



# Conservation News

A Publication of the Muscatine County Conservation Board

Volume 37 No. 1 Spring/Summer 2024

## Nature Does it Better by: Luke Hart, Naturalist

It's springtime again and it won't be long before we're in our gardens and running those lawnmowers at full force. The question on some people's minds: how do I get rid of those moles tearing up my yard? It's understandable, the anger that folks feel as they witness their yards turned into mole playgrounds, leaving unsightly hills of dirt and paths of raised sod snaking every which way.

However, it is my personal hope that with a little more knowledge and a bit of a change in perspective, people can begin to view these moles less as destructive adversaries, and more as tenacious allies in creating that "perfect" lawn. My advocating for moles is based on a basic principle to which many of us in conservation subscribe: *nature can do it better than we can*. Moles are no exception. To support this claim, allow me to first re-acquaint you.

Eastern Moles (*Scalopus aquaticus*), relatives to shrews and hedgehogs, are common mammals in Iowa. They do well in loose loamy soils of woodlands, pastures, and turfgrass lawns, and can make short work of even some of the more stubborn soil, where they create extensive tunnel systems for hunting, eating, sleeping, and rearing young.

Moles use shovel-like hands and powerful legs to displace enormous amounts of dirt - especially for their small size. ( They weigh between 1.5 and 5 ounces and measure between 5.5 and 7.5 inches long by 1.5 inches tall.) All that digging requires a lot of food, too. A single mole may need to eat its own body weight or more in food in a single day just to meet their physical activity demands.



They even have a special adaptation in their hemoglobin that allows them work this hard in low oxygen environments such as their tunnels. Their ability to smell "in stereo" is also incredible! They use both nostrils independently to determine the direction from which an odor is emanating. This skill certainly is useful in their constant search for food.

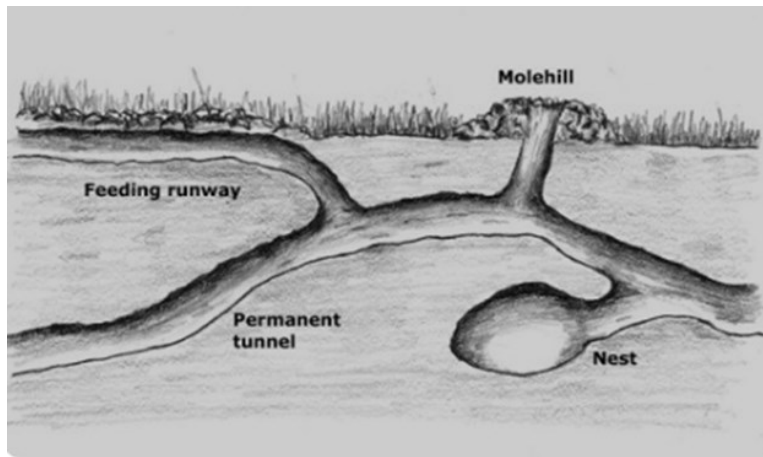
Moles are insectivorous, meaning they live mainly on a diet of bugs, not plants, and display a preference for earthworms. Interestingly, their saliva contains a toxin that can paralyze worms, keeping them fresh and in storage for a future meal. Moles are quite solitary outside of mating/nesting season and there may be up to only 3 individuals per acre of land. They are also short-lived: 3 years on average. They have poor vision, but their sense of hearing and touch is amazing. Dense and short black and brown fur with a silvery undercoat covers most of their body, including their ear holes (i.e. they have no external ears), and in lieu of eyes—also covered by fur—specialized hairs help them "see" their subterranean environment.

Eastern moles spend most of their lives underground and do not hibernate during the winter, but are susceptible to being preyed upon by animals that dig (e.g. coyotes, foxes, badgers, dogs and cats). When they do leave their burrows they may be grabbed by a hungry owl or hawk looming overhead.

Pretty cool! But, how does any of **THAT** benefit **US**? Well, it's all a matter of perspective.

