

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

Winter 2010

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi.php

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.

Wapsi Center Happenings

by Dave Murcia, Director

Wapsi River Center Receives 2010 Radish Award!



On behalf of the Scott County Conservation Board, the staff and volunteers of the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center, and our partner the Clinton County Conservation Board, I would like to thank the Radish Magazine staff for the privilege to be recognized as just one of many local agencies that is committed to **Healthy Living**. As a community leader in environmental education, we take **PRIDE** in offering many public programs with emphasis on stewardship, sustainability, low-impact activities and crafts with our natural world in mind.

As Naturalist and Director of the Center, I would like to personally thank the Radish Magazine and staff for their outstanding commitment to the community, the Scott and Clinton County Conservation Boards and park staff for their continued support, the Friends of the Wapsi Center for their volunteer efforts and most importantly, the staff at the Center for making everyday "a walk on the wild side". The skills, knowledge and abilities of all our employees and partners, make these experiences possible. **Thank you!**

As recipient of a **2010 Radish Award**, I would like to invite our readers, new and old, to visit our local natural places to observe, listen and watch for the wonders of our earth. Come out and feel the **Wapsi experience!**

Wapsi River Ecology Day - Keeping It Green ~ Sustainability in the Here and Now!

This year the Center offered programming with the support of our local partners in promoting sustainable resources within our lives. The afternoon began with

"Renewable Rain" by **River Action**, and described 6 simple ways to save our waterways with an emphasis on rain barrels. The **Scott Area Waste Commission** brought a hands-on paper making program using recycled paper; followed by "The Million Trees Project" from **Living Lands and Waters**. The late afternoon program by **Nahant Marsh** and the **Wapsi River Center** entitled, "Solar Cooking Demonstration," helped to wet appetites for the fall harvest supper sponsored by the **Friends of the Wapsi Center** that evening. "Rhythmic Recyclables & Wilderness Music" by the **Wapsi River Center** and **Clinton County Conservation** then taught participants how to create musical instruments from everyday items and try them out while listening to acoustic "wilderness music". The day ended with a celestial celebration and the **Eastern Iowa Star Party**. Look for more **Green** programming, as the Center will be emphasizing getting back-to-the-basics-of-nature in a variety of ways in 2010!



Fire and Water Courses

In cooperation with the IL DNR, the QC Natural Area Guardians, and the Black Hawk State Historical Site, Wapsi Center staff participated and assisted in conducting a National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG) S130 Firefighter & S190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior course this past November. Approximately 60 local participants as well as Ohio and the Chicagoland area, gained valuable career training. The Wapsi Center is proud to assist and conduct such career/professional development opportunities and will continue to offer and support such courses as partnerships grow.

The Wapsi Center in cooperation with local partners has again scheduled a **Boater Education Course** in cooperation with the Iowa DNR and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Please see **Winter Events** for details.



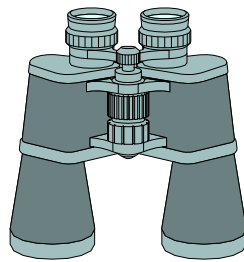
Wapsi Center Deer Hunt

The Wapsi Center deer hunt, held during the 1st regular shotgun season, Dec. 5-9, offered 20 permits to 11 hunters who harvested 9 deer.

The deer hunt at the Wapsi Center, along with the Scott County Park deer hunt (22 harvested), were designated Special Deer Management Zones by the DNR. Successful applicants who passed the shooter’s proficiency test and attended the hunter safety session were offered licenses for the Wapsi and Scott County Park hunts. The Scott County Conservation Board is managing the population in order to balance plant and animal communities, and the special deer licenses were for antlerless deer only.

Eagles Are Back!

Bald eagles have been seen and heard at the Wapsi River Center along the riverbanks! Best times to view eagles are December through March. On most occasions, the eagles return to the night roost from 3:30 P.M. to dusk. As many as 50 eagles have been observed at one time on the roost! It is located within 250 ft. of the Eagle View Eco Center where spotting scopes are available for indoor public viewing when the Center is open. Please be quiet when approaching the Eco Center! **Winter hours for the Eco Center and its displays are Saturdays from 12:30 - 4:30 P.M. Admission is free.**



Winter Wellness Activities!

