

CONSERVATION NEWS

A newsletter of the Iowa County Conservation Board

VOLUME 25 ISSUE 1

WINTER 2012


Nature Explore Playscape Update

By Laura Stephens, Naturalist

Thanks to our unheard of fall and early winter weather this year, a tremendous amount of work has been able to take place within the Nature Explore Playscape. Several large components, such as the sand pits, balance area, and messy materials area are nearly complete. However, there is still much work to be done and we need your help! Flagstone flooring, living tunnels, a dry creek bed, and entry features all still need to be installed. A Volunteer Build Day is scheduled for Saturday, March 31 beginning at 9:00 in the morning. Volunteers of all ages and abilities are welcome. Activities will be available for younger children, so even the littlest helpers can have a chance to get involved. Please

dress for the weather and wear old clothes that can get dirty. Bring work gloves along if you have them. A filling chili lunch will be served inside the nature center for all volunteers. For more information or to sign up to help, please call (319) 655-8466 or e-mail lstephens@co.iowa.ia.us

Volunteer Build Day
Saturday, March 31
9:00 AM start
Lake Iowa Nature Center



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Memorial Day Weekend Activities

Friday, May 25	
8:00 PM	Evening Demonstration Prairie Burn <i>Meet at Shelter 4</i>
Saturday, May 26	
7:00-10:00 AM	Free Will Donation Pancake Breakfast <i>Nature Center Lower Level</i>
9:00 AM	Grand Opening of Nature Explore Playscape and Tallgrass Prairie Exhibit <i>Front porch of Lake Iowa Nature Center</i>
10:00 AM	Double Elimination Dummy Board Tournament <i>\$10 entry/team, cash prize to top teams</i>

CAMPGROUND IMPROVEMENTS

By Lee Sorenson, Director ICCB

Here we are in January and so far what a winter it has been. It was the first time we did not have a white Christmas since 2005 from what I understand, and I can say it didn't bother me in the least. But I am positive that at some point in time the snow shovels and street plows will have to come out to move some of that white stuff.

During the winter months we work on planning projects that we can get done when the weather turns back in our favor. One of the projects we are looking forward to starting in the spring is the new dump station at Lake Iowa Park. I know you are thinking, how can they be excited about that? Well over the past several years we have tried several things to make the old system work properly, but it always seems to be an issue. Nothing is more frustrating when you have a line of 10 campers ready to dump and the system is plugged. Not to mention it is not the cleanest or best smelling duty of our jobs. Construction will begin first thing in the spring, so with help from weather, by early summer campers will have a new system. One of the other parts of the dump station we are looking forward to is its new location. The old location made you drive to the back of the campground where it would get congested with long lines of campers. The new location is at the entrance to the park, with a frontage road and two dumping areas to help streamline the dumping process.

Another project that we are working on is replacing the north shower house. This building was constructed in 1988 and has seen better days. We have just started the design process and hope to include as many environmentally conscience aspects to the building as possible. Hopefully you will be able to use one or either of these new features throughout the summer. Both of these projects are funded by camp registration fees that you pay each and every time you camp, so thank you for camping at Lake Iowa Park and making these improvements possible.

2nd Annual Dinner Banquet

The Friends of Iowa County Conservation Foundation invites you to their annual benefit dinner banquet on

Saturday, April 14

at the Lake Iowa Nature Center.

Silent Auction begins at 6 pm

Dinner Served at 7 pm

Dinner is once again catered by PHAT Daddy's of Marengo. Ticket prices and information on how to purchase tickets will be posted in the local papers in late February.

The Friends Foundation is still seeking donations of new, quality items for the silent auction. Donations may be dropped off at the Lake Iowa Nature Center. Please call (319) 655-8466 for more information.

