

CONSERVATION NEWS



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Naturalists participate in a watershed model demonstration during a presentation on the REAP Watershed Quality Grant.

Iowa County Conservation Hosts IAN Workshop

Caitlin Savage, Temp Naturalist

This November, Iowa County Conservation had the honor of hosting the Fall 2014 Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN) Workshop at Lake Iowa Nature Center. Over 80 people, including naturalists and others who are interested in the interpretation of Iowa's natural and cultural resources, attended the workshop. It kicked off with pre-workshop activities on November 5th, including a historical tour of the Amana Colonies and Leopold Education Project training, and continued through November 7th. Participants attended a variety of sessions and discussions, with topics ranging from the role of discipline in a classroom, creating displays on a budget, avian coloration, and summer camp ideas.

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There was a full parking lot at Lake Iowa Nature Center during the Fall IAN workshop.

In Like a Lion, Out Like a Lion

Mike Bode, Director

We started off 2014 trying to tackle something that many ICCB employees have tried to do over the last decade or so, redesign our logo. Although I myself am a stickler for tradition, I have heard nothing but compliments about our new logo, with just as many of them coming from me. Another big happening earlier this past year was our Park Ranger going through law enforcement training for 13 weeks. While she was off being educated on some of the more interesting ins and outs of the trade, we were fortunate enough to hire a part time Invasive Species Tech to help hand-cut and treat some of the more over-run and ecologically sensitive areas that we manage. In February we also crossed over into uncharted territory when we hired an office assistant to take over some of the office work that needs done, and none of us have looked back since.

Come about late winter or early spring, we were chest-deep into writing grants. We worked with our Friends Foundation to obtain a canoe trailer to help expand our programming capabilities. Funding for a disc golf course at Lake Iowa was also secured. A grant for extra seasonal staff and supplies was received for trails and other projects at Gunderson Conservation Area, the Laura and Skinny Schlesselman Area (Ballast Pit), and Lake Iowa.

We worked diligently this spring to plant the remaining vegetation in our Nature Playscape area from a Trees Forever grant that we received back in 2012. The weather finally cooperated well enough for us, along with the Iowa County Master Gardeners, to get everything in the ground. It was a long hard road that I for one was glad to see the end of

Another grant that we finished in 2014 was the reconstruction of the front pond at the Gunderson Conservation Area. The dam of the pond was completely reconstructed further downstream, dramatically



Progress on the pond at Gunderson Conservation Area.



Nature Playscape at Lake Iowa Nature Center.

increasing its size to 3/4 of an acre. With all the improvements to this area over the past two years, look for more information about a possible grand re-opening of the Gunderson Conservation Area coming up in 2015.

We definitely don't want to forget to mention something about what has been our bread and butter for years now, the Lake Iowa Park campground. Just like every summer over the past couple decades now, we hired multiple seasonal workers to help with the upkeep of our warm-season operations that focus primarily on the campground.

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We had many veteran employees return for these often times coveted summer positions, which made operations run quite smoothly. I'd like to give a shout out to all of our seasonal workers and say: "Job well done!"

The second half of 2014 saw the addition of a traveling snake exhibit to the Nature Center. The highlight while having this exhibit on-site was our most well attended public program of the year, our "Snakes Alive" program that featured live snakes.

One of our proudest accomplishments of the year had to be the implementation of the Iowa County Outdoor Adventure Day. What started as a partnership between us and Pheasants Forever turned into an outdoor event for youth that had more than 80 volunteers coming out of the woodwork to assist in this endeavor. Many of these outdoor enthusiasts were able to share their knowledge and skills, making lasting impacts on these young people. Another large event that we host is an all-day camp that is comparable to the overnight camp that students can attend at Springbrook. Mary Welsh 5th graders come out to Lake Iowa for a day (and evening) of trying their hand at all sorts of outdoor activities and experiences.

These two large events were just the tip of the iceberg for the programming and service activities that we were part of. We were looked to for anything from giving advice, to organizing, and even to leading service projects for dozens of schools and organizations. Hats off to our Naturalist and Park Ranger for all their leadership and organizational skills; they really do make this place tick.

Besides having countless volunteers assisting with special events, we had volunteers take care of specific tasks that were sometimes simply routine maintenance items. To all our volunteers, no matter what task or to what degree you've been able to assist us, thanks for helping make 2014 such a success in the record books. We literally couldn't have done it without you!

