

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

Summer 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 & Scott County News

by Dave Murcia, Wapsi River EE Center Director

Programs of the Wapsi River Center

During the **2009-2010 school year**, approximately 7,696 students, teachers and parents participated in 128 field trips at the Wapsi River Center and various satellite sites. A total of 92 public presentations were attended by 1,745 participants countywide. At our Earth Week Fair, we saw about 2,468 participants at both our booth (low-impact recreation) and the Rhythmic Recyclables programs created and led by assistant naturalist, Lisa Gerwulf.

If you would like to schedule a field trip, please schedule as far in advance as possible and visit our website to view/download our **Field Trip Planner**. School programs are not scheduled for Mondays so that staff may work on administration and resource management. We would like to see more schools take fall and winter field trips. And don't forget – **The Wapsi River Center is a place for all seasons.**



Volunteer Stewardship Workday

The Wapsi River Center hosted another successful workday this spring with support from the **Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc.** on Saturday, April 10. Volunteers included Walcott Scout Troop 670, Friends members and other community members. Projects accomplished included landscaping, Eagle View Eco Center spring cleaning and an installation of a new bat house. In appreciation for all the hard work and dedication, lunch was provided by the **Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc.** Please look toward fall for the next workday!

Quad City EnviroKids Summer Program

Join local environmental education agencies in our second summer program geared towards getting kids outdoors while learning about the environment! Activities include: fishing and water safety, wild edibles & renewable energy, farm to farmer's market, canoeing & kayaking (full) and creek stomping & bug catching! Please call (563) 468-4218 or visit www.ilivehereqc.org to register or for more information. All activities are weather dependent.

SCCB Director Recognized for Service

Roger Kean was recognized for **30 years of service** at the County's fourth quarter employee recognition event held at the administration center on June 22. Roger started his career as Park Manager at West Lake Park and has worked hard to support the community needs through conservation efforts throughout the County park system. Roger stated that it is through the support of all departments that the County is successful and a great place to work. We all appreciate his efforts and guidance in support

of SCCB projects. **Thank you Roger!**



National World Qualifying Quad City Triathlon Held at West Lake Park!

On Saturday, June 17, our very own West Lake Park hosted and supported the 11th Annual Quad Cities Triathlon. The national sprint distance qualifying triathlon was again sold out for the ninth year and included a full competition roster of around 700 athletes from as far as Maine, Oregon, California and Florida. Many participants commented on the quality of facilities and amenities; plus all the volunteers and staff that made this race a success. Well done, **Team SCCB!**



QC Garlic Mustard Pull 2010 Results!

Scott County Conservation Board, along with other local partner agencies, pulled **over 3,000 pounds** of garlic mustard on May 8! A total of six sites in both Iowa and Illinois, contributed to this vast amount of vegetation. The **West Lake Park crew pulled 31 bags** of the invasive woodland plant while the Bettendorf site crew pulled 60+ bags to take the QC trophy! Please consider joining next year's event and thank you to all the volunteers!



SCCB & SCIT Departments Awarded!

Through the initiative and cooperation of the **Information Technology Department**, the Scott County Conservation Board has been awarded funding by the **Scott County Regional Authority** to invest in educational and public viewing web cameras.

The SCCB strives to develop, protect and make available the environmental, recreational, cultural and historical values of our County for the benefit of all. Through the use of webcams, the County would be able to extend learning opportunities to all citizens including those who may not be able to visit such sites.

There is a webcam currently in use at Glynn's Creek Golf Course at Scott County Park. Other locations for consideration include the Wapsi River Center, West Lake Park and Buffalo Shores Recreation Area. Please look for future learning opportunities involving the webcams in upcoming editions of **The W.R.E.N.**

NRPA Take Me Fishing Initiative Makes Another Splash!

Through the **National Recreation and Park Association**, the Scott County Conservation Board has been recognized and awarded funding from the **Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation** to engage youth and families with particular emphasis on aquatic education and conservation through water recreational opportunities. These opportunities have included boating safety, canoe and kayaking programs, fishing programs as well as pond study programs.



