algae are photosynthetic organisms that occur in most habitats, ranging from marine and freshwater to desert sands, and from hot boiling springs


to snow and ice. Algae are important as primary producers of organic matter at the base of the food chain, and some species are used for medicine and food. They also provide oxygen for other aquatic life. However, algae can contribute to mass mortality of other organisms, in cases of algal blooms. Through hands-on-activities, participants will delve into the underwater world of freshwater algae and learn it is more than just some slimy, smelly scum.

26th ~ Explore Nature Series ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Manikowski Prairie ~ Join us for a tour of Iowa's largest limestone prairie remnant. The large summer wildflowers, like the purple coneflower, blazing star and yellow coneflower, should be in full bloom. The prairie is located 1 mile north of Goose Lake on County Road Z34, then ¼ mile east on gravel. 

26th ~ Star Party ~ Dusk ~ Sherman Park ~ Join the Quad Cities Astronomical Society at Sherman Park's north end to explore the night sky.

27th ~ Village Alive! ~ 1:00 - 5:00 P.M. ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ See the village come alive as "The Friends" of the village reenact life as it was on the 1890s Iowa prairie. Admission is FREE! For further information, contact Tara Youngers at (563) 328-3283.

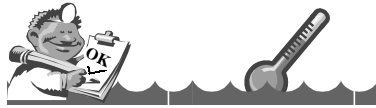
28th - August 1st ~ Frontier Week ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Enjoy a week doing what the pioneers did in the 1800s. Enjoy many activities such as a hayrack ride, frontier cooking, pioneer games and much more. This week, we will visit the Niabi Zoo and learn about animals. This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Contact Tara Youngers at (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

29th ~ Campfire Celebration & Hike ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Eagle Point Park & Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~ Meet at the outdoor fireplace south of the lodge in Eagle Point for music and stories of wildlife encounters, bring your own and add to the fun. Join naturalist Chuck Jacobsen for a hike through Soaring Eagle Nature Center following the fire. 

31st & August 1st ~ Pollution Safari! ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Clinton County Area Solid Waste Agency (31st) & Rock Creek Marina & Campground (1st) ~ Students in 4th, 5th and 6th grades are invited to spend two fun-filled days learning about our environment and how to take care of pollution. Thursday will be a day filled with understanding ways of handling pollution the correct way at the solid waste agency. Friday, the group will meet at the Rock Creek Marina. Chad Pregracke will be there to speak to the group. We invite all students to come back with their families on Saturday, August 2, for a river cleanup with Chad. Everyone needs to bring a sack lunch and wear tennis shoes. For more information or to sign up, call Laura Liegois at (563) 243-4749.

31st ~ Wapsi River Canoeing ~ 2:00 P.M. ~ Walnut Grove Park ~ Take an 11-mile float from Oxford Mills to Walnut Grove Park. Call 563-847-7202 for free canoe reservations.

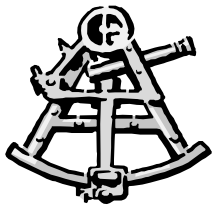
August



2nd ~ River Relief ~ 8:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M. ~ Rock Creek Marina & Campground ~ Join Chad Pregracke in his continuing efforts to rid the Mississippi River of trash. Chad is famous throughout the area as a river activist. Watch the local media for more details. For more information, go to www.cleanrivers.com or call (309) 496-9848.

2nd ~ Blue Heron Eco Cruises, River Relief Tour ~ 8:30 A.M. & 10:00 A.M. ~ Rock Creek Marina & Campground ~ Cruisers will get an overview of the River Relief event. The monumental cleanup is an amazing spectacle! Call Rock Creek at (563) 259-1876 or stop by to purchase tickets. Cost is \$5/adult & \$3/child under 16.

