

Winter 2017-18



Conservation Matters

Upcoming Event Highlights

**Nature Center
Open House-
January 14th**

**Owl Prowl-
February 10th**

**Winter Bird
Watching -
January 17th,
February 21st,
March 21st**

**Tiny Adventures-
January 3rd,
February 7th,
March 7th**

*More program
details and
contact
information
located in
newsletter.*

Mills County Conservation Board

Mills County Neighbor

The mighty oak tree is a familiar neighbor to many of us in Mills County and residents throughout Iowa. There are 12 different oak species that are native to Iowa, although, only a single species, the bur oak, is found throughout the state. In 1961 the Iowa General Assembly designated the "oak" as Iowa's official tree.

Iowa oaks are separated into two groups- red oaks or white oaks. The white oaks (white, bur, Chinkapin, swamp white, post and dwarf chinkapin) have lobed leaves with rounded lobes and acorns that mature in a single growing season and germinate in the fall. The red oaks include, red, pin, black, Northern pin, blackjack and shingle. They have mostly lobed leaves with bristle tips and acorns that require two growing seasons to mature.

Bur oaks are one of the most common oaks that grow in the Loess Hills. They are very slow growing and long-lived with an average life span of 200-400 years! Their resistance to drought and fire make them the perfect tree to survive in prairie areas. Oak savannas occur when scattered trees grow throughout a prairie. This ecosystem is one of the rarest in the world.

Red oak trees are another common oak that is known for its beautiful wood. These trees grow faster than other oaks and have become a popular choice in urban areas. Like the bur oak, the red oak has the potential to live a very long time, some have been recorded to be 500 years old.

Wildlife depend heavily on oak trees for shelter, roosting areas, and most importantly a good source of food. Squirrel, turkey, deer, blue jay, and woodpeckers all feed on acorns. If you are thinking about adding some new trees to your property the oak tree is a wonderful choice.

Grants and Donations

A grant was received from the Tallgrass Prairie Center for a preserved prairie root. This root will be displayed in the gallery of the Nature Center and is valued at \$2,500. Mills County Conservation is very excited about this unique display and greatly appreciates the opportunity to educate people about the importance of prairie plants. The root will be up for the public and school groups to view by June 1st. The roots for this project are grown at the University of Northern Iowa and typically take 2-3 seasons of growth before they are complete.

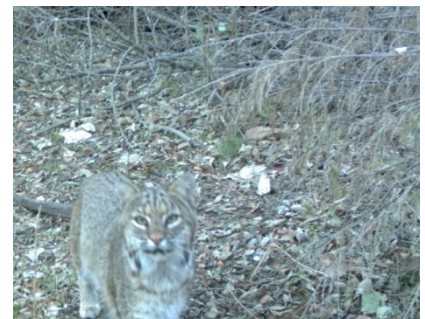
Conservation Tip

Co-existing with wildlife in our area is a touchy subject for some. In the past 200 years the landscape of Iowa has been almost completely changed by human settlement and agriculture. Some animals have adapted to living near humans while others have not made that transition and are now extirpated from the state. Black bears, mountain lions, elk, and wolves use to roam around Iowa but have now become infrequent visitors. Other species such as, white-tail deer, raccoons, opossums, and Canada geese have done VERY well living near humans. If you are a home owner there is a good chance you have feuded with some form of wildlife this year whether it be squirrels chewing on wires, mice getting inside your house, gophers digging up your yard, or a fox making dinner out of your flock of chickens. Many animals do not cause significant damage but are more of a nuisance when they are living near people. Whether you live in town or in the country there are ways to make co-existing with wildlife easier. Read on for a some tips:

- Never leave pet food outside after dark. Cat food is commonly left out over night and will attract raccoons, opossums, skunks, foxes, and even coyotes.
- Animal proof garbage cans will reduce the headache of cleaning up messes and won't attract scavengers to your property.
- Patch holes that might allow small animals to access your house- bats can fit in openings as small as ½ inch in diameter. If you do find bats in your house please call a pest control company to help you safely and responsibly exclude them from your property. There are strict laws to follow.
- Cut tree limbs that overhang your roof to limit access for squirrels and raccoons.
- Close off areas around decks, foundations, sheds, porches that may provide a shelter for unwanted critters. Skunks and woodchucks will readily move into these areas.
- Install squirrel/raccoon guards on bird feeder poles and try to keep the ground under feeders from piling up with discarded bird seed.
- Keep small animals and pets in secure enclosures if they are outside unsupervised.
- Chickens are an easy meal for hawks, owls, foxes, coyotes, and bobcats. An enclosure with a top is the most ideal way to keep them safe.

There are misconceptions that most animals only come out at night, when people see them during the day they assume they are sick. Nocturnal animals frequently come out during the morning and early evening hours. During the winter many animals change their routines so they can be out during the warmer part of the day instead of during the bitter cold nights. This means that you might see a coyote, fox, bobcat, raccoon, or skunk out roaming in the middle of the day.

In the event that you do encounter a wild animal, it's important to stay calm and give them space. Never try to corner or catch an animal. Most animals will leave on their own but you can wave your arms, clap and shout if you need one to leave immediately.



