

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

Winter 2019

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

www.scottcountyjowa.com/conservation/wapsi

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

Wapsi Happenings

By: Director, Dave Murcia



Iowa 4H AmeriCorps Positions!

The Wapsi River Center is grateful for being awarded two new AmeriCorps Environmental Education Member positions to serve in our environmental education program. The partnership between AmeriCorps and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 4-H focusses on preparing Iowa's youth to be knowledgeable, active, and contributing members of society.

The Members will improve and enhance youth-focused projects through education, related to the outdoors, and include our local partners. The

program seeks to foster: the importance of Iowa's **native resources and conservation practices**, understanding the science of the natural world, experiencing the joy of outdoor activities, and developing appreciation and sense of stewardship for the environment.

Positions for the two **Environmental Educators** will be announced for one half-time position (900 hours), and one minimal time position (300 hours). Each position will offer a monthly living allowance as well as an **education award** upon completion of the term. **Please stay tuned for official announcement and how to apply.**

Fall Events 2018

"Native American Culture and Skills" Ecology Day included both skills and crafting activities with 129 participants overall! The program day included dream catcher, rain stick, and cattail crafts, while the brave "hunters" tried hitting targets with atlatls and hatchets. A native harvest feast was hosted by our *Friends of the Wapsi Center*, and Smokey the Bear even came out of hibernation!



Wapsi Center: Mike Granger shares the skill of hatchet throwing

The **Natural Ornaments** program of the **Crafting for Conservation** program series is seen below.

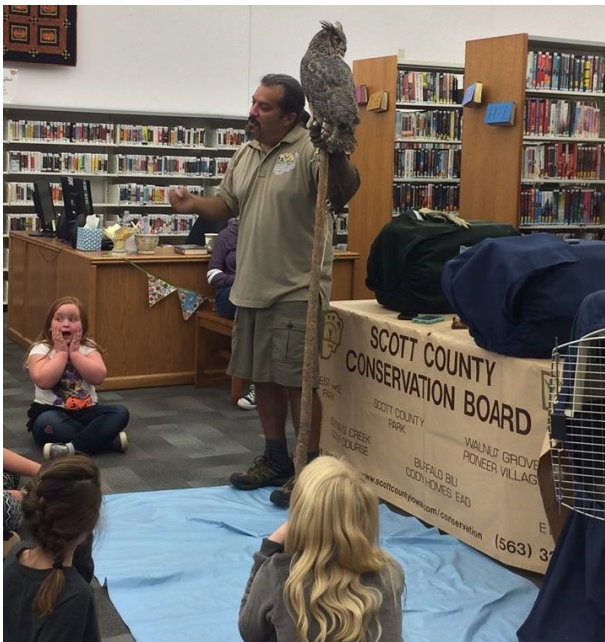


Wapsi Center: Natural ornaments

The **Fall Wild Edible Workshop** and the **Halloween Hike** were popular again, while the **Halloween “Zombie” Archery shoot** was right on target!



Our **Birds of Prey** programs continue to be a “hoot”, and always very popular!



Director Dave Murcia with “Bubo”

Sponsor an Animal

If you are interested in sponsoring an animal, please contact us at (563) 328-3286 for details.



Field Experiences

An **emphasis on supporting the Iowa Care 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 and contact us at (563) 328-3286.



Photo: Wapsi Center

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.

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

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-Sat 9 AM - 4 PM; dependent on program needs and site conditions.

Cross-country skis and boots fit a variety of families, while snowshoes are weight rated for both adult and children. Waterproof boots are suggested for snowshoes.