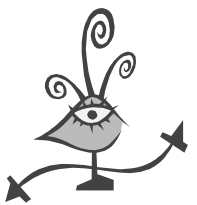
4th - 8th ~ Mark Twain Week ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Explore and learn what life was like for Mark Twain. Enjoy



paddleboating at West Lake Park and a tour of Lock & Dam 15 on the Mississippi River. Cast animal tracks, go fishing, carve soap and much more! This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Contact Tar Youngers at (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

5th ~ Nature's Myths & Misconceptions ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join AmeriCorps naturalist Danielle Schaffert for an evening exploring superstitions, common misconceptions and frequently asked questions about our native plants and wildlife. The program will include a presentation with live animals and a hike. If you have a burning question or topic you would like Danielle to address, feel free to call the Wapsi River Center at (563) 328-3286.

9th ~ Alien Invasion! ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ No, it's not Hollywood's latest thriller, but a real threat to our environment and economy. Non-native species of plants and animals, commonly referred to as alien species, have

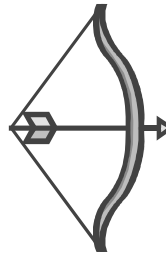


been introduced into the United States. Many spread or reproduce prolifically, choking out native vegetation or encroaching onto agricultural land and road ditches. They are the second worst threat to native species, right behind habitat destruction. Mutliflora rose, garlic mustard, autumn olive, purple loosestrife, zebra mussel and the gypsy moth are just some of the aliens commonly found in our area causing problems. Learn to identify local alien species and how you can play a role in the battle against them.

11th ~ Wapsi River Canoeing ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Rock

Creek Marina & Campground ~ Take a twelve-mile excursion from Walter's Landing, near McCausland, on the Wapsipinicon River to Rock Creek Marina & Campground on the Mississippi River. Call (563) 847-7202 for free canoe reservations.

15th, 16th & 17th ~ Enhanced Hunter Safety Education Course ~ 6:00 P.M. (Fri) - 4:00 P.M. (Sun) ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Standard hunter safety courses are 10 hours long, with about five of those hours spent in the outdoors using various shooting equipment. In this event, we will go far beyond the basics. In addition to all of the hunter education



standards, we will be teaching advanced shooting techniques, bowhunter safety, trapping, waterfowl, turkey & raccoon hunting, dog training, caring for game in the field, first aid, wildlife ID, calling and a whole lot more! All these activities will allow participants to actually participate, not just listen to speakers or watch films. The course is open to kids, age 11-16, whether or not they have received the

Hunter Education Certificates already. Cost per student is \$20.00, primarily for meals. Pheasants Forever and Whitetails Unlimited will be providing monetary support to cover the cost of lodging (at the Wapsi River Center's dormitory), ammunition and targets for the participants. Overnight chaperons will be provided by Pheasants Forever and participants' parents. Space is limited to 40 kids, so sign up early by calling (563) 847-7202.

15th ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Dr. Mitchell, Director of the Monsignor Menke Observatory, for a tour of the summer sky. Please call (563) 333-6141 on the day of the event to find out if the weather conditions will permit viewing.

16th ~ Explore Nature Series ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~ This will be a naturalist-guided hike through the property that includes prairie, woodland and wetland areas. It will be a great opportunity for bird watching, so bring your binoculars.

16th ~ Campfire Celebration ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Rock Creek Marina and Campground ~ Meet at the fire ring near the pavilion and join our naturalist for music and stories of fun in the great outdoors, bring your own and add to the fun.

23rd ~ Getting That Gorilla Off Your Back ~ 1:00

P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ AmeriCorps naturalist Stephanie Byers will share tips on packing light and eating well on your next outdoor adventure. Gear selection, packing technique and outdoor cooking skills will be highlighted, with participant sampling of food items. **Please bring your own place setting.** If interested, pre-register by calling (563) 328-3286 no later than August 14. Class size is limited to 20.



23rd ~ Star Party ~ Dusk ~ Sherman Park ~ Join the Quad Cities Astronomical Society at Sherman Park's north end to explore the night sky.

26th ~ Wapsi River Canoeing ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Syracuse Boat Ramp ~ This trip will cover 8 miles of the Wapsipinicon River from Walnut Grove Park to Syracuse Wildlife Area. Call (563) 847-7202 to reserve a free canoe.

26th ~ Nature Program & Potluck Dinner ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~ Bring a dish to pass and your own table service. A \$2 donation is requested per adult (non-SENC members). Proceeds will go towards maintaining the SENC. Call Linda at (563) 242-9297 for information.

