

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

FALL 2018

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi

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

WAPSI HAPPENINGS

By: Director, Dave Murcia

Education

Highlights of well-attended and successful programs from last quarter include: *Birds of Prey*, *archery*, *wild edibles*, *fishing 101*, *Monarch butterfly workshop*, *cattail decoy workshop*, and *paddling* programs.



Photo: by Eric Cassling, Birds of Prey at West Lake Park

A busy paddling season for both public and school kayak programs saw **1087 paddlers** who learned about safety, techniques, ecology, and stewardship. Programs were offered at *Pride Lake* in Scott County Park, *Lake of the Hills* at West Lake Park, and the *Wapsipinicon River*.



Photo: Director/Naturalist Dave Murcia, Wapsipinicon River

Bald Eagle Viewing

Bald eagles will start arriving in November along with migrant waterfowl. The stretch of the Wapsi River below the Center supports dozens of eagles in the night roost. The best viewing will be at the Center from December through early March, one to two hours before dusk. During Center hours scopes are available to view the birds along with other wintering songbirds. Don't forget to visit the program raptors housed in the Eagle View Eco Center too!

Fall and Winter School Field Trips

If you would like to **schedule a field trip**, we encourage educators to schedule as far in advance as possible and taking an active role. Our programs are focused on supporting the **Iowa core** curriculum, including **NGSS** and **STEM** elements for Iowa schools. *You may download our field trip planner from our website to better plan a trip!*

Center Improvements

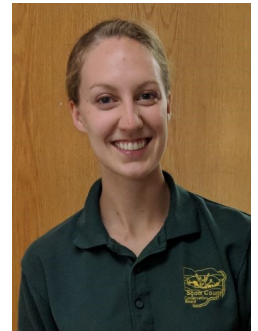


Photo: Director/Naturalist Dave Murcia
 Scott County continues to make improvements at the Center and this summer the new road was complete. Thanks to our **Board of Supervisors**, our own **Scott County Conservation Board**, and **Secondary Roads crew**. Thank you to **West Lake Park** staff as well, for new signage as well.

HELLO PAIGE!

My name is Paige. I am a nature enthusiast! What I like most is the diversity of the environment—there is always something to look at and study. As an animal lover, I am particularly fond of the wildlife. I am an eastern Iowa native, so the Wapsi River is something that I have grown accustomed to being around, and I find the area very beautiful and packed with diversity!

I am a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville where I studied biology and zoology. I am also a graduate of Western Illinois University where I received my master’s degree in geography. Throughout my schooling, I had some fantastic research opportunities. I studied a giant pacific octopus at the Dubuque River Museum and Aquarium and I did research on bats as an undergraduate. My graduate thesis was on terrestrial LiDAR, moss, and erosion. While in school I worked several different jobs, including with the Fish and Wildlife Service. I am excited to be able to share my knowledge to help people learn about and appreciate nature. When I’m not working or playing outside, I like to create things. A few of my hobbies include painting, and crafting, so you may see some of my work on display in the nature center soon.



“BECOME A WAPSI RIVER CENTER FRIENDS MEMBER TODAY!”

www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/Wapsi-friends

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.



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.

# FALL EVENTS

## OCTOBER

**6<sup>th</sup> ~ Twenty Seventh Annual Fall Ecology Day “Native American Culture and Skills” ~ 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join us for exciting day of presentations, activities, skills and crafts. Activities are geared for all ages and abilities, including hunting with an atlatl, hatchet throwing, a nature hike, dream catchers, rain sticks, cattail dolls and ducks. Smokey Bear will make appearances throughout the day. Please call (563) 328-3286 for more details and to register.



**9<sup>th</sup> ~ Fall Snapshot Sampling Event ~ 9:00 – Noon ~ Bettendorf Fire Station (5002 Crow Creek Road, Bettendorf, Iowa)** ~ The Partners of Scott County Watersheds and its members work to improve local water quality in a number of ways. Sampling our waterways is an essential component of monitoring water quality, the outcome of water quality projects, and for identification of new harmful inputs. Registration is limited and required. Please register to volunteer at, <http://sites.google.com/view/pscwsnapshot>.

**11<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Glynn's Creek Golf Course** ~ Call (563) 328-3280 for more details.