The Wapsi River Center has once again engaged **over 2,000 youth and families** in support of recreational boating, fishing, aquatic education and environmental conservation during this 2009/2010 grant year! The Wapsi River Center staff would like to also thank the many local partner agencies that have supported programming which fosters participation in recreational boating, angling and aquatic education and conservation! The Davenport Community School District is one dedicated partner in education that has benefitted from these opportunities including: Central High School, West High School and Monroe Elementary. Without our partners we cannot reach our next generation of stewards, thank you!

Sponsor-an-Animal Program

Visitors to the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center come to see and enjoy the displays at the Eagle View Eco Center. A very important part of environmental education at the Wapsi Center revolves around the live animal displays. Each year, thousands of individuals come to learn about the wild animals that are found in the region. A new sponsorship program is being designed to meet the special needs required to maintain the animals at the Wapsi Center. Schools, classrooms, youth organizations, families and individuals are encouraged to join and sponsor an animal. Sponsorships make great gifts! If you are interested in sponsoring an animal, please attend our sponsor-an-animal day on July 24 at the Eagle View Eco Center at 3:00 P.M. If you would like to join us, give the Center a call at (563) 328-3286. We have a variety of animals up for sponsorship including: three raptors, several snakes, turtles, frogs and a couple of tiger salamanders.

Sponsor-an-animal day will include: a program given by AmeriCorps naturalist Katie van der Linden who will introduce you to all the animals up for sponsorship, refreshments and the opportunity to choose an animal to sponsor. Animals will be sponsored on a first-come, first-served basis on that day. Sponsorship fees are as follows: raptor ~ \$50, snake or turtle ~ \$25, and frog or salamander ~ \$15.

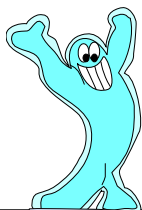
Upon sponsoring an animal, you will receive a packet of information containing: a fact sheet of your animal, photograph of the animal, letter of thanks and recognition of sponsorship on animal's enclosure. If you are interested in helping contribute to the care of these animals, but are not interested in sponsoring an animal, you may send a check payable to the Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc. at Wapsi River Environmental Education Center ~ Attn: Sponsor-an-Animal ~ 31555 52nd Avenue ~ Dixon, IA 52745.

In Appreciation of Your Support of the Wapsi River Center

Audrey Owen
Deana Jacobs
Deanna Peterson
Mary Johnson
Angi Black

George & Doris Straetker
Caroline Kimple
Connie & Dave Huber
Erma Wiszman
Carol Rogers

Dottie Wala
Bill Robbins
Lucia Dryanski
Ingrid Bogdanowicz
Orion Middle School



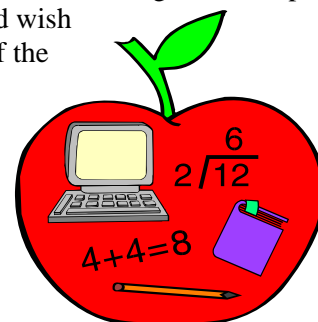
Rhythmic Recyclables Participants: Adams Elementary ~ Roberta Majors, Erin C., Tabitha Z., Jena P., Lauren V., Halle S., Adam M., Austin R., Daija J., Danika N., Austin F., Madisyn B. and Patty K., Ed White Jr. High ~ Dawn Rheingans, Drew B., Ryan P., Nate W., Kier B., Isi C., Brook S., Haylee J., Jenny D., Jordanne T., Elizabeth F., Marissa M. and C.J.

Hellos & Goodbyes

Alex Pehler: Hi! I will be the intern at the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center this summer. I am a 2007 graduate of North Scott, and I will be entering my senior year at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. I am majoring in math with a secondary education minor, and if I can fit it in, an environmental studies minor as well.

As a former boy scout, I am interested in the environment and learning about how-to preserve and

care for something that I grew up loving. I've worked at the Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village as a camp counselor for five seasons, and wish to continue sharing my love of the environment with others through the programming and community involvement here. Finally, if anyone asks, I will be happy to share how math fits into the environment!