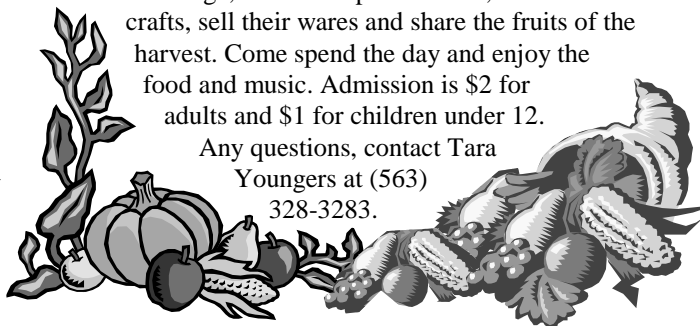


27th ~ Bluebird House Workshop ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~ You can build your own bluebird or wren nest box from a kit to provide for wildlife. You will also learn about placement and maintenance of the boxes. The kits will be available for a small donation to cover materials. Fees are \$5.00 per box. The fee will be 50% off if you donate the box back to us for use in the park. You must call (563) 847-7202 before August 20 to order your kits.

31st - September 1st ~ Village Fall Festival ~ 11:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Come and enjoy that old-fashioned, fall-harvest, festival atmosphere at the Village! "The Friends" of the village, dressed in period dress, will demonstrate

crafts, sell their wares and share the fruits of the harvest. Come spend the day and enjoy the food and music. Admission is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children under 12.

Any questions, contact Tara Youngers at (563) 328-3283.



September

10th ~ Full-Moon Night Hike ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Mockridge Preserve ~ Join a naturalist for a moonlit walk through this unique area. We will try owl calling, search for turkeys and seek some late wildflowers. Take Y44 north of Calamus, then take 215th Street west to 160th Avenue and turn north. Mockridge will be ¼ mile on the left.

Wildlife Viewing ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center



The public is invited to view the wetlands from the air-conditioned, mosquito-free Nature Barn and to browse through the displays. The SENC is located just south of the entrance to Eagle Point Park in Clinton. Binoculars suggested. A \$2 donation is requested per adult (non-SENC members). This fundraising event will be repeated every Wednesday all summer long! Proceeds will go towards maintaining the SENC.

June ~ 25th July ~ 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th August ~ 6th & 13th

Blue Heron Eco Cruises ~ 7:00 P.M. Rock Creek Marina & Campground

Take an hour and a half Eco Cruise on the Mississippi with a Conservation Skipper. Cruisers will learn about wildlife, commercial use, navigation and recreational use of the big river. Call Rock Creek at (563) 259-1876 or stop by to purchase tickets. Cost is \$5/adult & \$3/child under 16. Sunset cruises will be offered every Thursday through Labor Day. The **August 21** cruise will have a special theme, *Music and Old Man River*. On-board troubadour Chuck Jacobsen, will sing songs of the river and play his guitar.

June ~ 26th
July ~ 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th & 31st
August ~ 7th, 21st & 28th

Blue Heron Eco Cruise to Lock & Dam #13 ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Clinton Marina

Take an hour and a half Eco Cruise on the Mississippi with a Conservation Skipper. Cruisers will learn about commercial navigation and recreational use of the lock & dam system, see the dam up close and will lock through if available. Call (563) 259-1876 for tickets. Cost is \$5/adult & \$3/child under 16.

June 30th
July 28th
August 28th



Wildlife Profile: Voles ~ “Unseen, but not Unimportant”

During a recent day of owl pellet dissection with a group of 7th graders, I became aware of a pervasive ignorance about one of our most common local mammals. Nearly every owl pellet we pulled apart contained a vole skull, but few of the students had ever even heard of a vole. My conversations with the kids went something like this:

“Awesome skull! It looks like a vole to me.”

“A what?”

“A vole.”

“A mole?”

“No, a *vole*.”

“What’s a vole?”

