



CONSERVATION NEWS

A Publication of the Muscatine County Conservation Board

Volume 30 No. 4 Winter 2017/18

Conservation Success Stories by Michelle Berns

There are many reasons an animal that was once plentiful disappears from the landscape. The biggest reason is habitat loss. Animals need to be able to find their food, water, shelter, and have enough space in their habitat to live and grow. As towns and cities grow, it pushes animals farther and farther out, often times into another animal's territory or into unsuitable habitat. When an animal is gone from its previous area but you find it in other areas, this animal is 'extirpated.' When Iowa opened for settlement in 1833, many different game and non-game species lived here. As settlers moved into Iowa, they changed the landscape; plowed the prairies, drained the wetlands, and cut down the forests for their houses.

One of the animals affected by settlement were trumpeter swans. They disappeared from Iowa around 1883. The last nesting pair was in Hancock County. The combination of market hunting (unregulated hunting) and habitat loss was the reason for their disappearance. Settlers ate the swan meat and eggs, and used swan feathers for items such as hats, quill pens, and pillows. The Iowa DNR took action and in 1995 started releasing trumpeter swans across Iowa. To date, more than 1,150 swans have been released. Habitat work restored their prime habitat, wetlands. The first modern "wild" pair nested in 1998 in Dubuque County. Currently, there are about 50 wild nesting pairs in Iowa. Wow, what a success story!

During settlement, river otters were the most valuable furbearer in Iowa. Because of market

hunting and habitat loss, they were mostly gone from the state by 1890. In 1985, the Iowa DNR started a reintroduction program that lasted until 2005. During the program, the Iowa DNR released 345 river otters in 25 different watersheds across Iowa. The river otters came from a wildlife trade between states when Kentucky purchased river otters from Louisiana and then traded Iowa two turkeys for each river otter. They were a threatened species in Iowa until 2001 but now there is successful reproduction in all 99 counties. A trapping season began in 2006, with an allotted amount each year.

The bobcat or wildcat was a common animal in the 1800's in Iowa. By 1900, it disappeared from the state. Farmers feared for their livestock with predators roaming free, so many of Iowa's predators had bounties placed on them and the bobcat was no exception. Somewhere between the 1930's -1940's, bobcats began to reappear in the wilder four corners of the state. In 1977, Iowa put the bobcat on the endangered species list. Being an endangered species protected bobcats and their population grew each year. In 2001, they gave them threatened status, and in 2003 protected status. By 2007, bobcats were designated a furbearing animal and there has been a limited trapping season since. Given protection, animals can make a comeback, this kitty proves it!

Unbelievably, white-tailed deer were once mostly gone from the state. Market hunting and severe winters depleted their population by 1900. The accidental escape of captive herds helped to

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re-establish the wild population. After areas repopulated, the Iowa Conservation Commission (now the Iowa DNR) captured and moved deer to other areas in Iowa. Over the years, this led to deer populations increasing to the point of the first regulated Iowa deer hunt in 1953 that continues to this day.

Other conservation successes in Iowa include

- Peregrine Falcons
- Osprey
- Beaver
- Wild Turkey
- Giant Canada Geese

Some native animals just needed a little extra protection to recover the species, others needed some help with reintroductions and all needed help with improvements to their habitat. I hope in the future, there are many more conservation success stories here and across our globe.

Halloween Hike

The 29th Annual Halloween Hike was held on Saturday October 14. The theme was “Brrr! How Animals Do Winter” however, winter weather was the least of our concerns. Staff monitored the forecast the entire week before, hoping that the 70% chance of rain forecast for October 14 would go down as the hike got closer, but no such luck it just increased to 100%. For once the weatherman was right-it rained all day. It’s difficult to change the date when most of the hike is put on by volunteers, so we started considering alternate plans.

We wondered if we could somehow make it work indoors, and we did. The pumpkins that would have lined the trail outside, instead lined the front sidewalk and the Learning Center’s entrance. The classroom divider was pulled shut with three of the skits on one side and the other three on the opposite side. Participants got to sit where it was warm and dry to watch the skits having to only “hike” to the other side of the classroom.