JULY

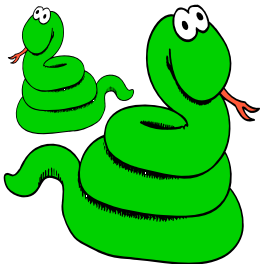
10th ~ QC EnviroKids ~ 9:00 A.M. - Noon ~ Nahant Marsh, Davenport ~ Kids, 3rd - 5th grade, are invited to participate in a wild edibles/renewable energy program at Nahant Marsh. For more information, call (563) 468-4218 or visit www.ilivehereqc.org.

12th - 16th ~ Young Pioneers Day Camp ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Native American Week ~ Visit the Hauberg Indian Museum, discover Indian sign language, make a drum and a dream catcher, plus many other crafts. Learn about the Native Americans in the area. Take a canoe ride at West Lake Park (life jackets provided)! This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Call (563) 328-3283 for registration information.



16th ~ Canoe and Kayak Tour ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park, South Entrance ~ Canoe or kayak around Pride Lake at Scott County Park. Pre-registration requested by calling (563) 328-3286.

16th ~ Native Iowa Snakes ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Bennett Park ~ Come learn all about Iowa's different species of snakes from Katie van der Linden, AmeriCorps naturalist. There will be many different live specimens available for viewing. Bennett Park is located by heading west on Highway 130 into Cedar County. The park is a few miles past New Liberty, Iowa on the right-hand side of the road or a few miles east of Bennett, Iowa.



17th ~ Watershed Festival ~ 8:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M. ~ Freight House Farmer's Market (421 River Drive ~ Davenport) ~ Come to this free, family-friendly event to learn about water, protecting water quality and the Mississippi River through song, dance, interactive demonstrations, displays and activities. There will be a rain barrel auction. The Wapsi River Center booth will focus on low-impact water recreation! To find more information about

SUMMER

this event, go to www.cityofdavenportiowa.com/watershed.

17th ~ Monsignor Menke Observatory 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 - 23rd ~ Young Pioneers Day Camp ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Laura Ingalls Wilder Week ~ Back by popular demand! Learn what life was like for Laura Ingalls. Visit the grist mill at Wildcat Den State

Park. Experience how she lived by spending time in an 1830's cabin and a one-room schoolhouse. Enjoy making crafts, taking hikes and much more.



This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Contact Jo Noon at (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

24th ~ QC EnviroKids ~ 9:00 A.M. - Noon ~ Freight House Farmer's Market (421 River Dr. ~ Davenport) ~ Kids, 3rd - 5th grade, are invited to participate in farm to farmer's market program. For more information, call (563) 468-4218 or visit www.ilivehereqc.org.

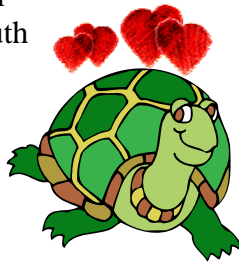
24th ~ Bends & Beaches Water Trail Float ~ 9:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ This is a continuance of the spring dedication float. Participants will meet at the Wapsi River Center where they will then be shuttled to Syracuse Wildlife Area. We will pick up the water trail at Syracuse Wildlife Area and float to the Wapsi River Center. At the Wapsi



EVENTS

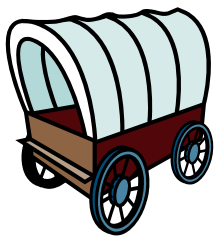
Center, participants will participate in a well-known canoe/kayak experience – the portage! In appreciation of your hard work, the Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc. will provide lunch. To reserve a spot/canoe, call (563) 328-3286.

24th ~ Sponsor-an-Animal Program ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ A new sponsorship program is designed to meet the special needs required to maintain the animals at the Wapsi Center. Schools, classrooms, youth organizations, families and individuals are encouraged to join and sponsor an animal. Come learn about the program and more great information. Call (563) 328-3286 to sign up!



25th ~ Village Alive! ~ 1:00 - 5:00 P.M. ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ See the Pioneer Historical Village come alive as the “Friends” of the village re-enact life on the 1890’s Iowa prairie. Enjoy folk art demonstrations throughout the day. Admission is FREE! For further information, call (563) 328-3283.

