

# CONSERVATION NEWS

*A newsletter of the Iowa County Conservation Board*

*VOLUME 25 ISSUE 2*

*SPRING 2012*

## Playscape Community Build Day

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, over 70 community volunteers donated their time, energy, and expertise to help construct a huge portion of the Nature Explore Playscape at Lake Iowa Park. Volunteers of all ages laid flagstone, moved woodchips, built a dry creek bed, filled garden beds, sealed benches and storage units, and finished off the tree house and music stage decking.

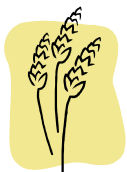
**A huge thank you to everyone involved!!**

**GRAND OPENING**  
**Nature Explore**  
**Playscape**  
**Saturday, May 26**  
**9:00 am**  
**Lake Iowa Nature Center**



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### Memorial Day Weekend Activities

- Friday, May 25  
8:00 PM Evening Demonstration Prairie Burn (meet at shelter 4)
- Saturday, May 26  
7:00-10:00 AM Free Will Donation Pancake Breakfast (lower level, nature center)
- 9:00 AM Grand Opening of Nature Explore Playscape & Prairie Exhibit
- 10:00 AM Double Elimination Dummy Board Tournament (\$10/team)

## Is it light or lite?

By Lee Sorenson, Director ICCB

As the weather warmed up early this spring, we headed out to start cleaning up the park, opening up shelters and bathrooms, putting boat slips in and many other odd jobs. One day my two little helpers and I were picking up trash around the park. As we started going down the first roadway, we were looking for trash along the ditch. It wasn't very far and there was a beer can, so we stopped and picked it up. One of my little helpers asked me what kind of beer can it was, and I replied, "It is an Old Milwaukee Light." As we traveled down the road we spotted another beer can and the question was asked "What kind is that one?" and I replied, "An Old Milwaukee Light." After that, a game kind of started on what type of can we would find next. As we drove down the road there was another can, and another. Most of them were Old Milwaukee Light. One of my little helpers stated "Wow that must be really good since almost every can we find is a light can." Also, my little helper asked why the beer had 'light' in the name. I informed her that it had nothing to do with the weight of the can, but it just has fewer calories in it and is less fattening. We were on our way again and there is another light beer can, and another, and another, and another- they seem to be everywhere. As we drove on, again and again we stopped to pick cans up along the roads, in the picnic areas, on the beach, in parking lots, and anywhere that you thought you would find the cans (and even some places that you wouldn't think possible). Along the way, of course, we had our conversation about the trees blooming early and what would happen if the temperatures got cold enough to hurt them, or about the turkeys that we saw along the way and how to identify whether it is a hen, jake or tom. We passed some people that were looking for morel mushrooms, although they were not having much luck. I am not sure what the earliest date morals have ever been found in the spring, but this would have to be one of the earliest, if not the earliest years. Whoop, there is another can, and once again it is a light beer can. Then something happens, we see a can in the ditch, but wait- this was different. It wasn't light beer it was a lite beer. When questioned, I told my little



helpers that it was the same thing, but just spelled differently. On our way back to the shop, my little helpers stated, "Wow, people sure are messy." I said yes sometimes they are, but I also told them a lot of people throw cans in the back of pickups and don't really think about what happens to those cans when driving down the road or on a windy day. They might not be throwing the cans in the ditches on purpose at all. They might just be coming out of the back end of trucks without them even knowing. I decided to share this story to get people to think about doing their part to keep our public lands clean and picked up. At the end of our rounds, we picked up 53 cans along the roadways. By the next day, 6 more were found in areas that we had just picked up less than 24 hours before. Next time you drink a pop or beer, please think about where that can should end up and help keep them out of our public areas.

### Did you know?

- Used aluminum cans are recycled and returned to a store shelf as a new can in as little as 60 days.
- Americans recycled enough aluminum cans last year to stretch to the moon and back 8 times.
- Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a television for 3 hours.
- The number of cans recycled every 30 seconds equals the number of people who could fill an entire pro football stadium.
- Aluminum never wears out, it can be recycled forever.
- Recycling aluminum creates 97% less water pollution than producing new metal from ore.