As for what to look forward to for this upcoming year? We don't have a lot of new projects planned specifically for 2015, as we hope to catch up on more maintenance related items. With that being said, our priorities and short-term focus are ever changing and I'll assure you that there'll be no shortage of interesting accomplishments to write about for this time next year.

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**Mike Bode, Director
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Disc Golf Update



We will be looking for volunteers this spring who are interested in helping with disc golf, including the setup and maintenance of the course. First, we'll need to clear the trail, so keep an eye open on our Facebook page and newspapers for our upcoming Disc Golf Volunteer Day!

(IAN Workshop, continued from page 1)

Presenters included representatives from the US Forest Service, Iowa Young Birders, Iowa State University, Iowa’s County Conservation System, and the Iowa DNR, among others. Participants also took part in an IAN business meeting and a silent and live auction as a fundraiser for IAN. The IAN workshop is not only an important resource for naturalists to get updated on relevant topics and learn about new ones, it is also a great way to network with other environmental educators in the state.

We are so glad Iowa County Conservation had the opportunity to host the workshop, and we thank all of the speakers who took the time to present to us, everyone who helped organize the workshop, and everyone who attended!

To learn more about IAN, visit their website at <http://www.iowanaturalists.org>.

If you are a student who plans to further your education in environmental education, cultural/historical interpretation, or outdoor recreation, consider applying for the Joe Halbur Scholarship through IAN. You can find more information at http://www.iowanaturalists.org/comm_joehalbur.htm.

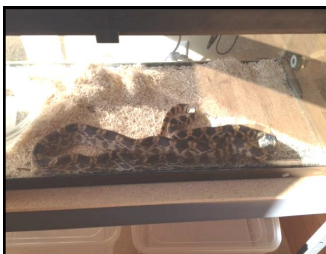
I-80 Property on the Move

Shelby Williams, Park Ranger

When you’re traveling on I-80 and pass the Marengo exit, be sure to take a look to the south. Our I-80 Wildlife Area, which is constantly seeing improvements, is located along the I-80 East bound exit for Marengo (exit 216). The invasive species are being removed and we will continue this work until the invasives are eradicated. Pheasants Forever has partnered with Iowa County Conservation to allow the I-80 Wildlife Area to be a beautiful prairie area, with showy flowers and native grasses. This partnership will bring a spectacular view to the interstate as people pass. Before we get to the planting, we’ll be burning and finishing the invasive species removal. If you happen to see us out there in the upcoming months, be sure to honk! We’ll be the ones in bright orange with chainsaws or huddling around the fire for warmth!

Say hello to Foxy and Bullwinkle!

Foxy is a female fox snake (right) and Bullwinkle is a male bull snake (below).



Thanks to everybody who participated in our snake-naming contest!

Nature Center Hours

Stop by to explore the “Snakes, Rattles, and Holes” exhibit and meet the new snakes! The last day of open hours for the winter season will be January 10th. Lake Iowa Nature Center will be open from 11AM — 3PM on this day.

There will also be an Ice Fishing Clinic at Lake Iowa from 2-4PM on that day. See page 11 for details.

Winter Wildlife Watch

Caitlin Savage, Temp Naturalist

Many animals stay around during the winter, but are less active to save energy and keep warm. You can still find signs they leave behind. Here are some to look for:

Nests/Dens: You may be able to see nests or dens of an animal. One nest to look for is a squirrel nest, which is a clump of leaves in a tree, usually in a fork of the tree.



Chew Marks/Food: You may be able to find signs that an animal has eaten somewhere. Look for chew marks: when rabbits bite the end of twigs, they leave a cut with an angle of 45°, like seen below. Deer leave torn, rough edges on the plants they eat. You may also find nuts that have been chewed on by rodents like squirrels.



Tracks/Trails: Snow is one of the best surfaces to find animal tracks in. Look for tracks, like these ones from a deer, and see if you can tell where their trail leads.



Scat: Scat is the word scientists use for animal poop. Finding scat can tell you a lot about an animal, including what type of animal left it (the scat pictured is from a coyote) and what kind of food they have eaten.



