

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

WINTER 2017

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

Wapsi Happenings

By: Director, Dave Murcia

Center Improvements

The Center has again completed a variety of improvements this year and we eagerly await the finish of our new **"Rustic Loft" office**. The office was purchased and installed by *Design Homes, Inc.* in Eldridge, Iowa, and includes a variety of green aspects and will be ADA accessible. Please stay tuned to our next *WREN* for a final update on the office. Two new water bar erosion structures were installed on the **River Trail** in an effort to "retain the rain", while the **Osprey Aquatic Lab** had the pump replaced. Road work is underway on **52nd Avenue** in anticipation of resurfacing, please watch signs for closures or routes. You may also see continued **improved habitat enclosures**, ensuring optimal animal care for our educational specimens. Thank you to our well trained and experienced naturalists.



Photo: Dave Murcia

Fall Events 2016

This year's **Ecology Day** theme was **"Wild About Nature"**, and included the fall tree hike, making fall wall hangings, a prairie hike, and learning to throw atlatls for the Great Pumpkin Atlatl Hunt. The **Halloween "Zombie" Archery** shoot was popular again with a full attendance, while the **Halloween Hike** was a "hoot" for another full program registration of brave hikers! **Cocoa Picasso** has continued its popularity with many full events. This program brings nature and art together by exploring the Wapsi Center grounds, while our **Natural Wreath** program shares the same love of nature in a different art form.



Photo: Michael Granger

Fall Field Trip Attendance

Approximately 1032 students, teachers, and parents participated in presentations during 10 field trips this fall. An **emphasis on supporting the Iowa Core and Next Generation Science Standards** will enhance future programming for 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/field-trip-planner> and contact us at (563) 328-3286.



Winter Equipment Loan Program

The Wapsi River Center invites you to get outdoors this winter and get active by snowshoe or ski. Our cross-country ski and snowshoe loan program requires just a few steps to enjoy these healthy, low-impact, outdoor recreational opportunities.



To Use our snow shoes or X –country Ski equipment:

We require a minimum of 4” of base and reserve the right to any loan, depending on conditions.

You will be required to render your license to hold any equipment while on loan.

You must remain on Wapsi River Center property.

Equipment is available during business hours M-F 9-4 pm and Saturdays 1-4 pm- dependent on program needs and site conditions.

Cross-country skis and boots fit a variety of families, while snowshoes are sized for both adult and children, with weight ranges up to 200 pounds. Waterproof boots are suggested for snowshoes.

Adventurers **must call the office ahead of time** to plan an outing at 563-328-3286.

New Specimen/Sponsor an Animal

We are delighted to introduce a new educational specimen- a **bull snake**! Please stop in to learn more about this beautiful snake. If you are interested in sponsoring an animal, please contact us at 563-328-3286 for details or visit our website.

Thanks to all who supported the annual events including the Friends of the Wapsi Center!



Photo: Emily Santiago

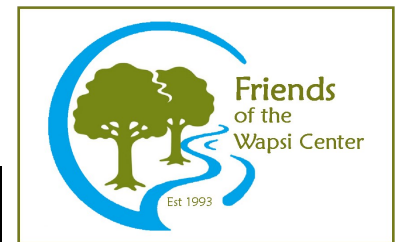
“BECOME A WAPSI RIVER CENTER FRIENDS MEMBER TODAY!”

www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/Wapsi-friends.php

The Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc. organized in 1993, is a citizens’ support group dedicated to encouraging the public use and enjoyment of the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center and to the preservation of the Center’s natural resources for present and future generations. Please contact the Wapsi River Center for more information (563) 328-3286.

YES! I want to join the Friends’ Group.

Enclosed is my contribution to the Friends of the Wapsi Center.