Source: Can Manufacturers Institute

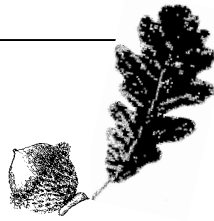
#### 2011 Iowa County Conservation Board

*Vic Rathje, Amana  
Jim Scandridge, Victor  
Marcia Wehner, Williamsburg  
Gordon Dietze, Millersburg  
Shirley Messer, Ladora*

#### Iowa County Conservation Board Staff

*Lee Sorenson, Director  
Mike Bode, Park Ranger  
Laura Stephens, Naturalist  
Sean Curry, Naturalist*

## Property Highlight: Burr Oak Wildlife Area



On August 21, 1984, Paul E. Hursh donated this 28 acre preserve that overlooks the Iowa River to the State Conservation Commission (Iowa Department of Natural Resources). On September 16, 1985, the Iowa County Conservation Board entered into a management agreement with the State Conservation Commission. This agreement became effective on October 3 of that year.



The Iowa County Conservation Board agreed to develop, care for, and maintain the property as an access area for the citizens of Iowa County as well as the people of the State of Iowa in substantially the same manner as State wildlife refuges are maintained and managed by the Iowa DNR.

As per the agreement, no trees or vegetation can be removed from the property and the natural features of this area must always be left undisturbed. No improvements or changes to the area can take place without approval from the Iowa DNR. And of course, the area can never be used for any commercial purposes.

The Burr Oak Wildlife Area is excellent for hiking, bird watching, and nature study. There are no facilities on the site, and hunting is not permitted on this property. To get there: go north of Marengo on V66, then east on F-15 for 1 1/2 miles. Access is just east up the driveway.



## Bird ID Teacher Pack

The Iowa County Conservation Board was awarded a \$500 grant from the Iowa Ornithologist's Union to assemble a Bird Identification Teacher Pack to be used in conjunction with Lake Iowa Park's bird observation blind. The Teacher Pack includes sets of 10 *Birds of Iowa* field guides and 10 *Birds at Your Feeder* laminated fold out guides. Both are easy to use and geared towards the beginning birder. The Teacher Pack also includes a iFlyer Birdsong Scanning wand. It works by scanning a barcode sticker that is linked to a specific bird's song. The stickers can be placed on field guides and posters. When a bird is identified, the teacher can immediately scan and play the bird's song for the students. A *Birds of the Eastern United States* poster was also purchased through the grant, which will be available for all to use in the bird blind. The Teacher Pack will mostly used by school groups visiting the park, but it will also be available to be checked out by scout groups, 4-H clubs, and other organized groups visiting the park.

Thank you to the Iowa Ornithologist's Union for helping Iowa County residents increase their knowledge of Iowa's native birds!



## Are you a fan of Lake Iowa park?

Visit our facebook page to get the latest news on park events and programs, campground updates, photos, and more!

[www.facebook.com/LakelowaPark](http://www.facebook.com/LakelowaPark)

Help us reach 1,000 fans!

## We say goodbye to one naturalist...

By Laura Stephens, Naturalist ICCB

Just over two years ago, I made my first-ever visit to Lake Iowa Park. It was mid-January, pouring rain, and so foggy I could hardly read the road signs as I traveled west on I-80. My interview took place in the back of the park shop. The heavy rain had created puddles inside, and a generator powered a set of halogen lights, since the power was out as well. Although the setting was a bit unconventional, by the end of my interview, I knew this was the place I wanted to be.

My time here has certainly been full of first experiences and opportunities. This was my first full-time permanent 'big-girl' job; my first chance to take on the responsibility of shaping and building a quality environmental education program (and trying to keep my own office clean). I went fishing for the first time since I was a little kid, and then proceeded to take 80 eager fourth graders fishing with me. I submitted my first successful grant applications, became certified to teach archery, banded my first goose, edited my first newsletter, attended a national conference, took a shot at my first clay pigeon (I missed), and perhaps most importantly- went on my first Creepy Camping hayrack ride.

During this same time, the Iowa County Conservation

Board and Lake Iowa Park have accomplished many firsts well. The Lake Iowa Nature Center has gone from a dream to a reality, and continues to grow and develop as a resource for the community. Staff and volunteers built one of the largest and most impressive bird observation blinds around, as well as an immense and beautiful butterfly garden. And of course, everyone is excited

about the upcoming completion and opening of the Nature Explore Playscape. It is truly inspiring to look back and see how much a small staff and community have accomplished over a relatively short period of time.