Facility Updates

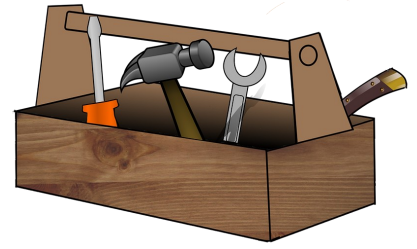
The Scott County Conservation Board has decided to repurpose the **Owl's Nest Dormitory** in support of our environmental education programming. Over the years, the



OWL'S NEST DORMITORY

rental use of the dormitory had declined, with the majority of usage not related to the education program. The facility was identified as a potential addition to the

education program by *E-Resources*, the consultants that made the recommendation in a 2017



assessment. Currently, renovations are in the planning stages and are focused on offering program space throughout the year. We look forward to exciting changes, and thank those who braved the wild Wapsi nights over the years.

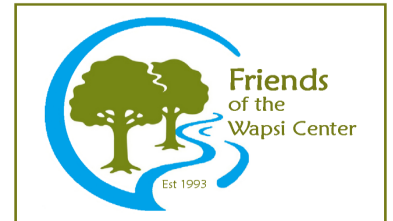


OWL'S NEST DORMITORY DECK

“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.

# WINTER EVENTS

## JANUARY

**1st ~ HOLIDAY** ~ County offices are closed in observance of the Holiday.

**9th ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M.** ~ The Scott County Conservation Board meets monthly at the West Lake Park Headquarters office (Gate 3) 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. Please call if interested in attending (563) 328-3280.

**11th, 12th, & 13th ~ Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days ~ (see times for each day below) ~ Quad Cities Expo Center** ~ The Quad Cities Conservation Alliance, Modern Woodman, Arconic, and Army Corps of Engineers are sponsoring this annual event. This event features live birds of prey, 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 to 8:00 P.M. on Friday, 10:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. on Saturday, and 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. on Sunday. Come see us at the Wapsi River Center display. Please call (309) 788-5912 for more details.



**21st ~ Holiday** ~ County offices are closed in observance of the Holiday.

**17th ~ Wapsi River Center Friends Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M.** ~ **Scott County Library (Eldridge)** ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**19th ~ Cocoa Picasso: "Backyard Birds" ~ 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. Space is limited. Call (563) 328-3286 to register.



**26th ~ Winter Wild Edibles ~ 10:00 A.M.** ~ **Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Naturalist Becky Baugh to learn about the many wild edibles in your neck of the woods. We will focus on identifying plants, foraging basics, and preparing wild edibles. After an outdoor hike, sample some of our local wild flavors. Registration is required for this work shop. Please call (563) 328-3286.



**26th ~ Thirteenth Annual STEM Expo (BIRDS OF PREY) ~ 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.** ~ **Bettendorf Middle School** ~ Join Director Dave Murcia and learn about the lives of these native raptors including where they live, how they hunt, and what you can do to support these beautiful predators. Live owls and a falcon will be on display!

## FEBRUARY

**2nd ~ Winter Fun Day ~ 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 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. Please see our special add for more details.



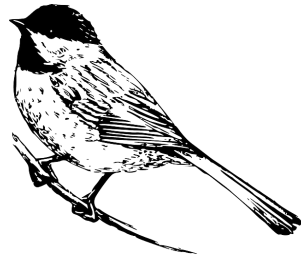
**13th ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M.** ~ The Scott County Conservation Board meets monthly at the West Lake Park Headquarters office (Gate 3) 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. Please call if interested in attending (563) 328-3280.

**14th – 17th ~ Quad Cities Outdoor Expo ~ Quad Cities Expo Center, Rock**

**Island** ~ The event is held at the QCCA Expo Center at 2621 4th Avenue, Rock Island, from 4:00-8:00 P.M. on Thursday / Noon to 8:00 P.M. on Friday / 9:00 A.M.-8:00 P.M. on Saturday / and 10:00 A.M.-4:00 P.M. on Sunday. Come visit the SCCB staff booth to pick up the latest info or visit with other vendors and get outdoors! Please call the Expo Center for admission prices and more information (309) 788-5912.



**16th ~ Great Back Yard Bird Count ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Wapsi 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 15th – 18th, 2019. During this program, you will learn about this research project and how you can conduct your own backyard bird count at home on February 17th & 18th. 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.



