

CONSERVATION NEWS



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Record-Breaking Creepy Camping Weekend

By Shelby Williams, Park Ranger

This year we kicked off our creepy camping preparation with a lot of rain. Given the results of last year's rain, we were nervous in the weeks leading up to the event. Eventually, it was clear; we had a great forecast for the week of Creepy Camping. There were a lot of first time participants this year and we were excited to see everyone here!

A week leading up to the weekend event, the campground was busy and only a few spots remained. Almost everyone had decorated their spots in advance and as I talked to campers, I found out many of them were ready for a three day weekend. It was a common occurrence for the kids to stop me as I went through the campground Thursday and say "Guess what?! We don't have to go to school tomorrow!"

On Friday, September 26th, we kicked off one of our busiest Creepy Camping Weekends. After the movie behind the nature center, it was clear everyone was anxious for the next day. The campground even settled down early!

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New Sport Coming to Lake Iowa

By Mike Bode, Director

You may have heard that this past spring we were awarded an Iowa County Community Foundation Grant for installing an 18-hole disc-golf course at Lake Iowa Park. We are excited to provide this new recreational activity to the community. Our design and layout will incorporate more of an exercise component than traditional courses. Anyone that follows the entire course will find themselves looping around the entire lake. To make it a continuous loop around the lake, we had to add some extra space between the goal-basket of one hole and the tee-box of the next.

The really neat thing about disc golf is that people of all ages and skill levels can participate in some aspect of the sport. Our Friends Foundation has even purchased a portable basket to take around to schools and events to give people a chance to try it out for themselves. There are special frisbees that can be used for disc golf to help players do everything from throwing considerably farther, to throwing straighter at shorter distances. If you don't want to invest in a professional disc, any "run of the mill" frisbee will work. Even if you're not into the sporting side of these type of games, just walking the course will give you new perspective of the park. On your way around the lake, the course trail will wind through various sections of prairie and timber, hills and valleys. This gives you a chance to make your way through many of the ecosystems that the park showcases.



Plans for the new disc golf course.



Zach Ahrens, Invasive Species Technician/Host, trying out our new portable disc golf set.

Meet Zach!

My name is Zach Ahrens and I grew up in Marengo, IA. I graduated from Iowa Valley High school in 2014. I began working this season at Lake Iowa as a seasonal and am currently the Invasive Species Tech/Host. Even though it is fall we are still really busy. Whether it is tasks like campground maintenance or cutting out invasive species, there is always something to do. Even though there is a lot of work to be done, I still truly love to work out here, meeting new amazing people and getting to do lots of fun meaningful jobs.



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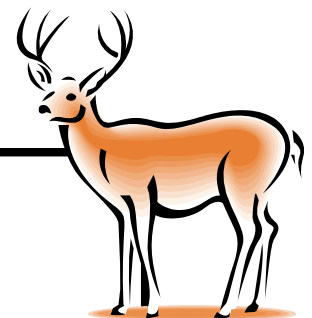
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Just a Reminder

Fall is here and so are the majority of Iowa's most popular hunting seasons. This is the time to view our properties around the county and see them at their finest colors, but remember to keep an eye out for hunters if you venture into the woods and prairie these upcoming months. It's a good idea to wear orange or other bright colors!



WHAT'S SLITHERING AT LAKE IOWA?

Thankssss to the Snake Man

By Caitlin Savage, Temporary Naturalist

The gasps of excitement as Don Becker brought out his 10-foot long Macklot's python spoke for themselves. Kids eagerly lined up to wait their turn to touch the snake and hold it around their necks for a picture. Even children who had adamantly stated they would not even touch the snake were soon holding it around their neck and grinning ear-to-ear. The python was the grand finale to a fantastic program, thanks to Don Becker, aka the Snake Man.

Becker took time out of his busy schedule to come to Lake Iowa Nature Center on Saturday, October 11th. His "Snakes Alive" program started at 10am, and the nature center was open an hour prior so visitors could check out the "Snakes, Rattles, and Holes" exhibit on display on the main floor. Almost 80 people showed up to watch Becker's presentation and meet the snakes.