So, let's begin first with an obvious problem that moles pose—**THEY DIG!** They sure do! But, not only does their digging aerate the soil (something we know is quite beneficial to root systems), it helps to incorporate vital nutrients and organic matter necessary for plant health. The mole hills (excess soil removed from tunnels) can also be scooped off and used as rich topsoil elsewhere in the garden. This practice of relocating the extra soil will certainly save your lawnmower blades, which can get caught up on these dirt hills.

But, what about all those soil nutrients the moles rob me of when they devour their weight in valuable earthworms each day? Well, while worms seem to be their favorite, they eat all sorts of other bugs, from spiders to ants, and all hosts of harmful insect larva. Moles also love to eat grubs. What's more, as the worm populations are decimated, moles prey switch (eat something else) or move on in search of other feeding grounds. During this time worms repopulate and get back to decomposing organic matter for you and your yard. Moles also ensure that earthworms (not native anyway) don't cause problems in the soil by becoming **OVER**-populated. In fact, too many worms can change the chemical balance in your soil—and not always for the better. Plus, have you ever walked barefooted through your yard and hit one of those hard lumpy mounds of soil in the grass? Guess what? They're made by **WORMS!!!**



Thirdly, and lastly here, what about the grass that dies off where moles have tunneled? Well, I can't exactly find a benefit to humans in this regard, other than perhaps this. The turf grasses we are so fond of aren't even native to Iowa (brought from Europe during colonization) and the amount of energy and worry we put into keeping them lush and green might not even be worth the trouble.

In fact, most turf grass is cool season grass that only grows best here in Iowa in the spring and fall. It really is designed to grow wild and unchecked, except by grazing livestock. During the hot summer months it goes dormant and turns brown of its own accord as a matter of survival. To keep it green

seems to be an exercise in futility. So, we're forever maintaining grass varieties that simply don't belong here, nor do they wish to remain as green as we would like them to be all season long.

So, here's my humble suggestion: leave the moles and get rid of the turf. Think native, instead.

Prairie and woodland species historically found in Iowa tolerate our climate better, require less maintenance and provide a bit more of a challenge to moles than the short-rooted sod and ornamental flowers we currently provide them.

The damage of mole activity will be much less noticeable, when your eyes are drawn toward a more natural, biodiverse yard.

In addition, you'll get soil aeration, nutrient mixing and bug control—and it's all free! Let the eastern mole help you take the sweat and tears out of lawn work.

With that extra time and energy, you can explore ideas to install other landscape features (e.g. walkways, decks, patios, raised garden beds and planters) that bring enjoyment rather than headaches.

Believe me...nature does it better, folks. It just takes a little knowledge, and a brand new perspective.

## 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.

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

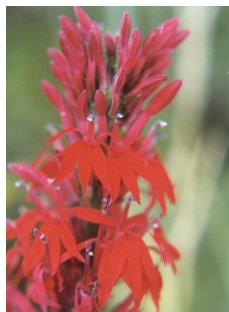
**Helen Atkinson**      **Larry & Judith Carter**  
**Mark & Julie Frye**   **Glenn & Kathy Huston**  
**Joyce Mathern**      **Doug & Judy Maxwell**  
**Jim Scott**            **Ervin Sindt**

## *Muscatine County Conservation Foundation*

The Muscatine County Conservation Foundation was formed in 1988 with the purpose of supporting the development and enhancement of environmental education and conservation projects in Muscatine County.

The Muscatine County Conservation Foundation is a nonprofit, contributions are tax-deductible.

Friends are recognized in our quarterly newsletter. There is also a beautiful butterfly display in the Learning Center that is updated annually to thank our Friends and show our gratitude.



We would love to count you among our Friends! Please consider a gift to the Muscatine County Conservation Foundation today!

Thank you for supporting conservation projects in Muscatine County!

## Newsletter Contact Information



To help save on Newsletter expenses, we would like to update our mail and e-mail information. If you have moved or changed your email address, please contact us or email us with new information.

