

The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

FALL 2025

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

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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

Partners of Scott County Watersheds



Water is Life

*“Through interpretation **understanding**, through **understanding appreciation**, through **appreciation protection**.” Freeman Tilden*

Organisms including humans, all have essential needs. These needs for life are basic, yet, need to be protected. In my 25+ years in conservation, what I have come to realize, is that we all agree that we want to breath clean air, eat clean food, and drink clean water. It is through our interpretation as naturalists, that understanding and appreciation of these hierarchy of needs are protected, and in Iowa, that is over-due for water.

Our Iowa watersheds including the rivers, lakes, ponds, streams, and marshes are essential for our drinking water, yet many are impaired. According to the 2024 Iowa State's Section 303(d) list of impaired waters list (<https://programs.iowadnr.gov/adbnnet/Assessments/>

[Summary/2024/Impaired](#)), there are multiple waterways identified as impaired. In Scott County alone, the waters identified as impaired are scattered throughout our county and includes the majority of the northern boundary (Wapsipinicon River).

In June 2025, The New Lead reported, “Of **Iowa’s 35.7 million acres of total land, roughly 31 million is devoted to farming**,” “As a key US farm state, Iowa has long been known for the leafy green stalks of corn that stretch seemingly endlessly across the horizon. With nearly 87,000 farms, the state ranks first not only for corn production but also for pork and egg production, and is within the top five states for growing soybeans and raising cattle.”

The fact that **88% of our land is nonnative ecosystem**, manipulated, drained, and manicured for farming, only contributes to the need to protect our watersheds. These protections must be holistic in approach and include natural areas and wetlands, swimming beaches, springs, waterfalls, and even pools to name a few.

“A controversial Iowa water safety report has confirmed what many people in the state have long feared to be true: Dangerously high levels of farm chemicals, including nitrates and pesticides are polluting waterways with potentially dire health consequences for hundreds of thousands of residents. As Iowans’ seek answers for rising cancer rates and other health problems, the report provides a host of recommendations for how to reduce the contamination and protect public health.” July 22, 2025, The New Lead

The Des Moines Register reported in August 2025, “The study, known as the **Central Iowa Source Water Resource Assessment**, involved 17 scientists who invested more than 4,000 hours analyzing the Des Moines and Raccoon river watersheds. It came amid an unprecedented summer marked by Central Iowa Water Works imposing — and then gradually lifting — a mandatory lawn-watering ban affecting 600,000 customers due to nitrate pollution”.

“The conclusion presented on Monday, Aug. 4 by four of the scientists who worked on the report was clear: agriculture is the primary driver of pollution, particularly nitrates, creating ongoing risks to public health, recreation and economic well-being in Iowa.”

"It is a little shocking that the majority of EPA human health criteria, which are intended to protect against chronic health problems like cancer, have not been adopted in the state in the last 10 years," commented Michael Schmidt, general counsel for the Iowa Environmental Council.

“For the last few years, **Iowa has had the second-highest rate of cancer in the nation, and is only one of two US states where cancer is increasing**. Leukemia, as well as cancers of the pancreas, breast, stomach, kidney, thyroid and uterus, are among the different cancer types on the rise across the state, according to the National Cancer Institute.” Carey Gillam, The New Lead

“The elevated levels [of nitrate] in the rivers are the sort of the telltale,” said David Cwiertny, director of the Center for Health Effects of Environmental Contamination at the University of Iowa. “The fact that we're still seeing the levels that we are tells us that the land has plenty of nitrogen to give, and unfortunately, we're seeing how water systems are having to struggle to manage that.”

Rachel Cramer of Iowa Public Radio reports in September 2025, “The percentage of Iowa farmers with some knowledge of the state's nutrient reduction strategy appears to have increased over the past decade, while the percentage who support adopting more conservation practices declined.

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy aims to reduce annual nitrogen and phosphorus loss by 45%, largely through widespread adoption of conservation practices, like cover crops, on farms.

As part of the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll, researchers at Iowa State University sent the

same set of questions to Iowa farmers in the spring of 2014 and 2024 to learn more about their perspectives. Among the findings, nearly 90% of farmers reported some knowledge of the state's strategy. This marked a 10 percentage point increase from 2014.