As winter conditions allow, please consider “renting” our winter sporting equipment, **free of charge – donations accepted!** In cooperation with our partners at Clinton County Conservation, we offer cross-country ski and snowshoe equipment for use on-site. Come experience the Wapsi challenge and call the office at (563) 328-3286 to check on availability of equipment. We require a valid driver’s license to hold equipment and all equipment must remain on-site during operation hours: M - F = 8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. and Saturdays = 12:30 - 4:30 P.M.

The WREN is Green!

Please remember that you may now visit our website and sign up to get The W.R.E.N. in an effort to **protect, conserve, and preserve our vital resources.** Please contact us if you require a mailed version.

Programs at the Wapsi Center

Approximately 3,213 students, teachers and parents participated in 49 field trips this fall (August - November). Twenty-one field trips (1,475) were conducted at the Wapsi River Center and twenty-eight field trips (1,738) were conducted off-site at various satellite locations.

If you are an educator and would like to schedule a winter or spring field trip, we recommend that you call well in advance, if possible. To set up a field trip, download a **Field Trip Planner** from our website: www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi_education.php and contact us at (563) 328-3286.

Winter Sports Opportunities

Wapsi River Environmental Education Center
The Center’s 1/5 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails provide the perfect opportunity for wildlife viewing. Cross-country ski and snowshoe equipment is available during Center hours on Saturdays from 12:30 - 4:30 P.M., free of charge.

Scott County Park
The park’s 4 miles of cross-country trails provide a journey rich in scenery. The trails are not groomed; however, they will be cleared of debris.

West Lake Park
Trails are open to cross-country skiing; however, they are not groomed. The park’s four lakes are the perfect location for the ice-fishing enthusiast. Be sure to check ice conditions before venturing out!

*In Appreciation of Your
Support of the Wapsi
River Center*

Don & Mindy Williams
K. J. Rebarcak
Mr. & Mrs. Varcho
Erma Wiszmann
Carol Rogers
Mr. & Mrs. Dunn
Bill Robbins
Ingrid Bogdanowicz
Lucia Dryanski
Ridgewood Elementary 3rd Grade



Kids' Corner

Woodland Creations

from the public television show *biorganic*
by Amy Newman, AmeriCorps Naturalist



So many things can be created out of using simple materials that you can find in your backyard. Here at the Wapsi River Center, we have recently discovered a fun activity that families can do together. Using natural materials you can create a variety of critters in addition to “stick people”. Pictured below some of the woodland creations we created: a turkey, Twiggy Jack, Twiggy Jill, an owl and a duck. Use your imagination and go wild with this fun, family craft!

Stick People Materials:

Hand Pruner

Branches ¼-inch in diameter

Branches ½-inch in diameter

1/16-inch drill bit

Drill

Vise

Needle-nose Pliers

Hammer

16-gauge Craft Wire

Ruler

Hot Glue Sticks

Hot Glue Gun

Seedpods

Acorns (can use all parts) or other Tree Nut



How To:

1. To make the body, use the pruner and cut a ½-inch thick branch to measure approximately 2½ inches long.
2. Cut 4 arms by using the ¼-inch thick branch making each 1 inch long. Two segments allow for a bendable arm.
3. Cut 4 legs by using the ¼-inch thick branch making each 1½ inches long. Two segments allow for a bendable leg.
4. One at a time, place arm and leg segments into the vise vertically. Using 1/16-inch drill bit, drill a hole lengthwise down thru the center of each segment.
5. Put the body into the vise horizontally and drill the holes for the arms and the legs. Drill about a ½ inch in from each end. After you have both ends drilled, turn the body vertically in the vise and drill a hole in the middle for the head. Drill down about ¼ inch.
6. Place a piece of wire about 1 inch long into the “neck” hole and pound it in slightly. Being careful to not go past the hole for the arms.
7. Drill a small hole in a nut (this will be your head), then put the nut in place fastening it with a bit of hot glue.
8. Cut a 6-inch piece of wire for the arms and an 8-inch piece of wire for the legs.
9. Feed the 6-inch wire thru the upper hole of the body for its arms. Slide two of the 1-inch pieces on one side of the body and bend the end with the pliers to form a hand. Repeat for other arm.
10. Feed the 8-inch wire thru the bottom hole of the body for its legs. Slide two of the 1½-inch pieces on one side of the body. Discard any excess wire and bend the end with the pliers to form a foot. Repeat for other leg.
11. Bend arms and legs as desired.