Thank you!

Muscatine County Conservation Board  
P.O. Box 109, Muscatine, IA 52761  
563-264-5922  
Email:  
conservation@muscatinecountyiowa.gov

### *A Gift For the Conservation Foundation*

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

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor                         | \$10—\$49   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like to donate my time. |             |

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Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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*Thank you for your support!*

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

# Programs and Special Events

## Spring Tree Giveaway (Tentative) April 27 - 9:00-10:30 a.m. - Discovery Park Shelter #1 - Free

We will have 200 saplings to give away. Limit 2 per household. First come first serve, no reservations. Species included will be Wild Plum, Aronia Berry, Serviceberry, Eastern White Pine, Hackberry, Red Oak and Cottonwood. All trees should be planted the same day you pick them up, planting information will be available.

If there is a date change, information will be posted on our website: [muscatinecountyconservation.com](http://muscatinecountyconservation.com) and on the Muscatine County Conservation Facebook page.

## Spring Story Stroll April 27 - 2:00-4:00 p.m.- Environmental Learning Center

**\$5.00 per person, under 3 free.**

Remember the Halloween Hike through Discovery Park? Think SPRING and STORIES with a Halloween Hike feel. Groups will travel between four stations on the hard-surfaced trail and stop and listen to characters (dressed up of course) and learn about Iowa's flora and fauna through stories or skits. There will be a craft area set up in the classroom along with popcorn and lemonade.

Reservations required, call the Learning Center to reserve your time at 563-264-5922. We will need a lot of volunteers to make this happen, so please call Michelle at the center or email [michelle.berns@muscatinecountyia.gov](mailto:michelle.berns@muscatinecountyia.gov) if you are interested in being a part of the First Spring Story Stroll through Discovery Park.

## Pearl City Buckskinner Rendezvous - Discovery Park - Free, family event

Come experience the 1800's fur trade era and the history of the mountain man. There will be demonstrations, knife and tomahawk competitions, and a candy cannon for the kids. A bonus this year, includes a pirate!

**Friday & Saturday, May 17 & 18 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.**

**Sunday, May 19 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.**

## Muscatine Art Center Partnership Series - Nature and Art - Free, family event - 10:30 a.m.

**Muscatine Art Center Studio-1314 Mulberry Ave., Muscatine, IA**

In partnership with the Muscatine Art Center, Conservation Board staff will be at the Muscatine Art Center with live creatures on the following dates. You'll meet and learn about that animal then art center staff will lead a craft project inspired by that animal.

<b>Raptors</b>	<b>Saturday , April 20</b>	<b>10:30 a.m.</b>
<b>Insect Metamorphosis</b>	<b>Saturday , June 8</b>	<b>10:30 a.m.</b>
<b>Chickens</b>	<b>Saturday, August 24</b>	<b>10:30 a.m.</b>
<b>Reptiles</b>	<b>Saturday, September 21</b>	<b>10:30 a.m.</b>

## Wildlife ID Hike - Saturday, May 25 - 9:00-10:30 a.m.-Discovery Park – Free, family event

**Meet at Environmental Learning Center - Children under 13 must be accompanied by an adult.**

Take another look at Discovery Park while identifying the incredible wildlife who live there. We will be hiking the park in search of cool plants and animal, and who knows...maybe we'll discover something new. This hike will be stop-and-go on hard-surfaced paths in and out of the sun.

Hikers who would like to continue their wildlife ID hike after the program wraps up are free to join conservation staff for an off-road hike through the park. Dress for the weather.



# Programs and Special Events

## **Raptors - Friday, June 7 - 1:00 p.m. –Environmental Learning Center– Free, family event**

Join a naturalist and learn all about Raptors! See really cool bio artifacts and meet one of our live birds.

## **Free Fishing Days - June 7-9, 2024**

The Iowa DNR's free fishing days this year are June 7th, 8th, and 9th. Iowa residents may fish on these days without a fishing license. All other fishing regulations must be obeyed.