☐

Check Box ✓

Name _____

_____ \$10.00 newsletter

Address _____

_____ \$20.00 contributing member

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

_____ \$30.00 supporting member

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

PLEASE SEND MEMBERSHIP FORM TO:

~~~Friends of the Wapsi “Treasurer”~~~

31555 52nd AVENUE, DIXON, IOWA 52745

Contributions to the Friends are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

# THANK YOU!

Friends of the Wapsi Center  
HQ & West Lake Park staff  
Joann Denklau  
Ron Rickman  
Tom Schwake  
Jerry & Emily Hoffman

FLL "Team Knowledge", Blue Grass  
Brandi Turner  
E Resources  
Design Homes, Inc.  
MidAmerican Energy  
Floyd CCB- Fall IAN Host  
River Action  
Don Becker



## WINTER FUN DAY ~ FEBRUARY 11th, 2017 10:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center

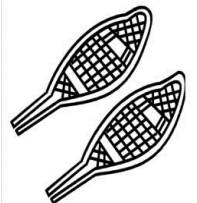


Join us for a fun-filled day of winter activities. This is an event the whole family can enjoy, so plan to come out and discover winter at its best. A limited number of skis and snowshoes are available, so please call to reserve equipment; (563) 328-3286. BYOM ~ Bring your own mug.

**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.



**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. ~ Build a Snowman Contest** ~ Have your team make the best snowman ever. We provide the carrots and charcoal! (An indoor snowy art activity will be held if there is no snow).

**4:30 P.M. ~ 8<sup>th</sup> 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!!!



# MUSHROOM PROFILE: TURKEY TAIL

By Naturalist Michael J. Granger

Let me introduce you to one of the most common mushrooms found throughout Iowa's woodlands, *Trametes versicolor*, or the Turkey Tail. I have found it along the Wapsi trails for years and it can be found growing on downed hardwood trees, and stumps throughout the United States and even in Europe.

To begin we need to have a quick lesson on living things. There are six Kingdoms of living things:

Plantae (Plants)

Animalia (Animals)

Protista (single or multicellular microscopic organisms)

Monera (Bacteria)

Fungi (yeast, molds and mushrooms)

Archaea (microbes without cell nuclei)



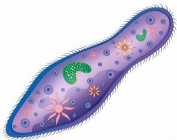
PLANTAE



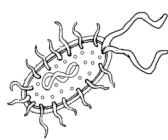
ANIMALIA



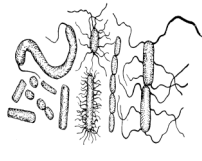
FUNGI



PROTIST



ARCHAEA



MONERA

Fungi are definitely in a group all by themselves. They may be single celled, such as, yeast or mold, or multicellular in the form of mushrooms. Mushrooms have an unusual characteristic that also separates them from plants and animals; they have chitin within their cell walls. Chitin, pronounced "KY-tin" is an amazing molecule and is a derivative of the sugar glucose. Chitin can be found in the natural world in the exoskeletons of arthropods which include: insects, spiders, crustaceans, millipedes, and centipedes. Chitin can also be found in fish scales, and the beaks of octopus.

Fungi are classified as decomposers or "saprophytes" which absorb nutrients, from dead or decaying material. In other words they do not possess the ability to photosynthesize to make their own food as in green plants and algae. Fungi can also be distinguished on their method of growth and nutrient

uptake. Fungi propagate by spores, which produce tubular structures known as mycelium that take up nutrients. When conditions are right a "fruiting body" forms which will create more spores.

Now that we have a basic knowledge of fungi, let's take a closer look at turkey tail. *T. versicolor* is a shelf polypore mushroom. First of all it lacks a stem and grows in circular or semi-circular thin "shelves" or brackets. Brackets can be found in clumps on fallen logs, stumps, or growing in rosettes. A cap's undersurface has many minute pores from which spores emerge, referring to the term "polypore".

The caps are only a few millimeters thin, somewhat flexible, and are banded with color. The bands may be brown, grey, cinnamon, blue green or even reddish orange. The outermost edge is usually a lighter off white color. Older caps may have a thin green film of algae growing on its surface. Nonliving turkey tail caps are a dull grey in color.

The turkey tail is not considered or sought after for consumption, however there is documentation on using turkey tail for medicinal purposes. It has properties which aid in reducing inflammation or swelling, fighting infections, lessening the side effects of radiation or chemotherapy, and increasing stamina and energy. It can be purchased in pill form or the dried brackets may be made into a tea.

Next time you are exploring the woods look for this amazing mushroom. It should be relatively easy to find and identify. You can look for turkey tail in any season and you can find it even while exploring in the winter. You might find it growing horizontally on a dead log or vertically on a tree stump, either way; its colorful banded brackets are beautiful!



Turkey Tail: [shoomery.org](http://shoomery.org)

# ANIMAL PROFILE: BLUE JAY

By Seasonal Naturalist, Becky Horton

It's a warmer winter day and you need to fill the bird feeder. You go outside and notice the neighborhood cat in your yard. All of the sudden, you hear a hawk and the cat runs for cover. You look around, but you don't see a hawk. Then you see the source of the call...a blue jay! Blue jays are sometimes perceived as the bully of the bird world, but they are highly social and very intelligent birds who frequently mimic the calls of hawks. This is to either provide information to other birds that a hawk is near, or to deceive other species, like a neighborhood cat, into thinking a hawk is near.