Becker's program was based on the snakes of Iowa County. He described the native snakes you may come across and how to tell them apart, as well as some of the habits of each species. Becker brought several live snakes for the audience to observe up close and feel if desired. These included a brown snake, both a red-sided and a plains garter snake, a northern water snake, a milk snake, a fox snake, and a bull snake, all species that can be found in Iowa County. The fox snake and bull snake are now educational animals living at Lake Iowa Nature Center.

If you have questions about snakes, you can contact Don Becker at psyon@psyon.org.



Above: Don Becker shows the crowd a bull snake.



Left: Kaiden Sears of Grinnell holds Becker's Macklot's python around his neck for the perfect photo opportunity.



Giant Reptile Takes Over Nature Center

If you've stopped by Lake Iowa Nature Center anytime since September, you may have noticed the inside looks a little different. As you walk into the entrance, a huge replica of a snake skull greets you, its jaw open and welcoming you to explore. The huge snake skeleton is part of the "Snakes, Rattles, and Holes" exhibit, whose goal is to shed light on some of the most misunderstood creatures in the world.

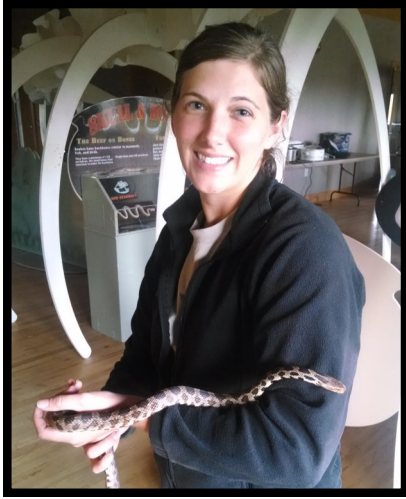
"Snakes, Rattles, and Holes" is a traveling exhibit developed by Purdue University to educate people about snakes and their role in nature. It is now owned by Dallas County Conservation Board. In addition to the 70-foot skeleton replica, the display includes numerous interpretive panels that explain the anatomy, senses, habitat, and behavior of snakes. Kids also get a chance to feel a snake skin and see a snake skeleton.

WHAT'S SLITHERING AT LAKE IOWA?

By Caitlin Savage, Temporary Naturalist

Meet our Newest Residents!

Recently, Lake Iowa Nature Center acquired two new residents: a female fox snake and a male bull snake. The reptiles will be used for educational programming and observation. We are hoping to name the snakes, but we need your help! See snake-naming contest details on the bottom left of the page.



Caitlin Savage, Temporary Naturalist, with the fox snake. Fox snakes get their name because of the musk they secrete from the scent glands at the base of their tail when frightened. It is said to smell like the musk of a fox. Fox snakes are constrictors. They wrap their bodies around their prey (mostly small rodents) to kill them before swallowing them whole.



Shelby Williams, Park Ranger, with the bull snake. Bull snakes get their name because of the noises they may make when approached. Bull snakes will often make loud hissing or huffing sounds to try and scare off predators, including people. They will also vibrate their tail, which leads to many of them being killed by people who mistake them for rattlesnakes. Bull snakes are also constrictors.

Snake-Naming Contest

We want you to help us name our snakes! If you think of a good name for one of the snakes, let us know by posting it on the Lake Iowa Park Facebook page, emailing csavage@co.iowa.ia.us, or calling (319) 655-8466. We will be accepting entries through Wednesday, November 26th. The winning entries will each receive 1 night of free camping at Lake Iowa Park (good for 2 years).

Nature Center Hours

Stop by to explore the “Snakes, Rattles, and Holes” exhibit and meet the new snakes!

Lake Iowa Nature Center will be open on the second Saturday in November, December, and January from 11AM—3PM. If you would like to visit the exhibit outside of these hours, call (319) 655-8466 to see if a staff member is available.