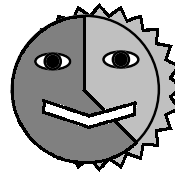
I found this lack of awareness disappointing but not at all shocking. After all, voles are, at first glance, dull and seldom seen little rodents whose lives rarely intersect our own. It’s easy to dismiss the vole as insignificant, but in reality the opposite is true. Most of the fields, marshes, prairies, pastures and orchards of our region are teeming with voles, and their activities and abundance affect countless other forms of plant and animal life. So, if you are currently unfamiliar with this unseen horde that surrounds us, please read on for a brief lesson on volish contributions to nature and science.

Two vole species occur in this area. The meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) is also incorrectly referred to as a field mouse. It inhabits moist, open areas with thick perennial grasses and copious plant litter. Fully grown, its body measures 3 1/2 to 5 inches long, plus an additional 1 2/5 to 2 3/5 inches of tail. Meadow voles may be distinguished from mice by their very small ears, barely protruding from the fur, and tiny beady eyes. Their long, soft fur is gray-brown to dark brown over most of the body, fading to a variable lighter shade on the belly. The most widely distributed of all voles, the meadow vole’s range extends throughout Canada and the northern United States as far south as South Carolina in the east, Missouri in the Midwest and New Mexico in the west. The meadow vole is absent from the West Coast.

Prairie voles (*Microtus ochrogaster*) prefer grassy areas dryer than those frequented by their close cousins. Fencerows, railways and dry prairies all make good prairie vole habitat. The prairie vole looks very much like the meadow vole, except its tail is shorter (1 1/5 to 1 3/5 inches) and its fur tends to be coarser than that of the meadow vole. The prairie vole has a whitish-yellow belly. This vole may be found in the central region of North America from Manitoba and Saskatchewan



southward to Tennessee, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Their range extends east to Ohio and west to Wyoming.



Both vole species are active day and night. They tend to live their lives in four-hour segments, with both foraging and napping occurring within each interval. During their waking hours, voles are the architects of extensive communal networks of underground tunnels and above-ground runways through tall grass. These 1- to 2-inch corridors are used to access preferred feeding areas. Voles are big eaters; they consume a broad range of plant materials including the tender stems, leaves, roots, tubers, flowers, fruits and seeds of grasses, sedges and other plants – sometimes including food crops and ornamental plantings. Additionally, voles may include insects, snails, crayfish and mice in their diet. Meadow and prairie voles share a characteristic method for obtaining and eating seedheads from the tops of tall perennial grasses. They first clip the grass off at its base and then snip it into matchstick-length pieces until they reach the desired seeds. Uneaten portions of the stem are laid down on the runway floors, where they become trampled into a sort of organic pavement.

During the snowy winter months, above-ground runways are transformed into sub-snow burrows with round openings to the surface. Under an insulating blanket of snow, the resilient rodents persist in their activities until spring. As food becomes scarce in wintertime, voles frequently resort to chewing on the inner bark of trees and shrubs from underneath the snow. Much to the consternation of gardeners and orchard-growers, this type of feeding can easily girdle and kill valuable plantings. On the whole, however, the tunneling and feeding of voles is beneficial when populations are reasonably sized. The biting off of stems and leaves stimulates new, tender plant growth, and tunneling aerates the soil and enriches it by working in leftover food and waste products.

Perhaps the most important role of voles in an ecosystem involves not what a vole eats, but what a vole is eaten by. These unobtrusive little creatures are truly the bread and butter of the food web. A diverse assemblage of carnivores and opportunistic omnivores including snakes, shrews, hawks, owls, herons, crows, gulls, bobcats, red and gray foxes, striped and spotted skunks, domestic cats and dogs, opossums, raccoons, coyotes, weasels, snapping turtles, bullfrogs and fish enjoy a bit of fresh vole with some regularity. Voles are such an important source of food for some animals, such as foxes, that vole population trends are clearly reflected in the population of the predator. The high availability of voles as prey also eases predation pressure on other creatures such as rabbits, chipmunks, birds, fawns, reptiles and amphibians. The importance of voles as an easy food source for other animals is grimly reflected in their longevity statistics. A mortality rate of 88% has been reported for meadow vole in

their first 30 days of life. In the laboratory, prairie voles commonly live for 27 to 35 months. Wild prairie voles, however, only a small percentage of individuals exceed 60 days old.