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M.** ~ Come join the Friends of the Wapsi Center to learn about current happenings and volunteer opportunities. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Trout Release ~ 10:30 A.M. ~ West Lake Park (Lake of the Hills, Gate #1)** ~ Join us for a fall trout release. 2,000 rainbow trout will be released with 200 tagged giving you a chance to win a great prize! There will also be raffle prizes where any person at the event has a chance of winning a prize. Several sponsors will be available along with DNR staff to answer questions and help you learn about fish, habitats, and



identification. Be sure to have your license, trout permit and appropriate gear. Iowa rules and regulations can be found on the Iowa DNR website. **(Prizes for tagged fish, or raffle, will only be available until 2:30pm the day of the release).** For more details please call (563) 328-3281.

**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Zombie Archery ~ 1:00 P.M. – 3:00 P.M. – Wapsi River Center** ~ Learn how to use a bow and arrow in this Halloween themed, informative, and fun hands-on class. You'll learn safety and proper archery techniques according to National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) guidelines. Children must be in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and above to participate and accompanied by an adult. Your target will be Zombies! This program is free and weather permitting. Registration is required. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register for this program.



**20<sup>th</sup> ~ The Great Atlatl Pumpkin Hunt ~ 3:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Naturalist Michael J. Granger for a chance to hunt with an atlatl, a primitive hunting weapon originally used to hunt mastodon and bison. Large target pumpkins and real pumpkins will be set out as targets. Fun for the whole family and outdoor enthusiasts alike!!! Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.



**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Halloween Hike ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Naturalist Michael J. Granger for an educational adventure to learn about mysterious and misunderstood animals. At 5:00 P.M. there will be an open fire for grilling. Please bring your own food

items and we will provide the fire and roasting sticks! The hike will begin at 6:00 P.M. with a spooky scavenger hunt afterwards. Please bring a flashlight! Family fun for everyone. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.

**26<sup>th</sup> ~ Birds of Prey ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Cordova District Library** ~ Join Wapsi River Center Director, Dave Murcia for a lesson on raptors. Discover how these amazing birds are adapted for a lifestyle of hunting for their own food. Owl pellets are available for dissection afterwards. Please call the library for more information (309) 654-2330.

**27<sup>th</sup> ~ Halloween Spooktacular ~ 9:30 A.M. – 12:30 P.M. ~ Freight House Market, Davenport ~** Come join us for a family fun event with crafts, treats, spooky creatures and a costume parade. These **Spooktacular** events are sponsored by the Freight House Farmers Market. Join Director/Naturalist Dave Murcia at the Freight House Market to learn about “*Nature’s Spooky Creatures*” including owls and snakes at 10:00 A.M.

## NOVEMBER

**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Wild Edibles ~ 10:00 A.M. – Noon ~** Join Naturalist Becky Baugh to learn about the many wild edibles in your own neck of the woods. We will focus on identifying plants, foraging basics, and preparing wild edibles. We will take a hike outdoors to identify and harvest some of the fall wild edibles available during this time. At the end of the program, you will get to sample some wild flavors! Registration is required. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register for this workshop.



**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park Headquarters (Gate 3).** Call (563) 328-3280 for details.

**15<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M. ~** Come join the Friends of the Wapsi Center to learn about current happenings and volunteer opportunities. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**17<sup>th</sup> ~ Crafting for Conservation: Natural Ornaments ~ 10:00 A.M. – Noon ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Join Naturalist Paige Ehrecke, as she teaches her first workshop in the Crafting for Conservation Series. You’ll get the chance to meet a real owl and then she’ll show you how to make an owl ornament from a pine cone. Or, you can choose from other natural-themed ornaments and decorations. Supplies will be provided. Participants must register ahead of time. Please call (563)328-3286 to register.



**22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> ~ HOLIDAY ~ Scott County Conservation Board Offices will be closed in observance of the Holiday.**

**25<sup>th</sup> ~ Holiday at the Village ~ 12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~** Bring the whole family for a celebration at Pioneer Village. See Santa and enjoy cookies and hot drinks for sale in the Soda Shop. Play some great pioneer crafts and games, while listening to music in the church. For more details please call the pioneer village at (563)328-3283

## DECEMBER

**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park Headquarters (Gate 3).** Call (563) 328-3280 for details.

**15<sup>th</sup> ~ Crafting for Conservation: Calendar Gift Bags & Magazine Gift Bows ~ 10:00 A.M. – Noon ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Join Naturalist, Becky Baugh, for our Crafting for Conservation series. During this series, we will be making arts and crafts out of either natural or recyclable items. During this session, we will be making gift bags out of old calendars and gift bows out of old magazines just in time for the Holiday season! A few calendars and magazines will be available, but participants are encouraged to bring their own old calendars and magazines. Registration is required. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register for this program.