Fur/Feathers: Look for fur or feathers. These could be parts of the animal that were lost naturally, but if there is blood or signs of a struggle, the animal might have been attacked by a predator.



What are these animals doing during winter?

Fox squirrel: Squirrels hide food supplies, such as nuts, during the fall. In winter, when food is harder to come by, they find their stored food to eat.

Bluegill: Fish, including bluegill, tend to become less active during the colder months, and they move into deeper water where it is warmer.

Groundhog: The groundhog is a true hibernator, spending its winter sleeping in an underground burrow.

Box elder bug: Insects overwinter as an egg, larvae, or an adult. In the case of the box elder bug, they survive the winter as an adult by finding a warm spot to spend the cold months, sometimes in buildings.

Black-capped Chickadee: Many birds leave Iowa to migrate south for the winter. The chickadee is one of the birds that stays put. They adjust to the colder weather by changing their eating habits (eating fewer insects), finding warm places to roost, and growing a winter coat. They also have the special ability to go into regulated hypothermia at night, decreasing their body temperature about 15°F below its daytime temperature, which helps them save energy.

Big brown bat: Many of Iowa's bats migrate farther south to hibernate. The big brown bat, however, stays here and hibernates in caves, tree cavities, and buildings.

Winter Camping

Guest Writers from Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo:

Joshua Mitchell, Amphibian Conservation Research Keeper

Brittany Wildman, Mammal and Bird Keeper for Desert Dome

For all outdoor enthusiasts who love a good camping adventure, winter camping is a great way to experience the snowy season in a new and exciting way. Our first winter camping experience together took place in the Colorado Rockies during the middle of January. There were no other campers in the entire park and we had the scenic views and surrounding wilderness completely to ourselves. It was truly an amazing outdoor experience.

For any camper who wishes to have a safe and memorable winter camping adventure in any park, there are a few important things to keep in mind. Most importantly, make sure to stay warm. Plan out your wardrobe in advance to ensure all parts of your body will stay warm and toasty throughout your daytime excursions and especially during the night when temperatures can drop drastically. Be sure to provide yourself with a few different options of getting warm if you happen to get cold. This can include keeping some spare layers of dry clothing handy, stashing some heat packs in your tent for extra cold nights or using a thermos full of hot water to put under the foot of your sleeping bag if your feet get cold. It's always a good idea to plan



hot meals if possible so you can keep warm from the inside out. Something of importance to think about when planning your winter adventure is the equipment you might need. For example, it is highly recommended to use a 3 or 4 season tent unless you don't mind being really cold. The equipment you bring can make or break your trip, so plan accordingly to create an enjoyable experience for yourself.

For the camper who likes to be active during the day and take in the sights we recommend snow-shoeing or cross country skiing on the nearby trails, sledding down hills close by, ice-skating, ice-fishing, or one of Britt's favorites...doing the polar bear plunge! For those campers who like to relax and stay close to camp, Josh finds it is surprisingly comfortable to make a nice seat out of snow and spend some time just taking in the wildlife. The possibilities are ripe for an amazing time if you have the imagination for it.

Before you start on your winter camping adventure make sure to stop by the local park ranger office and let someone know where you will be camping and how long you will be there. This will ensure someone knows where you are and will be looking out for you if something goes wrong and you need help.

Be safe and have an awesome winter camping adventure!

Quick Tips for Winter Camping

1. Always tell someone where you are and how long you'll be there.
2. Check the weather forecast before you go.
3. Make sure you have all the necessary supplies before going—do your research! REI has a great winter camping checklist at: <http://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/winter-snow-camping-checklist.html>.
4. Dress in layers and bring all necessary accessories (hat, gloves, socks, etc.).
5. Have a reliable clean water source.

Conservation Awards Presented by Iowa County Soil and Water District Commissioners

Rose Danaher, Iowa County Watershed Coordinator

Each year the Iowa County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Commissioners hold an event to recognize local landowners, producers and conservation professionals for going above and beyond in their roles to protect Iowa's water quality and wildlife habitat. The District held its annual award banquet on December 2nd, 2014 at the Lake Iowa Nature Center. Following the awards ceremony, Libby Casavant, former staff member for Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District, spoke about her experience in Liberia working to improve access to potable water.