**All proceeds will benefit the
Nature Explore Playscape Project.**



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Property Highlight: Berstler Woods

By Lee Sorenson, Director ICCB

On May 15, 1980 the Iowa County Conservation Board purchased a 69 acre track from Harold Berstler and Ruth S. Berstler. This property was purchased with the aid of the Habitat Stamp fund from the State Conservation Commission (DNR). The total cost of the project was \$41,875 with the grant covering \$31,406 of the cost. The selling price was \$600 per acre.



This area is a rectangular shaped area bisected by the Middle English River on the North end. The area consists of approximately 60 acres

of upland oak-hickory timber and 9 acres open pasture.

On October 1, 1980 the Iowa County Conservation Board entered into an cooperative agreement under the Wildlife Habitat Fund. This agreement says that (1) The local entity shall be responsible for maintenance and all expenses related thereto after completion of the project. (2) That the property shall be used for wildlife habitat purposes and no incompatible uses or changes in the property will be allowed. (3) That the property or any part thereof may not pass from the control of the Iowa County Conservation Board or be encumbered in any way without the written approval of the Commission (DNR).

This area is managed for wildlife habitat and allows public hunting, bird watching, and environmental education. Berstler Woods is located South of Millersburg on V-52, West on 325th, and North on GG Ave. This is dirt road access, do not attempt when wet.



From the Bird Blind

By Laura Stephens, Naturalist

The bird observation blind at Lake Iowa Park has been a happening place since the snow started to fall. While birds don't rely solely on our offerings of black oil sunflower seeds, peanuts, and suet to survive the winter, the easy availability of these items makes the feeders a popular place to be. It is not unheard of to see 10 or more species of birds bopping from feeder to feeder, but dark-eyed juncos, woodpeckers, and black-capped chickadees have been the most consistent visitors. The bird blind is always open, so you can stop out any time that is convenient. The blind is located to the west of the nature center, just follow the gravel path that starts behind the right side of the building. As an added bonus, the opening of the blind faces the south, making it a cozy place to sit even on cold and windy days! Before or after your visit, stop in the nature center library to check out our selection of bird ID guides and books on attracting birds to your own backyard. And of course, the birds are hearty eaters so we are always accepting donations of black oil sunflower seeds and **unsalted** in-shell peanuts. We hope to see you at the bird blind!

Explore Our Parks: Gateway Park and Preserve

By Mike Bode, Park Ranger

Gateway Park and Preserve, the site of the former sand and concrete plant located on the North side of Marengo, was purchased by the Iowa County Conservation Board in 2002. Obtaining this property would not have been possible without the help of a REAP grant from the State of Iowa and financial support from the Iowa County Board of Supervisors. The property encompasses 131 acres which includes a 40 acre lake as well as a 12 acre pond that is often connected to the Iowa River during high water.

Over one-half mile of riverfront along the Iowa River, forms the North boundary of the property. All three bodies of water have boat ramps installed. However, the year that the Iowa River boat ramp was put in by the State of Iowa, the main river channel switched more towards the north shoreline.

This has made the boat ramp unusable, except during high water conditions.

The property also includes two large buildings, one of which houses the Iowa County Transportation Department. The other contains outdated office space and a place for storing large equipment. Having a storage area like this has been a major benefit when our department is working on larger projects at the north end of the county, since all of our operations and equipment had been based solely out of Lake Iowa Park. The old office space is also in the process of getting City water and sewer lines ran to it, to eventually offer access to modern

restrooms in the park.

Years before Gateway was even obtained, a volunteer committee was formed to push forward with the purchase of the property, and they still exist today as an active group. RAIV, or River Access for Iowa Valley, is a steering committee that works directly with the Iowa County Conservation Board to keep local perspective and focus on changing issues dealing with the property. RAIV holds fundraising events to help pay for new projects and amenities such as portable restrooms during "peak" park use.



Gateway has been developed as a multi-use area with a focus of keeping everything as natural and low maintenance as possible. You will notice that nearly all areas that are not mowed or bottomland timber, have been restored to prairie. Of course there are some highly developed areas that are big draws for this preserve as well.

