

# Voices From The Ridge

Wapello County Conservation

Winter 2023



## Winter

The winter season is upon us, and we have settled into the cold, long days. Even though the days are long, that doesn't mean they are without anything to do! In this volume of Voices from the Ridge, we will explore the different events happening at Wapello County Conservation and beyond. What kind of winter edition would this be if we didn't include ways to be environmentally friendly around the holidays or how to get outside and enjoy the snow? If you are looking for something to do this winter break, come visit the Pioneer Ridge Nature Center! We have decorated our tree and will be open Monday- Friday from 8:00AM- 4:30 PM, excluding December 22nd and 25th for Christmas. We would love to see you! Happy Holidays!



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# Sustainable Gift Giving

By: Amanda Jones

“It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes or bags!” - Dr Seuss, How the Grinch Stole Christmas!

It is easy for us to get wrapped up (pun intended) in the hustle and bustle of the holidays. The list of names for presents to be bought for seems to get longer each year. The pile of gifts that are brought home seems to get larger as well. Leaving you with a full house or an extra garbage bag on trash day. It is estimated that Americans toss out 25% more trash during the holiday season (the average American already produces 5lbs of trash per day!). What if there was a more eco minded alternative to the holidays? An option that leaves us and the earth happy? We would love to share some of our tried and true sustainable gift giving tips!



## Ditch the wrapping paper!

We all know it is fun to look at the wrapping paper mountain at the end of the night, but when you think about this happening in so many different homes across the country and world, that adds up to a lot of trash! Give gifts wrapped in scarves or bandanas that can be used again. If you have your heart set on wrapping paper or bags, be intentional. Use second hand gift bags, recyclable wrappings, or newspaper!



## Give an experience!

Pay tuition for a loved one's camp (winter break camp is just around the corner), take them to mini golf, or maybe a trip to the zoo!



## Give a homemade gift!

Giving something homemade does not have to be extravagant or time consuming. Do you have a hidden crafting talent you'd like to share? Something as simple as a batch of homemade chocolate chip cookies can show your appreciation for a loved one.

# Eco Art



Andy Goldsworthy  
 Famous eco-artist from the UK  
 67 years old  
 Winter inspired eco art that  
 leaves no trace ❤️



Ecological art, like all art, will hold a different meaning for everyone. The important thing for this feature is that it brings awareness to an ecological issue or wonder. From poems to paintings, photos to sculptures, and all things in between we want you to submit your take on eco art and maybe see it featured here! Please know that by submitting your work you are giving permission for Wapello County to use this work in the newsletter as well as on other platforms to help promote the natural areas and our community.

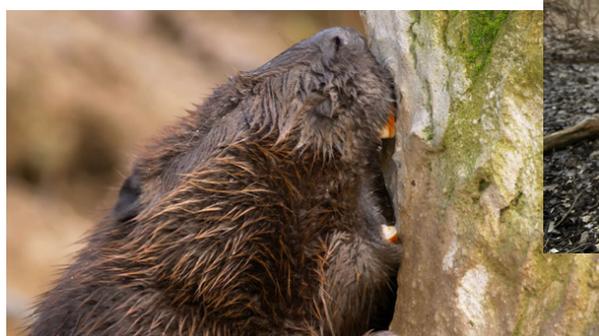


## Ask The Naturalist

*Why are a beaver's front teeth orange? -  
 Mallory T.*

A beaver's front teeth also known as incisors can be the color, orange, yellow, or brown due to the iron that is in their tooth enamel. The iron helps keep their teeth strong and durable which is a good thing since they are so famously known for chopping down large trees with their teeth! A beaver does not chomp on wood for food but instead they chew on wood in order to trim down their evergrowing incisors.

- The Naturalist



To submit your questions for the naturalist and/or if you want to submit some of your original eco art, send them on over with the subject line "For VFTR" to [wapellocountynaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:wapellocountynaturalist@gmail.com) Art can be submitted through a photo or a scanned copy. Please make sure to include your signature on any art.

# Trailblazers

By: Sunshine Laursen

## Malaika Vaz

National Geographic Explorer  
Wildlife Filmmaker  
26 years old  
Goa, India



Malaika Vaz grew up on the coast of Goa, India where she spent much of her childhood windsurfing, sailing, or hiking. Her outdoor experiences as a child and education at UWC Mahindra College of India has led her down the path of becoming an advocate for the planet as a young adult.

At the age of 18, Vaz turned her hobby of documenting wildlife into a production company named “Untamed Planet” where she creates meaningful film that has shown to make a difference in the world of conservation. Just a few of the topics she covers in her work are things such as wildlife trafficking, natural history of the land, and the stories of how small communities are being affected by the current changes in the environment.

**“I began to feel like adventure didn’t really mean anything if there wasn’t an intent to protect the natural spaces we were exploring in.” -Maliaka Vaz**



Just one of her remarkable achievements is involved in the research of why manta ray populations were decreasing at a concerning rate. Vaz even went so far as disguising herself as a seafood trader to get firsthand information on this alarming mystery. By doing this, she discovered manta rays were being poached for their gill plates. She shares her groundbreaking story in the Green-Oscar nominated film, “Peng Yu Sai.”