The New Cooperator Award was given to Chris Teggatz of Troy Township. This award is given to a producer who has shown dedication to conservation through a new partnership with the SWCD. Chris has installed grassed waterways and water and sediment control basins on his farm to reduce soil loss and is now using fall cover crops as a part of his crop rotation.

Keith Mews of Williamsburg was awarded the Owner/Operator Award for the conservation work he has done on his row crop acres. He uses no-till and contour farming practices and has installed many grassed waterways and water and sediment control basins across his operation.

The Landlord/Tenant award was presented to David and Judith Roberts, Doug Roberts and Dennis Roberts of Sumner Township. The Roberts have worked together to install a variety of conservation practices including terraces and waterways and they have seeded down steep hillsides through the CRP program.

Jacob McKusker of Ladora won the Wildlife and Forestry Management Award. He was chosen for his outstanding food plots, tree and shrub plantings and native grass and wildflower plantings. Jacob also assists other landowners across the county with installing native grasses for wildlife habitat.

The Conservation Education Award was given to Julie Uitermark, a 5th grade teacher at Mary Welsh Elementary School. Julie has gone above and beyond by promoting conservation education in her school and arranging an annual 5th grade field day that allows her students to try a variety of outdoor activities.

The Delmar Wetjen Award, an annual award presented by the Wetjen family in honor of their father, was awarded to Ted Oswald. Ted worked for the Natural Resources Conservation Service for more than 40 years as a Conservation Technician and a Civil Engineering Technician. His impact on conservation can be seen on many farms across the county.

In addition to the annual SWCD Awards, the Iowa Valley High School FFA Junior Soil Judging Team received an award for their second place finish at the Quad County Soil Judging Contest in September. Team members were: RyAnn Mattison, Elizabeth Smith and Anna Jordan.

Congratulations to this year's award winners!



Al Rudin (right), Iowa SWCD Commissioner, presents Chris and Tanya Teggatz with the 2014 New Cooperator Award.



Larry Wetjen (right), Iowa SWCD Commissioner, presents Keith Mews with the 2014 Owner/Operator Conservation Award.



Caitlin Savage (right), Iowa County Temporary Naturalist, presents Julie Uitermark with the 2014 Conservation Education Award.



Larry Wetjen (right), Iowa SWCD Commissioner, presents Ted Oswald with the 2014 Delmar Wetjen Memorial Award.



Katherine Timmerman (left), NRCS District Conservationist, presents Elizabeth Smith with a second place plaque for the Quad County Soil Judging Contest.



Larry Wetjen (left), Iowa SWCD Commissioner, presents Jacob McKusker with the 2014 Wildlife and Forestry Management Award.

What's the Buzz on the Flyin' Beez?

Caitlin Savage, Temp Naturalist



Mary Welsh Elementary First Lego League team, Flyin' Beez
Front row, from left: Aiden Feldman, Sam Lane, Lucas Reihman, Chloe Yearian, & Regan Grimm
Back row, from left: Ellie Stanerson and Hannah Allen

Take a group of dedicated 5th and 6th graders, mix in some robotics, and add a passion for prairies – what do you get? The First Lego League (FLL) team from Mary Welsh Elementary — the Flyin' Beez! This team is composed of students from the 5th and 6th grade SOAR (Seeking Opportunities for Accelerated Resources) gifted program at the school. FLL teams work together on extensive research, building, and programming to create a robot that completes various tasks on a playing surface. In addition to the robot trial, the students were challenged to come up with a topic they were interested in and help others learn about it.

The Flyin' Beez decided to focus on the Mary Welsh Educational Prairie. This prairie was designed and planted in 1999. It is used for school programs and is also open to the public. The Flyin' Beez agreed that the prairie is not used as much as it should be, so they wanted their project to teach

more about this location and the importance of Iowa's prairies.

The SOAR students spent a great deal of time researching the prairie. [In the fall, Iowa County Conservation naturalist Sean Curry](#) went to visit the Mary Welsh Educational Prairie and explore it with the students. Students learned basics about the prairie, completed plant surveys, and mapped different plants using GPS units. They also visited the Neil Smith National Wildlife Refuge and met with the Visitor Services Specialist, Brianna Patrick, to learn some tips on teaching students about the prairies. Patrick suggested that they gear their project towards 2nd and 3rd grade students, as it is more effective to begin teaching natural science concepts at a younger age. The team decided to create their lesson in the form of a website about the Mary Welsh Educational Prairie. Their website includes information about plants and animals that live in the prairie, lesson plan ideas, and an interactive game.