But the majority who said farmers should do more to reduce nutrient and sediment runoff dropped from 84% to 74%. Concerns about agriculture's impact on water quality also decreased from 76% to 70%. Half of the 2024 respondents agreed nutrients from Iowa farms contribute to the hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico, which is consistent with the 2014 results. But those who said they were uncertain jumped from 23% to 44%.”

Humans are the only animals on Earth that pollute. The Earth as we know it, is the only planet that we inhabit, and offers all the resources for all living organisms. We must awaken, to the fact that we all have choices to act as stewards to the very places we live....and need. Take liberties to stand for your rights for clean air, food, water, and your health.

You can make a difference. Please consider the following Citizen Science events, local watershed events, and activities to get involved:

- * **Fall Water Quality Snapshot** at <https://partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org/event/2025-fall-snapshot-water-quality-event/> ,
- * **Local upcoming clean-ups** at <https://partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org/category/community-clean-up-events/>,
- * **Plastic pollution tracking** at <https://partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org/2021/10/pscw-joins-the-mississippi-river-plastic-pollution-initiative/>
- * **Save the rain** at <https://riveraction.org/sustainability>,
- * **Leave No Trace events** at <https://iascottctyweb.myvscloud.com/webtrac/web/>.
- * **Local Paddling Events** at <https://www.scottcountyiowa.gov/conservation/activities/canoeing-kayaking>

I hope you are moved by waters.... and remember, water is life so keep well, stay wild, and leave no trace!

FALL EVENTS

Attention visitors: The Wapsi River Center moved to online registration. **Unless otherwise noted**, registration for our programs can be completed by visiting: <https://web2.myvscloud.com/wbwsc/iascottctywt.wsc/splash.html> **and clicking on Public Programs**. If you have any questions please call the Wapsi River Center at (563)328-3286.

Please stay tuned to our website and social media accounts for the opening date of our new and renovated Wapsi River Learning Center and Fred Lorenzen Hall.

OCTOBER

7th ~ Fall Snapshot Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring ~ 8:00 A.M to Noon ~ Bettendorf Fire Department – Crow Creek ~ This is a great opportunity to become a citizen scientist for the day and gather important data about the health of Scott County's watersheds. The valuable data gathered by volunteers will assist PSCW in raising funds for water quality improvement projects in the county. No experience is necessary, and everyone is welcome to participate! *Children under 13 should be accompanied by an adult*. Volunteers will meet at Bettendorf Fire Department – Crow Creek for a brief overview about water quality and quick training on how to collect the data. During this time, volunteers will meet their data collection group and enjoy some coffee and donuts from Dunkin Donuts. Register today at www.xstreamcleanup.org/

8th ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park (Gate # 3) ~ The Scott County Conservation Board normally meets the second Wednesday of every month at the West Lake Park Headquarters office, 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. The public and press are encouraged to participate. Please call (563)328-3281 for more information.

15th ~ Homeschool Day ~ 10:30 A.M. – 2:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Once a month the Wapsi River EE Center will be hosting a day just for homeschoolers! Join us for a full day of themed programming led by our Naturalists! The goal of this series is to immerse children in the natural world and help them experience seasonal phenomena in a hands-on way. Most appropriate for K-8th grades, though all ages welcome. Program fee of \$3/person payable at registration. Please come prepared for the weather because much of the planned programming will take place outdoors. Please bring a lunch. Online

registration is required for all attendees, including adults. Registration opens the 1st of each month. This month we will be learning about wild foraging and natural paints/dyes.

16th ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Virtual Only ~ Learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. This meeting will be virtual only via Zoom. Please call for more information (563)328-3286.

18th ~ Bones & Skulls ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come out and celebrate spooky season! Learn all about bones and how to identify different skulls, then take a hike to search for bones in the Wapsi woods. This program is free and is open to all ages! Online registration is required.

18th ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Monsignor Menke Observatory ~ Join astronomers from the QCAS and St. Ambrose University for a lesson on the night sky. Please call Dr. Mitchell (St. Ambrose University) for current sky conditions, the day of the event (563)333-6141.

25th ~ Trout Stocking ~ 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park (Lake of the Hills, Gate 1) ~ 2,000 Rainbow Trout will be release at West Lake Park's, Lake of the Hills, as part of the Iowa DNR community trout stocking program. There will be 200 tagged trout, and prizes will be awarded to those who catch a tagged fish during the event. Participants will also be able to enter a raffle for other great prizes. Anyone planning to fish will have to have a valid fishing license with a paid trout fee.

