

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

SPRING 2020

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education

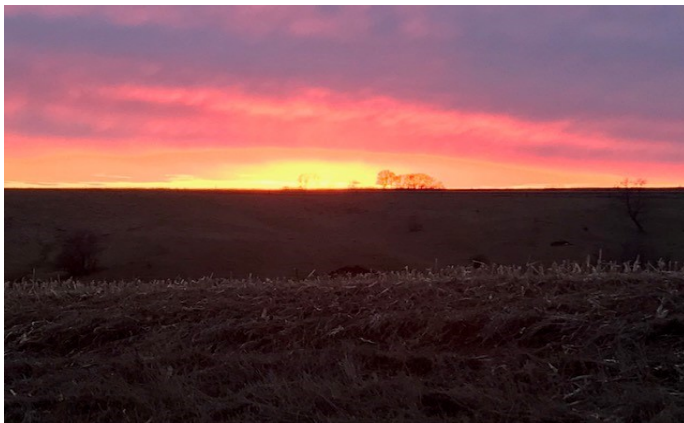
www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi

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

WAPSI HAPPENINGS

By: Director, Dave Murcia



Sunset at the Wapsi River Center

The Call of the Wild

Can you hear it? Nature is calling us, to reconnect, for peace, for restoration.....for healing. In this time of stress and anxiety, we all are searching for grounding, for our health and wellness. As the Iowan born ecologist **Aldo Leopold** stated, **"I am glad I will not be young in a future without wilderness."**

At this time, the professionals of our nation's parks, are working diligently to maintain safe, accessible, healthy, and educational spaces to reduce stress and improve mental and physical health. *The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)* states " We believe that many parks, trails and open spaces can continue to be used in a safe manner that

allows people to enjoy the mental and physical health benefits these spaces provide. In all instances, we recommend people follow local, state and national ordinances and guidelines regarding the use of these spaces and recognize that these vary from community to community. "

At this time, and until further notice, our Scott County Conservation **parks are open for you, as essential paths to wellness.** We greatly appreciate your support and trust, and we want the public to be able to continue to enjoy the outdoors as an opportunity to enhance both your physical and mental health, especially during this period that can create increased anxieties. **Please visit our website for specific information on what we are doing to make your nature adventure as safe and enjoyable as possible:** <https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation> .

Scott County Conservation specifically at the **Wapsi River Environmental Education Center** is evolving to offer **educational programming by internet!** These offerings may include educational **videos/webinars** for public and schools, supporting **literature** (worksheets, DIY crafting instructions, wild edible recipes, etc.), or simply **nature based phenomena!** Please search our website at: <https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi/education> , and our Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation/> for upcoming programming!

On behalf of **Scott County, the Scott County Conservation Board,** and staff at the **Wapsi River Center,** I thank you. I thank you for your commitment to our natural



world, our generation, and to the next generation of stewards. I propose this challenge to you.....think of sustaining our lives today, in a way that encourages grounding ourselves, in a holistic and authentic way that sustains or lives now, and into the future. By this, I mean to say, how can you live your life, by including the very intrinsic value of our natural world.

How many of you have supplies of last year's garden? Have knowledge of organic whole foods? Safe water supplies? Know where the fish are running? Can ID local seasonal wild edibles? Can season fire wood? Raise honey bees? Craft using local resources? Know how to build a rain barrel? Have a recipe for all natural home and health products? Have knowledge of travel using unconventional means between communities (bike, hike, water trails)?

Nature does not close! By bathing yourself in nature, we can maintain a level of healing in this current age, while exploring in our natural world. Here is a simple list to start your adventure:

- Plant a garden (vegetables/fruits/nuts)**
- Learn about wild foraging**
- Go fishing/hunting**
- Build a rain barrel**
- Hike**
- Nature photography**
- Canoeing/kayaking**
- Crafting- birdfeeders/houses, baskets, hiking sticks, upcycle, natural home & health items**
- Backyard meditation**
- Outdoor Yoga**
- Reading**
- Nature journaling**

It is this very time in our lives that we are reflecting on how we are to cope with this event, and more importantly, how do we maintain our lives, and into the future?

