

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

Winter 2015

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

www.scottcountyjowa.com/conservation/wapsi.php

The Wapsi River Center is owned, managed and operated by the Scott County Conservation Board

WAPSI HAPPENINGS

By: Director, Dave Murcia

Welcome Emily

Hello! I'm super excited to have been hired on as the **new full-time naturalist** at the Wapsi River EE Center. I worked here for about a year prior as a seasonal assistant naturalist. I'm excited to be a part of the improvements that are already in progress. I studied animal sciences at the University of Illinois and from there, also received a master's degree in agricultural education. With my new career underway, I hope to keep myself busy by continuing to educate people about our natural resources,



working with the wonderful volunteers, and getting my hands dirty helping to establish a beautiful pollinators' garden. This opportunity has been and promises to continue being a perfect way for me to offer my skills as well as to learn

many new things daily. They say that if you love what you do, you never work a day in your life. I'm one of those lucky few. I can't wait to see what my future with Scott County holds!

Fall Events 2014

The **Ecology Day** theme was *Woodland Wonders* and a total of 72 participants enjoyed : building a Native American woodland wickiup, Emerald Ash Borers, paper making, a woodland tree hike, and woodland creatures. The **Halloween Hike** was a *great fright*, and 31 brave participants made their way through the "haunted" woodland hike and learned about nighttime creatures.

Thanks to all who supported the annual events including the Friends of the Wapsi Center who hosted the Ecology Day lunch!



Eagle Scout Project

Eagle Scout candidate Jerod Samuelson of Durant Troop 153 has completed his project at the Wapsi River Center in support of public use at the Center. Jerod's project included planning, building, and installing a stage at the outdoor amphitheater. The direct benefit offers an enhanced, low-impact use of the amphitheater area. Visit the Wapsi to enjoy the hard work this Scout and his Crew gave to benefit the Center.



Pollinator Protection

The Wapsi River Center has officially pledged to protect pollinators as part of the *Xerces Society's Bring Back the Pollinators* campaign. By supporting the campaign, the Center pledges to: “grow pollinator-friendly flowers, provide nest sites, avoid pesticides, and spread the word”. The Center offers a wide variety of habitats including wildflowers **providing nectar and pollen** as well as **nest sites**.



Management practices include minimal/no pesticide applications and prescribed fire to improve habitat. The main mission of the Center is environmental education and will continue to spread the word on protecting pollinators and critical habitat. Take the pledge at, <http://www.xerces.org/bringbackthepollinators/> and look for future **Citizen Science** programs in our calendar in support of the pledge!

Center Improvements

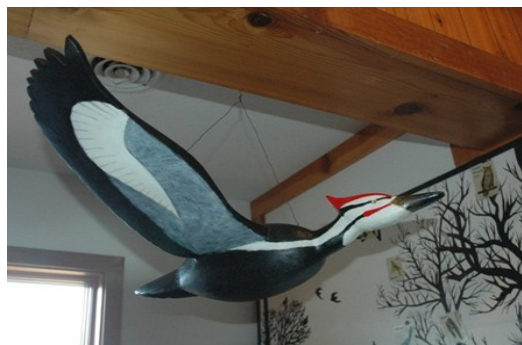
After the wind storm in June, three buildings are repaired, and most tree/brush clearing is complete thanks to **West Lake and Scott County Park maintenance staff, our Caretaker Leroy, staff, Correction Officer Don Rupe and the Community Restoration Crew, local contractors, and volunteers** throughout this season. Even with much tree damage from the storm, we are salvaging logs for current and future projects particularly at Scott County Park. Thanks to our **Friends of the Wapsi Center**, we have also replanted wildlife supporting trees and shrubs near and around the Eagle View Eco Center.

If you have visited the live animal room, you may also see **improved habitat enclosures**, ensuring optimal animal care for our educational specimens. Thank you to our well trained and experienced naturalists.

Bird Carvings Donated

The Center is pleased and thankful for a kind donation of wood bird carvings by Burlington artist **Dean Hurliman**. Dean has donated ivory-billed

woodpecker and pileated woodpecker carvings to add to our educational displays at the Eagle View Eco Center. Also added to our displays is a passenger pigeon carved by Dean and donated by our Friends group treasurer **Carol Rogers**. Thank you both for your artful contributions in environmental education at the Center. Please stop by and see the carvings on your next visit.