The blue jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*, is a large song bird with a perky crest that is easily identifiable by its various shades of blue, black, and white feathers. The belly of the blue jay is either white or light gray. There is a black bridle across the neck, face, and nape. This varies extensively amongst the blue jays and may help them recognize one another. The blue color in the feathers is not due to a blue pigment. In fact, if you crush a blue jays feather, it turns brown. The pigment in the feather is melanin, which is brown. The blue color is caused by scattering light through modified cells on the feathers surface. This is called structural coloration. If the structure of the feather is destroyed, the blue color disappears. Another well-known bird that exhibits structural coloration is the peacock.

The typical call of the blue jay is "Jay-Jay". This is how the bird got its name. It can also mimic many different hawk calls, as mentioned above. Captive blue jays have been known to imitate human speech and meowing cats. They can also communicate with each other by using their crest. If they are aggressive, the crest is straight up. When they are interacting with their mate, their young or other flock members in a social setting, they typically keep their crest flat against their head.

Blue jays are found in the eastern and central United States and north into Canada. They are highly adaptable birds and are very common in urban and suburban areas, especially where bird feeders and oak trees are present. Their favorite food is the acorn, the nut of oak trees. Before urban expansion, blue jays were

typically found on the edges of forests that contain oak trees. They have actually been credited with helping the spread of oak trees after the last glacial period because of their liking of acorns.

Aside from acorns, they also are known to eat insects, seeds, nuts, fruits, and grains. They create caches of food during the summer and fall so they have something to eat during the winter. Occasionally, they may also eat dead or injured small vertebrates. When caching their food, blue jays can carry food in their mouth, throat, and upper esophagus, an area called the gular pouch. They may store 2-3 acorns in the pouch, one in their mouth, and one in the tip of their beak. This way, they can cache more food using less energy!

Blue jays have complex social systems and tight family bonds. They mate for life and remain with their social mate throughout the year. The female is the only one who incubates the eggs while the male provides all the food for her and himself. After the nestlings hatch, only the female takes care of them for the first 8-12 days while the male provides them all the food. After the brooding period, both the male and female share the responsibility in providing food. The young often remain with their parents for at least a month, and sometimes two months.

Because of their aggressive nature, blue jays have been considered the bully of the bird world. They are highly territorial and will be aggressive towards humans and other birds or animals if they come close to their nest. They may also chase other birds from the feeder to get an easier meal.

If you would like to attract blue jays to your back yard, they favor black-oil sunflower seeds, corn, and peanuts. They will also readily eat milo and suet. For an easy homemade bird feeder, mix 2 cups of Crisco, 1 cup of peanut butter, and ½ cup of cornmeal. Spread this mixture on pinecones, toilet paper tubes, or small logs and roll the pinecones or tubes in birdseed. Hang this feeder outside your window and watch the birds enjoy a tasty meal!

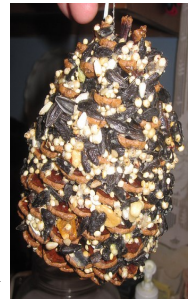
(Information: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology)



Blue Jay Range: [allaboutbirds.com](http://allaboutbirds.com)



Photo: Becky Horton



# WINTER EVENTS

## JANUARY

**6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> ~ Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days** ~ 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, exotic animals from Niabi Zoo, a 20 foot climbing tower, over 100 display booths, and of course, viewing of our national bird, the American bald eagle. This year's demonstrator is "Jim Nesci's Cold Blooded Creatures". 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.



**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Winter Carnival ~ 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. ~ Bettendorf Public Library** ~ Join Director Dave Murcia for an introduction to ice fishing at 10 a.m. & 12 p.m. in the Gilbert Room. The Carnival includes outdoor and indoor activities at various Bettendorf locations. All activities are free and open to all ages. Shuttles will make stops at all locations from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. For more information about the Winter Carnival, please call 563-344-4106.

**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Wapsi River Center Friends Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M. ~350 Grill, Eldridge Iowa** ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**21<sup>st</sup> ~ Cocoa Picasso: "Birds and Beaks" ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ In this kid-friendly class that blends nature and art, come learn about birds and what they eat. Then, warm up with hot cocoa while you learn to paint a themed picture on canvas in a guided, step-by-step experience! \$5/ canvas. Call 563-328-3286 to register.



**28<sup>th</sup> ~ 11th Annual Science Expo ~ 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. ~ Bettendorf Middle School** ~ Join Director Dave Murcia and many other local science presenters for a fun, hands-on event featuring science, technology, engineering and math activities for K-8th grade students. Learn about birds of prey, with live bird of prey sessions! Come learn about these beautiful predators up close including owls and falcons.

## FEBRUARY

**4<sup>th</sup> ~ 9:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Volunteer Round-Up ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ The *Friends of the Wapsi Center* is looking for more volunteers! Will you join us? This is your chance to learn more about the Wapsi Center and how to get involved. Share your passion for the environment with likeminded people. No experience necessary! Call (563)328-3286 to register.

**11<sup>th</sup> ~ Winter Fun Day ~ 10:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join us 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** ~ 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** ~ Come learn how to identify winter birds; plus how to attract and feed our feathered friends. Fun for all ages!

**3:00 P.M. ~ Build a Snowman Contest** ~



Have your team make the best snowman ever. We provide the carrots and charcoal! (An indoor snowy art activity will be held if there is no snow).