26th - 30th ~ Young Pioneers Day Camp ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Frontier Week ~ Enjoy a



week doing what the pioneers did in the 1800s. Enjoy many activities such as a wagon ride, rope making, 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. Call (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

AUGUST

2nd - 6th ~ Young Pioneers Day Camp ~ 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. Daily ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Mark Twain Week ~ Explore

and learn what life was like for Samuel Clemens aka Mark Twain. Enjoy paddleboating at West Lake Park and a tour of Lock & Dam 15 on the Mississippi River. Hike trails and do many crafts and activities! Go fishing at Scott County Park’s Pride Lake. This day camp is geared for children 6-11 years of age. Call (563) 328-3283 for registration information.

7th ~ QC EnviroKids ~ 9:00 A.M. - Noon ~ West Lake Park ~ Kids, 3rd - 5th grade, are invited to participate in a canoe and kayak clinic at West Lake Park. For more information, call (563) 468-4218 or visit www.ilivehereqc.org.

7th ~ Wild Edibles ~ 11:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Amy Newman, AmeriCorps Naturalist to learn about wild foods found at the Wapsi River Center. Learn how to identify various “food stuffs” and prepare some easy to make recipes. Bring your taste buds for this delicious edible presentation. Call (563) 328-3286 to register.



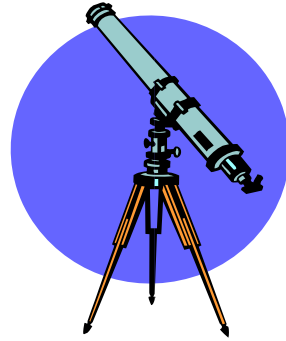
7th ~ Scholastic Recyclables ~ 1:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Going “green” when it comes to back-to-school supplies is easier than you think and very cost effective! Learn how to convert cereal boxes, chip bags, food wrappers, soda boxes, juice pouches and t-shirts into functional back-to-school supplies. These trash treasures will be a guaranteed hit! This program will offer lots of fundraising ideas for scout troops, environmental clubs and church youth groups. Registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286 by Thursday, August 5.

13th - 15th ~ 5th Annual Lower Wapsi River Cleanup Project ~ Please join us again to help beautify the Wapsipinicon River. Registration forms for the 2010 Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup from Anamosa to Hale are now available online at www.lowerwapsicleanup.org. Thank you, to the Friends of the Wapsi River Center, Inc. for helping sponsor this event. For more information, email Melisa Jacobsen at coordinator@lowerwapsicleanup.org or Jackie Gautsch at j.gautsch@hotmail.com.



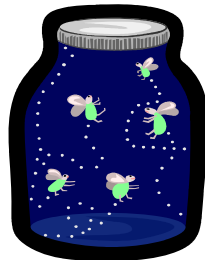
14th ~ Xstream Cleanup ~ West Lake Park ~
 Come join the efforts of local stewards as West Lake Park is cleaned of its invasive species! Xstream Cleanup is a Quad City-wide cleanup of creeks, drainage ways and sections of the Mississippi and Rock Rivers. To learn more, visit www.xstreamcleanup.org.

14th ~ Monsignor Menke Observatory Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Dr. Mitchell, Director of the Monsignor Menke Observatory, for a tour of the night sky. Please call (563) 333-6141 on the day of the event to find out if the weather conditions will permit viewing.



21st ~ Iowa's Native Turtles ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join AmeriCorps naturalist Katie van der Linden to learn about Iowa's many different native turtle species. We will take a short trip to the Osprey aquatic lab to do some turtle trapping. There will be live specimens available for viewing.

21st ~ Fascinating Fireflies ~ 8:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join AmeriCorps naturalist Katie van der Linden to learn about fireflies. We will take a hike to our prairie to get up-close and personal with these unique creatures.



27th ~ Canoe & Kayak Experience ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park ~ Come learn the basics of canoeing and kayaking while you paddle around Pride Lake. Programming includes water safety, instruction and equipment (please bring your own gear if you wish). This event is **weather dependent** and pre-registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286.

