



# The Web

*Newsletter of the Iowa Association of Naturalists*

Summer Workshop Info on pages 5 & 6!

## Mammoth Effort

By Mark Roberts, Education Coordinator Clinton County

Fourteen feet at the shoulder, weighing in at nearly ten tons with spiraled tusks that could grow up to sixteen feet long and weigh five hundred pounds. The Columbian mammoth was a savanna and grassland inhabitant, similar to the modern African elephant and it probably had little hair. It is named in honor of Christopher Columbus and is a uniquely North American animal. It lived here from just over one million years ago until as late as 7,800 years ago. The Columbian mammoth ranged from Alaska, across the midwestern United States and south into Mexico and Central America. The word mammoth is based on a Russian word for earth, because mammoth bones were found buried in the earth leading to the belief that the animals lived in burrows underground.

On August 30, 2012 a small team of inexperienced Paleontologists from Clinton County Conservation was given a “once in a lifetime” opportunity. They were invited to help dig up the remains of a Columbian mammoth near Oskaloosa, Iowa. Administrative Assistant, Karen Brix, Naturalists Jessica Steines, Chuck Jacobsen, Mark Roberts and volunteer, Karma Roberts packed into a Toyota Prius at 5:30 AM to begin their journey back in time. After a three-hour drive, we arrived at the farm where the mammoth dig was taking place. Once there, we met up with friend and fellow naturalist, Pete Eyheralde and two researchers from the University of Iowa.

The dig started last April and is being accomplished using largely volunteer help. On weekend digs, over forty people are often on hand moving soil and sifting thru samples. The best part for us was that we were able to go on a weekday, so we had the site very much to ourselves. This meant WE were the ones down in the pit making the new discoveries!

The pit had about two feet of water in the bottom and the first thing we had to do was bail out the bottom using a five-gallon bucket. The result was a very mucky hole where each step sunk you calf-deep in the goo. I was stepping along the side of the pit trying to remove some upper layers to expand the diameter of the hole with Pete and Chuck. My bare foot (no way to keep shoes from being sucked off!) stepped on something hard about a foot below the surface. I swam my hand down to the object and felt a hard, flat object about two and a half inches wide but only a half inch thick. A mammoth rib immediately popped to mind. Not wanting to look foolish by shouting out my possible discovery, I just knelt down in the boot-sucking mud and started digging with my bare hands. When I had a small section exposed and I was more certain I had really found something, I called over Jim, from the University and he confirmed my suspicion that it was indeed a rib.

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He suggested I try to expose the entire rib but be careful not to remove it. It needed to be documented in place and carefully removed from the pit. The mammoth bones are not fossilized or “turned to stone”. They are far too young for that. They are still bone and can be fragile. In other words.... Be Careful! As I was digging out and around the three-foot long rib, I found two others as well, a partial broken rib and the end of a rib sticking out of the side of the pit, still buried under four feet of wet, blue clay.

I was not the only one of our group to strike paleontological gold, Karen Brix found a large foot bone. She spent an hour carefully digging around the bone then cleaning it so it could be identified. My wife, Karma Roberts spent an equally long time carefully digging around a large object only to ultimately find out it was a piece of granite about the size of a volleyball! While using a probe to test for other possible buried treasure, she found two very important specimens; a large fragment of a leg bone and a piece of wood buried right along with the mammoth bones next to a partially exposed tusk, found by an earlier team. This piece of wood will be very important to date the mammoth through radio carbon dating. The piece of wood is likely part of a spruce tree that lived fourteen thousand years ago!

Karen and Jessica also had the privilege of removing a full, intact rib from the pit that was discovered by an earlier group. To think that you are holding part of an animal buried for one hundred and forty centuries is an awesome feeling! Chuck had less luck. He did the dirty work of expanding the pit, along with Pete, by shoveling layers of soil off the top edge of the pit. Since bone has been found throughout the ten-foot deep hole, Chuck and Pete needed to use a time-consuming technique where they had to slice off one-inch layers, breaking through the pieces with bare hands, to make sure they were not tossing out any bones or artifacts with the soil. Their greatest hope was to find human artifacts along with the mammoth. While they did not find the “smoking gun”, a few days after we left the site, a large stone spear point was unearthed right where Chuck was digging! Unfortunately, it was determined that the point was too recent to have been used on the mammoths.