25th ~ Zombie Archery ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Learn how to use a bow and arrow in this fun, informative, and FREE Halloween-themed 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 4th grade (**9 years old**) or above to participate and accompanied by an adult. Adults are welcome to participate as well! Your target will be Zombies! Park in Parking Lot A and meet at the Observatory. Online registration is required.

25th ~ The Great Pumpkin Atlatl Hunt ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Naturalist Mike 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!!! Online registration is required.

25th ~ Halloween Hike ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Naturalist Mike 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 6:30 P.M. with a spooky scavenger hunt afterwards. Please bring a flashlight! Family fun for everyone. Online registration is required.

NOVEMBER

11th ~ HOLIDAY ~ County offices are closed in observance of the Holiday.

12th ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park (Gate # 3) ~ The Scott County Conservation Board normally meets the second Wednesday of every month at the West Lake Park Headquarters office, 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. The public and press are encouraged to participate. Please call (563)328-3281 for more information.

15th ~ Harvest Wreath Workshop ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join naturalist Michael Granger to create a harvest wreath. Participants will create a grapevine base and then decorate it with seeds, pods, corn husks and cobs. Wreath kits are \$5.00 each. Participants may bring items to decorate and/or share. Online registration is required.

19th ~ Homeschool Day ~ 10:30 A.M.-2:00 P.M. ~ Once a month the Wapsi River EE Center will be hosting a day just for homeschoolers! Join us for a full day of themed programming led by our Naturalists! The goal of this series is to immerse children in the natural world and help them experience seasonal phenomena in a hands-on way. Most appropriate for K-8th grades, though all ages welcome. Program fee of \$3/person payable at registration. Please come prepared for the weather because much of the planned programming will take place outdoors. Plan to rotate through activities throughout the day and please bring a lunch. Online registration is required for all attendees, including adults. Registration opens the 1st of each month. This month we will be learning about wild game species and we will be joined by a Ranger to discuss pros and cons of hunting and hunting rules and regulations.

20th ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Virtual Only ~ Learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. This meeting will be virtual only via Zoom. Please call for more information (563)328-3286.

22nd ~ Native Mushroom ID & Foray ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Join Naturalist Becky to learn about native Iowa mushrooms. During this program,

you will learn about the mushroom life cycle, how to identify native mushrooms, which seasons they grow, and go on a fall hike to identify mushrooms found at this time. There is no cost for this program. Online registration is required.

22nd ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Monsignor Menke Observatory ~ Join astronomers from the QCAS and St. Ambrose University for a lesson on the night sky. Please call Dr. Mitchell (St. Ambrose University) for current sky conditions, the day of the event (563)333-6141.

27th – 28th ~ HOLIDAY ~ County offices are closed in observance of the Holiday.

DECEMBER

10th ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park (Gate # 3) ~ The Scott County Conservation Board normally meets the second Wednesday of every month at the West Lake Park Headquarters office, 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. The public and press are encouraged to participate. Please call (563)328-3281 for more information.

13th ~ Crafting for Conservation: Holiday Edition ~ 9:30am ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Come join Naturalists to get ready for the holiday season! We will learn how to create our own watercolor paints and how to repurpose and upcycle common household items and give them new life, just in time for the holidays! Projects will include: homemade cards using natural paints, calendar gift bags, magazine bows, and pinecone ornaments. This program is FREE! Online registration is required.

13th ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Monsignor Menke Observatory ~ Join astronomers from the QCAS and St. Ambrose University for a lesson on the night sky. Please call Dr. Mitchell (St. Ambrose University) for current sky conditions, the day of the event (563)333-6141.

24th – 25th ~ HOLIDAY ~ County offices are closed in observance of the Holiday.

JANUARY

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

SAVE THE DATE: January 9th —11th, 2025: Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days

PLANT PROFILE: AUTUMN OLIVE

By: Naturalist Becky Baugh

When hiking the trails this time of year, you will probably see many red berries. One of these berries is the from the deciduous shrub or small tree called the Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*). This plant is very invasive, meaning it did not originate here and once established, it can cause harm to the environment, economy, and possibly human health. In the case of the autumn olive, it has not caused harm to human health, but it has caused harm to the environment and to the economy.