This project can be used to fit your own style and personality. Try and use things like pine cones, needles and bark to create a variety of animals. Think about the critters you see everyday in your yard – squirrels, chipmunks and birds for example. Experiment with other natural elements and see what your family can create. Cut logs and arrange the stick people on it or even make your own little towns or villages using scrap wood, rocks, stones, or other natural materials. Be creative and use your imagination...the ideas are endless!

January



30th ~ Snowshoe Tracking ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Mike Granger, Wapsi River Center naturalist, as he takes participants on a stroll through the Wapsi woods. While making tracks of their own, via snowshoes, participants will have the opportunity to search for animal tracks and other signs of animal activity in this winter wonderland. Pre-registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286. **BYOM – Bring Your Own Mug.**

30th ~ Recycled Card Crafts ~ 1:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Did you know that during the holiday season we generate 5 million tons of trash? Recycling is the key! By attending this fun afternoon program, participants will learn to make gift boxes, decorative tags, ornaments and much more from recycled holiday cards. Scissors, glue, rulers and pencils will be provided; participants need only to bring cards. Pre-registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286. **BYOM – Bring Your Own Mug.**

30th - 31st ~ Bald Eagle Days ~ (see times listed below) ~ Mississippi Valley Welcome Center, (LeClaire, Iowa) ~ Come join us and the Corps of Engineers for an exciting celebration of the bald eagle at the visitor center. Learn about the eagle and other birds of prey each day. Presentations on Saturday will be at 10:00 A.M., 11:00 A.M. and Noon. Presentations on Sunday will be at 1:00 P.M., 2:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M. The welcome center is located on 900 Eagle Ridge Road in LeClaire, Iowa. For more details call (563) 322-3911.



February

6th ~ Snow Day for Grown-ups ~ 2:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ This is taking the place of our annual Winter Camp for Adults. We are keeping the best parts of the old camp and cutting back to a free, one-day event. We will cross-country ski, snowshoe hike, bring your ice skates, have a potluck supper, folk concert and social around the



WINTER

fireplace in the evening. To pre-register call (563) 847-7202.

6th ~ Folk Concert ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Relax and enjoy an evening of acoustical guitar and vocal offerings of the music of Paul Simon, Peter Meyer, John Denver, John Prine and several others as rendered by local talents. You may participate by using one of our simple percussion instruments, bringing your own, singing along, slapping your knee, tapping your foot or just being a quiet listener.



13th ~ Winter Fun Day ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come to the Wapsi River Center for a fun-filled day of winter activities. This is an event the whole family can enjoy, so plan to come out and discover winter at its best. A limited number of skis and snowshoes are available, so please call to reserve equipment (563) 328-3286. **BYOM – Bring Your Own Mug.**

* **9:00 A.M. ~ Cross-country Ski Clinic** ~ Come learn the basics of cross-country skiing and tour the Wapsi Center trails. Participants may bring their own equipment.



* **11:00 A.M. ~ Woodland Crafts** ~ Join naturalists to learn how to create a beautiful deer display. A program for the whole family to enjoy. Please call to register for kits; (563) 328-3286.

* **12:00 Noon ~ Chili and Soup Lunch** ~ Chili and soup will be provided by the Friends of the Wapsi Center for their annual "Chili Cook-Off". Come and sample all recipes and then vote for the winner! (First come, first served)



EVENTS

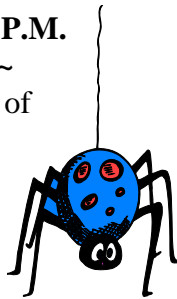
March

Please check the local media for rainbow trout release at West Lake Park after ice out.

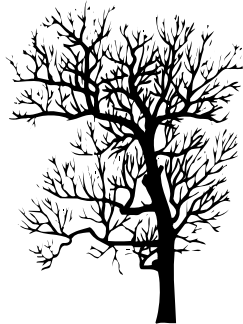
* **1:00 P.M. ~ Snowshoe Nature Hike** ~ Join Michael Granger, Wapsi River Center naturalist, on this excursion into the Wapsi River Center's woodlands. We will be traveling the way of the Native Americans and early pioneers, looking for signs of life in the still, winter woods.