## **Strawberry Moon Paddle – Friday, June 21- 8:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m. - Free -Ages 18+ Deep Lakes Park - Pettibone Boat Ramp**

Join the naturalists for a full moon paddle at Deep Lakes. We will have canoes and kayaks available or bring your own. Either way, pre-registration is required by calling 563-264-5922.

## **Live Animals - Friday , July 5 -1:00 p.m. -Environmental Learning Center –Free, family event**

Explore the amphibians and reptiles that call Iowa home! Participants will get a chance to see them up close and even touch a few.

## **Wild Edible Hike Series - Free, family events**

**Saturday, July 6 - Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area 9:00-11:00 a.m.**

**Saturday, August 10 - Deep Lakes Park 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.**

**Sunday, September 22 - Cedar Bluffs Recreation Area 9:00-11:00 a.m. (no restrooms, plan ahead)**

Discover some of nature's forgotten edible treasures as we hike County Parks in search of FREE food. We will discuss how to approach wild edibles in a safe and sustainable way and talk about how we can keep the art of food foraging alive for generations to come. Bring a basket or bag for collecting if you plan to take things home. Dress for the weather and pack your sunscreen, drinking water, and bug repellent (if you use it). See you out there!

## **What lives in the pond? - Tuesday, July 30 -3:30 p.m. - Free, family event**

**Meet at the Environmental Learning Center**

Who lives in Heron Hideaway Pond behind the ELC? Join us with pond nets, buckets, field guides, and magnifying glasses to see all the little critters that make up this cool ecosystem. A limited number of pond nets will be available. If you have your own please bring it.



## **Hunter Education**

**Saturday, August 24 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Environmental Learning Center**

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 30 students.

Classes are free but, you must register on-line at [www.gooutdoorsiowa.com](http://www.gooutdoorsiowa.com). After registering you must pick up a workbook at the Environmental Learning Center. The chapter review questions at the end of the workbook should be completed prior to coming to class. Students will need to bring their completed workbook and a sack lunch.

# Summer Nature Camps for Kids

## General Summer Nature Camp Info

- \* The registration form is available at the Environmental Learning Center or on our website [www.MuscatineCountyConservation.com](http://www.MuscatineCountyConservation.com)
- \* Signed registration form and payment are required to be registered for camp.
- \* Camps may include outdoor exploration, hikes, games, stories, crafts, and lots of fun!
- \* All camps meet at the Environmental Learning Center. We will provide transportation to and from any other areas we visit.
- \* Snacks are provided for any camps over one hour in length.
- \* Campers should bring a water bottle and wear
- \* Campers should wear clothes that can get wet and dirty and sturdy shoes, no flip-flops please.
- \* Refunds are only made if we have to cancel the camp.



## Polliwog Playtime

**Ages: 18 months through 3 years**  
**Environmental Learning Center**  
**9:00-10:00 a.m. or 10:30-11:30 a.m.**  
**Maximum 10/session**  
**\$5.00/session**

Wacky Water	June 17
Friendly Forests	July 1
Creek Stomping	July 15
Icky Insects	July 29
Wiggly Worms	August 12



Toddlers, bring your favorite adult to Nature Camp! Activities are designed to help toddlers explore nature through hands-on activities, stories, crafts, games, and activities.

Children must be accompanied by an adult.  
 Pre-registration is required.

## Knee-high Naturalists

**Ages: 4-5 years old**  
**Environmental Learning Center**  
**9:00-10:00 a.m. or 10:30-11:30 a.m.**  
**\$5.00/session**

Wacky Water	June 10
Friendly Forests	June 24
Creek Stomping	July 8
Icky Insects	July 22
Wiggly Worms	August 5

Get ready for a great adventure! We will have fun exploring nature together at Discovery Park. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Max of 12 children per camp.

Pre-registration is required.



