

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Summer 2013



No Strings Attached?

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world. ~John Muir

Historically, Iowa was covered in an estimated 23 million acres of prairie, 7 million acres of woodlands, and 4 million acres of wetlands. Today, most of Iowa's native habitats have been replaced by farms, towns and roads. Only 30,000 acres of the once vast prairies remain, 42,000 acres of wetlands, and less than 3 million acres of woodlands. These dramatic changes have caused serious issues from an ecological stand point. Large herbivores and carnivores have disappeared, grassland birds are some of the most endangered species in the world, and native plants are few and far between. One third of all Iowa's fish and wildlife are considered in need of immediate conservation or they will become threatened or endangered. Currently, there are over 50 animal species and 65 plant species that are listed as State Endangered Species. Unfortunately, most people are more familiar with the high profile endangered and threatened species found in other countries around the world than we are with the ones found right in our own backyard. It is often questioned why we invest money and time into saving a single species. The loss of one species of plant, animal, or insect in an ecosystem can have devastating effects on the remaining community. Likewise, the addition of a non-native to an ecosystem can cause major problems. Domestic cats kill 4 billion birds and 20 million other animals ANNUALLY in the United States. We all benefit from balanced healthy ecosystems. Wetlands provide a natural filtration system for ground water and cleans many pollutants out of our environment. Prairies provide the fertile soils that Iowa has been built upon and woodlands provide clean air for us to breath. It is important to learn about your local ecosystems and the benefits they provide. Everything in nature is connected and impacts our lives in one way or another.

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

Hérons, herons, and more herons. Great blue herons are large beautiful birds that are common in Mills County. Next time you spot a Great Blue stop and take a good look at it. Gray-blue with bold black lines and a bright yellow beak offers quite the site. One feature that you will notice on a breezy day is the long delicate feathers on their chest. These specialized feathers grow continuously and are used almost like a wash cloth. Fish slime and oils are gently wiped away from other feathers with the delicate, frayed feathers.

These large birds are patient hunters that seem like statues most of the time. Do not let them fool you though, when prey comes close they are lightning fast. They wade through shallow water searching for frogs, tadpoles, fish, snakes, snails, and nearly any aquatic life they can consume. They have been known to feed on ducklings when given the opportunity. You will also notice them walking through grassy areas looking for mice, gophers, and reptiles. They are not picky when it comes to food selection.

One of the unique behaviors about Great blue herons is their communal nesting grounds known as "rookeries" or "heronries". The male gathers most of the nesting materials and presents them to the female to build the nest with. Some "heronries" can contain as many as 500 nests. There are several colonies located in Mills County with most only containing 5-10 nests each. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology maintains a nest cam with live video of a heron and her babies, if you have internet access it is worth checking out [http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/8/Great Blue Herons/](http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/8/Great_Blue_Herons/).



Remember to use and take care of your County Parks. They belong to You!

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Classroom Connection

The chilly Spring weather made outdoor program planning tricky but it is a busy time for students across the county. Three groups from East Mills visited Pony Creek Park for a variety of activities, including fishing, hiking, and nature education. One hundred and fifty Glenwood 8th graders made the steep hike to the top of West Oak Forest for a spectacular view and learned about the Loess Hills. Students throughout the county learned about minerals, snails, life cycles, amphibians, snakes, and participated in scavenger hunts and nature journaling. Environmental education programs are always free to schools and the public throughout the year. If you are interested in a FREE program for a group please feel free to contact us at 712.527.9685.

Are you ready to do some camping? Time is running out before it gets miserably hot outside. Pony Creek Park located at 56235 Deacon Road west of Glenwood has camp sites. There are six electrical hookups and numerous tent sites. Fees are \$10 for tent sites and \$12 for electrical.

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 18th @ 10:00 am- "Pond Study"

Using nets and containers we will look at some of the fascinating creatures that inhabit a common Iowa pond. Pre-registration is required. This program will be held at Pony Creek Park.

June 20th @ 9:00 am- " Beginner Fishing"

Join us at Mile Hill Lake to learn basic fishing skills, fish ID, and responsible outdoor ethics. Equipment will be provided or feel free to bring your own. Pre-registration is required.

July 9th @ 10:00 am - " Animal Tracks"

Come out to Pony Creek to learn about some local wildlife and make animal tracks out of plaster. Pre-registration is required.

July 13th @ 10:00 am- " Nature Journaling"

Join us at Pony Creek Park to learn the skill of Nature Journaling. We will put together some fun journals and go on a hike learning about the environment. Pre-registration is REQUIRED.

August 24th - "Keg Creek Days"

Come find us near the Earthlodge to see some live animals and other fun stuff.

To pre-register for these events or for more information, please call Dessa at (712) 527-9685 or send us an email at millsccbia@hotmail.com

GO GREEN! If you would like to receive your Conservation Matter's newsletter straight to your email inbox please send your request to millsccbia@hotmail.com

It is also available on the MCCB website:
<http://mccb.millscoia.us>

This will also put you on the email list to receive event reminders.



LITTLE CRITTERS FUN PAGE

TRIVIA TIME:

1. What is North America's only marsupial?

2. Which animal's scientific name means "washer"?

3. Which common canid (doglike animal) can make twenty different types of sounds?

4. What animal is also known as a "whistle pig"?

5. Which animal annually kills the most people worldwide?

6. Which animal can help you calculate the temperature?

7. The young of which animal may stay at home for a few years to help their parents raise their siblings?

8. What animal has legs, but does not use them to walk?

9. What is the most dangerous wild animal in the United States?

10. TRUE or FALSE? All Spiders are carnivorous

11. What creature forms "puddle clubs"?

12. What animal feeds every ten minutes during the daylight hours?

Try to learn something
about everything and
everything about
something!

-unknown

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Trivia Answers:

1. The Virginia Opossum- *Females have an external pouch into which incompletely developed newborn young climb into nurse and finish developing. The babies are about the size of a bee and live in the pouch for 2 months.*
2. The Raccoon- *Procyon lotor is the latin name for this intelligent critter. The word, lotor means "to wash". Raccoons often wash most of their food when water is available.*
3. Foxes- *Foxes are most vocal during the winter months and can commonly be heard shrieking to attract males.*
4. The Groundhog- *They make a shrill whistling sound when predators are near.*
5. The Mosquito- *They carry malaria, yellow fever, dengue fever, west nile, and many other diseases. Worldwide malaria kills about 2.7 million people every year. In the United States, they spread encephalitis, West Nile virus, and canine heartworm.*
6. Crickets- *Crickets chirping can be used to calculate the temperature in cool weather. Count chirps per minute, divide by 4, and add 40 to the approximate Fahrenheit temperature.*
7. The American Crow- *Young will stay around and help gather food and watch the nest for up to two years.*
8. The mole- *A moles weight rests on its belly rather than its legs. The forelegs are quite strong and are used for tunneling.*
9. Deer- *Some 500,000 deer/car collisions result in thousands of injuries and deaths annually.*
10. True- *Most spider eat insects, but a few larger species prey on small mice and birds.*
11. The male butterfly- *The males of several butterfly species often gather around mud puddles, possibly for the dissolved minerals.*
12. Hummingbirds- *The worlds smallest bird consumes half its weight in nectar each day, feeding about every 10 minutes. They may visit up to 1,000 flowers per day.*