

Voices From The Ridge

Wapello County Conservation

Fall 2023



Fall

Who doesn't love fall? The leaves are changing, the air is chilly, and everyone is eating lots to prepare for winter. It is the perfect time to be outside and soak up some sun before the longer nights and shorter days set in.

There are many fun things that you can do outside in the fall, you will find a few of those scattered throughout this newsletter. Don't forget to check out our upcoming events and make sure that you get in on the Halloween Hike this year! Our theme will be insects.

As we wind down from a crazy busy summer, we are reflecting on the way the summer has gone. We are so grateful for all of the participation that we have had this summer. Without your engagement we would not be able to do what we do. Thank you!



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Campfires & Constellations

By: Sunshine Laursen

This time of year the weather is starting to get cool and the sun isn't staying around as long but people are still looking for ways to spend time outside for just a little longer. Sitting by a campfire and looking at the stars is the perfect way to spend a chilly autumn night.

Campfire Building

Tips



There are a few different ways to build your campfire. No matter how you do it though there are 3 things you will ALWAYS need to have a successful blaze. These 3 things are **oxygen, fuel,** and a **spark**. You cannot just have one or two, they are all equally important.

In times when we need to prepare quickly to set up a campfire for summer camp kids, we found the most reliable technique is the log cabin build. Think of it like stacking Lincoln Logs with your bigger pieces of wood, then with your smaller pieces of fuel such as twigs, dead grass, paper, etc. are left in the middle. Be sure not to pile everything together, your fire needs room to breath! Lastly, you need a spark whether that be a match, lighter, flint and steel, or if you're crafty enough two sticks.

Some people will use the pyramid build which can be useful but often times when the logs catch fire they will eventually collapse and will cause the fire to lose oxygen. The log cabin technique allows logs to burn and break but not cause a dangerous collapse.

Log Cabin



Pyramid

Stars and Stuff

Most of us are probably familiar with the "Big Dipper" or it's also known as "Big Bear" and "Ursa Major." It is one of the easiest constellations you can find in the sky and because of this for thousands of years cultures all around the world have imagined their own stories of this certain set of stars. One tale told in Iroquois legends were that the 3 bright stars in the handle of the "Big Dipper" are 3 hunters chasing after a bear. The chase lasts from Spring to Autumn until finally the hunters kill the bear with an arrow. The bear falls towards the Earth making the constellation come closer to the horizon. The blood that spills from the bear stains all the leaves into the beautiful red, orange, and yellow colors we adore so much.

Ursa Major



Draconids 2020



FYI: This autumn there will be a spectacular show of meteors or in other words "falling stars." This annual meteor show is called the Draconids which occurs October 6th-October 10th, the best nights to observe will be in the evenings of the 8th and 9th. It can be difficult to see all of these amazing things in our night sky when most of us live in places where it is hard to find a spot away from artificial light. This fall you can make it a goal to find a space to escape away from the city lights and be present under the stars. If you need some ideas, Pioneer Ridge is the perfect place to start!

Check out the Starfinder app to find all the constellations in the night sky with your electronic device!

Eco Art

Painting by Kayleigh Wanner. Age 10
Inspired by summer camps.



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

What is a place in nature that you visit often? - The Naturalist

For this newsletter we wanted to turn the tables and ask YOU a question. You can answer the question above as it is, or you can think a little deeper. Feel free to grab a pen and paper, discuss with a friend, or keep it to yourself.