**15<sup>th</sup> ~ Natural Wreath Class ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Join Naturalist Michael J. Granger for a lesson on wreath making. Participants will be able to fashion a wreath out of grapevine and then decorate it with natural items. Visitors may bring evergreen tree trimmings, seeds, nuts or other natural items to make their wreath a “one of a kind”. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.



**20<sup>th</sup> ~ No Friends Meeting**

**24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> ~ HOLIDAY ~ Scott County Offices will be closed in observance of the Holiday.**

## SAVE THE DATE!

**January 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, & 13<sup>th</sup> ~ Annual Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days ~ Quad Cities Expo Center ~** Remember to save the date and sign up to volunteer at the Wapsi River Center Booth. Volunteer time slots are arranged in two hour shifts starting Friday (11<sup>th</sup>) 4:00 to 8:00 P.M., Saturday (12<sup>th</sup>) 10:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M., and Sunday (13<sup>th</sup>) 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Please call to volunteer (563) 328-3286.

# ANIMAL PROFILE: THE "WOOLLY BEAR"

By Naturalist Michael J. Granger

Let me introduce to you a creature of lore and legend, the "woolly bear caterpillar". In some locations they are known as "woolly worms", and more



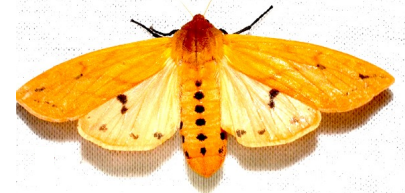
**Woolly Bears; Wapsi River Center  
Photo: Michael J. Granger**

scientifically they are known as the Isabella Tiger Moth, *Pyrrharctia Isabella*. On any autumn trip through the countryside these caterpillars can commonly be seen crossing county roads in search of a suitable place to hibernate. Most children are fascinated by caterpillars and the woolly bear's black and brown furry appearance make it extra appealing. People in the Midwestern United States and England have heard the caterpillar's reputation for predicting winter weather, and we will unravel the mystery soon, but first let's look at the life cycle of the woolly bear.

Woolly bear caterpillars are often found crossing roads while looking for a place to hibernate as a pupa for the upcoming winter. The caterpillar or larva, feeds on a variety of grasses and common plants, such as, plantain, nettles and even dandelions. Full grown caterpillars will live two to four weeks and reach a length of 1 1/2 inches long. As to why the caterpillar is so furry? The hairs are actually called setae and are more stiff than soft. This aids in protection from predators who would find eating the caterpillar painful experience. The hair doesn't insulate the caterpillar from the cold winter but actually helps it freeze during the winter. The caterpillar begins to produce glycerol, which acts as antifreeze allowing it to freeze without harmful effects. Woolly worms in the arctic actually freeze solid and have lived for several months in a state of frozenness. One particular caterpillar lived for a year frozen solid in a block of ice. Arctic woolly bears are said to take 14 years to complete their life cycle!

When the caterpillar finds a suitable spot to hibernate, usually under a rotten log or rock, the caterpillar spins a cocoon. After overwintering in its cocoon, the caterpillar crawls out on a warm spring day and feeds. Soon the caterpillar will go into hiding again to pupate. Roughly two weeks later the

pupa hatches and an adult Isabella tiger moth emerges. The adult moth has a wingspan up to 2 inches and is colored yellowish orange. No distinctive markings are on its wings but 3 rows of black spots can be found on its abdomen. The adult moths can be found throughout the summer months in the Midwest. Moths feed on flower nectar and look for suitable mates. Upon mating female moths find suitable plants to deposit their eggs, and thus continuing the cycle.



**Adult Isabella Tiger Moth;  
Bling Image Search**

To unravel the mystery as to whether the caterpillar can predict the upcoming winter, we have to look at back the colonists, who held such belief. It was said that by looking at the thickness of the caterpillars brown band one could tell the harshness of the upcoming winter. For instance, if the band was thick the winter would be harsh, or if the band was thin the winter would be mild. The thickness of the caterpillar's fur was also looked at as a prediction of the following winter weather.