Today, she travels the globe continuing to capture the fascinating tales the earth has to share.

**Like Malaika, what past experiences led you to be interested in what you care about now?**



# Oh, This? I Made It.

By Amanda Jones

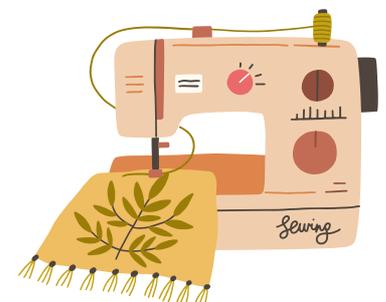
Long days in the house, cold snowy afternoons with nothing to do. What if you could change that? Winter is a great time to learn a new craft or plan for the upcoming spring. We may be bias, but some of the best hobbies are ones that benefit the environment. This may seem like a lofty goal, but it is actually obtainable for most! Simple things like growing your own food, raising your own chickens, or making your own clothes can have a huge impact on the environment.

A place many like to start is with planning and planting your own garden! You don't need to have acres of land to start growing some of your own food. Some recommend a garden of about 25 sq ft to start with, you could also do raised garden beds or container gardening on a porch if you have a small yard. Growing your own food has many different benefits for the environment. Plants benefit the soil by reducing soil run off, converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, and adding valuable food for pollinators. Because there is no need to have the food shipped or brought to a store and stored, it reduces your carbon footprint!

Trying your hand at a craft can also be a good way to fight winter boredom. This could be sewing, knitting, or crocheting your own clothes and accessories. Sewing and mending your own clothing has a huge impact on the environment. Fast fashion has exploded over the past few years. Brands make cheap clothing at accelerated rates and because of the poor quality the garments find their way to the landfill quickly. The polyester used in these clothes take 20-200years to decompose and when washed add microplastics to the water. Mending clothing you already have or making your own out of sustainable materials like cotton or linen helps lessen the negative impact of the fashion industry on the environment by reducing demand.

We have all been excited to hear the chirping in the farm stores every spring when the chickens have hatched. Have you ever thought about bringing a few home with you? Raising your own backyard flock of chickens can benefit not only you, but the world as well. Chickens are happy to eat your food scraps, which prevents them from heading to the land fill and contributing to greenhouse gasses. They are natural pest control, leaving beneficial bugs alone, but eating the problematic ones. Their waste is also amazing fertilizer for that garden you are planning. And who doesn't love farm fresh eggs?

Still not convinced? There are many other ways to be a little more self-sufficient while helping the natural world! Install solar panels to reduce your energy bill. If you are a baker, maybe try making your own bread and pastries instead of buying them from the store. Rain barrels collect rainwater run off that can be used to water plants, your garden, or refill your bird bath. Installing a clothesline is a great way to use less electricity and lower your bill at the same time. No matter your space or capabilities, we can all do things to help not only ourselves, but the environment as well.



## We are hiring!

We are looking to add to our team! Do you enjoy working outside and have a passion for conservation work? You could be just the fit!

### **Conservation Technician**

Application Deadline: January 10th, 2024

Starting Pay: \$20.49/hour

To apply: email cover letter, three references, and resume to [rtebbs@wapellocounty.org](mailto:rtebbs@wapellocounty.org)

**Qualification:** High school diploma or equivalent required. Associate degree in a natural resource related field is acceptable, or 1-3 years of experience in a related field, or the equivalent combination of training and experience which provides the required knowledge, skills, and abilities. Bachelor's degree in resource management field preferred.

Check out the complete job description on [www.wapellocounty.org](http://www.wapellocounty.org) or [www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com).



## Winter Break Camp

A more detailed list of events can be found at [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com) on the Wapello county page or on our facebook page.

### **Winter Break Camp-**

Looking for something to do over the winter break this year? We will be hosting a one-day camp for kids **6-12 years old** on **December 27th** from **10 am- 3:30 pm**. We will be exploring nature from both inside and outside so come prepared for **both indoor and outdoor** activities. Hot chocolate may be involved. (:

Registration is required and can be done online at [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com). Registration closes on December 26. Please reach out with any questions. Camp will be limited to 15 kids.



## American Gothic House Center News

**February 3rd:** AGHC Birthday Sleuth Event **10AM-11:15AM/11:30AM-12:45PM**

Can you decide whodunnit? Ages 14through adult only. Work in teams to solve the crime by deciphering clues. Deadline to register is January 26th and can be done online or by calling the AGHC.

**February 3rd:** AGHC Birthday Celebration for Kids **2PM-3PM**

FREE birthday scavenger hunt for school aged kids and their parent or guardian. No registration required.



American Gothic House

# CRAFTERNOONS WITH WAPELLO COUNTY CONSERVATION



## January 20, 24

1-3 pm

### Candles and Cookies

We will make homemade candles, talk about the benefit of natural smells and oils and share cookies and coffee.

This year Wapello County Conservation is teaming up with ISU extension for some of our Crafternoons. Join us throughout the colder months to do a fun craft, learn a little something about sustainability and hang out with friends! Here is the line up.