* **2:00 P.M. ~ Winter Bird Feeding & Watching** ~ Join naturalists to learn how to attract birds into your backyard and how to identify some of our common feathered friends.

14th ~ The Unhuggables ~ 1:30 - 3:30 P.M. ~ Putnam Museum, (Davenport, IA) ~ Have a heart and fall in love with some of nature's unhuggable creatures. We'll explore their "icky" features via multi-sensory activities and games. We'll take a close look at some live animals, including the Wapsi Center's great horned owl. Will we discover that these unhuggables are just misunderstood? Deadline for registration is on Friday, February 12. Please call (563) 324-1933, ext. 242 to for more details or register online at museum@putnam.org.



27th ~ Winter Tree Identification ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come to the Wapsi River Center to be a winter tree detective. Learn how to identify trees by looking at the bark, buds and seeds. Please call to register; (563) 328-3286.



27th ~ Maple-Syruping Demonstration ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Tom Greene as he discusses the history and procedure of tapping trees for syrup. Handouts and where to find tapping equipment will be provided to participants. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register .

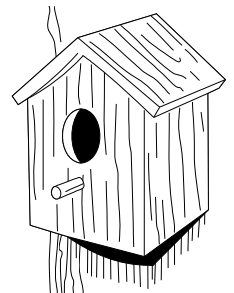
6th ~ Woodland Creations ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come and learn how twigs, bark, seeds and leaves can be used to create miniature figurines. Make people, animals or whatever your creative spirit can come up with. Please call to register your family or yourself by March 3; (563) 328-3286.

6th ~ Maple-Syruping Demonstration ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Once again, join Tom Greene as he discusses the history and procedure of tapping trees for syrup. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register .



20th ~ Recycled Stitches ~ 1:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come join naturalist Lisa Gerwulf as she shows you how to create a uniquely versatile yarn from recycled plastic bags. "Plarn" (plastic yarn) is not a new fad, but rather a frugal technique reminiscent of the Depression Era. Participants will learn about the plastic industry, plastic's waste-to-energy potential, as well as how to create two versions of "yarn" out of recycled shopping/grocery bags. Knitted, crocheted, woven, braided and corded items will also be on display. Those interested need not be fancywork experts to enjoy this program. Each participant needs to bring 5 plastic shopping/grocery bags and a pair of sharp scissors. If you have access to a quilting tool called a rotary cutter and mat, consider bringing these. Pre-registration is required, by calling (563) 328-3286 to reserve your spot.

25th ~ Birdhouse Workshop ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ You can build your own bluebird, wren, kestrel or wood duck nest box from a kit to provide for the wildlife in your world. You will also learn about placement and maintenance of the boxes. The kits will be available for a small fee to cover materials. Fees are \$5 for a wren or bluebird and \$25 for a kestrel or wood duck box. You must call (563) 847-7202 before March 20 to order your kits.





25th & 26th ~ Boat Iowa: Safety Certification Course ~ 5:00 - 9:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park, Gate 3 ~ Come to West Lake Park (14910 110th Avenue) to learn about navigating the water safely,

properly maintaining your boating equipment, keeping up to date with Iowa boating laws, handling boating emergencies, and much more! This program is brought to you by the Scott County Conservation Board and the Iowa DNR. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register by March 19. Space is limited, so don't hesitate to sign up for this opportunity!

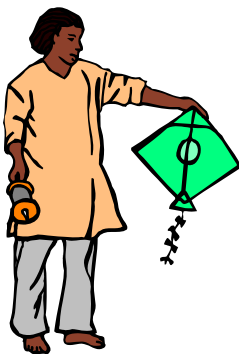
April

Spring Sneak Peak ~ more events to come in the spring newsletter.

3rd ~ Natural Dyed Eggs ~ 1:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Just in time for Easter, this program takes a natural-spin to the centuries old craft of dyeing eggs. Bring a dozen hard-boiled eggs and the whole family for this history-rich how to. Walk-ins are welcome, but pre-registration would be appreciated by calling (563) 328-3286 by Thursday, April 1.