SEPTEMBER

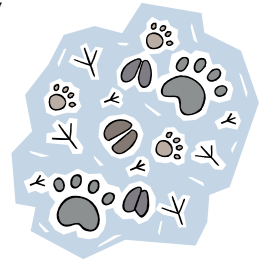
Fall Sneak Peak ~ more events to come in the fall newsletter.



10th ~ Canoe & Kayak Tour ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Pride Lake, Scott County Park ~ Come learn the

basics of canoeing and kayaking while you paddle around Pride Lake. Programming includes water safety, instruction and equipment (please bring your own gear if you wish). This event is **weather dependent** and pre-registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286.

11th ~ Native Ways ~ 10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come learn how the Native Americans lived by learning how to track animals, make pottery, weave rope, start a fire and build a model wickiup. Please bring a lunch, or items to prepare on an open fire (we'll provide the fire and roasting sticks). Family fun for everyone! Please call to register your family by calling (563) 328-3286



11th ~ Monsignor Menke Observatory Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Dr. Mitchell, Director of the Monsignor Menke Observatory, for a tour of the night sky. Please call (563) 333-6141 on the day of the event to find out if the weather conditions will permit viewing.

25th ~ Everything Cattail ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come learn about the amazing cattail with this hands-on workshop. Learn how they grow and make an awesome cattail craft to take home. Call to reserve a spot (563) 328-3286.

OCTOBER

Fall Sneak Peak ~ more events to come in the fall newsletter.

9th ~ Nineteenth Annual Ecology Day ~ 10:00 A.M. - 6:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Bring the whole family, invite a friend and plan to attend this family-oriented event. More details to come!

9th ~ Eastern Iowa Star Party ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center (Monsignor Menke Observatory) ~ Come join representatives from the Quad Cities Astronomical Society and astronomy clubs from all over the Midwest to view the heavens above. More information can be found online at www.qcas.org.



Species on the Brink

by **Katie van der Linden, AmeriCorps Naturalist**

Extirpated, endangered, threatened and special concern; if you're like me you've heard these terms before but might be confused by their meaning. What does it take for an animal to be considered endangered in Iowa but not federally? What exactly is a special concern species? In this article, I hope to clarify the differences in these terms as well as give you some examples to better help you understand the plant and animal around you.

An extirpated species is a species that is considered no longer living in an original region. Habitat loss, overhunting and being out-competed by other species are common reasons for a species to be extirpated from an area. For example, the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is a species that is extirpated from Iowa.

An endangered species is any species which is in danger of extinction throughout a significant part of its range or all of its range. A federally endangered species is a species which is protected by the endangered species act as well as a specific state. The names of federally endangered animal species in Iowa are: least tern (*Sterna antillarum*), Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*), Topeka shiner (*Notropis tristis*), Iowa pleistocene snail (*Discus macclintocki*) and Higgin's-eye pearly mussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*). There are no federally endangered plants in the state of Iowa.



State endangered species only include animals that may be in trouble in that particular state, but may be doing well in other states. These species are protected by state law. Some examples of Iowa endangered animal species are: red-backed vole (*Clethrionomys gapperi*), red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), freckled madtom (*Noturus nocturnus*), western hognose snake (*Heterodon nasicus*), blue-spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*),



Dakota skipper butterfly (*Hesperia dacotae*), frigid ambersnail (*Catinella gelida*) and spectacle case mussel (*Cumberlandia monodonta*).

Freshwater mussels are one of the most endangered animal species in North America. This is due to dams that block the migration of mussels and fish. Fish are an important part in the reproductive cycle of mussels. Other invasive mussels, sedimentation and chemicals also cause problems for freshwater mussels. An example of an endangered Iowa plant species is northern panic grass (*Dichanthelium boreale*).