“When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect”- Aldo Leopold

Winter Events 2020

Quad City Bald Eagle Days included educating about 1055 students, teachers, and parents

on the school day, and our booth saw about another 600 public visitors over that weekend! Our booth showcased our live great horned owl and fox snake, while focusing on winter animal homes including native cultures. We would like to thank our *Friends* members, and all the **volunteers** for assisting with the booth.



Assistant Naturalist Paige Owings and ambassador Bubo



Naturalist Mike Granger and snow shoe adventurers

Winter Fun Day had 57 brave participants overall, with snow! The event started with a snow shoe trek and no waste bird feeders, followed by a winter bird hike and grapevine baskets. Congratulations to **Mike Wendt** of Wheatland for his winning chili recipe! Thank you to our volunteers and *Friends* members for supporting the event!





Chili cook-off winner Mike Wendt (back right) of Wheatland with Friends members



Grapevine baskets during winter fun day



**Naturalist Mike Granger
“enforcing the fishing rules”**

The 2020 Quad Cities Outdoor Show this past February saw many brave visitors at our booth. Thanks to all SCCB park staff, that shared West Lake Park lake restoration questions. Cabin rentals, fishing/hunting, and program opportunities were shared as well. The fish I.D. board was “a keeper” with the kids, young and old alike!

School and Public Programs

The Wapsi Center takes an interdisciplinary approach to environmental education and maintains **100% satisfaction ratings** through comments cards and evaluations. The Center also meets at least one **Iowa Core** requirement for all Iowa school programs surveyed, while current efforts are now focused on **NGSS/STEM** standards. The Center’s staff can help plan your field trip to meet educator needs. If you are an educator who wants to schedule a field trip, give us a call at (563)328-3286.

Life Rank Candidate Service

Sam Dickman is with Boy Scout troop 203 out of Long Grove. He is Star rank working on Life rank. As part of a service project for rank advancement, he chose to build Leopold benches for the Wapsi Environmental Center. Sam enjoys doing all things outdoors including hiking and camping, hunting and fishing. He felt this project will be a perfect fit and enjoyed being able to help.



Pay Back Mother Earth

The year 2020 brings the **celebration of 50 years of Earth Day!** The earth is showing, and possibly, telling us, we need to do our part to be mindful of caring for our natural world. After all, it is the only planet we live on! Whether your interests lie in recreation, arts, food, travel, wildlife, etc., please take a moment to reflect on how you impact this planet.

At the Wapsi River Center of Scott County Conservation, along with local partners, there are stewardship events that you can be a part of. During our Volunteer Stewardship Workday, participants get a chance to give back to the earth in the following possible projects: remove invasives, plant, mulch, trim, beautify the campus grounds, pick up litter, etc. Current event partners are listed on the following page.

I QUAD CITY I
EARTH
WEEK

2020
50TH ANNIVERSARY

April 22, 2020: The 50th Anniversary of Earth Day!

In celebration of Earth Day 2020, local cities passed Earth Month proclamations and twenty local organizations planned a series of events. While many events will be postponed by the virus outbreak, we cannot forget the Earth's own crisis. Taking action to heal our planet must be a part of any plan to heal ourselves. Watch for rescheduled celebrations this summer, and remember that **every day is Earth Day**.



City of Davenport, East Moline Public Library, Family Museum, Figge Art Museum, Freight House Farmers Market, Humility of Mary Center, Living Lands and Waters, Metropolitan Community Church, Moline Public Library, Nahant Marsh, Niabi Zoo, Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat, Progressive Action for the Common Good, QC Botanical Center, QC Interfaith, QC Earth Coalition, River Action, River Cities' Reader, Rock Island Public Library, Schuetzen Park, Sierra Club Eagle View Chapter, Scott County Conservation, Waste Commission of Scott County, Western Illinois University, Wapsi River Center



HELLO JAMES

Hello! My name is James Lasher. I'm a student at St. Ambrose University and I'll be interning at the Wapsi River Center during the spring season! At St. Ambrose, I am majoring in English and Biology. I also have an environmental studies minor, which led me here to the Wapsi River Center! I'm currently considering future work that might allow me to meaningfully fulfill my passion for the outdoors, such as careers in conservation or environmental law.