Fall Field Trip Attendance

Approximately 3691 students, teachers, and parents participated in 22 field trips this fall. An **emphasis on supporting the Iowa Care** will enhance future programming for Iowa school programming. 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**, you may download a **Field Trip Planner** from our website: http://www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi_education.php and contact us at (563) 328-3286.

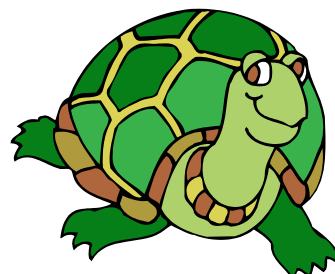
The WREN is Green!

Please remember that you may now visit our website and sign up to get the WREN in an effort to *protect, conserve, and preserve our vital resources*. Please contact us if you require a mailed version and visit us on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation>.



Sponsor an Animal

If you are interested in sponsoring an animal, please contact us at 563-328-3286 for details or visit our website.



Wapsi River Center Receives Monarch Waystation Certification!

The Wapsi River Center is now proudly certified as a Monarch Waystation through Monarch Watch. Our site offers everything monarchs need in all life stages such as milkweed, nectar sources, and shelter. In addition, our commitment to being pollinator-friendly by not using pesticides on our site allows us to maintain a quality habitat for bees and other pollinators. If you think your backyard qualifies for these certifications and you want to commit to helping protect invertebrates, visit www.monarchwatch.org.



WINTER FUN DAY

Once again, come join us for a winter wonderland at the Wapsi River Center. This event has been a wonderful way to enjoy winter activities for years at the Wapsi River Center. Snowshoeing, cross country skiing, winter bird feeding and of course the famous chili cook off has made this day a memorable experience for young and old alike. Please check our calendar for a list of this year's activities, and call to reserve your families spot (563)328-3286.



New Exhibits at the Wapsi Center

Iowa's Ice Age Megafauna

During the last Ice Age, Iowa looked very different, as did the animals that roamed it. The Wapsi River Center's new exhibit highlights some of the large mammals that were alive at that time, where their remains have been found, and how they measured up to the size of a 6 foot man. Humans who lived back then relied on these massive creatures for food and warmth – but how did they hunt them? Come discover a timeline of events from the extinction of the dinosaurs leading up to today and find out why all of Iowa's megafauna disappeared.

Citizen Science "Projects Through the Seasons"

Citizen Science is scientific research conducted by public volunteers in collaboration with professional scientists. This new display designed by Seasonal naturalist, Becky Horton, features Citizen Science projects that occur during spring, summer, fall, winter, and year round. It also features how you can get involved with citizen science projects and explains the definition of citizen science.

DECEMBER

20th ~ Cocoa Picasso: Furry Winter Preppers ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ In this kid-friendly art class, participants will learn about a wintery theme, then warm up inside by the fire with a cup of hot chocolate and bring what they learned to life in a guided step-by-step beginner painting experience. This class is targeted for kids, with help from their parent or guardian. Cost is \$5 per painting for materials. B.Y.O.M. (Bring Your Own Mug). Registration is limited to 10 painters, so please call ahead. (563) 328-3286.

20th ~ Natural Wreaths ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come to the Wapsi River Center to learn about making grapevine wreaths. Grapevine, loppers, wire and trimmings will be provided. Feel free to bring your own trimmings (seeds, nuts, evergreen branches). Please call to reserve your spot as space is limited (563) 328-3286. BYOM "Bring your own mug", as hot chocolate will be available.



JANUARY

9th – 11th ~ Annual Quad City Bald Eagle Days ~ Quad Cities Expo Center ~ The Quad Cities Conservation Alliance, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Army Corps of Engineers are sponsoring this huge event. This event features live birds of prey, and exotic animals from Niabi Zoo and the Pella Wildlife Company, a 20 foot climbing tower over 100 display booths, and of course, viewing of our national bird, the American bald eagle. The event is held at the QCCA Expo Center at 2621 4th Avenue, Rock Island, from 4:00-8:00 P.M. on Friday, 10:00 A.M.-8:00 P.M. on Saturday, and 10:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M. on Sunday. Come see us at the Wapsi River Center display. Please call (309) 788-5912 for more details.