A threatened species is a species that could very possibly become endangered in the future throughout part of its range or all of its range. There are both federal and state threatened animal and plant species in Iowa. Federally threatened species are afforded the same protection by both the endangered species act and the state. The piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is the only federally threatened species in Iowa. There are a few federally threatened plant species including: western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*), eastern prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*), Mead's milkweed (*Asclepias meadii*), prairie bush clover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*) and northern wild monkshood (*Aconitum noveboracense*).



Iowa also has threatened species that are only protected by state law, as with Iowa's endangered species; the animal or plant may be jeopardized throughout its range in Iowa but is doing fine elsewhere. Examples of threatened Iowa animal species are: least shrew (*Cryptotis parva*), long-eared owl (*Asio otus*), grass pickerel (*Esox americanus*), Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), central newt (*Notophthalmus viridescens*), Baltimore butterfly (*Euphydryas phaeton*), Midwest pleistocene vertigo snail (*Vertigo hubrichti*) and purple pimpleback mussel (*Cyclonaias tuberculata*). An example of Iowa's threatened plant species is the spring ladies-tresses (*Spiranthes vernalis*).



Special concern species are not protected by the endangered species act or state law. It is a species that's distribution or status is not documented, but is cause for concern. The species may not be protected by state law, but is protected by laws dealing with hunting, fishing, collecting and harvesting. A few Iowa examples of special concern animals are: southern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), pirate perch (*Aphredoderus sayanus*), bullsnake (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*) and zebra swallowtail butterfly (*Eurytides marcellus*). There are many plant species on the list for special concern in Iowa, and an example of one is the eared false foxglove (*Tomanthera auriculata*).



I hope you now grasp a clearer understanding of the some complicated terminology. If you are interested in learning more about extirpated, endangered, threatened, or special concern species in Iowa you can visit the Iowa DNR's website at www.iowadnr.gov/other/threatened.html.

Wildlife Profile ~ Yellow-billed Cuckoo

by Mike Granger, Naturalist

Let me introduce you to a fabulous bird which is frequently heard but rarely seen. Known to be very secretive, the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) can be heard in a variety of habitats throughout the region. While working here at the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center, I hear this call (Kuk...kuk...kuk...kuk...kuk...kakawowlp...kakawowlp...kakawowlp!) frequently during the summer months, but oftentimes do not see the calls creator. The telltale call starts quickly, sounds somewhat metallic, and then slows to a “clunky” ending. I have heard the call emanating from tall willow trees or dense thickets near a small pond. This is very typical cuckoo habitat – open woodland clearings often with a water source nearby. The yellow-billed cuckoo is not the only cuckoo found in Iowa; for the black-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) also exists. It has similar habits, but is identified by a red ring around its eye when it is an adult, and its range extends more northward into the southern parts of Canada. For simplicity, we will only focus on the yellow-billed cuckoo.



The yellow-billed cuckoo is a large bird; measuring 12 inches from beak to tail. Its beak has a definite sickle shape to it. Overall, the bird has a medium-brown coloring on its head and the upper surfaces of its

wings and tail. The belly and throat are brilliant white; making the bird appear to be two-toned. The underside of the tail is colored in bold black and white; making it an important identification characteristic. The yellow-billed cuckoo can be heard and viewed in the summer during its migration, and can be spotted in Iowa from the middle of May through September.

The bird builds a platform nest of sticks and twigs and is often built in brush overgrown with grape vine. The nest is lined with moss, pine needles or tree catkins. The nest measures only 5 inches wide, and has just a small depression to hold 3 to 4 pale, blue-green eggs. A

nesting bird's head and tail will stick out both sides of the nest. Cuckoos sometimes take advantage of nearby birds by



laying eggs in their nests as well. Cuckoo eggs have been found in the nests of the American robin, gray catbird, cedar waxwing, northern cardinal, wood thrush, dickcissel, mourning dove and red-winged blackbird. After egg laying, both the male and female will incubate the eggs. Young will be ready to leave the nest in as little as 17 days! They aren't able to fly, but they use their wings and beak to climb through the dense brush while hunting for food. This premature fledging expands the parents hunting territory, and allow the young to practice hunting while still receiving an occasional meal from mom and dad.