Face to Face with an Owl

By Shelley Berger, Office Assistant

I have rescued kittens, baby ground hogs and raccoons, elusive dogs, baby robins and worms from my sidewalk after a hard rain. Sometimes it requires round the clock feedings, rushed trips to the vet at 3 a.m. or just stopping to usher would-be fishing bait from the hot sun to the grass on my way to my car. Sometimes people roll their eyes when I tell them I will stop dead in the street if it looks like a squirrel will cross it. I don't care. I love animals and always have, from the first stray (pregnant) cat I begged my parents to keep to the absolutely beautiful Great Horned Owl I scooped into a box and drove to Cedar Rapids this past August.

Our naturalist received a call about an owl in a ditch. From the tone of the caller it seemed that the owl was dead and would make a good subject for teaching students about raptors as the feathers, talons, etc were all present. As it turned out the owl in question was still alive and my daughter, Bailey, and I were dispatched to H Avenue along with a box and an old towel. It took a couple of passes down the road to find the marker flag left on the roadside but it only took a moment to find the owl it was placed for. Did you know that the eyes of a Great Horned Owl are truly hypnotic? They are always portrayed that way in cartoons but they are indeed amazing. Usually when you look at an animal's eyes, they appear to be solid color with no hint at the fluid that fills them. Not so with this owl. As she peered up at us from the tall grass her eyes seemed to be two giant clear glass marbles sitting atop two vivid yellow discs. They were very impressive and made it a bit daunting to approach her especially as she watched us inch closer to her with a ratty brown towel in hand. Her beak and talons didn't build our confidence in our owl wrangling abilities either. It was all too easy to imagine her taking chunks of flesh out of our hands. As it was, getting her into the box couldn't have been easier. She weighed about as much as a bag of cotton balls and put up no resistance to being scooped into a box. I had to make sure she was actually in the box before we loaded her into the back seat of the old grey truck since she added no weight to it at all.



After a speedy trip back to Director Mike's house for a dog crate we called the Kirkwood Raptor Center for help. The Kirkwood Raptor Center is part of the MacBride Raptor Project, a cooperative effort between Kirkwood and The University of Iowa Division of Recreational Services. Injured birds of prey are cared for and rehabilitated at the facility by students, volunteers and staff veterinarians. The project was founded in 1985 and helps over 180 birds a year. About half are returned to the wild. The birds left crippled by their injuries are placed with zoos, nature centers, and other licensed facilities.

When we explained the situation we were told to bring it in right away so we got back in the old grey truck and drove to the Kirkwood campus. The owl was looking a little less intense and seemed to be almost lulled to sleep by the jostling of the truck. Needless to say every time I looked back to check on her she was looking right back at me with those giant orbs.

When we arrived at the Raptor Center we were ushered into their small building by a veterinarian student and 7 year volunteer at the Raptor Center. His experience with birds of prey was evident as he reached in and grabbed hold of the owl. She gave him a few loud clicks of her beak but, unfazed, he plunked her against his chest and examined her wings, ribs and legs. He said that she was terribly emaciated and probably hadn't eaten for 5 days or more. He explained that owls need to eat every day or begin to decline very rapidly until they can no longer hunt and die of starvation. Great Horned Owls are fierce predators that can take large prey, including raptors such as Ospreys, Peregrine Falcons, Prairie Falcons, and other owls. They also eat much smaller items such as rodents and frogs. Our little owl obviously hadn't even had so much as grasshopper in recent days and she was also severely dehydrated. He explained her treatment and cautioned that the odds were not in her favor.