15th ~ Wapsi River Center Friends Meeting ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Conservation Board, Headquarters – West Lake Park (Gate #3) ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

WINTER

17th ~ Cocoa Picasso: Animal Tracks ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ In this kid-friendly art class, participants will learn about a wintery theme, then warm up inside by the fire with a cup of hot chocolate and bring what they learned to life in a guided step-by-step beginner painting experience. This class is targeted for kids, with help from their parent or guardian. Cost is \$5 per painting for materials. B.Y.O.M. (Bring Your Own Mug). Registration is limited to 10 painters, so please call ahead. (563) 328-3286.



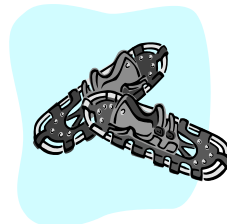
31st ~ Science Expo ~ 11:00 A.M. ~ 2:00 P.M. ~ Bettendorf Middle School ~ Join Wapsi River Center Director Dave Murcia, in supporting this year's Bettendorf Community School District's science expo with live bird of prey sessions! Come learn about these beautiful predators up close including owls and falcons.

FEBRUARY

7th ~ Winter Fun Day ~ 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. ~ 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.

10:00 A.M. ~ Cross-Country Ski Clinic ~ Come learn the basics of cross-country skiing and tour the Wapsi Center trails; if conditions allow. Participants will learn about proper skiing techniques, safety and equipment. Participants may bring their own equipment.

12:30 P.M. ~ Snowshoe Nature Hike ~ Join Michael Granger 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.



EVENTS

2:00 P.M. ~ Winter Bird Feeding ~ Come learn how to identify winter birds; plus how to attract and feed our feathered friends. Fun for all ages!



3:00 P.M. ~ Fabulous Furs ~ Join a Wapsi naturalist to learn about furbearers that live in our area. Learn how they adapt and thrive during the cold winter months. Explore the history of fur trapping, trading and how the animals were used.

4:30 P.M. ~ 8th Annual Chili Cook-off ~ The Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc. will be hosting this annual competition. Please bring your best chili creation to share, and possibly win the coveted chili cup!!! Donations are accepted, and please bring your own table setting.

14th ~ Citizen Science: Backyard Birds ~ 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Please join seasonal naturalist, Becky Horton, and show your “love” for birds on Valentine’s Day by attending our first installment of our Citizen Science series and learn about the Great Backyard Bird Count. The Great Backyard Bird Count occurs from February 13th -16th, 2015 and is hosted annually by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. Learn how to get involved with this research project and how you can conduct your own backyard bird count at home on February 15th and 16th. During this program, we will also learn about other winter citizen science projects, bird migration, and play our



“Migratory Mayhem” board game. Please call (563) 328-3286 to sign up for this informative lesson.

19th ~ Wapsi River Center Friends Meeting ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Conservation Board, Headquarters – West Lake Park (Gate #3) ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

28th ~ Cocoa Picasso: Snow Science ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ In this kid-friendly art class, participants will learn about a wintery theme, then warm up inside by the fire with a cup of hot chocolate and bring what they learned to life in a guided step-by-step beginner painting experience. This class is targeted for kids, with help from their parent or guardian. Cost is \$5 per painting for materials. B.Y.O.M. (Bring Your Own Mug). Registration is limited to 10 painters, so please call ahead. (563) 328-3286.



28th ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come join Tom Greene to discuss the history of syruping, tree identification, and then make maple candy! Fun for the whole family. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.

MARCH

7th ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come join Tom Greene to discuss the history of syruping, tree identification, and then make maple candy! Fun for the whole family. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.