Afterwards refreshments were served and the kids painted mini pumpkins.

Even though everyone enjoyed the event and we know now we can pull it off indoors, we hope we don’t ever have to again because... it’s just not the same.

Thank you to all the donors and volunteers who helped make the Halloween Hike a successful event.

Suzette Gonzalez

Julie Herold

Linda Stoddard

Alecia Strickland

Diana Broderon

Mary Bulger

Jan Forbes

Betty Collins

Diane & Dave Moritz

Amy & Ari Bakke

Lindsey Phillips

Tasha Phillips

Creed, Cruz, Alissa, & Brian Birkhofer

Brendan, Emma, Dianna & Brian Steele

Lauren, Denise & Kevin Dirth

Amie, Chuck, & Chase McConnaha

Young Professionals Network

Muscatine High School Academy

Stout’s Market

Taylor’s Market

Fareway

Hy-Vee

Erika Rickets

Patt Drake

Helen Atkinson

Francie Williams

Halley Berger

Betty Collins

Eileen Forbes

Jake Walton





Memorials

A tree was planted in Discovery Park *In Memory of Bill & Gert Busch.*

Monetary donations were made *In Memory of Rocky Casini.*



Thank You

Thank you to all those who generously gave time, talent, funding and/or materials to help make our programs, projects, and areas better than ever.

Julie Herold - instructing the Polliwog Playtime classes.

Lynn Tavener - monetary donation for our environmental education program.

Joni Axel - nature calendars.

Brian Steele & Family - monarch eggs and caterpillars.

Marla Kurriger & Family - monarch eggs and caterpillars.

Claire Martin - collection of animal skulls.

Thanks to the Fruitland Lions Club for holding a cleanup day at Deep Lakes Parks earlier this fall.

Wayne & Judy Shoultz
Tom & Maggie Curry
Chris & Janina Hawley
Tim Stevens
Nadine Brockert
Darrell & Pat Crieger
Kathy Kurriger
Pastor Tom Berryman

Trout Release

October 28 was a chilly morning, but about 65 people staked out a spot around Discovery Pond in anticipation of catching some of the 1,000 trout the Iowa DNR released into Discovery Pond.



Anyone catching one of the 100 tagged trout that day received a \$10 gift card from Blain's Farm & Fleet. Sixteen tagged trout were turned in and those people were then entered into a drawing for a \$100 and a \$30 Blain's Farm & Fleet gift card. Winner of the \$100 gift card was Frederick Koehnke of Burlington, Wisconsin and winner of the \$30 gift card was Carlos Salsido of Moline, Illinois.

Thanks to the Muscatine County Conservation Foundation and Blain's Farm & Fleet for the gift cards.

Pearls of Progress Project

In October, Muscatine was awarded a \$500,000 Community Attractions & Tourism (CAT) Grant by the Enhance Iowa Board providing that the community raise \$500,000 in matching funds by November 15.

In late November it was announced that the \$500,000 had been raised thanks to many generous local businesses, industries, and individuals.

The \$8.09 million Pearls of Progress Project consists of four parts; the new Musser Public Library & HNI Community Center, a community dog park, the Westside Trail that will run from Kent-Stein Park to Discovery Park, and rental cabins at Deep Lakes Park.

Construction of the cabins could begin as early as next spring. Trail construction will not begin until 2019 when federal funds are available.

Programs & Special Events

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

The Environmental Learning Center will be closed on Sunday-Monday, December 24-25 and Sunday-Monday, December 31-January 1.



POLLIWOG PLAYTIME

ages 18 months through 3 years \$5.00/class maximum 12/class

Join us at the Environmental Learning Center and Discovery Park for activities designed to help toddlers explore nature. Children must be accompanied by an adult. All classes meet on the second Thursday of the month from 9:00-10:00 a.m.

January 11
March 8

Animal Tracks
Spring Flowers

February 8
April 12

Animal Winter Homes
Earth Day & Recycling

KNEE-HIGH NATURALISTS

4-6 year olds \$5.00/class maximum 12/class

must have at least 5 signed up to hold class

Join us at the Environmental Learning Center and Discovery Park for nature activities such as games, crafts, stories, and exploration. Children must be accompanied by an adult. All classes meet on the second Saturday of the month from 10:00-11:00 a.m.