The first thing that needed to be done was to provide fluids. Unfortunately this is not as easy as giving her a drink with an eyedropper. To get fluid to her tissues quickly the volunteer injected warm fluids under her paper thin skin. Her body would process the fluids much quicker through her tissues than through her digestive tract. The next step was to relieve some of the stress of being approached by two humans, scooted into a box with a towel and then taking a long drive to have another human poke and prod her for 20 minutes or so. This was accomplished by wrapping her in a towel and placing her in a cozy box with a heating pad in it. The next part of her rehabilitation would be the trickiest. She needed to be fed. The volunteer would first try to feed her some raw meat but if that failed he would try some formula. If all went well our little owl would regain her strength and we would get the call to come pick her up so we could release her back in the timber near H Avenue.

Even though she was so emaciated and stood little chance of surviving we held out hope that we had found her in time. Unfortunately she had just missed too many meals and passed away in the night. Hopefully being hydrated and warm and cozy at the Raptor Center was a better end than being cold and starving in a ditch. Rescuing any animal is never easy but the rewards outweigh the long hours or inconvenience.

I give many thanks to the crew at the Kirkwood Raptor Center for their tireless efforts to rehabilitate birds of prey. Our little owl may have not made it but they had two beautiful, very healthy Kestrels at the center that did. One will be released and one will be used in education...as soon as she learns to stop biting the hand that feeds her.

To learn more about their amazing work visit:

<http://recserv.uiowa.edu/Apps/Programs/MacbrideRaptorProject.aspx>

Visitors are welcome at the Flight Cage at the University of Iowa's Macbride Nature and Recreation Area. Guided tours can be arranged by calling (319) 398-5495.

If you find an injured bird of prey:

- ◆ Call the Macbride Raptor Clinic immediately at (319) 398-5495
- ◆ Be sure to note exactly where the injured bird was found as well as any strange or suspicious circumstances.
- ◆ Don't handle the bird or offer it food or water. It is best not to touch the raptor until you receive proper instructions.



Extreme Makeover: Gunderson Edition

Just beyond the parking lot at the Gunderson Conservation Area, our new pond is really starting to take shape. Our staff will be spending a lot of time there this fall and winter. From developing a trail starting at the parking lot and leading all the way around the pond, to placing limestone rip-rap to stabilize the shoreline, there is no shortage of work that needs to be tackled with this pond construction project. Over the last 2 years there have been many conservation projects completed on the property. Stay tuned for a grand re-opening celebration that we're looking to plan for next spring. So if you're traveling between Marengo and Blairstown, stop by the Gunderson Conservation Area and check out the new pond for yourself!



Director Mike Bode shows off the new pond at Gunderson Conservation Area.



These pictures show the improvements being made on the pond. The "before" picture on the left was taken on October 10th, while the "after" picture on the right was taken on October 21st, only 11 days later.

(Creepy Camping continued from page 1)

Saturday, we started the day with a Dummy Board Tournament and kid's games. The kid's games brought in hundreds of people to paint, play, and try out various activities, such as archery. The Dummy Board Tournament proved to be successful with a \$63 first place prize, which was generously donated back to the lake. Shortly after those activities finished up, there was the costume contest and then trick-or-treating. This year, trick-or-treating brought in approximately 550 children! We heard several campers tell us about their 300 pieces of candy being gone before the time was up.

The end of the night brought a crowd favorite – the Creepy Camping Hayrack Ride. Last year, rain caused us to change our route and ride-goers were unable to see all of the scenes we had planned. As a result, this year we had two years' of work combined into one. We kept a lot of our original work and added to it, making it one of our most entertaining hayrack rides yet.