10th ~ Kite Flying ~ 1:00 - 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Up, up and away! Come to the Wapsi River Center to learn how to create a two-stick bow kite the old-fashioned way. Using sticks, paper, glue and string make kites like your grandfather did. There is a \$2 material fee for each kite. Please call to pre-register and reserve your supplies; (563) 328-3286.



17th ~ Earth Day Expo ~ 10:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M. ~ QCCA Expo Center ~ The Quad Cities Earth Week Coalition is hosting its 7th annual Earth Week Fair at the QCCA Expo Center in Rock Island, IL. This event is free to the public and will feature over 60 booths offering hands-on activities, demonstrations, make-and-take crafts,



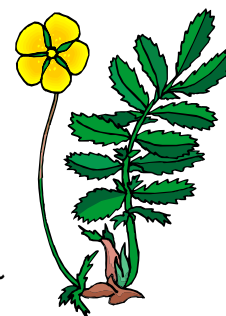
literature, videos, quizzes and other interactive projects. For more information, contact Erin Robinson, QC Earth Week Co-Chair at (563) 386-9575.

23rd ~ Nighttime Prairie Burn ~ 7:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join the prescribed burn teams of the Wapsi River Center and Clinton County Conservation and learn how fire is an important tool in managing prairie ecosystems. A portion of the Center's prairie will be burned to promote new growth. The rain/wind date is Tuesday, April 27.

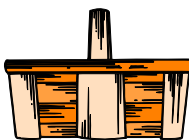
May

Spring Sneak Peak ~ more events to come in the spring newsletter.

1st ~ Wildflower Hike ~ 5:00 - 6:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join us for a hike to identify some spring woodland wildflowers like rue anemone, hepatica, Dutchman's breeches, Jacob's ladder, spring beauty, dog tooth violet and many more.



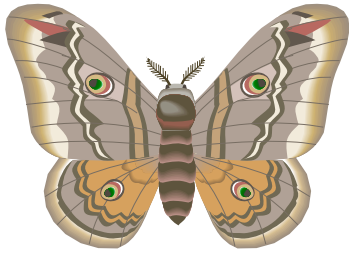
1st ~ BYOP - Bring Your Own Picnic ~ 6:30 - 7:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join us for an outdoor feast at the Pine Ring. Please bring your picnic food items and we'll provide the fire, forks and fun!



1st ~ Moonlight Frog Chorus ~ 7:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Experience the sounds of the season, in search of the frogs and toads which inhabit the Wapsi River Center. Please bring a flashlight and waterproof footwear.

15th ~ Canoe and Kayak Tour ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park, Lake of the Hills ~ Join Wapsi Center naturalists in an educational and fun introduction to canoeing and kayaking. This program includes equipment and instruction. Participants are requested to register by calling (563) 328-3286 for this free event - weather dependent.





22nd ~ Owls, Bats & Moths – Oh My! ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Learn more about nature’s night shift as we look for nocturnal creatures

at the Wapsi Center. See firsthand how owls, bats and moths survive and thrive in the woodlands along the Wapsipinicon River. Participants should bring a small flashlight.

29th & 30th ~ Heritage Days ~ 11:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of yesteryear! The past will come to life at the Village as interpreters and actors recreate pioneer life. There will be pioneer craft demonstrations, folk music and a gun show performed by the Wapsi Wranglers. Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village is located on the north end of Scott County Park. Admission is \$2/adult and \$1/children.

What's in a Name?

by Lisa Gerwulf, Assistant Naturalist

Did Wednesday, December 30 have you humming the tune of a Rodgers and Hart ballad? Or perhaps reciting a Percy Bysshe Shelley poem? If so, then it appears you were aware of the evening’s celestial celebration occurring overhead – the second full moon of the month! A blue moon to be exact.

But why do they call it a blue moon? It’s not based on any atmospheric trick-of-the-light that casts the moon in a bluish glow. The name dates back to 1528 England, when clergy were determining the dates for Lent and Easter using the phases of the moon. Sometimes the full moon’s timing was too early, so the name “betrayor or belewe/beleue” moon arose.