## February 10, 24

1-3 pm

### Lotion, lip gloss & lemon bars

We will talk about sustainable beauty supplies, enjoy a sweet treat and make our own lip glosses and lotions.

## December 21, 23

6-8 pm

### Star Gazing and Stained Glass

We will learn all about the constellations in our night sky and create a faux stained glass piece inspired by the stars.

Here is a small recap from our November Wreath Building program. If you missed us this time, be sure to join us next year!



# Halloween Hike Thank You

Special Thank yous!

That's a wrap for the 2023 Halloween Hike!! The weather unfortunately did not cooperate for the first night of our event, but our second night turned out to be wonderful! We appreciate the patience and support from all who attended this year's Halloween Hike!

We also cannot thank the actors, volunteers, participants, and campers enough for all of their hard work to make this event happen.

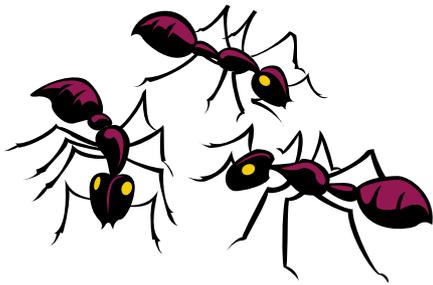
This year's theme was all about the incredible world of insects, if you have any thoughts or ideas for next year's theme please reach out!

Until next year! 🐛🐜🐝



Halloween Hike Trunk Or Treat Winner  
Voted for Best Decorated Campsite

**Bobbie Amburn**



Halloween Hike 2023 Actors:  
(Names left to right)

**Beth Doggett**

**Jan Tallman**

**Chase Kelly**

**Becky Ingle**

**Charles Smith**

**Abby Canny**

**Jillian Rominger**

**Debbie Truitt**

**Dave Truitt**

**Talise Plate**

**Miles Hedgecock**

# Species Spotlight

## Bald Eagles

Sara Runyan



Winter is a really good time to talk about Bald Eagles not only because there are more in the area, but also because they have a really sweet love story.

Eagles, like many birds, move to warmer places for winter. For Bald Eagles that is Iowa. While it does not always feel warm to us in winter, it is for eagles travelling from colder northern climates. Typically, bald eagles spend their summers in the most northern parts of Canada and then come to Iowa where it is “warmer” to raise their babies. Bald Eagle’s love to eat fish which can be tricky to catch in ponds and lakes that have frozen over, so they come here for the open water found in fast moving rivers like the Des Moines, or around damns, like the one here in Ottumwa.

Bald Eagles reach maturity around 4 years old which is when they start searching for their forever valentine. This is also when they will have fully developed their white head and tail. Before this time, they are almost all black. When they find “the one” the pair will stay together until death, since bald eagles can live up to 30 years in the wild, this is no small commitment. Together they build a nest of sticks and raise 4-5 eaglets their first year. Every spring after that, the pair will meet at the exact same nest, fix it up, add a bit more space and raise more babies. So, if you see a couple on a gigantic nest, you can assume that this pair has been raising eaglets together for many years.

**Mark your calendars for February 24th!!!** This February Wapello County Conservation and Meet Ottumwa will be hosting our first annual “On Eagles Wings- Wapello County Wildlife Weekend.” The event will be held at the Bridge View Center- The perfect Bald Eagle viewing location! We will start the morning bird watching with an expert, then we will have breakout workshops that teach all about Iowa wildlife. There will be educational booths as well as some local crafters set up throughout the center. We will announce the main attractions on our social media, along with a more detailed schedule.

**On Eagle's Wings**  
Wapello Wildlife Weekend

**Save The Date**

February 24th, 2024 @ Bridge View Center

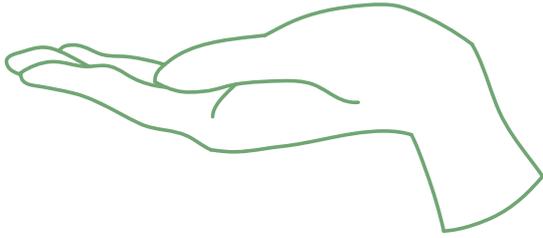
Join us for a day of adventure. We will get to see eagles on the Des Moines river, meet some animals up close and learn about all kinds of Iowa Wildlife.

This event is free to the public.

Hosted by Wapello County Conservation and Meet Ottumwa

## Wapello County Conservation Board

The future in our hands..



### Pioneer Ridge Nature Center

Open Monday through Friday  
8:00 am to 4:30 pm

The Nature Center will be  
closed for the following days  
in the Winter:

Christmas- December 22nd  
& 25th

New Years- January 1st  
MLK Jr. Day- January 15th  
President's Day- February  
19th



Call us: 641.682.3091



Like us: Pioneer Ridge Nature Area-  
Wapello County Conservation Board



Follow us: [wapellocountyconservation](https://www.instagram.com/wapellocountyconservation)



Look us up:  
[www.wapellocounty.org/conservation/](http://www.wapellocounty.org/conservation/)



Come see us:  
1339 Hwy 63  
Bloomfield, Iowa 52537

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