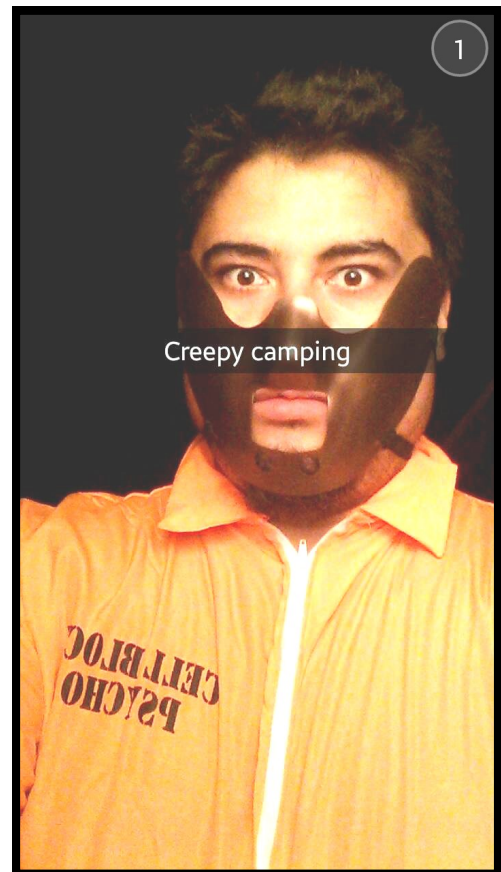
The Game Changer

We were very excited to have around 100 volunteers to make this weekend happen! If it weren't for all of the help, dedication and time our volunteers gave us, Creepy Camping would not have been successful! Volunteering starts weeks before the event kicks off with preparation, planning and building. The weekend of, we have around 70 people volunteering at any given time!

We broke records in camping revenue, ticket sales and participants! We can't thank our volunteers enough and hope to get more signed up in upcoming years. This record breaking Creepy Camping will be hard to beat in the approaching years, but we will do our best.



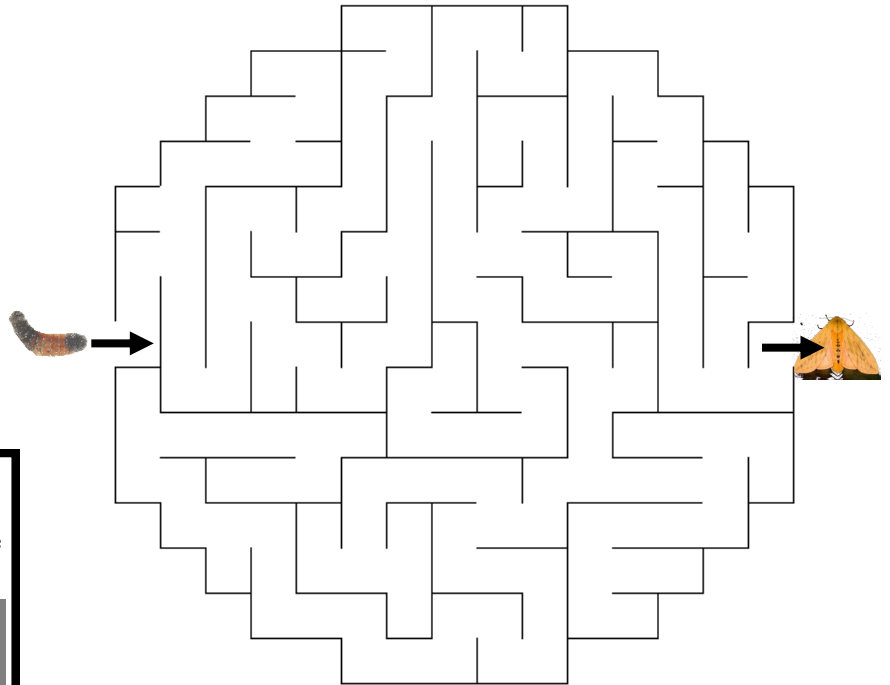
The double dumpstation does its duty as a multitude of campers head out of the park after a fun-filled Creepy Camping weekend.



Adam Taukei of Williamsburg sends a Snapchat while getting ready to volunteer on the trail for Creepy Camping.

Creature Feature: Woolly Bear Caterpillar

- ♦ Woolly bear caterpillars are covered in bristles.
- ♦ They have two black bands with an orange-brown band in the middle.
- ♦ As the fall weather gets colder, lots of woolly bears come out because they are looking for a warm spot to spend the winter, like under bark or in a log.



Help the woolly bear caterpillar turn into an adult moth by finding your way through the maze!