My relationship with nature is founded in hunting and fishing with my dad while I grew up in Scott County. This kind of upbringing exposed me to nature's wonders at a very young age and cultivated in me a passion for learning from the rich and humbling education that the natural world's limitless complexity provides. Today, I continue to enjoy these hobbies of hunting

and fishing as well as cooking wild game, hiking and camping throughout Iowa's natural places and beyond.

My studies at St. Ambrose and other learning opportunities such as this internship at the Wapsi River Center continually develop my understanding of nature. Every new thing that I take in from these organizations enriches my experiences and interactions with the natural world. I am very excited to continue learning from the Wapsi River Center so that I

might better protect our natural places and help to sustain a healthy relationship between people and our shared environment in future.



SPRING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

APRIL

Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village Season Opens ~ Until further notice opening season remains postponed. Visitors may tour the site from 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. through October 31st. Call (563)328-3283 for more information.

Buffalo Bill Cody Homestead ~ Until further notice opening season remains postponed. Visitors may tour the site from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. through October 31st. Call (563)225-2981 for more information.

8th ~ 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.

16th ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ Wapsi River Center ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563)328-3286.

18th ~ Earth Day Volunteer Workday ~ 9:00 – Noon ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join the *Friends of the Wapsi Center* and Staff for a celebration of Earth Day for our annual Spring Volunteer Workday. The workday will focus on habitat clean-up and sprucing up the facilities for upcoming events. There will be work for people of all ages and abilities. Please bring appropriate clothing, work gloves, and a water bottle. A light lunch will be provided by the *Friends of the Wapsi Center*. Please call (563)328-3286 to register your family.



22nd ~ Earth Day, 50th Anniversary

25th ~ Natural Health and Home ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come join Wapsi River Center staff and Iowa 4-H AmeriCorps Environmental Educator, and learn to become more sustainable by creating your own health and home products made

with natural ingredients. Creating your own health and home care products is cost effective, customizable, and a more sustainable solution to buying products with harsh chemicals...plus it is fun! We will focus on creating some spring cleaning-type items (hand sanitizer, dusting spray, multi-purpose cleaner, and soap bars). This program costs \$15/person. The fee covers ingredients for all products. Please provide your own containers to take the products home. You will need: 2 spray bottles *(glass is best, 8-16 ounces), a reusable squeeze bottle for the hand sanitizer (ex: travel shampoo bottle or empty pocket hand sanitizer), and a small container to transport the soap home. Supplies are limited, so please call to register (563)328-3286.



MAY

2nd ~ 360 Trail Project Spring Edition ~ 9:30 A.M. – Noon ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Iowa 4-H AmeriCorps member for a *free* day of hiking and orienteering! Participants will learn how to read use a map and compass, then take to the trails and capture 360° photos to show off what the Wapsi River Center trails have to offer in the spring! This event is family friendly. Please bring a reusable water bottle and dress for the weather. Registration is required by calling (563)328-3286

2nd ~ Spring Wild Edible Workshop ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ 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 spring wild edibles available during this time. At the end of the program, you will get to sample some wild flavors! Please call (563)328-3286 to register.



2nd ~ Spring Wildflower Hike ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Join Naturalist Michael Granger for a lesson on spring woodland wildflowers at the Wapsi River Center. May apple, bloodroot, and hepatica are just some of the wildflowers to discover. Please wear sturdy waterproof shoes for this woodland adventure. Please call (563)328-3286 to register.

2nd ~ Frog and Toad Chorus ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come learn about the frogs and toads of Iowa and experience the sounds of the season, in search of the frogs and toads which inhabit the Wapsi River Center. Please bring a flashlight and waterproof footwear. Please call to register (563)328-3286.



3rd ~ World Migratory Bird Day 2020 ~ 10:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M. ~ QC Botanical Center, Rock Island, IL. ~ Join Naturalist/Director Dave Murcia from the Wapsi River EE Center for a presentation on **Birds of Prey!** The program will include biology, ecology, habitats, with live owls! Birds Connect Our World will follow the journeys of migratory birds, exploring the ways we track their migrations, from geolocators and banding, to feather studies and surveys, examining the threats they face along the way and highlighting the communities on the ground that are working to protect them. This event is open to all ages at no charge and no RSVP is necessary. Regular admission for all visitors applies (3:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.)