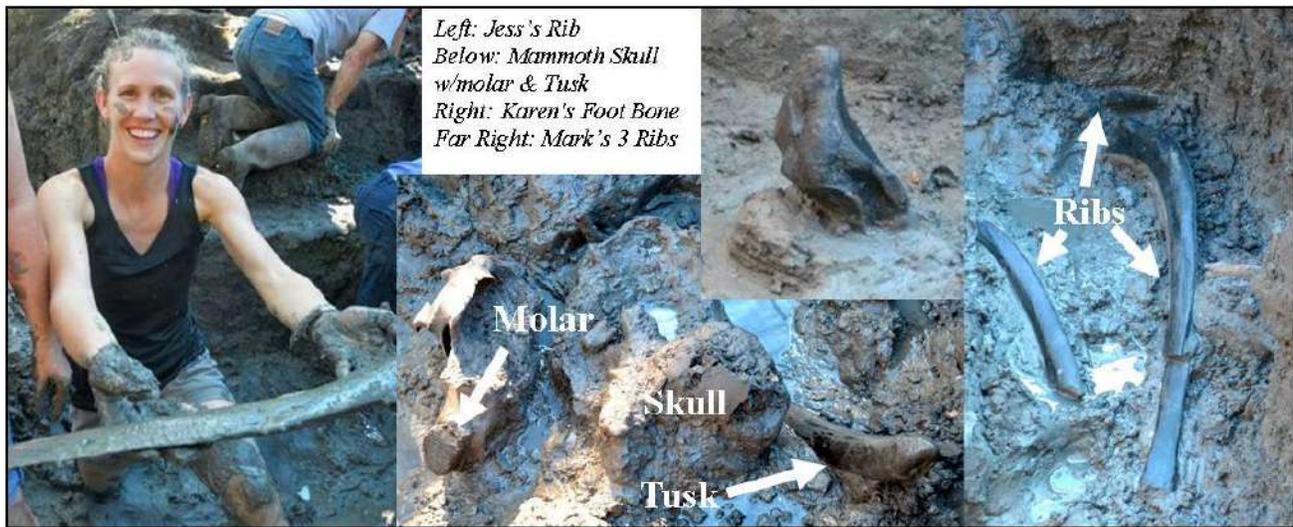
What really makes the find significant is that the remains of the animals' environment also were found with the ancient bones. The bones were found with remains of trees, such as spruce and fur, that existed here when the mammoths lived and the species continue to grow today, although not in Iowa. Researchers have dug about ten to twelve feet down and uncovered the bones and remains of the mammoths' environment.

The identification of a woolly mammoth at the site is unusual in Iowa and the Midwest, according to paleontologists. Combined with the confirmation that a femur previously uncovered at the site belongs to a Columbian mammoth, finding two species of mammoth in one spot “is a first for our state,” says Sarah Horgen, Education Coordinator at the Iowa Museum of Natural History and leader of the excavation.

The identification of a woolly mammoth comes from the team's latest find of skull fragments and two teeth. Woolly mammoths usually preferred colder climates and wide expanses. But there were exceptions, as it appears in this case, says Chris Widga of the Illinois State Museum, who is examining the distribution of mammoths across the Midwest and is consulting on the Iowa dig.

“In recent years, we've come to the realization that woolly mammoths were not necessarily the open-land, tundra dwellers we always thought they were,” Widga says. “Rather than following tundra habitat to the north as the glaciers receded, many mammoths stayed put in the Midwest, eventually going extinct as local populations.”