After creating the website, the team needed to come up with a way to present it. They decided to write and star in a humorous skit. They presented the finished project to their teachers – including 2nd and 3rd grade teachers – parents, and the Iowa County Conservation naturalist for practice and feedback before their competition.

The team's persistence, time, and dedication paid off. On Saturday, December 6th, the team attended the regional FLL competition at Indian Hills Community College. They won the first place trophy for the project and presentation award, out of 30 teams total. Congratulations to the Flyin' Beez, and thank you for all your work in teaching others about the importance of prairies!

Check out the Mary Welsh First Lego League's hard work and learn more about prairies at their website: <https://sites.google.com/a/williamsburg.k12.ia.us/mary-welsh-prairie/>.

The Mary Welsh Educational Prairie is open to the public. Stop by and check it out! In the spring, the Mary Welsh SOAR team will be putting up a display board on plants found in the prairie.

Thank you to all our volunteers!

Every day the list of to-dos for Iowa County Conservation staff seems to grow. From finishing grants, rip-rapping a pond, putting up job descriptions, and checking in hunters, the list goes on and on. We wouldn't accomplish half of what we do without the help of our generous volunteers. Our volunteers may show up for one afternoon or hundreds and donate their time, asking nothing in return. It doesn't seem like spending a couple of afternoons with the staff of Iowa County Conservation could make such a drastic difference, but thanks to them, we have accomplished projects that seemed out of reach. We would also like to thank our contributors who have donated resources that help us to accomplish our goals.

If you are interested in volunteering, you can call us at (319) 655-8465 or email swilliams@co.iowa.ia.us.

Thank you!



Two of our volunteers busy at work: Dan Williams (top) and Dan Horras (bottom) volunteered 20-30 hours a week for several months working on campground improvements and land management work.

We Need Your Help!



Iowa County Conservation is hoping to purchase a buffalo hide/fur and various buffalo supplies to add to our educational materials.

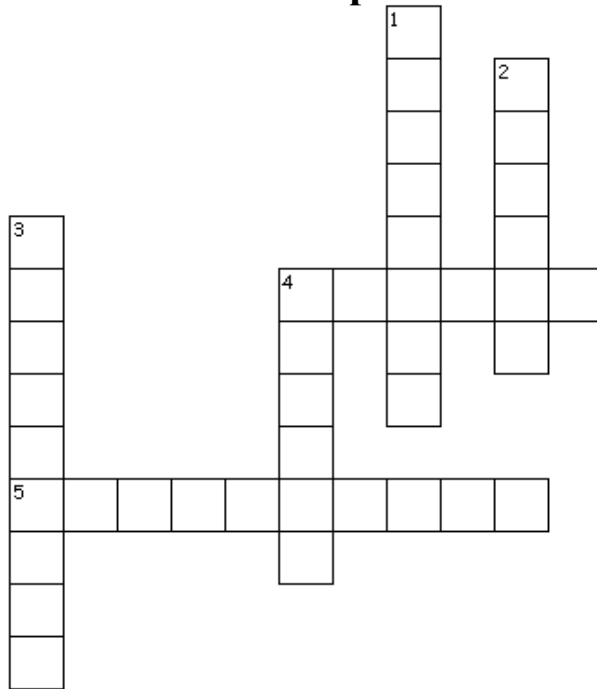
These materials would be purchased from a South Dakota-based company, whose owner makes everything in the traditional methods used by the Plains Indians. They would be used for school and public programs.

We have an anonymous donor who is willing to provide us with a \$500 match if we can raise this same amount in donations. If you would like to help us meet this goal, please consider donating. You can fill out the form on the back of the newsletter and send it in with your donation. Please earmark your donation for "Environmental Education materials." Feel free to call us if you have any questions. We appreciate your support!

**Creature
Feature:
Groundhog**



Complete the clues below to fill in the crossword puzzle.



Across

- 4. If the groundhog sees its _____, legend says there will be six more weeks of winter.
- 5. In the winter, the groundhog _____ in its burrow.