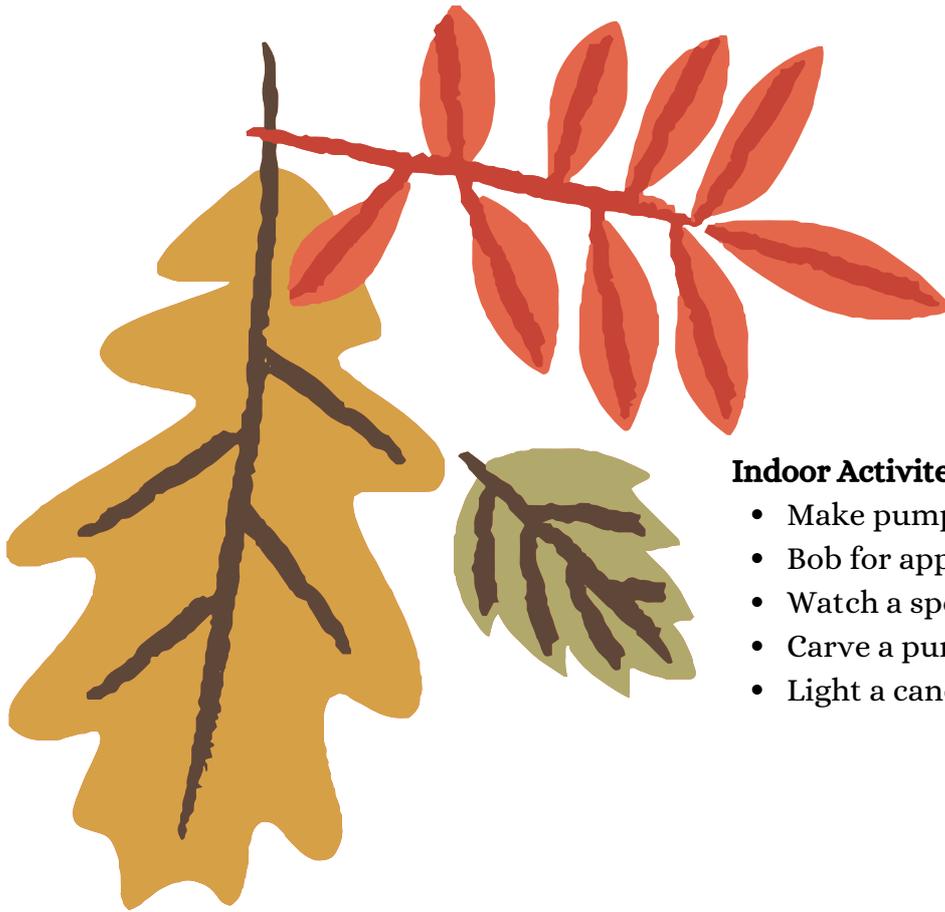
If you want to dig in a little bit more think about these...

- *Why is this place in nature important to you?*
- *When did you first discover it?*
- *Do you usually come alone or with others?*
- *How often do you visit?*
- *What does it smell like? Sound like? Feel like?*



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. Art can be submitted through a photo or a scanned copy. Please make sure to include your signature on any art.

Fall Fun



Outdoor Activities

- Jump in the leaves
- Go to a pumpkin patch
- Have a campfire
- Go to an apple orchard
- Make a scare crow

Indoor Activities

- Make pumpkin pie
- Bob for apples
- Watch a spooky movie
- Carve a pumpkin
- Light a candle and read a book

Owl Cupcakes



Ingredients

- 1 box chocolate cake batter, plus ingredients called for on box
- 1 (16-oz.) tub chocolate frosting
- 1 package of Oreos, halved
- 1 package of chocolate mini M&Ms

Directions

1. Preheat oven and prepare cupcake batter according to the directions for the cake mix you have chosen. Put cupcake liners in the muffin tin your recipe calls for.
2. Scoop cupcake batter into liners and bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 22 to 25 minutes. Let cool.
3. Frost cupcakes with chocolate frosting, making two swooshes on top for ears!
4. Top with Oreo halves, icing side up for eyes. Dot the bottom of chocolate mini M&Ms with frosting and place on top of Oreo halves for eyeballs.



Fall Wild Edibles

By Amanda Jones

Fall is a great time to try out foraging for the first time! There are many different plants, mushrooms, and nuts that are easy to identify, easy to find, and, most importantly, tasty! Foraging for different foods pays off in different ways. Not only do you get a tasty or useful treat, but you also get to spend time in nature becoming more familiar with your local wild spaces. Fall offers a time of year that can't be beat for foraging. There are so many different things to forage including acorns, elderberries, and chicken of the woods mushrooms.

Acorns are a favorite among foragers and for good reason. They can be found in abundance and have many different uses. When foraging for acorns be sure to gather large, fully brown acorns with the cap still attached. Leave any damaged or old acorns for the local squirrels. Once gathered, if you are intending to use the acorns for consumption you must first remove the bitter tannins. This is done through a process of either cold or hot leaching. One of the most popular uses for acorns is flour. The flour from acorns is a great gluten free option for a lot of people.