Woolly mammoths are popularly known thanks to the “Ice Age” movie series, their long tusks and their iconic linkage to the last glacial period in North America and Eurasia, when these huge beasts roamed the frozen plains. Their Columbian brethren are less well-known even though these animals were larger (measuring fourteen feet at the shoulder compared to eleven feet for woolly mammoths) and had long, spiraled tusks. Both species largely died out when the Ice Age ended roughly 11,000 years ago, due to a rapidly changed climate and hunting by humans.



Left: Jess's Rib  
 Below: Mammoth Skull  
 w/molar & Tusk  
 Right: Karen's Foot Bone  
 Far Right: Mark's 3 Ribs

The discovery of separate species at the same site has raised a host of questions, including whether the species lived together, at the same time or years apart. Horgen and her team hope that further analysis of the teeth samples and bones will shed more light on the creatures and their circumstances. "The wonderful preservation of bones and other biological remains at the site such as plants and invertebrates could offer a detailed snapshot of the landscape this mammoth lived in before it died—and may even offer clues to how and why they went extinct," Horgen says.

The dig began in April, about three years after a local farmer stumbled upon what looked to be a bowling ball, which turned out to be a massive bone, sticking out of an eroded riverbank. What he discovered was an approximately 4-foot-long femur that belonged to a Columbian mammoth that called Iowa home at least 10,000 years ago. The team will return to the site periodically to expand the excavation and recover more bones. As of September, 2012, at least seventy bones had been found.

Art Bettis, with the University of Iowa Department of Geo-science, says that a piece of organic material, like a tree, survives the ages "because it remains wet." "When we get into these really saturated environments, the microbes that are there aren't very efficient at decomposing organic matter." Bettis says that it's possible to last a million years in such an environment.

Bettis called the site, "The perfect storm of organic preservation." Scientists and students from all around the state are taking the opportunity to learn more and experience a dig such as this one. What makes this dig so interesting isn't necessarily the number of bones, but "is the fact that we know they were living right here."

**SEASONS OF PLENTY**  
*enlightening. inspiring. & rewarding (not to mention darn good fun)*

Midwest Environmental  
 Education Conference 2013

September 25-28, 2013  
 Marriott Hotel and  
 Conference Center,  
 Coralville, IA

Sponsored by:



## IAN Mini-Grant Project

Several Iowa naturalists attended the session “Big Events for Little Kids” at the 2011 NAI Conference in St. Paul. We thought it would be great to reproduce the large felt habitat murals. We applied for and received \$500 from IAN and \$175 from NAI Region 5 to purchase most of the materials needed to make 5 sets of 3 murals (forest, prairie and wetland). Each district contributed additional materials like fabric, lamination, grommets and Velcro to complete the project. It was fun working on this state-wide project and a great opportunity to see the creativity of our fellow naturalists!

A group of us met in central Iowa in August to begin the project. That day we sewed 5 forest murals and began cutting out habitat components like trees, logs, tunnels, and flowers. Then we returned to our respective parts of the state to work with others on completing each set. Groups met several more times to work on the project. Naturalists contributed materials like more fabric, velcro, grommets, lamination and storage containers. Every set is unique, depending on the creativity and style of each group.

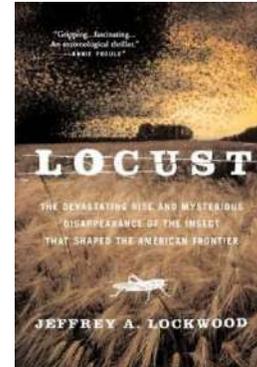
Each region has a designated host site and we will keep track of their checkout and the number of people using these murals. NW Iowa- O’Brien County; SW Iowa- Shelby/Audubon County, NE Iowa- Benton County, SE Iowa- Washington County, Central Iowa- Cerro Gordo County. With more than 100 naturalists statewide, we feel that this project will serve as a fun and engaging way for young children to learn about Iowa’s wildlife and habitats. These murals will be used at nature centers, in classrooms and at public events across the state. Each mural has the IAN and NAI logo stitched on the front for recognition.