As many of you know, my husband and I will soon be heading north to Minneapolis for our next set of life's firsts. My husband will begin his first job as a patent attorney, we will purchase a home of our own, and we'll finally be able to get that puppy

we have wanted for a long time now. I am certainly going to miss the park, my coworkers, and all of the tremendous people I have met during my time here. Thank you all for welcoming me into the community, I could not have asked for a better place to be. We plan to come back and visit as we can. Maybe you will see us at the Creepy Camping Potluck- we'll bring the hotdish.



## Lake Iowa Nature Center's Butterfly Garden is a Certified Waystation!

The Butterfly Garden at the Lake Iowa Nature was recently approved as Monarch Waystation #5255 by the Monarch Watch organization. Monarch Waystations are areas that provide the resources necessary for monarch butterflies to produce successive generations and sustain their incredible yearly migration to Mexico. Waystations include milkweed plants that serve as hosts for monarch eggs and larvae as well as nectar plants to provide an energy source for adults.

The Butterfly Garden and surrounding area at the nature center contains three species of milkweed as well as blazingstar, joe-pye weed, purple coneflower, sedum, lantana, pentas, and many other beneficial nectar producing plants. A wooden butterfly house was added to the garden this spring. The butterflies even have a shallow water source in the middle of the garden that is attached to a tile line from the nature center.

Monarch Waystation Certification is not limited to gardens at nature centers or other conservation areas. Home gardens, schools grounds, business landscaping, and even roadsides can be certifiable habitat for monarch butterflies. Creating a Monarch Waystation can be as simple as adding milkweed and a few nectar plants to a current garden or landscape.

**To learn more about Monarch Waystation certification and monarch conservation, visit:**  
[www.MonarchWatch.org/waystations](http://www.MonarchWatch.org/waystations)



... and welcome another!

By Sean Curry, Naturalist-to-be ICCB

Life is a journey. With each day and each decision, we are all faced with finding our own way. My journey has led me to you, the residents of Iowa County.

Born in California and raised in Wisconsin, I have always loved the outdoors. I have many fond memories from my youth traveling across the west, hunting and fishing with my dad, attending summer camps, and visiting nature centers as often as possible. These were but the first steps down a path that would later be formalized through education.

After high school, I attended the University of Minnesota in Duluth where I earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology. A chance exposure to environmental education during a field course to a national park inspired me to pursue teaching. In 2008, I received a Graduate Certificate in Environmental Education. This educational background has served me well in my time teaching people about the outdoors.



I worked for five seasons as an interpretive ranger at Isle Royale National Park. Located in northwestern Lake Superior, the island is renowned for its remote wilderness and internationally recognized for a long term study of wolves and moose. Since the park is only open in the summer, I have had many opportunities for other experiences. I have worked as an environmental educator in northern Minnesota, served as a park ranger in Florida, and taught undergraduates about interpretation and environmental education at my alma mater. These seasonal jobs have helped me grow as an educator, but after all those seasons one starts to wish for somewhere to call home.

I am very excited to be your new naturalist. I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at public and school programs. I hope you will enjoy the programs that I will be offering. I also look forward to learning from all of you about Iowa County. I am sure that several people reading this are experts on the history and nature of the county; I would love to hear whatever you have to teach me. I am proud to be part of your community and call Iowa County home.

## SUMMER PROGRAM CALENDAR

**SATURDAY, MAY 26**

9:00am

**GRAND OPENING**

**Nature Explore Playscape &  
Tallgrass Prairie Exhibit**  
Lake Iowa Nature Center

**SATURDAY, JUNE 2**

1:00-3:00pm

**Free Fishing Weekend Activities**

Lake Iowa Boat Ramp

*Try your hand at fish printing, practice your casting technique, learn about water safety, and even check out a fishing pole and tackle to use for the afternoon. From June 1-3, all Iowa residents may fish without a license. However, all fishing regulations must be observed.*

**FRIDAY, JUNE 8 AND**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 9**

All Day

**Iowa Basketweaving Guild**

The public is welcome to come and watch members weave with a variety of natural materials. You can even try your hand at weaving on a willow trellis. Short workshops to create a plaited reindeer ornament will take place at 3:00pm and 5:00pm on Friday and at 11:00am and 2:00pm on Saturday in the lower level of the nature center. Fee is \$1 to cover the cost of materials.