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Animal Profile: Mountain Lion

By Becky Horton, Seasonal Naturalist

The mountain lion, *Puma concolor*, is also referred to as the puma, cougar, painter, panther, or catamount. They have been a hot topic in the state of Iowa both from a political and a biological standpoint. Currently, mountain lions do not have a legal wildlife status in Iowa. This means they are not listed in the Iowa Code and therefore have no protection in Iowa. There have been two legislative efforts to add the mountain lion and the black bear to the Iowa code, but because Iowa is a strong agricultural state, both efforts have failed. Mountain lions, black bears, gray wolves, and lynx, the four main large predators of Iowa, were all extirpated from Iowa in the 1860's. There have been recent sightings of mountain lions in Iowa but those sightings have been of reproductively immature 1 to 2 year old males. Mountain lions are not reproductively mature until at least 3 years of age. Most likely, these males were just wandering through or staying for short periods of time due to being pushed out of their home range from more dominant males. There are no self-sustaining breeding populations of mountain lions currently in Iowa. Also, the Iowa DNR has not 'stocked' or introduced mountain lions into the state of Iowa and there are no considerations of doing so.

Mountain lions' are very large, slender felines that are about 6-9 feet in length with their tails making up 2.5-3 feet of that length. They are generally tawny brown in color, do not have tufted ears, and their muzzles are white with a dark brown outline. Adult males can weigh 140-160 pounds and females can weigh 90-110 pounds. They have very powerful hindquarters and shoulders and a long, heavy, cylindrical tail. The last 2 inches of the tail is black. The tracks of a mountain lion are round in shape and at least 4 inches in size. They have 4 toes and a heel pad with 3 posterior lobes and a slight "M" shape on the forepart of the heel pad. Also, mountain lions have retractable claws, so there will be no claw marks on the track.

Mountain lions favorite food items are usually deer or small mammals. They rarely take livestock. To catch their prey, they ambush them and bite the throat or on the back of the neck. They usually try to eat their prey in one

sitting, but if the prey is too large, they will cache it and return later to finish it. If the cached prey becomes tainted, they will leave it for scavengers such as turkey vultures, crows, or coyotes. Mountain lions prefer fresh meat.

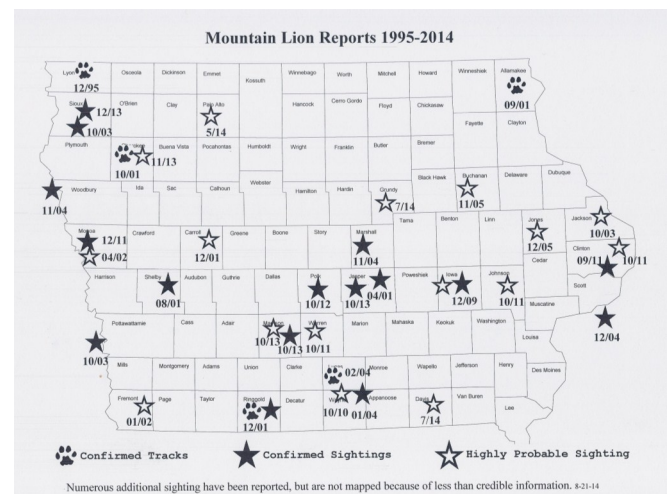
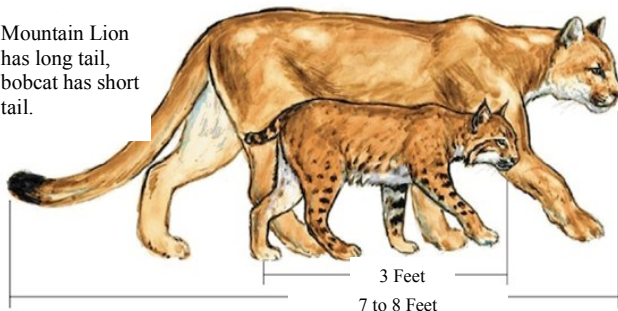
From 1995 to 2013, only 18 mountain lions have been confirmed in Iowa. In the past 110 years, 66 people have been attacked by a mountain lion resulting in 19 deaths. None of these attacks have occurred in Iowa. The home range of the mountain lion is the western and southern part of the United States and in western Canada and all of Mexico. They come as far east as Colorado and as far north as Arkansas. Every year, there are several reports of mountain lion sightings in Iowa. Usually 85%-95% of these reports are of a mistaken identity. Mountain lions are often mistaken for shepherd dogs, yellow labs, bobcats, feral house cats, or deer. In the off chance that a mountain lion encounter occurs, there are 5 suggestions on what to do in that situation:

- 1) Appear larger by raising a coat or shirt above the body.
- 2) Stand still, wave, shout and DO NOT run, as running stimulates the predator to chase.
- 3) Maintain eye contact with the mountain lion. They prefer to ambush their prey.
- 4) Gather small children and other people into a group. Mountain lions do not attack large groups.
- 5) If attacked, fight back with sharp objects and aim for the eyes.