## Book Review: Locust: The Devastating Rise and Mysterious Disappearance of the Insect That Shaped the American Frontier

By Jeffrey A. Lockwood

Reviewed by: Annette Witrock, Wapello County Conservation Naturalist



I did not really know what to expect when I started this book this winter, which I purchased at a garage sale some years ago. It turned out to be an interesting and educational read.

Between 1874 and 1877 the damage done to agriculture west of the Mississippi by the Rocky Mountain Locust outbreaks was estimated at \$200 million. That’s equal to \$116 billion in today’s money.

This locust was a horrible hindrance during outbreaks, and it left farmers quaking with anticipation between outbreaks. Then it mysteriously disappeared – never to be seen again in those numbers. Lockwood set out to learn more about the outbreaks, but most importantly, to find out where this agricultural nemesis disappeared, how and where it met its demise.

Along the way, he learned about its anatomy, which makes them different from other species. He also heard the many odd ways people attempted to rid the land of the pest – religion, fire, potions, explosives and many more. The stories of these settlers are worth the read.

Lockwood and companions searched many glaciers, spent lots of money and time, and risked their reputations trying to find the frozen carcasses of this insect that disappeared years ago. What did he learn in the end? Well if I told you that, it would ruin the story for everyone. Jeff Lockwood is an entertaining writer, and this book is worth a look if you have any interest in the life and death of the Rocky Mountain Locust.



**Summer IAN 2013**  
**Leave No Trace Certification**

Warren Co. Conservation Annett Nature Center  
August 7-9 2013



**Wednesday August 7**

- 12:30 Registration at Annett Nature Center - Welcome
  - 1:00 Overview of LNT history and discussion of LNT principals (Guest speaker Peter Bergeland)
  - 2:30 Plan Ahead and Prepare
  - 3:00 Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
  - 3:30 Dispose of Waste Properly (garbage and waste water)
  - 4:00 Dispose of Waste Properly (human waste)
  - 5:00 Minimize Campfire Impacts
  - 6:00 DINNER TIME - front country (FC)
  - 7:30 Leave What You Find
  - 8:30 FC Respect Wildlife
- Done for the day.....relax

**Thursday August 8**

- 8:00 FC breakfast
  - 9:00 Be Considerate
  - 9:30 Durable surfaces-on vs. off trail
  - 10:15 Hike to Lake Ahquabi State Park
  - 11:00 Campground Hike – 7 principals
  - 12:00 LUNCH TIME – back country (BC)
  - 12:45 Paddle Boarding
  - 3:00 Clean up from lake and gather gear
  - 3:30 Hike to BC cooking site
  - 4:15 BC Respect Wildlife
  - 5:15 DINNER TIME (BC)
  - 6:30 Back to camp – discussion
- Done for the day.....relax

**Friday August 9**

- 8:00 FC breakfast
- 9:00 LNT horseback riding
- 9:15 Horseback Riding (1st group) \*  
Role Play and review (2nd group)
- 10:30 Horseback Riding (2nd group)  
Role Play and review (1st group)
- 12:00 Certificates and Goodbyes!!!!!!

**Special Notes:**

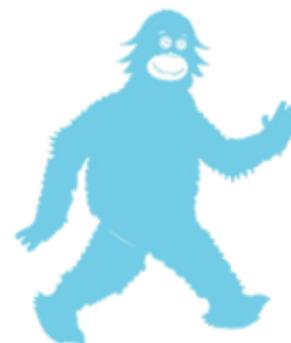
Horseback riding is limited to the first 21 registrants. If you do not want to ride, indicate that on your registration form.  
\*None riding participants will be done with workshop at 10:30.