Another significant event occurred in 1948 when Dr. Howard Curran (curator of entomology from the American Museum of Natural History) studied the caterpillar on Bear Mountain in New York with his colleagues and their wives. He focused on the caterpillars brown bands and then made a correct prediction about the following winter. His findings were published in the New York Herald Tribune, and the story was picked up by the national press, spreading the myth.

The truth about woolly bear caterpillars is that many do have differing thicknesses on their brown bands. A caterpillar with a thick brown band can be found next to one with a thin brown band. The thickness is a reflection of how fast the caterpillar completed its life cycle, the availability of food sources and the caterpillar's age. As to its ability to predict the winter, some people still look just for fun, and when I find one I share the story of this amazing creature.



# FUNGUS PROFILE: GIANT PUFFBALL

By Naturalist Becky Baugh

Have you ever taken a walk through the woods on a late summer or early fall day and thought you saw a volleyball on the trail? I



**Giant Puffball at the Wapsi River Center ; Photo Becky Baugh**

know I have several times. Growing up, I would often want to kick them as soon as I saw them. These volleyball like objects are actually giant puffball, (*Calvatia gigantean*) mushrooms. Now, knowing what they are, I do not want to kick them but I do want to find them as they are edible and very delicious.

Giant puffball mushrooms are often found in open grassy fields and meadows or just inside deciduous forests. They always grow from the ground, never on trees or logs. They can grow singly, in groups, or in large circles called fairy rings. The range of the giant puffball is throughout North America and Europe. They are typically easy to find because they are rather large in size and are bright white. They stick out compared to the browns and greens of the woodlands and meadows. They can range in size from a few inches similar to a softball, to the size of a volleyball, a soccer ball, a basketball, and even up to 3 feet wide! Sometimes they are slightly flattened and look like a big lump of dough. When you cut into the giant puffball, the inside flesh is solid white, similar to that of a marshmallow. The outside layer of skin is smooth and feels similar to suede. The texture of the puffball mushroom is similar to tofu. Native Americans sometimes used this mushroom as a coagulant, particularly on mouth and nose bleeds.

As the giant puffball ages, the skin develops scaly patches and cracks.



**Inedible Puffball**

The interior becomes yellow, then a greenish color and finally a brown color. When they turn brown, the mushroom sheds its outer layer of skin and the spores are ripe and ready to be spread by the wind. When they are the brown color, kids

typically like to stomp on them since they become a giant smoke bomb, but be careful not to inhale the spore cloud as it can cause respiratory distress.

As mentioned earlier, giant puffball mushrooms are edible. Before diving right in and eating this mushroom, a little research needs to be done first. When you find a puffball that you want to harvest, the first thing you need to do is cut the mushroom in half from top to bottom. If the mushroom is not pure white and featureless on the inside, it is not edible. Young puffballs look similar to the deadly Amanita mushroom on the outside. The inside tells you which species of mushroom you have. An Amanita button mushroom will have a faint outline of a cap and stem

on the interior flesh of the mushroom. Always cut small puffball mushrooms in half before cooking and eating them. Another thing to look for when cutting the puffball in half is the coloration. If the mushroom is not pure white on the inside, do not eat it. Any other color than white means the puffball is inedible and ready to release its spores. Once you have determined that you



**Inedible Amanita mushroom; button stage**



**Peeling a Giant Puffball**

have a giant puffball in its edible form, peel and discard the outer layer of skin off the mushroom. Sliced or cubed pieces may be seasoned and then fried in olive oil or butter until golden brown. You

can also batter it in flour before frying. People have also been known to use it as a pizza crust. Whichever way you want to eat it, make sure you ALWAYS cook the mushroom before eating it.

Next time you are on a hike during late summer or early fall, be sure to look for the giant puffball mushroom. When the conditions are right, they are easy to find and delicious to eat. Happy foraging!