Just remember, in general, mountain lions avoid humans. People are more likely to be struck by lightning or killed by a domestic dog than attacked by a mountain lion.

If you think you might have seen a mountain lion contact your DNR Officer. If possible please provide a picture of the animal or its footprint. More information can be found the Iowa DNR website.

Mountain Lion has long tail, bobcat has short tail.



Plant Profile: Partridge Pea

By Emily Santiago, Naturalist

Partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) is a legume in the pea family (*Fabaceae*) commonly found in our prairie at the Wapsi River Center and in disturbed, or unmanaged, areas. We spent several days wandering in the prairie this summer looking for migrating monarch butterflies to tag, so I got to know some plants that I had never taken the opportunity to examine before. What I noticed about this plant first was the narrow, almost flat seed pods. When I broke one open, the seeds were very small, as you can see in the photo with the dime for size reference. These little plants are 1-3 feet tall annuals and have blue-green, pinnately-compound leaves, which means they have a thin stem with leaflets arranged on opposite sides of each leaf. Quite adorably, their leaves will fold closed when touched, which is where they get their other common names, sensitive-plant and sleeping-plant. Partridge pea also has lovely yellow flowers marked with red in the center.

It brings bright summer color to the prairie attracting all sorts of wildlife. Of course, butterflies, bees and other insects are always fluttering and buzzing around them collecting pollen and nectar. The common sulfur butterfly lays its eggs on



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the leaves and the larvae use them as a food source. Songbirds and game birds, like the bobwhite quail and greater prairie chicken, also stop by, finding food in the seed pods and cover in the brush. The white-tailed deer also find the browse to be tasty. Although it is a nutritious food source for several native species, it can be poisonous to cattle and should be considered dangerous. This is because partridge pea leaves and seeds contain a cathartic substance, which in large concentrations can stress the



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animal to the point of death. Like other members of the pea family, partridge pea requires the presence of

microorganisms to survive. In the root systems of these plants, you will find a community of soil bacteria called rhizobia. Legumes and rhizobia have a symbiotic relationship, whereby both parties benefit from the interaction. They keep busy by converting atmospheric nitrogen to a kind that they and their host plants can use. When hosts are not available, rhizobia in the nongrowing “persister” state can survive for up to a year in the soil without food, especially if they started off with abundant resources. If times get rough, they will “hedge their bets” and spilt into two daughter cells- one of which gets the majority of the resources and becomes a persister, the other gets fewer resources, but still has the ability to grow.



Seed Pods

Like many plants, partridge pea has a history of medical use among the Cherokee and Seminole tribes. It has been used as a stimulant to help people who suffer from fainting spells and nausea, and more modernly, the root has been used in baseball to keep the players from tiring. Partridge pea may also be used as a bio-control plant in some regions for the control of pests such as mole crickets and cactus moth. The mole cricket is parasitized by the parasitoid wasp that gets the nectar it needs from the partridge pea. Mole cricket populations in areas where partridge pea is abundant have been successfully reduced. Similarly, *Opuntia* plants growing near partridge pea had less cactus moth damage than those growing farther away, possibly due to the higher predatory ant populations in the vicinity.



Partridge Pea Range Map

Winter Weather Phenomena: Sun Dogs, Moon Halos and Light Pillars

By Michael J. Granger

During winter's icy grip, weather impacts our lives in many ways. Many of us embrace the changing of the seasons as outdoor adventurers and see the beauty in nature. Winter weather can be beautiful in many aspects, from elaborate icicles, snow covered trees, animal trackways through the snow and also seeing how animals cope with the changing of the seasons.

There are also interesting winter weather phenomena. "Sun dogs" are bright spots in the sky on each side of the sun. Sun dogs have the scientific name parhelia (singular parhelion). These are seen



Sun Dogs—North Dakota:
Wikipedia

during the day and appear on the right and left side of the sun. They also appear at the same elevation as the sun. Normally they appear when the sun is setting and the sun's rays are cutting through the earth's atmosphere.