**20th ~ Great Backyard Bird Count ~ 9:00 – 11:00 A.M. ~ Fulton Windmill Cultural Center (Fulton, Illinois)** ~ Join Wapsi naturalist, Becky Baugh, and learn about a global Citizen Science Project called the Great Backyard Bird Count. During this program, you will learn about this research project and how you can conduct your own backyard bird count at home. 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 (815) 589-3925.

**21st ~ Wapsi River Center Friends Meeting ~ 6:30 ~ Scott County Library (Eldridge)** ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**23rd ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come join Naturalist, Michael Granger for a lesson on maple syruping. Learn the history syruping, tree identification, and sample maple candy! Fun for the whole family. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.



## MARCH

**2nd ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come join Naturalist, Michael Granger for a lesson on maple syruping. Learn the history of syruping, tree identification, and then sample maple candy! Fun for the whole family. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.

**12th ~ Reptiles and Amphibians ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Eastern Avenue Library (Davenport)** ~ Join Wapsi River Center Director Dave Murcia for a lesson on reptiles and amphibians. Learn how they live and see some live ones up close and personal. Contact the library for more details (563) 888-3393.



**13th ~ Spring Break Family Getaway Day ~ 1:00 to 4:00** ~ Cure your winter blues at the Wapsi River Center. Snow shoes will be available to use to explore our trails throughout the afternoon. Registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286. This activity is weather dependent.

**16th ~ Imagination station – Fifth Annual WQPT-PBS Imagination Station ~ 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. ~ Western Illinois University - Moline, IL Campus** ~ Naturalist Becky Baugh will present a “Wild Kratts” 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/>.

**21st ~ Friends of the Wapsi River Center Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

## APRIL ~ Save the Date!!

**20th ~ Volunteer Workday ~ 9:00 – Noon ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Save the date and join us for a spring volunteer work day. More details to come.

### Check out our Eagle View Eco Center UPDATES:

- \* New BIRD of PREY Silhouettes
- \* New Woodpecker display!
- \* See our improved animal enclosures!





# WINTER FUN DAY ~ February 2, 2019

Come join us for a wintery festival at the Wapsi River Center. Family friendly indoor and outdoor activities, including snowshoeing, live animals, furbearers, and crafting activities will be happening throughout the day. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.

## ~ OUTDOORS ~

**SNOWSHOEING TOURS** ~ Snow shoeing sessions will be held throughout the day. Sessions will start at 9:00 A.M. / 10:15 A.M. / 12:30 P.M. / 1:45 P.M. ~ Come explore the Wapsi woods in search of tracks, and wildlife on snowshoes, fun for young and old alike. Please call to reserve your time slot and number of Snowshoes!

## ~ INDOORS ~

**9:00 - 10:15 A.M. ~ LIVE ANIMALS** ~ Come discover some of our native wild creatures at the Eagle View Eco Center including reptiles, amphibians and birds of prey!

**10:15 - 11:30 ~ ANIMAL ENRICHMENT WORKSHOP** ~ Create some natural items to help improve our animal enclosures, and improve their wellbeing.

**12:30 - 1:15 ~ BACK YARD BIRD FEEDING** ~ Come learn how to make some bird feeders out of natural and recyclable materials.

**1:15 - 2:15 ~ SNOW SCIENCE** ~ Come discover some snowy experiments.

**2:15 - 3:00 ~ THE FUR-BEARERS OF IOWA** ~ Learn about some of the mammals that inhabit our area.

## ~ CHILI COOKOFF ~

**11:30 - 12:30 ~ CHILI COOKOFF** ~ Don't forget about the chili cook-off and the coveted Chili Cup.

The *Friends of the Wapsi Center* will be hosting this annual tradition. We will provide dinner and table ware. Please bring a crockpot of your favorite creation to share and possibly win the "CHILI CUP"!!