**FRIDAY, JULY 27 AND**

**SATURDAY, JULY 28**

Christmas in July

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 AND**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29**

Creepy Camping

**ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS WILL BE SCHEDULED SOON!**

The full summer schedule will be available on our website at:  
[www.mycountyparks.com/county/iowa.aspx](http://www.mycountyparks.com/county/iowa.aspx)

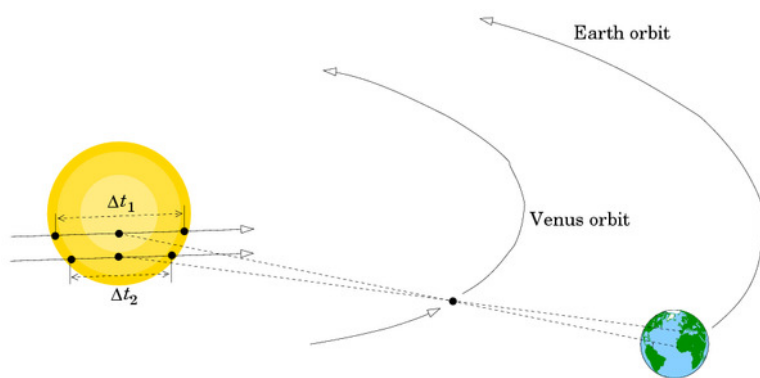
**Watch for the return of a few favorites such as Fire Starting and Dutch Oven Cooking, as well brand new programming from Sean Curry!**

# A Twice-In-Your-Lifetime Opportunity

By Laura Stephens, Naturalist ICCB

Where will you be on the evening of June 5? I'll be watching the Transit of Venus- an event that takes place only twice every one hundred years or so. What makes this occurrence even more unique is that the two transits take place 8 years apart, meaning the first transit in our lifetime was on June 8, 2004. Did you miss it? I did. I was too busy counting down the days to my high school graduation to keep track of my 'Celestial Highlights' calendar. Lucky for us, we'll have a second chance to view this spectacular event. However, if you miss it this time, your next viewing opportunity will not come along until 2117, and I'm guessing you might fail to see that one too.

A Transit of Venus occurs when Venus passes directly between the Sun and the Earth. When this happens, the silhouette of Venus can be seen travelling across the face of the Sun. The Transit of Venus is essentially an annular eclipse of the Sun by Venus. Venus passing between the Sun and the Earth is not a rare event in itself- that takes place every 1.6 years. It is the alignment of the two planets with the Sun that is uncommon. While both Venus and Earth orbit the Sun, they orbit on different planes. Typically, when Venus passes between the Earth and the Sun, it is a little above or below the Sun, making it invisible in the Sun's glare.



German mathematician Johannes Kepler first predicted the Transit of Venus to take place in 1631. French astronomer Pierre Gassendi attempted to

observe the transit, but missed it.

English astronomer Jeremiah Horrocks became the first person to observe the Transit of Venus in 1639, meaning Kepler's original prediction was correct. Subsequent pairs of transits have taken place in 1761 and 1769, 1874 and 1882, and now in 2004 and 2012. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Edmund Halley discovered that measuring the



Transit of Venus from different locations could allow astronomers to calculate the distance to Venus, and therefore the size of the solar system. Even today, scientists and astronomers are using measurements from the transit to calibrate methods used to determine size and distance in space.

In eastern Iowa, the transit will be visible from roughly 5:00pm until dark. The entire transit will last until just before midnight, with Venus being midway through its journey around 8:30pm. You can view the transit through inexpensive eclipse glasses (solar shades) or even #14 shaded welder's glass. Regular sunglasses are NOT sufficient to protect your eyes! Telescopes can be outfitted with proper solar filters over the large end, giving you an up close look as Venus scoots across the Sun. If the sky is overcast or you are otherwise unable to view outdoors, a live webcast of the transit will be shown from Mauna Kea in Hawaii. The Black Hawk Astronomy Club is even hosting a Transit of Venus viewing event at the Grout Museum in Waterloo (visit [www.groutmuseumdistrict.org](http://www.groutmuseumdistrict.org) for more info). If you really want to get involved, smartphone users can download a free Transit of Venus app- versions are available from iTunes and the Android market. You can even buy t-shirts to commemorate the event. Remember, not everybody gets a chance to see this!