5th ~ Spring Snapshot ~ 8:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M. ~ Davenport Public Works building (1200 E 46th St., Davenport, IA). ~ *Partners of Scott County Watersheds* will be hosting its annual Spring Snapshot volunteer water quality monitoring event with groups of volunteers testing around 60 sites in Scott County for nitrogen, phosphorus, chloride, pH, temperature, and turbidity, and macroinvertebrates, among other parameters. Our volunteers come from many different educational backgrounds and age groups, and no previous experience is necessary! Your hard work will contribute to over 20 years of water quality data in Scott County! Volunteers under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. This event is free to attend, and volunteers will receive a free t-shirt and pizza lunch. Please RSVP at <http://xstreamcleanup.org/upcoming-events> to reserve your spot. Contact info@partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org with any questions.



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.

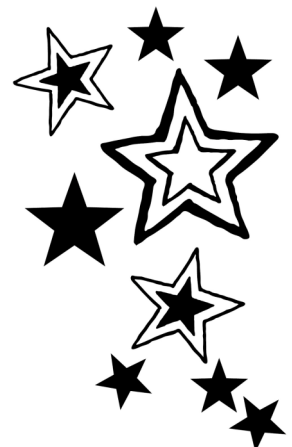
16th ~ Fly Fishing 101 ~ 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. ~ Pride Lake (Scott County Park) ~ Come join the **Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association** and Iowa 4-H AmeriCorps member for a day of fly fishing! Participants will learn casting and fly fishing basics, then participants will have a chance to test their new skill by trying their fly fishing luck at Pride Lake (located in Scott County Park). This program is free and family friendly. Participants are encouraged to bring their own rods, a reusable water bottle, and dress for the weather. Space is limited – registration is required by calling (563)328-3286.



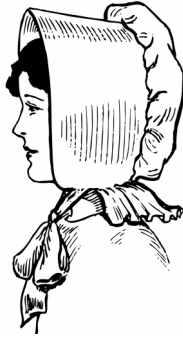
16th ~ Spring Bird Hike ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Birds are already starting to migrate back through our area. In May we should see even more! Come out to the Wapsi Center to learn about some local birds and some others that may be passing through on their migration. We will have a brief presentation on the various birds, then get outside and explore to see what we can see. This program is FREE and suitable for the whole family! Please call to register (563)328-3286. Hike will be weather dependent.



16th Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Beginning at sunset, **St. Ambrose University** opens its observatory to the public for a night of stargazing. Visitors may use the observatory's telescopes or bring their own. This event is free of charge. For more information, contact Robert Mitchell at MitchellRobertC@sau.edu or (563)333-6141, or go to the AmbroseAstro Facebook page. On the day of the event, the same number may be called for a recorded message that will either confirm the event or report a cancellation.



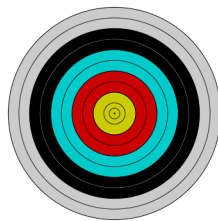
24th & 25th ~ Pioneer Village Heritage Days ~ 11:00 A. M. to 5:00 P.M. ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village ~ Enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of yesteryear! The past will come to life at the Village as interpreters and actors recreate pioneer life. There will be pioneer craft demonstrations, folk music and performances by the **Wapsi Wranglers** and Kickapoo Indian Dancers. Admission is \$2 for Adult and \$1 for Children. Please call (563) 328-3283 for more information.



25th ~ HOLIDAY ~ County offices will be closed in observance of the Holiday.

27th ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park (Pride Lake) ~ Join the Wapsi River staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions, weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register for a seat at (563)328-3286.

30th ~ Archery Basics ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Learn how to use a bow and arrow in this informative and fun hands-on class. You will learn safety and proper archery techniques according to **National Archery in the Schools (NASP)** guidelines. Children must be in the 4th grade and above and accompanied by an adult to participate. This program is free and weather permitting. Please call (563)328-3286 to register.