**Giant puffball; Cubed, seasoned, and fried in butter.**

# KID'S KORNER: DREAM CATCHERS

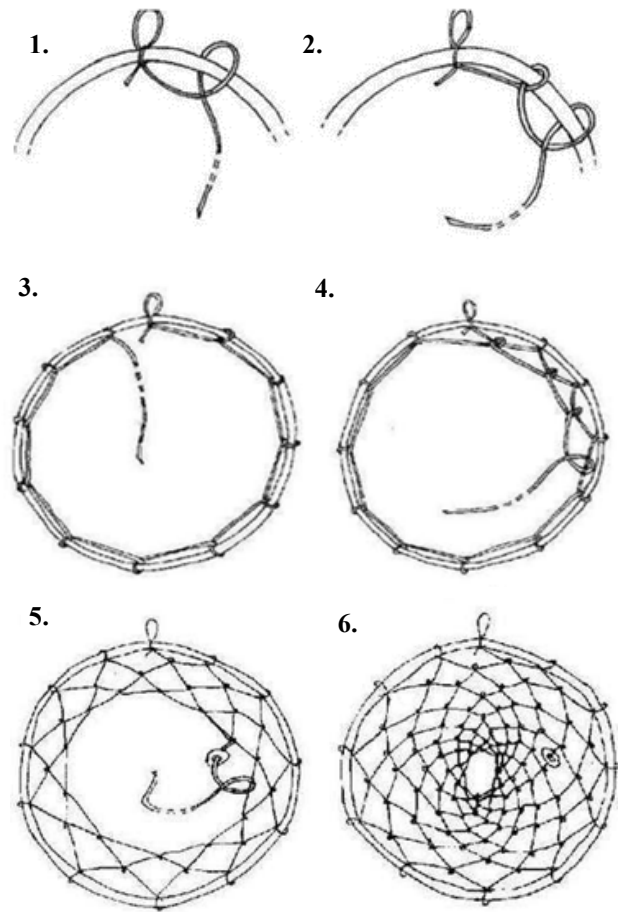
By Naturalist, Becky Baugh

The dream catcher originated from the Ojibwa tribe. The Ojibwa word for dreamcatcher “*asabikeshiinh*” means spider, which refers to the web woven over the hoop. The Ojibwa people believed the spider was a symbol of protection and comfort. According to the Ojibwa story, “Spider Woman”, a mystical and maternal spirit, served as the protector of the tribe, especially the young children and babies. As the Ojibwa tribe grew, the “Spider Woman” found it difficult to protect and watch over all of the tribe members so she created the dream catcher. The mothers and grandmothers of the tribes would then make these dream catchers to protect their children and family.

The hoop, in which the dream catcher is woven, was held to the highest esteem in Native American culture because it symbolized strength and unity. Native Americans typically made dream catcher hoops out of twigs of red willow and other trees in the willow family, as well as red twig dogwood. The string of the dream catchers was made out of the thread of the stalks of stinging nettle. Natural feathers, semi-precious gemstones, arrowheads, and beads were all used to decorate the dream catchers. Native Americans used dream catchers to protect people who are sleeping from bad dreams. They believed that the night air was filled with both good and bad dreams. When the dream catcher was hung over or near the bed, they would catch the dreams as they drifted by the sleeping person. The good dreams would know how to pass through the dream catcher, passing through the holes in the pattern and gently sliding down the feathers to comfort the sleeping person below. The bad dreams would get tangled in the dream catcher’s protective net and destroyed,

burned up with the first light of the new day. ([www.dream-catchers.org](http://www.dream-catchers.org))

To make a dream catcher, tie a hoop out of a willow branch and use yarn to tie the webbing. Follow the diagram below.



## THANK YOU!

**FRIENDS OF THE WAPSI RIVER CENTER, INC.**  
**WEST LAKE PARK MAINTENANCE**  
**SCOTT COUNTY SECONDARY ROADS**  
**IOWA, DNR**  
**DAVENPORT PARK AND REC**  
**ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY**  
**HEATHER BALLOU, ATEEC**  
**ROSS TIBBITTS OF UTICA, NY**

**GOODWILL DAY/HABILITATION, DAVENPORT**  
**JOY SHEELEY**  
**RED FERN FARM**  
**LOURDES CATHOLIC SCHOOL**  
**ERIC CASSLING, WIU INTERN**  
**QUAD CITIES ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY**  
**KWQC TV 6, PAULA SANDS LIVE**  
**WQAD NEWS 8**



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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



“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.

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Paige Ehrecke, Assistant Seasonal Naturalist  
Brandi Turner, Resident Caretaker

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