## WINTER FUN DAY CONTINUED:

**4:30 P.M. ~ 8<sup>th</sup> 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!!!



**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Wapsi River Center Friends Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Scott County Library System (Eldridge) ~** Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Great Backyard Bird Count ~ 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. ~** Please join assistant naturalist, Becky Horton, and learn about a global Citizen Science Project called the Great Backyard Bird Count. This annual event is hosted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society and occurs from February 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 2017. During this program, you will learn about this research project and how you can conduct your own backyard bird count at home on February 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. You will also make take home bird feeders to attract birds to your own backyard. Bird watchers of all ages can participate in this project to create a real-time snapshot of where birds are located. Please call in advance to register at 563-328-3286.

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Cocoa Picasso: "Animal Tracking" ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~** In this kid-friendly class that blends nature and art, come learn how to read tracks and other clues that animals leave behind. Then, warm up with hot cocoa and paint a themed picture on canvas in a guided, step-by-step experience. \$5/canvas. Please call 563-328-3286 to register.



**25<sup>th</sup> ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Come join a Wapsi River Center Naturalist 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

**4<sup>th</sup> ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Once again, come join us for a lesson on syruping. Fun for the whole family. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.

**12<sup>th</sup> ~ "National Plant a Flower Day" ~ Go out and plant a flower in celebration of this special day!**

**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Wapsi Center Friends Meeting ~ Scott County Library System (Eldridge) ~** Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual WQPT-PBS Imagination Station ~ 9:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M. ~ Western Illinois University - Moline, IL Campus ~** Wapsi staff will present 2 sessions on local, native animals including live educational animals. The talk will include habitats, needs, and how you may be able to support them where you live. This is a free family event and you may register at: <http://www.wqpt.org/imaginationstation/>

**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Spring Trout Release ~ Noon ~ West Lake Park ~ Gate 1 ~** Trout will be released by representatives from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at West Lake Park. This year there will be 2,000 rainbow trout released at Lake of the Hills. Come join us for this spectacular event!



**25<sup>th</sup> ~ Cocoa Picasso: Animal Architects ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~** In this kid-friendly class that blends nature and art, come learn about nature's architects and their amazing abilities to construct impressive homes. Then, warm up with hot cocoa and paint a themed picture on canvas in a guided, step-by-step experience. \$5/canvas. Please call 563-328-3286 to register.

## APRIL

**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Wapsi Center Friends Meeting ~ Scott County Library System (Eldridge) ~** Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

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

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

*A  
P  
l  
a  
c  
e*



*For All Seasons*

“**The W.R.E.N.**” is published quarterly by the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center and the Scott County Conservation Board.”

**Mailing List:** To receive a copy of the WREN free of charge, please send a postcard to the address above.



**Check us out on Facebook!**

[www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation](http://www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation)

## **Scott County Conservation Board**

Members:

Rich Mohr

John “Skip” O’Donnell

Carol Fennelly

Doug Grenier

Beth McAleer

Director:

Roger Kean

## **Phone Numbers**

Wapsi River Environmental Education Center

(563) 328-3286

Scott County Conservation Board

(563) 328-3280

## **Wapsi River Environmental Education Center Staff**

Dave Murcia, Director/Naturalist

Mike Granger, Naturalist

Emily Santiago, Naturalist

Becky Horton, Seasonal Assistant Naturalist

Sean Santiago, Resident Caretaker

The Scott County Conservation Board in the provision of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes they have been subject to discrimination, they may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Scott County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240.