**Accommodations:**

Camping at the Annett Nature Center – FREE  
OR

Apple Tree Inn  
1215 N. Jefferson St. (Hwy. 65/69)  
Indianola, IA 50125  
1-800-961-0551

Super 8  
1701 N. Jefferson St. (Hwy. 65/69)  
Indianola, IA 50125  
515-961-0058



**Directions to the Annett Nature Center:** Center is located five miles South of Indianola.

Travel four miles South on Hwy 65/69 and look for the Annett Nature Center signs. From there turn West on G-58 to Lake Ahquabi and then turn North on 118<sup>th</sup> Ave. The ANC is on the East side of the road.



**Summer IAN 2013 Registration**  
Leave No Trace Certification  
 Warren Co. Conservation Annett Nature Center  
 August 7-9 2013  
 Registration Deadline: July 26, 2013



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Meal accommodations:  Vegetarian  Gluten free  Other Allergies \_\_\_\_\_

**Wednesday, August 7**

Everything is included and part of the certification

**Thursday, August 8**

Everything is included and part of the certification

**Friday, August 9**

Horseback Riding, \$15 (limited to the first 21 people)

Workshop Fee: (Required) \$35 (Includes meals, activities, and camping.) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Horseback Riding: \$15 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Late Fee: \$15 (if registering after July 26, 2013) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

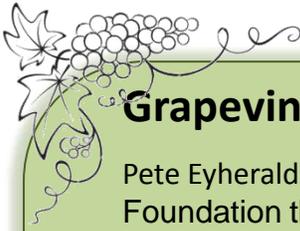
**Total Payment Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Please make checks payable to IAN TREASURER and mail payment and registration to:**

Missy Smith, Warren County Conservation, 15565 118<sup>th</sup> Ave., Indianola, IA 50125

**Bring:**

Tent and overnight camping gear, table service, water bottles, sunscreen, sunglasses, insect repellent, hat, hiking and swimming apparel, day pack, rain gear, and a life vest if you prefer not to wear an orange county one.

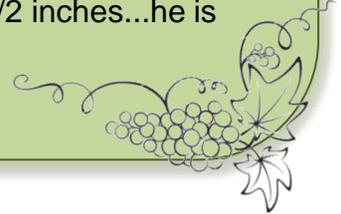


## Grapevine News!!

Pete Eyheralde , Iowa State Unviertsy, has received two awards from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation the J.N. "Ding" Darling Scholarship: "in recognition of scholarly attainments and dedication to environmental education" and from Iowa State University, the NREM Department Outstanding Teaching Award: "in recognition of dedication to and excellence in teaching"

The Wapsi River Env. Ed Center of Scott County Conservation Board welcomes the newest Assistant Naturalist, Casey Becker. Casey is a Midwest native, has a B.S. in Environmental Science from Simpson College, enjoys anything outdoors, and previously worked for The Nature Conservancy.

Tom and Jenny Ammon, Dubuque County Naturalist and their daughter Casey welcomed baby boy Henry on January 9th 8:30 am. He weighed 7 lbs 5 oz and was 19 1/2 inches...he is growing fast and loves to smile.



## Name That Nature Center Contest!

Submit your guess to Jess Wagner (jess@jacksonccb.com ); please use "Name This Nature Center" as the subject line. The sender of the first correct answer will win bragging rights in the next issue of The Web!



The winner of the "Name that Nature Center" in the last edition of "The Web" was Brian Gibbs, Clayton County Naturalist who guessed correctly Fontana Park Interpretive Nature Center in Buchanan County.

## IAN News

ICEC/IAN Awards - Chair: Angi Reid

The following awards were presented at the Spring IAN Workshop:

Lifetime Achievement Award- Mark Wagner (MRM&A), Outstanding Environmental Education for a county with 2 or less naturalists- Laura DeCook (Mahaska), Ada Hayden Conservation Award for Preservation of the Land- Gary Siegwarth

Fundraising - Chair: Emily Herring

Members: Jenny Ammon, Annette Wittrock, Heather Hucka, Jackie Gautsch, Matt Wetrich, Reba Cook, and Victoria DeVos

The fundraising committee has met to discuss fundraising at the fall MEEC conference. All funds raised at MEEC will benefit IAN. If you are interested in donating gift baskets, educational items, or auction items please contact Emily Herring at 515-232-2516 or at eherring@storycounty.com. You can also bring your donation items to the registration desk at the conference.