If you are hooked and want to learn more about this unique and exciting occurrence, visit:

[www.TransitofVenus.org](http://www.TransitofVenus.org)  
[www.exploratorium.edu/venus](http://www.exploratorium.edu/venus)

## Explore Iowa's Tallgrass Prairies

By Laura Stephens, Naturalist ICCB

Iowa was once covered by 30 million acres of tallgrass prairie. Today, only 0.1% of this historical landscape remains. The majority of our pre-settlement native prairie has been lost to agricultural fields and urban sprawl. Fire suppression and a general unawareness of this distinctive landscape has also led to its decline. The few patches of true remnant prairie across the state exist in pastures that have never been plowed, in some road ditches, and in untouched pioneer cemeteries.

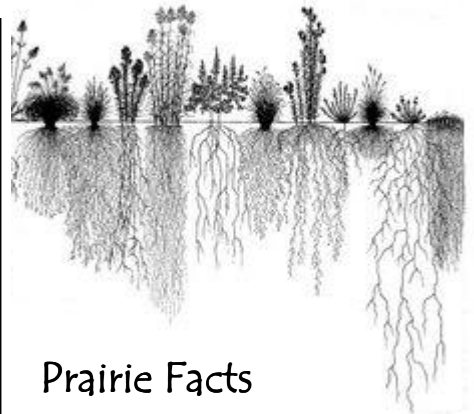
A prairie ecosystem is comprised mostly of tall grasses and forbs (flowering plants) along with a diverse array of animals, fungi, rich soils, unique geology, and fire. As the glacial ice sheets retreated from Iowa 12,000-10,000 years ago, the climate gradually changed to become warmer and drier. The spruce and pine forests retreated with this change, and prairie became established in its place. The prairie continued to develop over the next 8,000 years. Frequent fires helped to maintain the ecosystem, and prevented the intrusion of forests into the prairie. The few tree species that could withstand the fires interspersed with the tall grasses, creating patches of savanna habitat.

Prairie plants are well adapted to withstand drought, intense grazing from bison herds, and frequent fires. Two-thirds of the prairie plant mass is hidden deep underneath the soil in the plants' root systems. When fires sweep across the prairie, the dead tops of the plants burn off, returning nutrients to the soil. The plants can then re-sprout from their deep root system. Historically, a prairie would burn every 5 to 10 years. This cycle of frequent fires eliminated nearly all shallow rooted plants and species with woody stems. Over thousands of years, this cycle of fire and re-growth helped build the fertile soils of Iowa and the Midwest.

Today, the importance of preserving our undisturbed prairie remnants and promoting the restoration of native prairies is widely recognized by both conservation organizations and private landowners.

The Iowa County Conservation Board will be hosting the exhibit, *Tallgrass Prairie: Past, Present, and Future* at the Lake Iowa Nature Center from May 26 through July 14. Hands-on displays and interactive components will engage visitors in learning about the prairie landscape and native plant species. The "Tallgrass Prairie" exhibit was produced by the Iowa Association of Naturalists with funds from the Resource Enhancement and Protection – Conservation Education Program (REAP – CEP), Living Roadway Trust Fund, Pheasants Forever, Iowa Trust for Local Conservation, the Tallgrass Prairie Center – UNI, and Truax Company. Many conservation organizations, including the Friends of Iowa Conservation Foundation, also assisted in funding the display.

Source: Iowa Prairie Network




### Prairie Facts

- Prairies once covered about 40% of the United States
- Prairies are one of the most recently developed ecosystems in North America
- Over 100 plant species can occur in a prairie of less than 5 acres
- Prairie grasses can grow as high as 10ft, but average a height of 6-8ft
- Some prairie plant roots can reach a depth of 12ft
- Up to 60 million bison grazed on the plains and prairies of North America prior to European settlement. Fewer than 600 existed by 1885.
- Grazing was an integral part of the prairie ecosystem and increased the growth of prairie plants
- Prairie fires can move as fast as 600 feet per minute and burn as hot as 700 degrees Fahrenheit

*From: Quick Facts, Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area*

**Iowa County Conservation News**

Iowa County Conservation Board  
Lake Iowa Park  
2550 G. Ave  
Ladora, IA 52251

For more information about the  
**Iowa County Conservation Board,**  
please contact us 

**Director** 319-655-8465  
lsorenson@co.iowa.ia.us  
**Park Ranger** mbode@co.iowa.ia.us  
**Campground Hosts** 319-655-8465  
**Naturalist** 319-655-8466  
lstephens@co.iowa.ia.us  
**Fax number** 319-655-8400  
**Website** www.mycountyparks.com/County/Iowa

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**Enclosed is my donation for:**

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

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Please earmark my donation for:**

- 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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