In the United States, naming of the full moon stems from various Native American tribes trying to keep track of different seasons. Therefore, each month’s full moon has its own name. Below is a list of what it was named and a brief description of why it was named so:

- **January ~ Wolf** ~ During this time of the year, hungry wolf packs often howled outside of villages.
- **February ~ Snow** ~ It was the time of deepest snows.
- **March ~ Worm** ~ As the ground thawed, earthworm casts began to appear heralding the return of robins.
Sap ~ Maple trees are being tapped.
- **April ~ Pink** ~ Moss pink or wild ground phlox is one of the earliest widespread wildflowers this time of the year.
Fish ~ A time when the shad swam upstream to spawn.
- **May ~ Flower** ~ Flowers were abundant everywhere.
Corn Planting ~ Ask even area farmers and

they will tell you this is the time to plant corn.

- **June ~ Strawberry** ~ The short but abundant season for harvesting strawberries.
- **July ~ Buck** ~ Deer are in velvet during this time of year.
Thunder ~ Thunderstorms are most frequent.
- **August ~ Sturgeon** ~ Species of fish most readily caught during this time of year.
- **September ~ Fruit & Barley** ~ These were the names of the first full moon when two full moons were observed; also a time of ripening fruits and grains.
Harvest ~ Occurs closest to the autumn equinox (longest day of the year) allowing for long periods of light for crops to be harvested; also the name associated with the third full moon of a season when four are observed (normally there are only three per season).
- **October ~ Hunter’s** ~ With the harvest complete, this was the time to hunt the deer, raccoon, rabbit and fox that came to the fields to glean.
- **November ~ Beaver** ~ Time to set traps to ensure warm winter furs; also time when beavers are actively preparing for winter.
- **December ~ Cold** ~ No description necessary.
Long Nights ~ Ditto!

So, you might be wondering if we can expect another blue moon in 2010? Unfortunately, no. The length of time between this phenomenon is 33 months! So, mark your calendars for September, 2012. By the way, September boasts the most blue moons of all the calendar months. February will never boast one because a full moon occurs every 29.5 days.

Oh, and if anyone makes you a promise that ends with the phrase, “...once in a blue moon.” You can rest assured, it will be a longtime coming.

Wildlife Profile ~ Northern Cardinal

by Katie van der Linden, AmeriCorps Naturalist

The northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) is arguably one of Iowa's most beautiful birds. Its bold coloring makes the cardinal stand out amongst its surroundings and grabs the attention of bird watchers of all ages and experience levels. It is named after the cardinals of the Roman Catholic church who wear red robes. The northern cardinal has become a mascot for many sports teams; including our very own Iowa State University. It's also the state bird of seven states.



The northern cardinal shows sexual dimorphism – this means there are visible differences between the sexes. The male cardinal is bright red all over his body. The female has a brown-colored body with less dramatic red coloration on her wings and tail. The color

differences serve a purpose. The bright red color on the males help him to attract a mate; while the more drab coloration of the female help her to stay hidden on the nest and avoid predation. Both male and female are medium-sized songbirds with bright orange beaks, black faces and a crest on their heads. Juvenile cardinals are similar in appearance to females, but lack the orange beak.



Cardinals are not migratory birds and stay year-round. They are typically monogamous species and usually mate for life. Their nests are built in the spring in dense shrubbery or thick branches of a tree. Most of the nest building is done by the female with occasional help from the male. The nest is made of whatever the female can scrounge up: leaves, twigs, grasses, bark, roots and vines. The inside of the nest is lined with grass.



In the spring, the females lay from one to five greenish, whitish eggs with the average clutch totaling three. The eggs hatch within eleven to

thirteen days, and both parents feed the chicks. The parents feed their young a diet of insects. The chicks fledge (leave the nest) within nine to thirteen days of hatching. After fledging, the parents feed the young up to fifty days before they are truly on their own. Next spring, the juveniles will be sexually mature and able to mate and reproduce their own chicks.

Typically, many songbirds only call in the spring. Male and female cardinals; however, call all year-round. While most female songbirds do not call, female cardinals are quite exceptional singers and their calls can be more complex than the males. Mated pairs of cardinals often share calls. The cardinal's song is 'cheer-cheer-cheer'. Male cardinals are territorial and very protective; especially during mating season. Males (and occasionally females) have even been seen attacking their own reflections. I have seen this behavior firsthand here at the Wapsi River Center when a male cardinal attacked his reflection in one of the windows at the Kestrel cabin this fall.