How do these poor animals persist through such adversity? Through *extremely* prolific reproduction, of course! Female meadow and prairie voles can become pregnant as early as 3 weeks after birth, and are often simultaneously nursing a young litter and pregnant. One captive female meadow vole produced 17 litters in one year, totaling 83 young. In the same year, just one of her daughters produced 13 litters, totaling 78 young, before she was one year old. Although these statistics are almost certainly more extreme than the fecundity of an average wild female, they do impart a sense of the incredible reproductive potential possessed by voles.

Most vole species, including meadow voles, exhibit social, sexual and parenting behaviors typical of small animals with high rates of reproduction and mortality. Specifically, they are socially aggressive towards their own kind and sexually promiscuous. Male voles have no role in parenting their offspring and females could hardly be described as attentive mothers. Strangely enough, prairie voles do not share in these common behaviors. In contrast, they are cooperative and monogamous (though not 100% of the time), and both parents care for and protect their young.

These differences have intrigued scientists and inspired an impressive body of research on the neurochemistry of social

attachment and pair bonding in mammals. We now know that two peptide hormones, oxytocin in females and vasopressin in males, are largely responsible for the pair bonding and parental behavior observed in prairie voles. Females experience a spike in oxytocin during mating in conjunction with increased levels of dopamine, the neurotransmitter associated with pleasure. The oxytocin seems to induce bonding behavior and a strong preference for her mate above other males. Repeated mating strengthens the attachment. Oxytocin is active in all mammals. Though its action has not been so thoroughly studied with respect to sex and pair bonding among mammals other than voles and mice, it is known that a rush of oxytocin following childbirth facilitates maternal feelings and behaviors in new mothers of all species. Oxytocin is also believed to be important in initiating labor. Vasopressin works in partnership with dopamine to elicit pair bonding behavior in male prairie voles. It seems that the distribution of vasopressin receptors, rather than the amount of peptide, is the primary factor in determining whether males of a given species will exhibit monogamous or polygamous behavior.

The scientific community recognizes voles as fascinating and useful research subjects. Countless predators recognize the vole as essential nutrition, and the ecology of our grassy places is impacted in untold ways by their activities. Most people may not know a vole from a mole, but their importance in the natural world cannot be diminished by our ignorance.



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Kids' Corner ~ Umbrellas on Alert!



Have you ever been outside when it's raining cats and dogs? Or pitchforks and hammer handles? Can you rearrange these letters to come up with other forms of rain? Answers are found at the end of *To Feed or Not to Feed* article.



1. cludo sbutr _____
2. dugeel _____
3. howser _____
4. rsuehg _____
5. lizzerd _____
6. laqusl _____



7. nilperks _____
8. lygul erhaws _____
9. ternrot _____
10. zilzem _____
11. opunword _____
12. smit _____



Plant Profile: Wild Raspberry ~ "A Thorny Treasure"

by Stephanie Byers, AmeriCorps Naturalist

Each morning I walk down the path from the office to the nature center to care for our animals and prepare for the coming day, and each morning my eyes trail over the fence row and linger on the lush verdure threatening to escape its confines. Usually there is a little chipmunk scampering beneath the white oak saplings with their optimistically large leaves, striving to outpace the jewelweed and multiflora rose. Growing just as exuberantly is the wild raspberry shrub, promising sweet reward to my morning commutes. The lusciously sweet and tart berries are only part of what I love about this plant; considering its medicinal value and its availability, it is one of those simple pleasures that every hiker can appreciate. In the right habitat, one can find a type of raspberry nearly anywhere in the country. Look for raspberry bushes where there is patchy woodland, and even in waste places like ditches. In the Pacific Northwest, they can be downright weedy, though I certainly don't mind having a handful of berries wherever I happen to be. One of my fondest memories of a visit to Whidbey Island, Washington State, is of picking breakfast directly behind the hotel.