JUNE

5th - 7th ~ Free Fishing Days ~ Let's go fishing! During these three days, Iowa residents may fish and possess fish (within legal limits) without a fishing license.

6th ~ Fishing Clinic ~ 9:00 – Noon ~ West Lake Park (Rolling Hills Shelter) ~ This program is exclusively sponsored by **The Quad City In-Fisherman** and is part of the Iowa DNR FISH IOWA angler education program. Open to Scott County residents grades K-6. Children under 9 must

be accompanied by an adult, moms and dads are encouraged to attend. All poles and tackle are provided. Registration begins at 8:00am. Please call for current details (563)328-3281.

9th ~ Raptors Along the River, Channel Cat Talks ~ 9:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M. ~ Channel Cat Landing, 2951 E. River Drive, Moline, IL ~ Join Wapsi River Center Director Dave Murcia, to learn about birds of prey in our area: habitats, ecology, and human impacts to these awesome predators. Be sure to bring your kids and see a live raptor from the **Wapsi River Center** up close! Call River Action to register at (563)322-2969.

10th ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park (Pride Lake) ~ Join the Wapsi River staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions, weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register for a seat at (563)328-3286.



10th ~ 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.

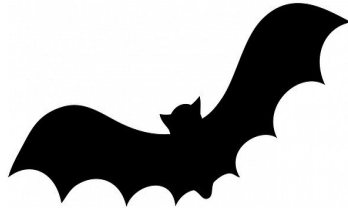
11th ~ Raptors Along the River, Channel Cat Talks ~ 9:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M. ~ Channel Cat Landing, 2951 E. River Drive, Moline, IL ~ Join Wapsi River Center Director Dave Murcia, to learn about birds of prey in our area: habitats, ecology, and human impacts to these awesome predators. Be sure to bring your kids and see a live raptor from the **Wapsi River Center** up close! Call River Action to register at (563)322-2969.

13th ~ Pollinator Workshop ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Learn about the cause and effect of the decline in bee populations through **The Great Sunflower Project**. You will get to participate in a pollinator count and then make insect hotels that you can take home and install in your own garden using recyclable items.



empty soup or pasta cans for the insect hotels. Please call (563)328-3286 to register for this workshop.

13th ~ Bats 101 ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center
~ Head out to the Wapsi Center to learn about our local bats! Activities include a small lesson, campfire roast (hotdogs and s'mores provided by the *Friends of the Wapsi Center*), building bat houses, and an evening hike. (Hike and campfire weather-dependent). Limited space for building bat houses. \$10 per house (BYOH – Bring Your Own Hammer) Please Call to register (563) 328-3286.



18th ~ Friends of the Wapsi River Center ANNUAL Meeting ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Lake View Shelter (West Lake Park Gate #1) ~ Join us to learn more about the *Friends of the Wapsi Center* group. Learn about current events and volunteer opportunities. A main dish will be provided. Please bring a side dish to share. Please call (563)328-3286 before the event, for more information.

27th ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Beginning at sunset, **St. Ambrose University** opens its observatory to the public for a night of stargazing. Visitors may use the

observatory's telescopes or bring their own. This event is free of charge. For more information, contact Robert Mitchell at MitchellRobertC@sau.edu or (563)333-6141, or go to the AmbroseAstro Facebook page. On the day of the event, the same number may be called for a recorded message that will either confirm the event or report a cancellation.



29th ~ International Mud Day at the Wapsi ~ 11:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come join Wapsi River Center staff for a day full of muddy fun to celebrate International Mud Day! Learn about the fun and unique animals that live in the mud in your very own backyard or local park. Participants are encouraged to get down and dirty by rolling around in a giant mud pit! This mud-tastical event will include a wide variety of activities for the whole family! Participants are encouraged to wear clothes that can get muddy. It is also recommended to bring a change of clothes or towel and a water bottle.