Cuckoos are incredible hunters who can stay motionless for minutes before striking their prey. A cuckoo's favorite food is caterpillars! The cuckoo will capture them, work them back and forth in their beaks to get rid of the fur or hair and then swallow them whole.

Tent caterpillars provide a plentiful supply of food, and one cuckoo was reported to have eaten 64 caterpillars in 6 minutes! Avid birders will look for tent caterpillars first, and then listen for the call of the cuckoo in the hopes of viewing this secretive bird. One reference calls the yellow-billed cuckoo



“nature's pest control and a farmer's best friend”. I know my appreciation and awareness for this spectacular bird has grown, and I will listen evermore intently for its distinctive call.

Plant Profile ~ Prairie Sage

by Amy Newman, AmeriCorps Naturalist

Prairie sage (*Artemisia ludoviciana*) is a highly aggressive weedy plant that typically grows in tallgrass prairies, along roadsides and railways. It is a member of the daisy family (*Compositae*) and is different from the sage used in cooking; which is a member of the mint family (*Labiatae*). According to the USDA and the Forest Service, prairie sage is distributed from the Northwest Territories in Canada south through the intermountain region of the United States to Mexico. The range encompasses the majority of Canada and the United States east of the Rocky Mountains; with the exception of Alabama, Florida and West Virginia. It is a rare find in Michigan. The hearty perennial prefers soil that is fairly dry and sandy, and as a result is spread throughout the sand prairie at Buena Vista Public Use Area.



The plant is also known as white sage, sagewort, western mugwort and cudweed. It will bear tiny, creamy-yellow flowers in August and September. Prairie sage usually produces clustered stems that grow up to 40 inches tall with linear leaves that are covered by a thick layer of silvery-green fuzz. Prairie sage is often heavily aggregated in pure stands 6.5 to 10 feet in diameter, with all stalks joined by underground stems called rhizomes that thicken with time. Prairie sage rhizomes and dense, coarse roots are typically found between 1 and 5.5 inches deep. Root branching in the fibrous root system is so interlaced that a firm mesh forms in the upper 2 inches of soil. Prairie sage roots can reach 27.5 inches deep!

Its foliage, stems and flower clusters are the primary source of food for sage grouse, antelope, mule deer, cottontails, chipmunks, gophers, ground squirrels, various species of mice, prairie dogs, kangaroo rats, elk and mountain sheep.

Native Americans used prairie sage as a remedy for sore throats, stomach ailments and difficulty in childbirth. As written in Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie, there are several accounts of how the Native Americans used prairie sage. The Dakotas used it to drive away evil spirits. The Omaha would wrap their smoking pipes with the sacred herb in order to cleanse them. Arikara women made a tea of prairie sage to relieve menstrual troubles. The Meskwaki and Pottawatomie had separate names for the plant, both meaning “mosquito smoke”, would burn a bundle of the sage to drive away pesky mosquitoes. They also used it as a poultice on sores. Many native tribes, including the Cheyenne, would place prairie sage along the altars and edges of their ceremonial lodges.

According to a document by the USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data & Center



at the University of California – Davis Arboretum, white sage also has other ethno-botanic uses. Primarily, white sage was used in ceremonies and rituals in the form of smudge sticks. Many native tribes, including the Plains, would add other herbs like cedar, lavender and sweetgrass to their smudge sticks. These “sticks” were actually bundles of dried prairie sage that was secured by tying the stems together. The bundle would then be lit and begin to smolder and smoke. The smoke was dispersed by hand or feathers. It is believed that the



smoke from the smudge stick would soothe the mind, body and soul of bad thoughts and sickness. Burning prairie sage in this fashion was done not only during tribal ceremonies, but also to purify people, weapons, horses, homes, tools, etc.

Today, “smudging kits” can be found at a variety of retailers – from organic grocers to tattoo parlors. They have found their way into modern homeopathic culture as well. I suggest caution, further research and interviewing knowledgeable experts before performing a personal smudging.

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~ ~ ~ ~ ~ **Eagle View Eco Center Hours ~ Saturdays ~ 12:30 - 4:30 P.M.** ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

“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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