Wild red raspberry, *Rubus strigosus*, is native to Iowa, and prefers sandy to moist wooded areas. To identify it, look for a shrub growing 3 to 6 feet high, with thorny purplish-red stems that are highly branching. The stems look to have a whitish, waxy patina on them as well. This plant is a biennial, meaning that it grows vegetatively the first year, and flowers, fruits and dies the second year. Runners also allow the plant to spread, so that these shrubs can cover an extensive area. The leaves are pinnately compound, with 3 to 5 leaflets, meaning that each leaf is composed of 3 to 5 leaflets that are arranged opposite from each other. The 1 to 3 inch-long leaflets have toothed margins and are oval in shape, with the undersides being white and pubescent (furry). The white flowers may appear between May and July, depending on location, and resemble wild rose blossoms. In fact, all raspberry species belong to the rose family, Rosaceae, and are relatives of the roses and

strawberries. The aggregate fruits appear between July and September, and are ripe when bright red. As with all aggregate fruits, drupelets compose the seedy, edible portion, and are attached to the receptacle, which is left behind on the plant when the berry is picked.

Wild red raspberry is related to wild blackberry, *Rubus occidentalis*, and to thimbleberry, *Rubus*

parviflorus, just to name a few. Thimbleberry, also known as salmonberry, is not native to, nor found in, Iowa, but I consider it to be the choicest *Rubus* variety. The fruits are large and taste like a cross between strawberry and watermelon. They are worth traveling to Upper Michigan, Northern Minnesota and Canada in August. There's nothing like grabbing a handful of thimbleberries along a dense, rocky, sun-dappled portage trail after humping packs and canoes through the brush from lake to lake. Wild blackberry is native to Iowa and can be found in much the same habitat as wild red raspberry. While home with my infant son, I would often take him and my dog hiking and blackberry picking at Scott County Park. A hike is so much more visceral and satisfying when one can use all the senses, including that of taste.



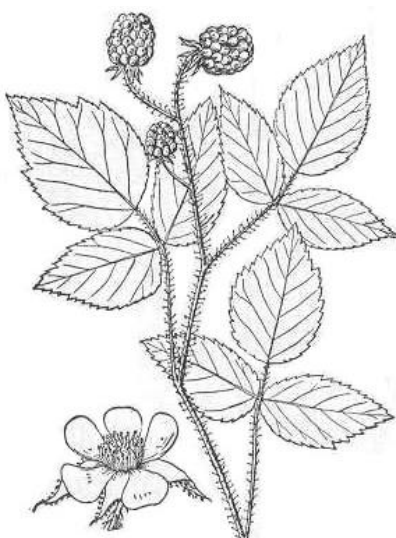
Wild raspberry has a long history of use, and not just to satisfy the stomach. It is a valuable food source for wildlife, and was important both medicinally and nutritionally to native peoples and early settlers. The leaves, flowers and fruits are high in vitamins A, B, C and E. The leaves are astringent and can be made into a tea for treating sore throats. The leaves furthermore contain chemicals called fragrenes, which tone the body's smooth muscle organs. For this reason, raspberry leaf tea has long been used as a "female tonic" to aid in labor and delivery. Midwives still recommend this to pregnant women; a useful dose would be 1 cup of infusion (tea) per day for the last two months of pregnancy. An infusion can be made by steeping 30 g of dry leaves, or 75 g of fresh leaves, in 500 ml of near-boiling water. Red raspberry leaf tea may also be bought, and tastes to me like regular black tea. While pregnant and overdue, I often drank 2 quarts or more of tea a day, hoping to encourage some activity, and the very palatable nature of the tea certainly helped. If harvesting leaves, collect before the fruit ripens, and use only fresh or completely dry leaves, as the leaves temporarily become mildly toxic during the wilting process. Consider location of the plants; roadsides and gardens may contain pesticides or fuel residues.

In closing, I hope you have an opportunity to enjoy some of nature's bounty this summer, and participate in an age-old ritual of gathering and harvesting; being connected from plant to plate is not so common as it once was.

Raspberry and Walnut Vinaigrette:

- ½ tsp. Honey mustard
- 2 Tbsp. Raspberry vinegar
- Sea salt to taste
- 3 Tbsp. Walnut oil
- 3 Tbsp. Olive oil
- 1 Tbsp. Minced fresh tarragon

To make raspberry vinegar, steep 500 g of fruit in 1 L of wine vinegar for 2 weeks, and then strain. Blend all ingredients until emulsified. Enjoy!