The largest of which, is the Gateway Arboretum. This area boasts many varieties of trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers both perennial and annual. The Iowa County Master Gardeners along with countless volunteers have taken on the task of maintaining the area. There is a small trail that winds through the Arboretum and near the center is a meditation area which is secluded by berms and plant life. Also within the Arboretum is a beautiful Veterans Memorial with various flags, decorative concrete, pavers, and plants. The Arboretum has quickly become a popular place for graduating seniors and families to get their professional

pictures taken.

Gateway Park showcases an elaborate trail system, even within its boundaries. In the summer of 2004, the limestone trail around the lake was completed. By the spring of 2009, with funding from the Blaine Foundation and the cooperative efforts of numerous volunteers, 1.3 more miles of trail were completed, mainly outside of the park. This second phase of the trail project would have the previous trail continue along Marengo's flood levy, heading west out of the park. This connected Highway 212 to the Gateway Trail complex creating countless route possibilities and more points of access for trail users. It ends up being 1.6 miles around the lake if you stick to the limestone trails closest to the shoreline. While going around the lake, continuing along the levy to 212, and walking through town back to your starting point, would be around 3.4 miles.

Also featured, is the Shon Houdek Memorial Pavilion, up along the levy near the North end of the park. This is an open-air shelter with picnic tables that is available for use by the public on a "first come first serve" basis. There is another structure that I always get questions about; the partially completed fifty-foot tall structure also located along the levy, just east of the pavilion. What you currently see of this structure are the main poles and beams of a bird observation tower that was donated to the Conservation Board



from a family outside of Maquoketa. The completion of this structure has been put on hold because of insurance compliance issues including; finding a way to continually comply with load limits, acceptable scheduled opening and closing of access, and successful securing of the structure when not in use. There is also a secluded bird blind you should check out, located along the lake trail between Lafayette and Franklyn Avenues.

Fishing opportunities abound on all three bodies of water within Gateway Park and Preserve. Because the smaller 12 acre pond is connected to the river at times, it potentially has the same types of fish that you would find in the Iowa River. On the other hand, the 40 acre lake is separated from the river by the levy. It is deep and has very clear water which makes surveying the fish population extremely difficult. Although I have seen bluegill, crappie, catfish, and some nice bass caught out of it, over the years.

It takes the continued cooperative effort of many different agencies, groups, and individuals to maintain Gateway at the level we have all come to expect. Thanks to everyone that has helped, and continues to help, keep Gateway Park and Preserve a great source of public pride.



Spring Program Calendar

Winter Birds Snowshoe Hike

Saturday, February 11

1:00-2:30 PM

Lake Iowa Nature Center

Watch Iowa's cold weather birds and learn how they survive the cold and snowy weather. Snowshoes are available for participants ages 6 and up. Please call to pre-register by February 10. Use of snowshoes is dependent on sufficient snow conditions.



Earth Day Celebration

Sunday, April 22

Lake Iowa Nature Center

Stop in to the nature center between 11am and 2pm to celebrate the 42nd Anniversary of Earth Day! Get creative with recycled crafts, try your hand at solar cooking, and learn easy ways to lessen your impact on our planet.

GRAND OPENING

Nature Explore Playscape & Traveling Tallgrass Prairie Exhibit

Saturday, May 26 at 9:00am

Be among the first visitors to get a chance to explore the exhibit "Tallgrass Prairie— Past, Present and Future" at the Lake Iowa Nature Center. Also join in on the fun at the official opening of the Nature Explore Playscape, located just east of the nature center. Staff members will be available to answer questions about the design