Elderberry is a plant that has gained recent attention over the past few years! This purple berry totes many different benefits including nutrient dense, can improve cold and flu symptoms, high amount of antioxidants, and can be good for heart health. With a list like that no wonder it has gained attention but proceed with foraging carefully. The elderberry has many look a likes and if not cooked properly even the edible elderberry can cause serious stomach problems. The berry also contains cyanogenic glycosides which can release cyanide. There have been no reported deaths from eating elderberries, but it is still something to keep in mind. When foraged and cooked properly elderberries can be made into jams, syrups, and tinctures.

Chicken of the woods is one of the most easily recognizable in the forest. With colors resembling a traffic cone it is hard to miss. This mushroom is found on dead and decaying deciduous trees, especially oak trees. It will thrive in humid climates with low temperatures, making fall the perfect time to hunt this mushroom. Identifying factors include, shelf mushroom, pores on underside, bright orange, yellow, or even salmon coloring on top, and it should resemble a ripply pizza crust. This mushroom stays true to it's name and has a distinctive chicken flavor. It is often used as a meat substitute in chicken salad.



When foraging in the fall, just like any other time of year, be sure to take only what you need and what is growing in abundance. Never consume anything that you aren't 100% sure of its identity. Always check with your primary doctor before trying anything new, especially if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, have preexisting health conditions or are currently taking medications.

Campground Closure

We want to thank everyone who camped at Pioneer Ridge Nature Area campground this summer! It was awesome to see so many people out recreating and enjoying what Wapello County Conservation has to offer.

The PRNA campground will close for the season **November 1st, 2023.**

After the 2023 camping season comes to a close, the campground will not be open for the 2024 camping season.

Do not fret! We plan to reopen for the 2025 camping season with some improvements.

Wapello County Conservation has been awarded the Governor's Destination Iowa Grant to expand the Pioneer Ridge Campground. This expansion will add a dump station, playground, an additional shower house, and 15 additional campsites!

We are so excited to see these improvements happen and we appreciate the public understanding the need to close the campground to do so.

We cannot wait to see you in 2025!

If you can't stay away, the cabins at PRNA will be open year-round through the campground expansion!

Upcoming Events

A more detailed list of events can be found at mycountyparks.com on the Wapello county page or on our facebook page

Crafternoons- Miscellaneous Dates:
See Flyer Below



Monarch Tagging- Date To Be Determined-

Once we know when the monarchs are flying we will post the public event to our facebook page. Help us catch, tag and release these butterflies on their way down to Mexico.

Moth Program- September 22
Come explore the night with us as we collect and identify moths at Pioneer Ridge.



Bat Netting- Septmeber 16
Join us to get up close and personal with bats in our area alongside Russ Benedict from Central College.

Halloween Hike - Insects- October 13th and 14th:
See Flyer Below



Owl Prowl- November 21
Learn all about our local owls and help us call in a few.

American Gothic House Center News

September 21st: Make a Fall Wreath **6PM-8PM**

Come make a fall wreath!

October 19th: Fall Murder Mystery Challenge **6PM-8PM**

Can you solve the mystery?



American Gothic House



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.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

September 29, 23

6-8 pm

Fire Starters and S'mores.

We will make fire starters to take home and have s'mores around a campfire.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

December 2, 23

10am-12 pm

Soup and Soap

We will make homemade soap, talk about zero waste practices and enjoy crockpot style soups.

October, 23

7-9 pm

Doodles and Donuts

Come out to Pioneer Ridge. Sunshine Laursen will be guiding you through a spooky painting while we snack and chat.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

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.

November 18, 23

2-4 pm

Wreaths and Rolls

For the third year in a row we will be building wreaths at Pioneer Ridge!

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

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.

32nd Annual

Halloween Hike: Insects

Date: October 13th and 14th

Hike Start Times: 5-7:00 pm

Location: Pioneer Ridge Nature Area

Cost: Tickets \$3 per person 3 & under free

Some walk-ins will be permitted from 7-7:30 but will cost \$5 per person

Take a 1/2 mile hike on our paved trail and learn about 8 different insects!

After hiking we will have hot drinks, snacks, games, and Trunk or Treat!

(If you are a part of a local business or club that would like to participate in the trunk or treat please reach out!)

For reservations please log into mycountyparks.com. Click on counties. Click on Wapello. Go to Events and then find the time of your hike that you would like to sign up for.