# THANKYOU!

Friends of the Wapsi Center

Goodwill Day Habilitation

Down Range Excursions  
& Kevin Flack

Hope of the Brick House

West Lake Park Maintenance

Pride of the Wapsi Pumpkin Patch  
Hope at the Brick House

Cordova IL District Library

IAN- Blackhawk County

Conservation Board

James & Jane Varcho

Vanderwalle Family

Lourdes Catholic School

WHBF News 4 & Brittany Price

Grant Wood Cub Scout Pack

Rebecca Nelson

River Action

USFWS Iowa Field  
Office



# WINTER SPORTS EQUIPMENT!

YES it is that time of year again. WINTER IS HERE !!! Come out and explore the Wapsi River Center via snow shoe or X-Country skis. The Eagle View Eco Center is open on Saturdays from 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Please call ahead prior to your visit. A host will be able to assist you with equipment check out.

**EQUIPMENT MUST BE USED ON SITE AND IS AVAILABE ON SATURDAYS FROM 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.**

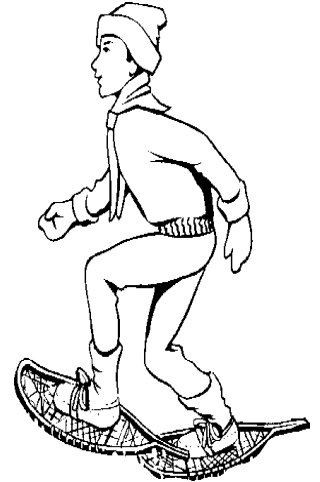
**SNOWSHOES RATED FOR YOUTH AND ADULTS ARE AVAILABLE: AGES 8 AND UP RECOMMENDED.**

**CROSS COUNTRY SKIIS AND BOOTS**

**ARE AVAILABE WHEN THERE IS A SNOW BASE OF 4 INCHES.**

**PLEASE FOLLOW TRAILS NOTED ON OUR TRAIL MAP.**

**PLEASE LEAVE A VALID DRIVER'S LISCENSE WITH US WHILE YOU ARE USING EQUIPMENT.**



## "SNOW SNAKES": A Winter Tradtion

Let me introduce to you an ancient Native American winter sport, for many tribes in the upper Midwest, the Snow Snake. Tribes include the Ojibwe, Sioux, Wyandotte, Oneida and other Iroquois people. "Snow snake" is essentially a competition which involves tossing a wooden stick or pole down a long ice trough made on the snow, or on a frozen track. According to the Iroquois oral tradition, the game of snow snake dates back more than 500 years, to before the arrival of Europeans in North America. Originally a form of communication between villages, the throwing of "snow snakes" in a trough of snow developed into a competitive sport during long winters when the long track was not used for communication. The name "snow snake" is said to have come from the serpentine wiggling motion of the poles as they slide down the icy track.

The track for snow snake is essentially a trough in the snow measuring 5 inches deep and running up a hill. Often two parallel tracks will be created next to each other for competitions. The snow snake is a wooden pole made of local hardwood trees, such as maple, oak or hickory. Poles were of differing lengths and used in different competitive scenarios based on the size of player in the competition. The longest snow snakes could be 6 to 10 foot in length. Snow snakes were carved, polished and elaborately decorated. Some players even tied feathers on the ends to add their own personal touch.

A game of snow snake is played by four teams, called "corners", who compete in trying to throw their wooden "snow snakes" the farthest along a long trough, or track, of snow. The game is divided into rounds, and in a round each team gets four throws. At the end of each round, two points are awarded to the team of the person who made the farthest throw in the round, and one point is awarded for the second farthest throw. Play continues until one of the teams wins, by achieving a certain predetermined number of points (usually 7 or 11).

For simplicity a track can be created in your back yard by pulling a log on a rope through the snow. Creating your own snow snakes, is not too difficult. For you traditionalists, you can cut and gather wooden poles, carve the bark off and decorate your snake. For a quicker solution an old broom handle would make a quick snow snake and be about the correct length for most players. Here is a drawing showing a snow snake competition. I really like this picture, but I believe there are better clothing options available. Either way, happy competing!!!