Sun dogs are caused by hexagonal ice crystals in high elevation cirrus clouds. The crystals act like miniature prisms which break up sunlight. As the sun sets and temperatures begin to drop, the crystals will settle and align themselves vertically with the atmosphere. When this happens, sun dogs appear. The inside edge of a sun dog (side closest to the sun) will often appear red in color fading outward to pure white.

Sun dogs, also called "mock suns" are not

uncommon and I have seen them on several occasions. Throughout history, this phenomenon has caused chaos, fear and intrigue. Greeks and Romans often thought of sun dogs as a sign of deity, and then later observers attributed them as forewarnings to changing weather conditions.

Occasionally if conditions are right you may also see a "22 degree halo" around the sun. It forms as sunlight is refracted in millions of randomly oriented hexagonal ice crystals suspended in the atmosphere. A 22 degree halo is large, and the radius is roughly the size of a person's outstretched hand at arm's length. The 22 degree halo may also appear around the moon and

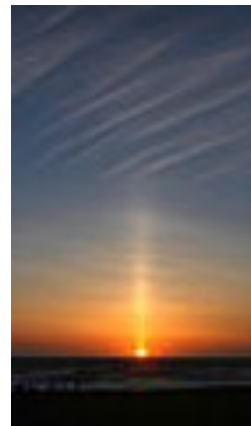


Moon Halo—Colorado
Wikipedia

is called a moon halo or moon ring. It is believed that a moon halo is a precursor to colder or foul weather.

One final apparition is known as a "light pillar". This appears as a beam of light emitting skyward from a setting sun. It is caused by light being refracted from hexagonal ice crystals. In this case, the crystals are aligned horizontally low to the horizon. These can also appear emitting from street lights or city lights.

This winter, I invite you to keep a camera handy just in case you see one of these wintery apparitions, and of course stay warm out there!



Light Pillar—California:
Wikipedia

THANK YOU

KJ Rebarcak

Dean Hurliman

Girl Scouts of America

Friends of the Wapsi Center

North Scott CSD

Jackson CCB

Wild Birds Unlimited

Lucia Dryanski

Kyle Moeller

**Don Rupe & Community
Restoration Crew**



Becky Horton

KID'S CORNER

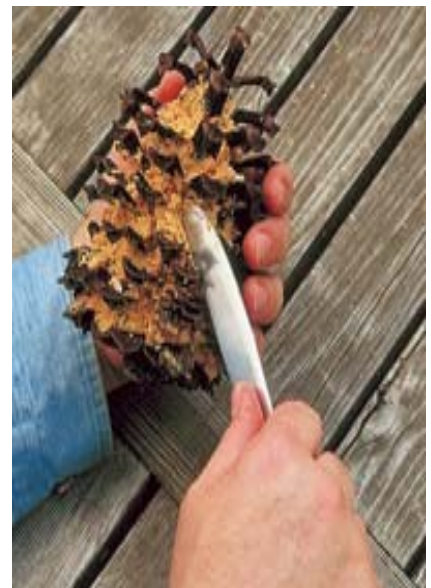
See how many animals you can identify in this wintery scene.

Pine Cone Bird Feeders:

Help your feathered friends this winter with this delicious easy to make treat. Mix in a bowl the following ingredients:

- 1 part Crisco (Lard)
- 1 part Peanut Butter (Chunky or Smooth)
- 1 part Corn Meal (helps to make it thicker)
- 1 part dry Oatmeal (optional)

After mixing the ingredients, this homemade suet can be smeared on pine cones, suet logs, or put into a suet feeder. Birds love this recipe and it will help get them through our cold Midwest winters.



WAPSI RIVER E. E. CENTER
31555 52ND AVENUE
DIXON, IA 52745
Tel: (563) 328-3286
Fax: (563) 843-2845

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**Scott County
Conservation Board**
(563) 328-3281

Members:

Rich Mohr Gene Weis Beth McAleer
John “Skip” O’Donnell Carol Fennelly

Director:

Roger Kean

**Wapsi River Environmental
Education Center**
(563) 328-3286

Staff:

Dave Murcia, Director/Naturalist
Mike Granger, Naturalist
Emily Santiago, Naturalist
Becky Horton, Seasonal Naturalist
Leroy Haeffner, Resident Caretaker

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