Down

- 1. Groundhog Day is in the month of _____.
- 2. Groundhogs dig a hole in the ground called a _____.
- 3. Another name for a groundhog is a _____.
- 4. If the groundhog does not see its shadow, it is believed that _____ will arrive early.

Answers: Across 4. shadow 5. hibernates
Down 1. February 2. burrow 3. woodchuck 4. spring



The groundhog has many nicknames, including woodchuck, whistle-pig, and marmot.



The groundhog is a mammal.



Groundhogs eat grasses, leaves, fruits, and tree bark.



They dig underground burrows, which they use to sleep, raise their babies, escape from predators, and hibernate. They even use a special part of the burrow as a bathroom!



Groundhogs eat lots of food all summer and fall to build up fat. After the first frost, the groundhog goes to its underground burrow to sleep until spring.

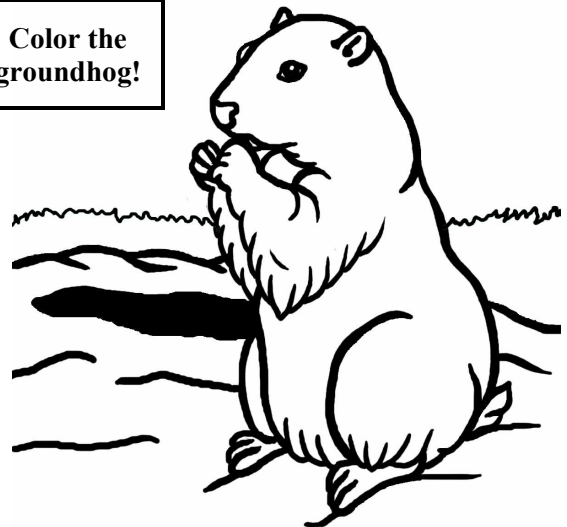


The groundhog is a true hibernator. When it hibernates, its body temperature gets very low. It breathes as little as two times per minute and its heart beats five times per minute.



February 2nd is a holiday known as Groundhog Day. Legend says that if a groundhog sees its shadow on that day, there will be six more weeks of winter. If it doesn't, spring will come early.

Color the groundhog!



PUBLIC PROGRAM SCHEDULE

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

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 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.

Saturday, February 21st

2-4PM: Winter Fun Day



Bring the whole family to explore the winter world of Lake Iowa Park. We will discover how animals survive the winter and look for some signs of these animals. You will also get a chance to try out some snowshoes (weather permitting).

Afterwards, there will be an indoor activity and hot cocoa to warm up. Dress for the weather. Please pre-register by calling us at (319) 655-8466 or emailing csavage@co.iowa.ia.us by Friday, February 20th.

Saturday, March 7th

9-10AM: For the Birds

While many birds migrate, lots of birds stick around in Iowa, and the cold winter months make it harder for them to find food. Come to the nature center to make some bird food treats that you can take home! Afterwards, we will visit our bird blind to see what feathered friends are still here.



10:15-11:15AM: Snowshoeing Adventure

Come explore the park with this exciting mode of winter travel. We will cover the basics of snowshoeing and go on a relaxing winter walk to give it a try. We have snowshoes you can borrow, or you can bring your own. Please pre-register by calling us at (319) 655-8466 or emailing csavage@co.iowa.ia.us by Friday, March 6th, as we have a limited number of snowshoes. This program will be cancelled if we have less than 5 inches of snow cover.

Saturday, March 21st

2PM: Take Flight!

Join guests from the Macbride Raptor Project (MRP) at the Lake Iowa Nature Center. They will discuss birds of prey, including their habitat needs, identification, and adaptations. They will also talk about the important work the MRP does to protect these animals. Attendees will get the chance to see a live hawk and owl!



Wish List

The following items are needed by Lake Iowa Nature Center. Please bring donations to the nature center.

- ◆ Cash donations
- ◆ Functional blenders (for papermaking)
- ◆ Dry erase markers
- ◆ New washcloths

Visit us online at:

www.mycountyparks.com/County/Iowa

Like “Iowa County Conservation” and “Lake Iowa Park” on Facebook.





Iowa County Conservation News

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

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

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Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Please earmark my donation for:

- Cabin Development
- Lake Iowa Park Improvements
- Environmental Education materials & equipment
- Conservation News newsletter
- Habitat improvement/development on ICCB areas
- Use my donation where needed most
- Other: _____

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