Snow Snakes :Google Image Search

# PLANT PROFILE: WHITE FALSE INDIGO

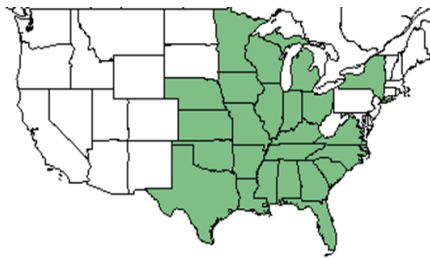
By Seasonal Naturalist, Paige Ehrecke

The prairies of Iowa are generally thought of as very vibrant and full of life. But, in the fall and winter months prairies morph from beautiful assortments colors to drab hues of brown. Just because it is not as showy does not mean that there is nothing to see!

There are plenty of plants that can be identified throughout the fall and winter. One such plant is White False Indigo (*Baptisia alba*). The scientific name is derived from words meaning “to dye” and “white.” Hence the name, White False Indigo. It is related to the traditional indigo, but it does not make a typical indigo (blue) hue when used to dye. Some say it can be used to make a paler dye, but individuals report differing levels of success.

White False Indigo is native to Iowa and can be found throughout the state. Its range also extends across most of the Eastern States. It prefers less disturbed habitats as it’s hard for it to survive in disturbed areas because of the impact of disturbances on the seed dispersion and success rate.

**WHITE FALSE INDIGO  
(Range Map) USDA**



**DRIED STEM IN WINTER**  
Photo: Michael J. Granger

The structure of this plant resembles a tree, especially when dried in the winter: one tall central stalk with a dome-like arrangement of branches and leaves forming a canopy around the top. A single plant may grow 3 to 6 foot in height. In the growing season it has blue-green oblong leaves that sort of look like a succulent plant. They grow in clusters of three.

Brilliant creamy white flowers grow on flowering stalks which grow straight up in the air. One plant will contain several flowering stalks, and are quite

showy when in bloom. The flowers do not have a scent, but they do attract a lot of pollinators, including bees and several species of butterflies. White False Indigo is also host to the wild indigo weevil beetle.

An easy identification feature for this type of indigo are the seed pods.

White False Indigo is a member of the pea or bean family, (leguminosae). So, similar to peas, the seeds are contained in pods. The pods branch off of a single tall stem, with each stem holding multiple pods. The pods start out green then turn brown then black as they dry out. They are unique because not many plants keep seed heads as long as they do in the winter. Sometimes White False Indigo is referred to as “rattlebox” because once the seed heads dry up and turn black they begin to rattle.



**WHITE FALSE INDIGO;  
SEED PODS**  
Photo: Michael J. Granger

One final note: this plant is poisonous! If herbivorous animals, including cattle and horses, eat it they can get seriously ill. However, ingestion is unlikely because it doesn’t seem to taste good to them, so the plant is generally avoided.

If you do have this plant in your pasture areas, be on the lookout for signs of toxicity or illness in your animals and contact your veterinarian ASAP if you think they have been eating it. Check out our recently updated prairie display in the Eagle View Eco Center to see an example of this plant in the winter! The display also includes new species of flowers that were not previously displayed.



**FLOWER SPIKES  
IN SUMMER**  
Illinoiswildflowers.info



# ANIMAL PROFILE: RED BREASTED NUTHATCH

By Naturalist, Becky Baugh

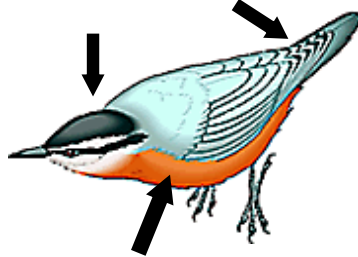
This winter, we have seen an uncommon visitor to our bird feeders. It looks similar to one of our more common species, but is smaller and feistier. The red-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) is a smaller, more colorful cousin to the more common white-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) seen here year-round. When researching the red-breasted nuthatch, it