Nature in Winter

It is COLD outside but don't let that stop you from getting out and about. Winter is one of the best times to check out the local woodlands. The understory plants have gone dormant so it is easier to walk off the beaten path and explore new areas. With the absences of colorful flowers and leaves it seems like a sullen place to visit, however, it is the complete opposite. There are many features that are overlooked during the growing season that stand out now. Evidence of wildlife is one fun thing to look for. Tracks, scrapes, abandoned bird nests, squirrel nests, holes in tree trunks are just a few signs that can lead you on an adventure to learn more about the residents of the woodland. Trees have a different kind of beauty during this dormant season, with shapes of branches and textures of bark highlighting the horizon. Conifers (evergreen) trees are a welcome burst of color and provide valuable shelter for birds and mammals, they are a great place to search for critters. West Oak Forest, Pony Creek Park, Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve, Kenny's Woods and Ray Thomas Wildlife Area are great places to visit. Take along this simple track guide and see what you can find!

ANIMAL TRACKS



Opossum

Front Foot



Hind Foot



Squirrel

Hind Foot



Front Foot

Rabbit

Trail



Turkey

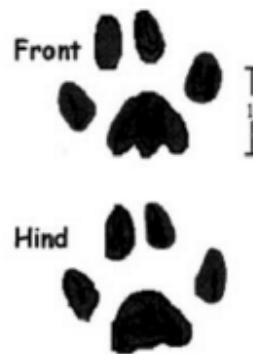
Front



Hind

Raccoon

Front



Hind

Bobcat

Front



Hind

Coyote

Upcoming Public Programs

January 14th- Nature Center Open House @ 1:00-3:00pm

Browse through the building, watch winter birds utilize the feeding station and enjoy some tasty treats. This is come and go as you please, the Naturalist will be available to answer questions.

February 10th- Owl Prowl @ 5:00 pm

A short presentation about our local owls will be held inside the Nature Center followed by a prowling along the trails at Pony Creek Park to look for live owls. Weather appropriate shoes and clothing are recommended for the hike.

Winter Bird Watching

The third Wednesday of each month, 9:00-10:00 am.

Bird watching at Pony Creek Nature Center. The feeders around the Nature Center and Bird Blind will be full to attract some of our beautiful birds that brave the Iowa winter. Weather permitting there will be bird watching along the trails at Pony Creek Park. Pony Creek Lake also provides a great spot to view winter waterfowl and eagles. Bring binoculars if you have them, a limited supply are available to borrow. Bird identification books and a spotting scope are provided.

January 17th, February 21st, March 21st

Tiny Nature Adventures:

The first Wednesday of each month, 10:00-11:00 am.
Nature themed activities for children 3-5 years old.

Adult must stay with child and pre-registration is REQUIRED, call 712-527-9685. We will be outdoors when weather allows so dress accordingly! Pony Creek Nature Center, 56235 Deacon Road.

January 3rd, February 7th, March 7th

Pony Creek Nature Center
56235 Deacon Road
Pacific Junction, IA 51561
712-527-9685

Monday thru Friday
9:00am- 3:00 pm



Pre-registration contact
information:

Phone: 712-527-9685
Email: millsccbia@hotmail.com

Pre-registering helps us plan
accordingly for programs.

Mills County Conservation

Contact information

Mills County
Conservation
Pony Creek Park
56235 Deacon Rd
Pacific Junction, IA 51561

PHONE:
(712) 527-9685

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millscobia@hotmail.com

Website:
mccb.millscoia.us



Mills County Conservation Board:

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Zach Kohlhoff, Specialist
Jesse Ayers, Technician

MCCB Board Members:

Jan Faraci, Mineola
George Marshall, Malvern
Lana White, Hastings
Kreg Kinzle, Glenwood
Ted Golka, Glenwood



The Mills County Conservation Board is committed to providing the citizens of Mills County with quality outdoor recreation areas and opportunities for environmental education experiences. Please take advantage of these services and visit the nearly 1,800 acres of public land available!

CONSERVATION MATTERS
MILLS COUNTY CONSERVATION
56235 DEACON RD
PACIFIC JUNCTION, IA 51561

Winter 2017-18

West Oak Forest

308 acres in the Loess Hills consisting of woodlands and prairie, open for hiking and nature viewing.

Pony Creek Park

83 acres of woodland and small prairie remnants in the Loess Hills. This park provides two open shelters, 3 pit latrines, 6 electrical camping sites, primitive camping sites, playground, hiking trails, a scenic overlook and the Pony Creek Nature Center.

Mile Hill Lake

39 acres of woodlands with a 10 acre fishing lake. Provides a boat ramp, hiking trails, scenic overlook and is open to public hunting.

Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve/ Foothills Park 906 acres of hay field/ag land, reconstructed prairie, and woodlands. Rich archaeological significance, paved trails, fruit trees, great birding location.

Kenny's Woods

20 acres of woodland, open for nature viewing.

Fisher Wildlife Area

20 acres of reconstructed prairie, woodlands, and the River. Paddlers access ramp with parking area, open to public hunting

Ray Thomas Wildlife Pres.

90 acres open for passive use ONLY, reconstructed prairie, cropland, woodland, creek

Washburn Landing

Canoe/kayak access ramp with parking area. Access from east side of the river.

Lake George Park

11 acres, picnic shelter, grill and two acre pond

Indian Creek Greenbelt Area

17 acres reconstructed prairie, creek access, fruit trees

Wabash Trace Nature Trail

25 miles of biking/hiking trail. Former railroad corridor with limestone surface with access points in Malvern, Silver City, Mineola.