Friends of the Wapsi Center
Lucia Dryanski
Rick Rouse
Mike Wendt
Ryan Anthony- USFWS
James Lasher- SAU intern
Sam Dickman - Life rank BSA
(Troop 203)

QC Women's Outdoor Club
Our Lady of Lourdes Elementary
Tami Finley, Walcott Library
Angela Meyer, Backwards Yoga
Stacey Schuerman, Yoga for
Peace LLC
Mike & Ann Held
Tim Garner
Brad Jipp (Triple B
Construction
Corporation)



PLANT PROFILE: DANDELION

By Assistant Naturalist Paige Owings

It is finally warming up outside and you decide to go take a leisurely stroll. Wait, is that something yellow? Oh! A dandelion!

I don't know about you, but to me it is a very welcome sight! I love seeing those bright yellow flowers (yes, that's right, I said "flowers" not "weeds") after so many months of seeing dull greys, browns, and whites.

It seems that no matter where you are, you are likely to see these flowers. They are extremely widespread throughout the US and are found on 6 out of the 7 continents! They are thought to be native to Eurasia, but research is still underway.

So why would I not see dandelions as a nuisance weed? Because I have learned their value



Leaves, Flower and Seed Heads

for our ecosystem. For example, since they are one of the first flowers to begin blooming, they are an essential food source for pollinators (like honey bees!) as well as beetles, butterflies, and birds. We at the Wapsi LOVE

bees! Bees

provide us with many food items including (but not limited to) honey, almonds, and several fruits.

Also, did you know that dandelions have many practical uses for people? All parts of this plant are edible! Dandelions have been used for medicinal purposes for centuries. Those pretty yellow flowers are high in magnesium, so when infused into a carrier oil, they can help reduce inflammation of sore muscles, among other things. Ever had dandelion greens in a salad? They are rich in vitamins. The roots can be used to make a "dandelion coffee" drink. **BUT** you don't want to use this plant (or any plant!) if you can't identify it! Read on for more!

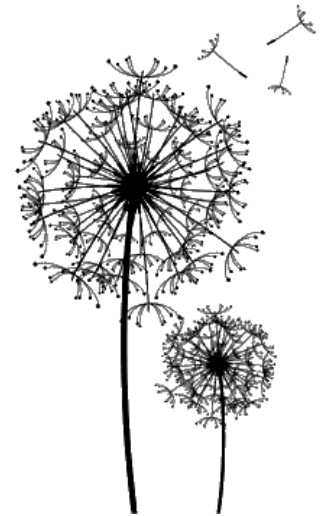
Dandelions are easily recognized by their yellow flowers that resemble a half of a pom pom. They can vary in size from about 1-2 inches in diameter. When the flowers mature, the seeds are individually carried away on the wind by their own little "parachutes".

The dandelion (Latin name *Taraxacum officinale*) has multiple possible origins for its name including French. Dandelion is likely derived from the French term 'dent de lion' or 'lion's tooth' as the leaves are said to resemble the teeth of a ferocious lion. Dandelion leaves are basal (all growing from the same spot in the ground) and have ragged edges. There are multiple possible origins for its name including medieval Latin or German, but all seem to have this influence in common.

The stems are hollow and excrete a white milky substance if broken. They typically have one very long, sturdy taproot that can be hard to remove from the earth. When trying to pull a dandelion, if you do not remove the whole thing, the plant can regenerate from what is left of this root.

In addition to having a positive identification, you should also not use any part of the dandelion if you are unsure if it has been sprayed with herbicide or pesticide. These flowers on their own provide many potential health benefits, but if they are contaminated they could cause you harm, so use caution. Spraying them also causes harm to all the other species that rely on these flowers for their first food of the spring.

Now you know these little yellow flowers pack a real punch! So, when you start to see dandelions this season, please try to remember all the value they provide and leave them there for the wildlife to enjoy. Maybe even consider using them for yourself! And please reconsider spraying them. Nature will thank you!



Seed Heads



THIS!



NOT THIS!

ANIMAL PROFILE: EASTERN SONG SPARROW

By Naturalist Michael J. Granger

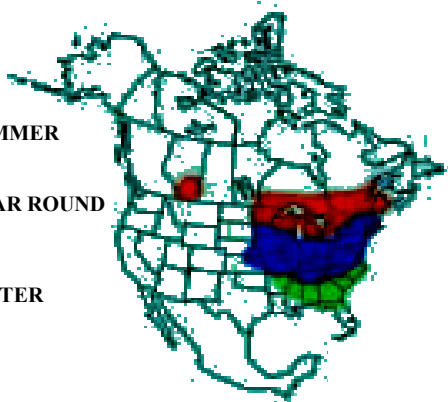
While hiking recently I saw a common sparrow that is found in our area. The eastern song sparrow, *Melospiza melodia melodia*.