**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH**  
Photo: Becky Baugh

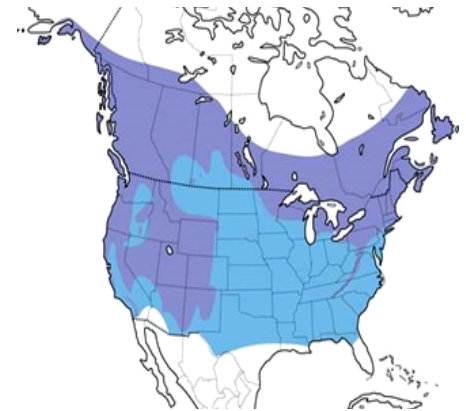
is described as an intense bundle of energy that can be aggressive and dominate larger birds at the feeder. After watching a few of the red-breasted nuthatches at the feeders at the Wapsi River Center, I would have to agree with that statement. They are very intense bundles of energy that are highly entertaining to watch. They even stand their ground to the larger woodpecker species that visit our feeders.

The male red-breasted nuthatches are blue-gray birds with a rich rusty-cinnamon underpart and a black cap, a black stripe through their eye, and a white stripe above their eye giving their head a zebra pattern. Females are similar in color except their underparts are a lighter rusty-cinnamon color and their cap is more of a gray color. Red-breasted nuthatches are noticeably smaller than the white-breasted nuthatch. They are compact with almost no neck, a plump, barrel-chested body, short tail, and a sharp expression accentuated by its long, pointed bill. Their flight is bouncy and short and they usually move quickly over trunks and branches by creeping up, down, and sideways without leaning against their tail.



They prefer mature boreal forests and mountains. Year-round, they can be found throughout Canada and along the west coast of the U.S., in higher elevations of the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains,

and in the New England states on the east coast. In winter, some migrate south and you can find them in conifer trees such as spruce, fir, and hemlock, or in deciduous trees. They typically travel with chickadees, kinglets, and woodpeckers. Their diet includes insects and seeds. In the summer, they mainly eat insects and spiders, and in the winter they mainly eat



**NON BREEDING**  
**YEAR-ROUND**

Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
[www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)

seeds. When the winter food crop of spruce seeds becomes scarce, the red-breasted nuthatches migrate in large numbers to the south. This is called an irruption. Scientists are claiming this will be an irruption year for the red-breasted nuthatches due to food scarcity and competition. They also believe it will be an irruption year for the snowy owl, purple finches, and common redpolls.

In the summer when these birds are building a nest, they are one of the few species of birds besides the woodpeckers that excavate a cavity in the side of a tree. They typically choose aspen trees since they are softer wood, but will also excavate nests in completely dead trees, dead parts of live trees, or trees with broken tops. To protect the nest, red-breasted nuthatches plaster resin globules from conifer trees around the entrance of the nest hole. The resin helps keep out competitors or predators. They avoid getting stuck to the resin themselves by diving directly through the hole of the nest cavity. When building the nest, red-breasted nuthatches are known to steal nest-lining material from the nests of neighboring birds.

If you would like to take advantage of the irruption year for the red-breasted nuthatch, but you don't live near any conifer trees, place some suet cakes or peanut feeders around your yard. These birds, along with other birds, will never say no to lard, seed, peanuts, and peanut butter during the winter months. Come out to the Wapsi River Center this winter, and you may get to see the red-breasted nuthatch at one of our feeders! Happy birding!!!

**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.

### **Scott County Conservation Board**

Members:

Rich Mohr                                      Doug Grenier  
John “Skip” O’Donnell                      Beth McAleer  
Carol Fennelly

Director:

Roger Kean

### **Phone Numbers**

Wapsi River Environmental Education Center  
(563) 328-3286

Scott County Conservation Board  
(563) 328-3280

Email: [wapsicenter@scottcountyiowa.com](mailto:wapsicenter@scottcountyiowa.com)

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

Scott County:

Dave Murcia, Director/Naturalist  
Mike Granger, Naturalist  
Becky Baugh, Naturalist  
Paige Ehrecke, Assistant Seasonal Naturalist  
Brandi Turner, 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.