January 13
March 10

Animal Tracks
Turtles

February 10
April 14

Sneaky Salamanders
Earth Day & Recycling



REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS



Join Conservation Board staff to learn about the Reptiles and Amphibians of Iowa, and meet some live ones!

Sunday, January 14
1:30 p.m.
Environmental Learning Center
Free family event



Programs & Special Events



HUNTER EDUCATION

Anyone born after January 1, 1972 who wants to purchase a hunting license in Iowa must have successfully completed a Hunter Education course. The minimum age for certification is twelve. Each class is limited to 50 students.

Classes are free but you must register on-line at www.iowadnr.gov. After registering, you must pick up a handbook at the Environmental Learning Center. The chapter review questions at the end of the handbook must be completed prior to coming to class. Students who show up with a blank book will not be allowed to attend the class. Students should bring a sack lunch to class, as well as their completed handbook.

Saturday, February 24
9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Environmental Learning Center
Free, but preregistration is required

WILDLIFE OF IOWA

Join Conservation Board staff for a program about the Wildlife of Iowa.



Sunday, March 18
1:30 p.m.
Environmental Learning Center
Free family event



SPRING NATURE HIKE

Join Conservation Board staff for a hike through Discovery Park. We'll search for signs of spring. Dress to be outdoors.



Saturday, April 14
2:00 p.m.
Discovery Park-meet at the Environmental Learning Center
Free family event



ATTENTION TEACHERS

It's time to set up your spring fieldtrip. We're getting reservations already, so call us at (563) 264-5922 or e-mail conservation@co.muscatine.ia.us to get your choice of dates.



Become a Friend

Thank you to all our “Friends” whose donations to the Muscatine County Conservation Foundation support the development and enhancement of environmental education and conservation projects in Muscatine County.

Eugene Anthony

Kelly S. Brown

The names of all donors go into our donor book and those who donate \$250 or more receive a plaque on our donor wall. Please include the form below with your donation and become a “Friend” today.

A Gift For the Conservation Foundation

I would like to become a Friend,
please accept my donation.

- Sponsor \$10—\$49
- Partner \$50—\$99
- Patron \$100—\$249
- Guardian \$250—\$499
- Steward \$500—\$999
- Benefactor \$1000 +
- I would like to donate my time.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Thank you for your support!

Please make checks payable to:
Muscatine County Conservation Foundation
PO Box 109, Muscatine, IA 52761

Shooting Range Update

Inquiries are coming in about what is happening with the proposed shooting range. Honestly, nothing at this time.

When the Conservation Board presented the idea of a shooting range, on County-owned property near Jasper Avenue, to the Zoning Board we were received with much hesitation. After two public hearings the Zoning Board still did not come to a decision one way or the other. The Conservation Board decided to pull its application to the Zoning Board to reexamine this location or possibly find another suitable location.

Some citizens opposed to this site say there is a better location in Muscatine County. We spent many years looking and this piece of public land was the best location we could find that met the criteria we set for a shooting range.

Below is some of the criteria required of the location.

- Public owned land or land offered at little or no cost to the County. We have money pledged for construction, but none for land acquisition. If the land is public owned, the agency who owns it must agree to a shooting range.
- No houses or buildings at least two miles down range. This is the most important criteria and the most difficult to meet.
- Few houses close to the range. No houses would be ideal, but we do not believe such a property exists in Muscatine County.
- A location close to Muscatine, Wilton, and West Liberty.
- Land that does not flood or is protected by a levee most of the time.
- Land that would allow at least a 200 yard range.
- Land that has the materials on site needed to build the berms. Trucking in materials to construct a NRA approved range with 20 foot back stops is not in the budget.

If you know of such a location in Muscatine County we would like to hear from you.

Creature Feature

Blue Jay

Blue Jays are an easily recognized songbird found in the eastern two-thirds of the U.S. and up into the east and central parts of Canada. Blue Jays live along forest edges, as well as in urban and suburban areas, especially where there are lots of oak trees to satisfy their love of acorns.