For questions please call the nature center at 641-682-3091

Summer Camp Recap

By: Sara Runyan

Thank you to all those who participated in summer camps this year! We had an absolute blast. Even through the heat and a few thunderstorms, we made some really great memories that will last a life time. Don't miss out next year!



Species Spotlight

Bats- Sara Runyan

This time of year, there is a lot of talk about bats. You hear of them in stories, see them in decorations and maybe even start to notice them flying around at night. Of all of the wildlife that is associated with Halloween, bats seem to be the most talked about. It starts with the fact that in the cooler months swarms of bats are not uncommon to see, especially around dusk. Bats start to gather together in the fall just before migration and hibernation. They can travel hundreds of miles for migration and who wants to do that alone?

Halloween is, across cultures, associated with death and souls and haunted things. This is the time that the land is decaying, the darkness of winter is setting in and everybody wants to tell a good, spooky story. A lot of times, especially in older days, celebrations and storytelling this time of year took place around a big bonfire. Insects are drawn to the heat and flame of the bonfire so the bats, being insectivores would swoop in and feast! Many associated this with the spirits of the dead swooping around their heads and the poor bats have never lived it down.

Bats can be spooky when they are swooping at you in the dark, but they are also some of the most amazing mammals that we have in Iowa! They might get close, but they will never run into you and that is because they use this magical thing called echolocation to track and catch their prey. Echolocation is when the bat sends out a high-frequency sound, it bounces off of the environment around them and when the sound comes back the bat can tell the size and location of the insects that they are trying to eat and other things around them. Cool, right?



In Iowa we have 9 species of bats, but I want to tell you about one specifically, the Indiana Bat. These brown or gray bats are small, only measuring about 3.5 inches with a wingspan of only about 9 inches. They have very soft fur and fuzzy toes. They look similar to some other species that we have in Iowa; the difference is that this species of bat is endangered.

The Indiana bat is listed federally as an endangered species. While there are many things that could be contributing to the decline of these creatures the biggest threats are humans and disease. Humans can pose a threat when they are exploring caves, especially in winter. Bats will use caves to form their hibernacula. In a hibernacula the bats try to stay warm through the winter, they do this by grouping up and then their bodies start to slow down and preserve energy. People in caves can wake the bats up, bringing their heart rates back up and speeding their body functions which can cause them to need more heat that is not available in the dead of winter. The bats cannot survive. Often times if a cave is a known hibernaculum conservationists will block off the caves with bat friendly gates. Another threat that these tiny creature face is White Nose Syndrome, this is a fungal infection that can quickly kill the bats. Because they are so small the infection can quickly take over their little bodies, there is little known about this disease and not much that we can do to stop the spread of it.



Species Spotlight

At the end of the summer Russ Benedict a biology professor from Central College came to Pioneer Ridge with some of his students to complete a study on the bats in the area. They set up mist nets and lights after dark to collect, tag and monitor a handful of the bat population in this part of the world. In the past we have documented Indiana bats at Pioneer Ridge but unfortunately, they did not document very many bats at all this year. The decrease could be solely due to the conditions of the night that they collected or the location of the nets but could also be due to a decrease in number of bats. This study is ongoing and happens year after year so we can use it to see if there are patterns in bat populations at Pioneer Ridge.

You can help bats too! Remember not to interrupt their hibernation, talk about them in a positive light, if you get one in your house please refrain from killing it, not only is it illegal but they are harmless to you.

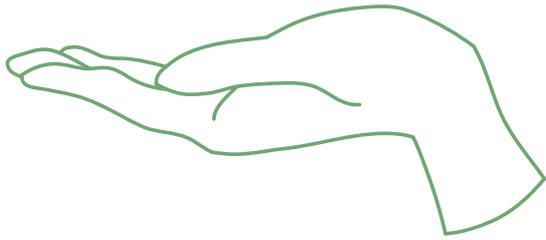


On September 16, Russ will be at Pioneer Ridge nature center to do a program on bats. We will try to net some and get to learn all about bats up close and personal. Come out and join us! It will be a blast! The program will start at 7:15 and you can leave whenever you would like. Be sure to dress to be outside, bring a lawn chair or blanket to sit on. The bats should start flying around 8.

We are so excited to see you!

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 Fall:

Labor Day- September 4th

Veteran's Day (observed)-

November 10th

Thanksgiving- November

23rd and 24th



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/



Come see us:
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