Most notably the bird was sitting on the top of a shrub singing his song trying to attract a mate. Its head was pointed upward and tail straight down. As I walked closer the bird flew down to another shrub and disappeared into another thicket.

Sparrows are a group of birds with brown bodies, streaked backs and bellies. Sparrows have short rounded beaks, and are primarily seed eaters but will feed on insects during the nesting season. Sparrows are primarily ground feeders foraging for seeds, often in large groups when not in the breeding season.

The eastern song sparrow is an attractive small sparrow with a light brown cap, a light gray stripe across the eye and a light brown cheek stripe. Its throat is white bordered by a dark black bar on each side. Its white belly is heavily streaked around the chest, diminishing to a white underbelly. The most distinguishing mark is a dark black spot on the center of its chest.

The eastern song sparrow is a subspecies of song sparrow, a group which includes an estimated 24 subspecies. They occur throughout different areas of North America.



Each subspecies differs in color or the amount of streaking. The eastern song sparrow's range is east of the Rocky Mountains to the east coast. It prefers open scrubby grasslands, prairies next to woodlands.

A year round resident at the Wapsi River Center the eastern song sparrow's diet consists of insects and seeds. During the summer the song sparrow eats many insects, including beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, ants, wasps, and even spiders. Seeds of grasses and weed plants make up a suitable winter diet. A winter diet includes a variety of grass and weed seeds. It is not uncommon for a song sparrow to visit a winter bird feeder, foraging for seed on the ground.

During mating season a male will attract a mate by singing. A male song sparrow makes up for its small size by its loud vocalizations. During breeding season males will sit high atop a shrub and call. When calling the male points his tail down, and head skyward, appearing to "shout out" his distinctive call. The song sparrow sings a loud call starting with 3 high notes followed by a varied trill.

Upon finding a mate and mating, the female will search for a suitable nesting site. Once chosen, the female will begin nest construction. The female works mainly during the morning. A song sparrow nest is a simple, sturdy cup made of loose grasses, weeds, and bark on the outsides, then lined more tidily with grasses, rootlets, and animal hair inside. The nest is usually hidden tall grass but may be also found in a small shrub. Construction takes about 4 days.

One to six eggs are laid in the nest. Song sparrow eggs are pale greenish white with reddish brown colored spots. Once hatched, both parents go about foraging for insects to feed the young. After 10 – 12 days the young are ready to leave the nest. Fledging's typically remain with their parents for 3 weeks before venturing out on their own, ensuring the success of future populations.

So the next time you're out exploring, if you see a small light brown colored sparrow with a heavily streaked head and breast with a dark spot in the middle of its belly, you are probably looking at one of the more recognizable sparrows, the eastern song sparrow. Take a moment to enjoy its cheerful song and watch it hop and scamper through the thicket, bobbing its tail as it goes!



KID'S CORNER: LOG CABIN BASKET

Here is a quick project for kids that is simple and easy to make. It will help with basic skills, such as hammering, using a saw or loppers and measuring. You can make the basket to any size according to your needs, and materials available.

TOOLS & MATERIALS:

3-3/4 inch pine boards (bottom and 2 sides)
hammer / finish nails / loppers or saw
tape measurer / willow sticks or other sticks
a length of grapevine



STEPS:

1. Nail each end to the bottom board.
2. Cut sticks to length and nail onto the sides.
3. Add a grapevine or sapling handle.

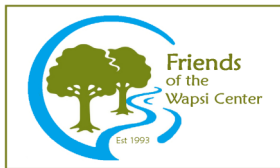
NOTE:

You can stain or seal the pine boards to help preserve the wood and make the basket last longer.

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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 WOULD LIKE TO BE A FRIENDS MEMBER: _____

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 _____
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PLEASE SEND MEMBERSHIP FORM TO:

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

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*For All Seasons*

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

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