Blue Jays are smaller than a crow, but larger than a robin. These crested birds are blue, black and white above, and white or light gray below. The black stripe across the face, throat and back of the neck is different in every bird and scientists think that may help Blue Jays recognize each other. Females and males look the same, although males are slightly larger.

Nuts, seeds, and insects make up most of Blue Jays' diets, but they may also eat small vertebrates they find dead or injured. On occasion they raid the nests of other birds and eat the eggs or the nestlings. They hold nuts and seeds in their feet and use their beaks to break them open. Blue Jays love to cache food, and can carry five acorns at once. They have a gular pouch in their throat that can hold 2-3 acorns in addition to one in the mouth and one in the tip of the bill.

Blue Jays build their nests 10-25 feet high in deciduous trees or conifers. The nest is an open cup made of twigs, grass, sometimes mud, lined with rootlets. Both the male and female take part in the building with the male doing more gathering of materials and the female the building. They may abandon a nest if they notice predators nearby.

Blue Jays have one brood each year. They lay 2-7 eggs that are incubated by the female for 17-18 days with the male providing her food. After hatching the nestlings spend 17-21 days in the nest before leaving. However, they may hang around for another month or so and let mom and dad keep feeding them.

Blue Jays are smart birds with a tight family bond. They often mate for life. Blue Jays are known for being very vocal. They will mimic the call of hawks to let other Blue Jays know that a hawk is nearby or to scare other birds away from a feeder. Migration is not understood very well because some Blue Jays migrate, some don't. Sometimes they may migrate one year, but not the next.

Blue Jays are a favorite at bird feeders preferring peanuts, sunflower seeds and suet from tray or hopper feeders rather than a feeder they must hang from. They also enjoy drinking from a birdbath.

Blue Jay Facts

- The height of a Blue Jays' crest has to do with its comfort level. When feeding with other family members or taking care of nestlings the crest is low, but when on alert the crest is held high.
- Six Blue Jays, fitted with transmitters, each cached 3,000-5,000 acorns one fall.
- The oldest known Blue Jay was a bird banded in 1989 who was found dead in 2016 at almost 27 years old.
- The pigment in Blue Jay feathers is melanin which is brown. The blue colors you see are caused by the scattering light on their surface.
- Blue Jays like fresh rootlets for their nests and may fly a good distance to get them from freshly dug dirt or newly fallen trees.

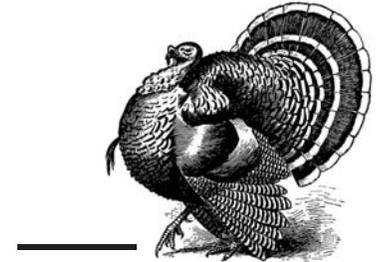


Topper's Page



Topper says it's a great time of year to look for animal tracks. Mud and snow show the best tracks. Sand, unless it's wet, usually makes tracks harder to identify. Help Topper match the track to the correct animal by writing the number of the track next its animal. Here are a couple of hints to get you started. Cat claws rarely show in a track. Some animals have webbing between their toes.

Answers are on the next page (coloring page).



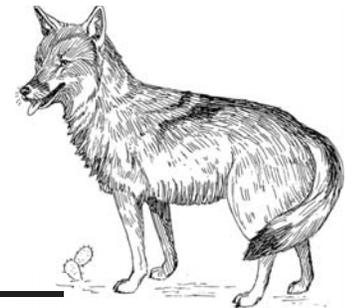




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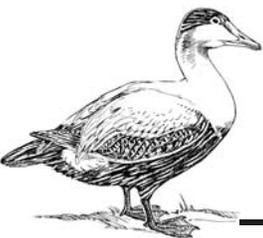






4







5



6







7



8

- Bobcat 7
- Raccoon 3
- Duck 5
- Beaver 2
- Turkey 8
- Coyote 6
- Bear 1
- Deer 4



MUSCATINE COUNTY
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The Muscatine County Conservation Board meets the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. Meetings are held at the Environmental Learning Center, 3300 Cedar Street in Muscatine. The public is welcome to attend.

If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, or handicap, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Muscatine County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240



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