Professional Development - Chair: Miriam Patton

Members: Heidi Anderson & Charlene Elyea  
At the March workshop, 21 recipients were recognized, including three new participants. The following received recognition for professional development for 2012: Lyndsey Anderson, Katherine Brakeville, Katie L. Cantu, Charlene Elyea, Sunday Ford, Bradley H. Freidhof, Diane Hall, Abbey Harkrader, Emily Herring, Heather Hucka, Lilly Jensen, J. Dave Murcia, Cari Nicely, Michele Olson, Emily Ostrander, Miriam Patton, Karen M. Phelps, Tina Popson, Missy Smith, Sarah Subbert, Katie Van Der Linden, Jennifer Meyer, Jess Wagner

Joe Halbur Scholarship - Chair: Lora Kanning

There are currently a few applicants for 2013, committee will look into creating requirements for evaluating repeat applicants.

IAN Scholarships - Chair: Jessica Steines

Members: Steve Martin, Michele Olson, Sondra Campbell  
\$1700 has been allocated for scholarships for 2013. To date there has been 6 requests totaling \$558.85, leaving \$1141.15 left for the remainder of the year. The requests have been for the NAI Region V(3) and Spring IAN(3). This is more than we have had in recent years.

IAN Mentoring - Chair: Heather Hucka

Committee continues to pair new IAN members with mentors, please contact Heather at hhucka@storycounty.com if you are interested.

IAN Website - Chair: Cari Nicely

Please continue to send any website changes directly to Cari at cnicely@henrycountyconservation.com.

Travelling Exhibits - Chair: Ann Burns

The Wade into Your Watershed team continues to work on a grant proposal, the exhibit panel drafts, and lining up partners. But, they have decided to NOT submit a REAP CEP grant proposal for the May grant round. The reasons for this are:

- 1) Not enough potential funding partners have confirmed their participation to make us comfortable we have the match money for a grant
- 2) The team would like more time to take their panel concepts to greater detail. This will give partners and grant reviewers a better idea of what the completed exhibit may look like.

The team is committed to carrying this project to completion and has now set their time line for submitting a REAP CEP grant in November 2013. So, we thank those IAN members and their agencies who have already given us their support in the form of a letter or email. And, we encourage others to write or email us to indicate your intent to be a funding partner and find the traveling exhibits valuable to your education efforts. BUT please do not send any checks to myself or IAN treasurer, Chuck Jacobsen at this time. We would rather you wait to send your matching funds after we have received confirmation of the REAP CEP grant – which should be in late November or early December.

If you have already sent a check to Chuck Jacobsen to be a Wade into Your Watershed exhibit partner, we have earmarked your contribution and will keep it for the project. If prefer to have your contribution returned until we secure the REAP CEP grant, please contact Chuck at 563-847-7202 or cjacobsen@clintoncounty-ia.gov.

IAN Publications - Chair: Kelly Dix

Committee is still having difficulty finding members to update the IAN booklet series. At the spring workshop, members proposed accepting bids for a qualified candidate to update the Environmental Issues Series. If you or someone you know are qualified and interested in updating this 6 book series (all except the Waste Management booklet), please contact Kelly at



## Friends of Jackson County Conservation Grant Strengthens Organization's Work

Submitted by Ann Burns Jackson CCB

Four members of Friends of Jackson County Conservation (FJCC) are wrapping up a year of bookkeeping training and database software implementation thanks to an Every Day Grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF). The grant, which is made possible by Toyota Motor Sales USA, Inc. is designed to strengthen public lands support organizations – doesn't that sound like your Friends group or Foundation??? --- by increasing their power to promote and help maintain the parks and wildlife areas they serve.