Autumn olive is a tree/shrub that can grow up to 20 feet tall and 30 feet wide. It has alternately arranged, elliptically shaped leaves that can be distinguished from other similar plants because of the shimmery look of silver scales found on the underside of the leaves and silver specks on the berries. In fact, this plant also goes by the names Japanese Silverberry and Autumn Berry. The tops of the leaves are a dark, dull green color. The stems are also speckled and have thorns on them. The bark is a grayish green color that is smooth on smaller trees and can peel in long, thin strips on older trees.



Autumn Olive Leaves;
Photo Becky Baugh

The dull yellow flowers of this tree bloom mid-to late spring and have a very strong, sweet fragrance. They grow in crowded clusters and are bell-shaped with 4 petals each. The fruit is plump, orange to red in color and freckled with silver specks. Each fruit contains one soft-shelled seed and each tree/bush can produce more than 200,000 fruits every year! The fruits become ripe in late summer through fall. Even though these fruits are referred to as berries, they are technically drupes or stone fruit, similar to cherries.

Autumn olive is an invasive species because with all the seeds, it can outcompete and displace native plants. It was brought over to the U.S. from Asia in the 1830's as an ornamental plant to provide wildlife food, human food (the berries are edible!), and landscaping. In the 1950's, it was widely planted by the Soil Conservation Service as erosion control to

reclaim and stabilize old mine spoils, eroded hillsides, and newly constructed roadways. These locations are where it is most commonly found today. Autumn olive are among the few non-legume species with nitrogen-fixing properties in its roots. There is a bacterium called *Frankia* that lives in the roots that helps fix the nitrogen to the soil. Because of this ability, it can grow on bare mineral substrates. It also can change the chemistry in the soil around it through a process called allelopathy. This can prevent the germination of other native plants nearby. It will leaf out early in the spring and hold onto their leaves late into the fall. This prevents a lot of our native species from getting any sunlight in the spring. Now that this plant is deemed invasive, it should not be planted by anyone! It is spread by animals who love to eat the fruit. The seed survives the digestive tract, and can germinate due to the digestion.

To control this plant, cutting and burning often results in a vigorous re-growth. The best methods include hand pulling the smaller plants and prevent re-seeding by gathering the fruit.

The drupes on this plant are edible to people as well! Please make sure to ID this plant correctly as it can be confused with a similar, also invasive, and non-edible plant, the Bush Honeysuckle. Autumn olive fruit is very healthy for you! It contains 18x more lycopene than tomatoes, beta-carotene, and is a good source of vitamins A, E, and C. The seeds contain Omega-3 fatty acids. The berries are very tart, and astringent due to their tannin content. If gathered after the first frost, they lose their astringency.



Autumn Olive Fruits;
Photo Becky Baugh

If you want to beat the wildlife to the fruit, gather before the first frost and taste test for their bitterness. If still astringent, place in the freezer to help ripen them. You can eat the fruits raw right from the plant, or make the fruit into fruit leather, jelly or jam, cookies, smoothies, a puree that can be used in ice cream.

The next time you are hiking in a woodland area, and notice red berries with silver freckles, have a little taste! You not only will get a trail snack, but you will also help control this invasive species.

ANIMAL PROFILE: BOBWHITE QUAIL

By Naturalist Michael J. Granger

Let me introduce you to the northern bobwhite quail, one of Iowa's most popular game birds, second only to the ring-necked pheasant. This small, beautifully colored bird may be located by its familiar "bob-white" whistle. The bobwhite's diverse habitat requirements, life history and their struggle for survival will truly win your heart.



Northern Bobwhite, Male; Cornell Lab, All about birds.

The northern bobwhite is a typical quail species with a chunky body and short tail. The bird is described as being no larger than an eastern meadowlark. The body shape allows the bird to live in a variety of habitat cover types. Overall, the bird has a reddish-brown body and a gray tail. The underbody is pale and streaked with light stripes. Male bobwhite quail have a distinctive white throat patch and a white eye stripe. These markings are also present in the female, but buffy-yellow in color.

The bobwhite quail requires a diversity of grasslands, brushy fields, fencerows and cropland to meet the bird's many requirements. Grasslands, which include species such as bluegrass, brome grass, wild lespedeza, alfalfa and clover, provide food and cover. An abundance of insects and seed-bearing plants make short-grass fields bountiful food resource areas for nesting and raising young.