# Summer Nature Camps

## Chipmunk Camp

Kids who just completed K or 1st grade

9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

\$10.00/session

Maximum 16/session

Discover Water	June 18
Discover Birds	July 2
Discover Reptiles	July 9
Discover Prairies	July 16



## Kestrel Camp

Kids who just completed 2nd or 3rd grade

9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

\$10.00/session

Maximum 16/session



Discover Water	June 19
Discover Birds	July 3
Discover Reptile	July 24
Discover Prairies	July 31

## Otter Camp

Kids who just completed 4th or 5th grade

9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

\$10.00/session

Maximum 16/session

Discover Birds	July 11
Discover Reptiles	July 18
Discover Prairies	August 8

Campers will travel to Big Sand Mound Nature Preserve on August 8 for their prairie adventures.



## Outdoor Recreation Camp

Kids who just completed 6th - 8th grade

9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

\$10.00/session

maximum 16/session



Explore Big Sand Mound	June 21
Survival Session #1	June 28
Survival Session #2	July 19

# Environmental Learning Center



## Visit the Learning Center at Discovery Park

\*FREE\* and open to the public!

3300 Cedar Street, Muscatine, Iowa 52761

Hours: Monday - Friday from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday from 12:00- 4:00 p.m.

Closed most holidays.

Highlights include:

- Two 1,200-gallon aquariums with native fish
- Live animal displays
- Over 100 animal mounts
- Natural history exhibits
- Hands-on kids area
- Live raptors



For more info or to make a reservation:

Conservation@muscatinecountyia.gov

563-264-5922

Website: MuscatineCountyConservation.com

Facebook: Muscatine County Conservation Board



## Relax in a Cabin at Deep Lakes Park

Muscatine County Conservation has 4 reservable cabins at Deep Lakes Park! Cabins 3 & 4 overlook beautiful Lake Patricia. Cabins 1 & 2 have a great view of Valentine Chute.

Fees start as low as \$110/night for a one-bedroom cabin (max of 4 people) and \$125/night for a two-bedroom cabin (max of 8 people).

There is so much to do! Paddle or fish the many lakes, walk or ride the Muscatine Bike Trail, or simply enjoy the peaceful view.

For more info or to check rental availability visit [MuscatineCountyConservation.com](http://MuscatineCountyConservation.com) or contact us.

## Reserve a Picnic Shelter

Picnic Shelters are great for a variety of parties.

Reservations may be made up to a year in advance.



### Discovery Park

- Shelter #1 - Near the Learning Center  
Seats 80-100 people (\$40)
- Shelter #2 - At the Playground by Harmony Lane  
Seats 50-70 people (\$40)
- Shelter #3 - At Discovery Pond (no electricity)  
15-20 people (\$20)

### Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area

- Chicken Creek - Shelter #1  
60-80 people (\$25)
- Cedar River Boat Ramp - Shelter #2  
60-80 people (\$25)

### Jack Shuger Memorial Park

- Large shelter near the playground  
50-60 people (\$25)



## Sleep under the stars at Saulsbury

The Saulsbury campgrounds feature a shower house, dump station, water, playground, access to hiking trails, fishing at Chicken Creek, reservable picnic shelters, firewood, and the Cedar River Boat Landing.

The main campground has been updated to include 20, 30 and 50-amp electrical service! Each site also has a picnic table and campfire ring.

Camping fees are as follows.

- |                        |            |
|------------------------|------------|
| • Main Campground      | \$25/night |
| • River Campground     | \$20/night |
| • Primitive Campground | \$10/night |

## Save money with these great camping deals!

- **\*FREE\* Wednesdays** - every Wednesday guests can camp for free!
- **Camping Coupons** - purchase a book of camping coupons for \$125 and receive one **\*FREE\*** night! Available at the Environmental Learning Center, or from a park officer.
- **\*2 for 1 Weekends** - the second weekend of each month, pay for Friday and get Saturday night FREE!
- Those with a permanent handicap can camp for just \$20 in the Main Campground.