Cardinals eat a variety of things in the wild. The main staple of their diet is seeds. Cardinals eat seeds from a variety of different plants; including weeds. Depending on availability, fruits and insects can also be on the menu.

Cardinals are a beautiful bird that can be enjoyed year-round by people of all ages. If you are interested in attracting cardinals to your area, here are few things you can do. Cardinals' favorite treat is sunflower seed, but they also enjoy safflower seed. They prefer eating off the ground, so you can place seeds either in a large shallow dish or simply scatter them on the ground. Cardinals will also feed from a stationary feeder that is uncovered and no more than five to six feet off the ground.

Observation shows that cardinals will visit feeders more readily if nearby cover is available, so your dish or feeder should be placed near shrubs, brush, or a wooded area. I hope you get the opportunity to enjoy this year-round resident.



Plant Profile ~ Honey Locust

by Mike Granger, Naturalist

Let me introduce you to a very unique tree species that some of you may be familiar with because of its thorns and seedpods. The honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) is a deciduous tree which is fairly common in our region. It is found along river valleys and upland forests from southern South Dakota down to central Texas and as far east as Massachusetts.



The tree belongs to the Fabaceae or Leguminaceae family of flowering plants. Leguminaceae is an older term, but is still accepted today; since, the tree is a legume. This means it has a bean- or pea-like seedpod. A legume is a fruit which splits on each side when dry. Included in the family are many other species such as: alfalfa, clover, peas, beans, lentils, soybeans and peanuts.



There are several aspects of this tree which make it truly unique. The leaves are either singly (pinnate) or doubly (bipinnate) compound; with leaflets 1 to 1½ inches long. It is the only tree in Iowa with doubly compound leaves. The leaves give the tree an airy look and allow sunlight to penetrate to the understory.

Flowers will appear in from May to June, and give a sweet smell to the surrounding woods. The flowers are greenish-white, and are displayed on a 2-inch long raceme (flowering spike). Male and female flowers grow on separate branches, and cuttings from a “male” branch will grow into a pod-less tree.

There are several honey locust trees here at the Wapsi River Center. Each tree is adorned with long pods which are readily seen from a good distance away. The pods measure from 6 to 16 inches long, 1½ inches wide, and are filled with hard round seeds measuring ⅓ of an inch long. It is believed that Native Americans roasted the seeds, and ate them or used them for a coffee substitute. One reference mentioned that it was such



an important trade item that the Native Americans are credited with the spread of the honey locust throughout its range.

The honey locust’s name refers to the sweet pulp found within its pods. It is said that the pulp is edible, but may be somewhat irritating to the throat. The pods mature through the months of September and October. These pods will hang on the tree throughout the winter months, but will be rapidly consumed by a variety of animals including: livestock, deer, opossum, squirrel, rabbits, quail, crows and starlings. The seeds provide an important source of protein during hard winter months.



Another familiar aspect of the honey locust is its large thorns, which often covering the tree from top to bottom. The thorns can be 4 to 8 inches long and start out green and pliable, but later harden and turn a deep red. On a mature tree, thorns will be present along the main trunk, often in dense clusters, which are to be avoided by any passerby. Why does the tree have such a threatening defensive strategy? Many references point to Pleistocene or Ice Age mega fauna, which in Iowa included: mastodon, giant beaver and giant sloth. These large mammals would have been very hard on tree-life at that time.



The honey locust is a very hardy and fast growing tree – up to two feet each year! It can live to be 120 years old and grow up to 2½ feet in diameter. Since it produces shade quickly and is tolerant of salt, it is often planted along city roadways, parking lots, new parks and housing developments. This practice is somewhat diminishing today in favor of biodiversity in urban settings.

As a child, I remember gathering the pods as “souvenirs” on hikes through the woods. With my newfound knowledge, I have gained more respect and appreciation for this unique tree species.

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For All Seasons

The Wapsi River Environmental Education Center is a joint project between the Scott and Clinton County Conservation Boards. "The W.R.E.N." is published quarterly by the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center and the Scott County Conservation Board.

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