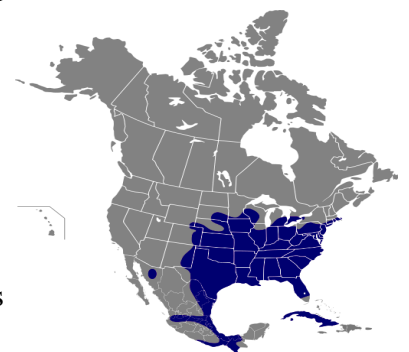
Cropland also serves an important role in quail habitat. The bobwhite is primarily a seed-eating bird, and cropland areas provide important food resources, especially during the cold winter months. Where corn and soybeans are found, 60 percent of the diet may be made up of either of these crops.



Quail sleeping in a circle, Gettyimages.com

The northern bobwhite quail usually lives no longer than one year, due to high mortality rates. Much of the year, from late summer to early spring, quail may be found in coveys. A typical covey is a grouping of 8-25 birds that forage, sleep and travel together. When the birds sleep, they will arrange themselves in a tight circle with their heads pointing out to watch for danger.

In late March and early April, quail will pair up and begin nest construction. Quail nests consist of a grass-lined depression on the ground. Overhanging grass helps to conceal the nest. Egg production occurs several days after nest construction. A female quail will lay one egg each day until the clutch is complete. An average nest will contain 12-16, one-inch long eggs, off-white in color. When the final egg is laid, a 23-day incubation period begins. After incubation, all of the eggs will hatch on the same day. The quail is a "precocial" species, which means the young are fully independent when they hatch. Soon after hatching, the chicks leave the nest to forage with their parents. The chicks will be able to fly in 2 to 3 weeks. Recent findings show that female quail may have several broods in a season.



Northern Bobwhite: Range Map: Google Images

The state of Iowa lies on the northern edge of the bobwhite's range. The best quail habitat and largest populations are found in the two southern tiers of counties in Iowa. In the northern 3/4 of the state, the bird can be found where habitat conditions are ideal.

Bobwhite quail were originally uncommon on Iowa's vast prairie regions at the beginning of settlement. As the settlers changed the landscape, creating greater habitat diversity, quail numbers rose greatly. However, from the 1930s on, Iowa has experienced a gradual decline in the number of quail. It has been said that there will always be quail in Iowa, but their future will involve landowners providing adequate quail habitat as a part of their land management goals and practices.

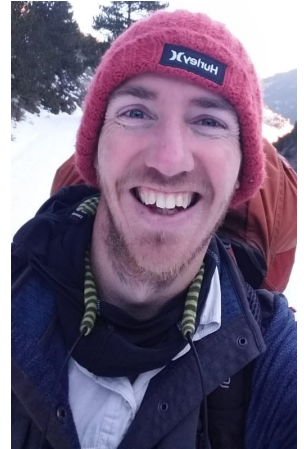
HELLO!

Hello! My name's Brendan O'Brien and I just started as an Assistant Naturalist. I grew up in Davenport and can remember first coming to the Wapsi on a field trip in elementary school. Since that time, I've continually sought out more and more vast natural areas where humans are not the dominant force. This led me out West.

I spent several seasons working for the Forest Service and National Park Service in positions ranging from wildland firefighting to trail maintenance to natural resource interpretation. Eventually, I returned to school for a master's in geography at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. I devoted my studies to thinking and writing about the myriad ways that humans impact the natural

world and how humans are part of the natural world.

Following grad school, I worked as a guide for youth backpacking trips in the Cascades and lodge-based trips for retirees in Grand Canyon. I've done a lot of exploring and seen so many wonders of the natural world. I'm fascinated by the movement of water, the night sky, and the intricate relationships between living things in ecosystems, humans included. I believe that the best way to learn is to observe closely- to hear, to watch, to touch the surrounding world, and enter into that world. I look forward to learning from the Wapsi River Center.



THANKYOU!

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River Action
Green Iowa AmeriCorps
St. Ambrose University
Clinton CCB
Scott County Library System
Wild Birds Unlimited, Isaac Caron
Putnam Museum
Silvis IL Public Library
Printing Plus Signs Inc.
Scott County Library System Bookmobile
Gus Elliot, IADNR
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Laura McCreery, Davenport North High School
Iowa Association of Naturalists

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