## Rent the Saulsbury Lodge

The Saulsbury Lodge is a great setting for a family reunion, small wedding reception, graduation or birthday party.

This enclosed building has both heat and air. There is a small kitchen area, modern restrooms, and access to the Saulsbury Bridge. It has the capacity to seat around 75 people with tables and chairs.

Prices vary depending on the day of the week and type of event. Availability can be viewed on our website. Call or email us to make a reservation.

**For more info or to make a reservation:**

[Conservation@muscatinecountyia.gov](mailto:Conservation@muscatinecountyia.gov)

563-264-5922

[MuscatineCountyConservation.com](http://MuscatineCountyConservation.com)

Facebook: [MuscatineCountyConservationBoard](https://www.facebook.com/MuscatineCountyConservationBoard)



## New Saulsbury Park Officer

Hello, My name is Trevor Ebeling. I am the new park officer living at Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area.



In February of 2023 I began working for Muscatine County Conservation. I graduated from the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy in December and have been enjoying my time learning about the job and working in the different parks and wildlife areas.

I am excited to return to Muscatine where I grew up, to be closer to my family.

In 2012, I graduated from Northland College with my Bachelor's degree in Natural Resources, Fisheries and Wildlife Ecology.

After graduating I enlisted in the United States Air Force, where I served 7 years as Security Forces with 4 deployments. After my Honorable Discharge from the Air Force, I worked in Webster City, Iowa with the National Resource Conservation Service as a Soil Conservation Technician.

I look forward to serving the County Parks and the visitors that enjoy our parks for many years to come.



## Holiday Closings

The Conservation Board offices and Environmental Learning Center will be closed in honor of the following holidays.

Easter - Sunday, March 31, 2024

Memorial Day - Monday, May 27, 2024

Independence Day - Thursday, July 4, 2024



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.

**Karen Gray, Patty Foor** - Christmas Tree ornaments

**Stacy Christensen-Corey, Eliana Veen** - Book Nook books

**All Seasons Glass** - monetary donation for the raptor programs at Bald Eagle Days as well as other programs and projects

**Todd Stammer** - Environmental Education program help.

## Memorials



A Crabapple tree was adopted in Discovery Park

***In Memory of Guadalupe Fuentes Castillo.***

A Maple tree was adopted in Discovery Park

***In Memory of Ezra Alexander Segura.***

A Maple tree was adopted in Discovery Park

***In Memory of Michael J. Bunn Sr.***

A Maple tree was adopted in Discovery Park

***In Memory of Savannah Leigh Hahn.***

A Maple tree was adopted in Discovery Park

***In Memory of Beverly White.***

A monetary donation

***In Memory of Beverly White.***



## Honorariums

An Oak tree was adopted in Discovery Park

***In Honor of Harry Church.***

MUSCATINE COUNTY  
CONSERVATION BOARD  
3300 CEDAR STREET  
PO BOX 109  
MUSCATINE, IA 52761

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## MUSCATINE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

### BOARD MEMBERS

Sherry Seright	Chairperson
Julie Jindrich	Vice-chairperson
Karen Hartman	Member
Mark Petersen	Member
Mike Schulte	Member

The Muscatine County Conservation Board meets the third Monday of each month at 6:00 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, gender, 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

### STAFF

Katie Hammond	Director
Michelle Berns	Naturalist II
Luke Hart	Naturalist
Kent Kaufman	Operations Supervisor
Ryne Brimeyer	Park Officer
Kristin Neeld	Maint. Tech./Park Officer
Trevor Ebeling	Maint. Tech./Park Officer
Lori Dietrich	Office Manager
Dave Schuler	Learning Center Assistant

### Contact us at:

3300 Cedar Street, PO Box 109  
Muscatine, IA 52761  
P(563) 264-5922  
[conservation@muscatinecountyia.gov](mailto:conservation@muscatinecountyia.gov)  
[www.MuscatineCountyConservation.com](http://www.MuscatineCountyConservation.com)