- ♦ In the spring, woolly bears come out of their hibernation spot and spin a cocoon.
- ♦ The adult that comes out is an Isabella Tiger Moth.



Fall Word Search

Find the words below in the word search. They are going forwards, backwards, up, or down.

L	S	H	L	S	I	Q	S	E	U
B	H	I	U	B	Z	F	Q	K	I
Y	L	B	F	U	I	R	U	I	D
J	X	E	R	R	F	O	I	H	B
D	D	R	O	R	A	S	R	O	E
P	D	N	L	E	A	T	R	T	O
N	B	A	O	E	C	G	E	M	K
M	Z	T	C	D	R	T	L	F	B
H	X	E	H	C	R	A	N	O	M
N	O	I	T	A	R	G	I	M	Z

COLORFUL	DEER RUBS	FROST
HIBERNATE	HIKE	MIGRATION
MONARCH	SQUIRREL	

PUBLIC PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Programs will meet at Lake Iowa Nature Center unless otherwise stated. All are free and everyone is welcome.

Saturday, November 1st

3PM: *Creepy Crawlies*


Discover some spooky animals that make their homes in this area, and why they may not be so creepy after all! You will also have the chance to meet our new snakes.

Saturday, November 8th

11AM-3PM: *Lake Iowa Nature Center open to the public.*

Saturday, November 15th

2PM: *Scavenger Hunt*

Brush up on your detective skills with a  fall scavenger hunt. Come to the nature center to get your clues and see who can find everything on the list the quickest.

Saturday, December 13th

11AM-3PM: *Lake Iowa Nature Center open to the public.*

3PM: *Nature Jeopardy!*



Bring the whole family for a break from the cold and test your knowledge of animals, plants, Lake Iowa Park and more. Prizes will be awarded to the winning teams.

Saturday, December 20th

3PM: *Winter Wildlife*



Come discover what animals are doing during the winter. We will go on a short winter walk, weather permitting, then come inside to hear some winter stories.

Saturday, January 10th

11AM-3PM: *Lake Iowa Nature Center open to the public.*

2-4PM: *Ice Fishing Clinic*

If you're ready for a great way to spend some time outdoors in the winter, come out to Lake Iowa Park to learn about one of Iowa's most popular winter sports—ice fishing. Join Brad Freidhof, Conservation Program Manager for Johnson County Conservation, to learn the basics of ice fishing and ice safety, as well as fish identification.



Meet at the boat ramp and make sure to dress for the weather! We will provide equipment and bait, but they will be limited, so bring your own equipment if you have it. Please bring something to sit on for out on the ice.

Wish List

The following items are needed by Lake Iowa Nature Center. Please bring donations to the nature center. We appreciate your help!

- ♦ Clean plastic jars with lids (such as peanut butter jars)
- ♦ Cash donations for bird seed
- ♦ Dry erase markers
- ♦ New washcloths
- ♦ Functional blenders (for papermaking)

Visit us online at:

www.mycountyparks.com/County/Iowa

Like "Iowa County Conservation" and "Lake Iowa Park" on Facebook.





Iowa County Conservation News

Lake Iowa Park
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For more information about
Iowa County Conservation,
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Director
Park Ranger
Naturalist

319-655-8465 **mbode@co.iowa.ia.us**
319-655-8465 **swilliams@co.iowa.ia.us**
319-655-8466 **csavage@co.iowa.ia.us**

Thank you for supporting the Iowa County Conservation programs with your tax-deductible donation:

Enclosed is my donation for:

\$50 \$100 \$500 \$1000
 \$5000 Other

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Please earmark my donation for:

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- Lake Iowa Park Improvements
- Gateway Park Improvements
- Environmental Education materials & equipment
- Conservation News newsletter
- Habitat improvement/development on ICCB areas
- Nature Explore Playscape Project
- Use my donation where needed most

Send to ICCB, 2550 G. Ave, Ladora, IA 52251

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