Free Fishing Weekend Activities

Saturday, June 2

1:00-3:00 PM

Lake Iowa Boat Ramp

Try your hand at fishing 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 still be observed.**



www.mycountyparks.com

The Iowa County Conservation Board's webpage has received many updates in the past few months. The 'Facilities' section for Lake Iowa Park now contains pictures, reservation information, and a list of amenities for our picnic shelters as well as rental info for the Lake Iowa Nature Center. A 'Gallery' section has also been added and contains pictures of the bird blind and of progress to the Nature Explore Playscape. And of course, our website is a great place to get the latest information on programs and events taking place at Lake Iowa Park. To reach the ICCB's site directly, visit: www.mycountyparks.com/county/iowa.aspx

Nature Explore Playscape

Volunteer Build Day

Saturday, March 31

9:00 AM Start Time



Insects in Winter

By Laura Stephens, Naturalist

As the days grow shorter and the temperatures begin to drop, we as humans begin to prepare for winter by digging out our sweaters, unpacking extra blankets, and turning up the thermostats in our homes a few degrees. Deer grow a thick coat of fur, squirrels furiously pack away caches of acorns, and hibernating animals find a cozy spot to sleep away the winter. But what happens to the six-legged ectotherms among us? Fortunately, the insect world boasts a multitude of adaptations to cope with extreme winter weather.

Perhaps the most well-known method of winter survival is some insects' production of glycerol. Glycerol, a type of sugar, lowers the freezing temperature of body fluids and helps prevent cell damage from the formation of ice crystals. When kept in a dry environment, these super-cooled insects can survive temperatures of nearly -4°F!

Many insect species also pass the winter in diapause, or a long-term state of suspension. Praying mantis eggs, woolly bear caterpillars, black swallowtail pupae, and even some adult mosquito females employ this method of survival. The insect prepares for the extended dormancy by building up lipids, proteins, and carbohydrates in its system in order to maintain the body's lowered metabolic function. Diapause is terminated when an external signal such as day length or temperature indicates the environmental conditions are once again favorable to the insect.

A more unique method of winter survival is exercised by gall-forming wasps, flies, beetles, and moths. Typically, in the spring an egg is laid on the surface of the stem or leaf of the plant. Once the egg hatches, the larva burrows into the plant and secretes a chemical that irritates the plant causing excessive cell growth. This extra plant tissue conveniently forms an insulated shelter exclusively for the larva which will over-winter in the gall and hatch in the spring.

Possibly the most impressive display of winter adaptation is the yearly migration of monarch butterflies to Mexico and some parts of Southern California. Incredibly, monarchs over-winter in the same trees year after year even though no butterflies ever migrate twice. The adults fly back north in the spring and lay their eggs, only to die a short time later. Several generations separate the groups of migrating monarchs.

Whether freeze resistant, gall forming, migrating, or suspended in diapause, insects are undeniably well adapted to weathering the extremes of the winter season. The next time you head inside to escape the cold and blustery weather, take a minute to appreciate the incredible winter adaptations of some of the smallest creatures on earth.

Source: Heinrich, Bernd. *Winter World*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003



Try it!



Fun winter activities for those cold and snowy days...



Frozen Bubbles

If it's well below freezing, take last summer's jar of bubbles outside. Do your bubbles freeze before they touch the ground?

Watercolor Snow

Fill clean spray bottles with water. Add 10 drops of food coloring to each bottle and shake to mix. Spray to add color to snowmen, snow forts, or the backyard!

Ice Castles

Dig out your sand pails and shovels and get to work! See who can build the tallest snow tower or the most elaborate design.

Snowflake Catcher

Cut a small square out of a dark piece of felt or construction paper. Take the catcher outside while the snow is falling. Use a magnifying glass to closely inspect each snowflake.

Snow Ice Cream

Ingredients:


8 cups of snow (or shaved ice)
1 cup sweetened condensed milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Set a large bowl outside before the snow falls or collect a bowl full of clean, fresh snow. Mix in can of milk and vanilla. Serve immediately.



Iowa County Conservation News

Iowa County Conservation Board
Lake Iowa Park
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- Nature Explore Playscape Project
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