To Feed or Not to Feed, That is the Question

by Greg Wolf, Interpretative Naturalist

Summer presents itself with many interesting occurrences. For instance, birds have courtship, mating and raising of their young. That brings me to feeding birds in summer. There are many opinions out there on whether you need to feed birds then or not. Experts from many bird organizations feel that feeding birds in summer will not hinder nor impede the natural process of behavior of the birds. One reason for feeding birds is to lure them in so people will see them and enjoy them. Feeding birds allows people the chance to see birds they might not otherwise see in nature.



Summer is an excellent time to feed the birds. It is different than the wintertime. With the return of neo-tropical migrants and our year-round residents, feeding birds is a rewarding experience. Birds like indigo buntings, orioles, hummingbirds and rose-breasted grosbeaks are only here during the warm months. These colorful birds make it worthwhile to feed the birds in the summer.

There is a myth or two that needs to be dispelled. People believe that feeding can harm birds because they rely on the birdseed as a major source of food. The truth is that birds that come to feeders take no more than twenty percent of their daily food requirement. If no birdseed is provided, the birds will find other sources of nourishment. Another myth is you shouldn't feed birds in the summer. Actually, during the summer is one of the best times because of several reasons. Birds that are colorful and are only here during the summer will come to the feeders. Also, adult birds will bring their young to the feeders to teach them how to survive and what is good to eat. In general, summer has a wider variety of bird species than any other season.



Summer is also a great opportunity to try new food at your feeders. Grape jelly and orange halves to attract orioles and sugar water in nectar feeders for hummingbirds and orioles is a good start. To make the sugar water, boil four parts water to one part white granulated sugar, let cool and add to feeder. You can make a large batch and freeze some for a later date. Other fruit that can be used is cut apples (wormy is ok) or raisins soaked in water overnight. They will appeal to robins, gray catbirds and cardinals. Mealworms will attract bluebirds, cardinals, catbirds, chickadees, native sparrows and woodpeckers. Woodpeckers will eat suet year-round – just watch for melting and spoilage.

Summer bird-feeding tips:

- It is important to do daily maintenance on nectar feeders. Scrub thoroughly with a bottlebrush before refilling.
- Keep cats indoors. The fledglings will be around try out their wings, which makes them defenseless.
- If you offer water (which is great to attract birds), it needs to be refreshed every day.
- Try a dust bath. Dust will soak up excess oil on feathers, making birds in better health.
- When seeds pile up under the feeder, clean it up or move your feeder a few feet. This also prevents your grass from dying.
- Place a hanging feeder or platform feeder with fruit, and it will attract mockingbirds, catbirds, cardinals, orioles and tanagers.
- Take care that food placed in feeders or in the open does not spoil and start to rot.
- Before yanking all those "weeds," remember that some pesky wildflower plants, such as pokeweed and goldenrod, are attractive to the seed-eating birds.
- Add a tray to either your hopper or tubular feeder to catch the seeds that the birds kick out. The tray does additional duty as a place for the birds to land and help themselves to seed.
- Before you have a dead tree removed, it would make a great nesting site for woodpeckers and other cavity-nesting birds.



With many more species here during the summer, feeding them is a great way to see them. Taking the time to place the right food like fruit, suet, nectar, as well as sunflower, thistle and peanuts, you can attract a large number of birds. To feed or not to feed? Well, I hope that it's not a question anymore. Enjoy feeding the birds this summer and keep it up year-round. It might surprise you what might visit you.



Answers to Kids' Corner: 1. cloud burst, 2. deluge, 3. shower, 4. gusher, 5. drizzle, 6. squall, 7. sprinkle, 8. gully washer, 9. torrent, 10. mizzle, 11. downpour, 12. mist

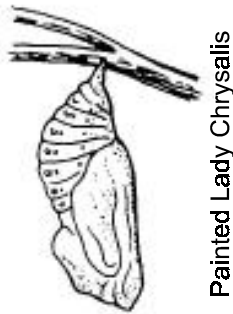


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