Most grants available to small non-profit groups are targeted toward a particular project or event. The NEEF/Toyota Every Day grant, however, is a capacity building grant. As such, the funds can be used to increase your Friends/Foundation's ability to operate more effectively as an organization.

In 2011 a FJCC strategic planning committee met to discuss the future direction for the organization. The committee felt it was time for the organization to take on a large landscape enhancement project at the Center; and to expand its mission beyond the Center to a greater extent.

Writing grants for the "Hurstville Outdoor Makeover" and the prospect of tracking the hoped for numerous large and small donations that would make the project possible; several members realize they either needed to recruit an accountant, or they needed to learn some accounting skills. The file folder for volunteers, the notebook for recording donations, and the recipe card file for memberships needed to be converted to a database that could cross reference people who are members of all three categories.

With the Toyota Every Day Grant FJCC was able to contract with a local CPA firm to have an accountant work with two members to develop logical accounting categories to better track FJCC's income and expenses. Grant funds were also used to purchase volunteer and donation tracking software to enable FJCC to better track these activities and produce statements which are needed for many grant proposals and year end reports.

If your Friends/Foundation organization is ready to become a stronger organization in the community; check into the National Environmental Education Foundation and the Toyota Every Day grant at [www.neefusa.org](http://www.neefusa.org) . They may provide your organization with the tools to carry out their mission in a business- like manner!

### You could write for *The Web*!!

We are always looking for articles, book reviews and upcoming events that would be of interest and any member can submit something!! To submit send your submissions to *The Web* Editor Jacklyn Gautsch at [j.gautsch78@gmail.com](mailto:j.gautsch78@gmail.com). Electronic submissions are preferred in word documents for text and jpeg for images.

### Upcoming IAN Workshops:

Spring 2014 – Dickinson County  
Summer 2014 – Sac County



## Eco-Currents

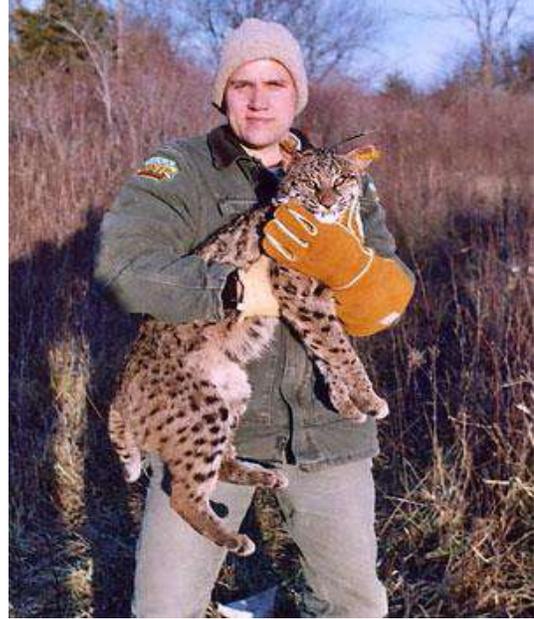
By: Pete Eyheralde

Brand new in this edition of *The Web* is the feature section “Eco-Currents” highlighting current scientific publications of ecology research in Iowa. Hope you find it useful in your programs!

### Deer Disease Likely to Cross Mississippi River

Author: Krista Lang

Researchers from Iowa State University studied the potential spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD), a fatal prion disease of cervids, in Iowa white-tailed deer populations. They looked at genetic connectivity between deer populations in eastern Iowa and western Wisconsin (where CWD occurs in wild deer populations) to assess the risk of natural movement of CWD-infected deer in to Iowa. It was thought that the Mississippi River, which separates the two states, may restrict the movement of deer and thus disease. They collected DNA from hunter-harvested female deer collected from both states. Reported in the *Journal of Wildlife Management 2012 (Population genetic structure of white-tailed deer: Understanding risk of chronic wasting disease spread, Authors: Krista Lang and Julie Blanchong)* the resulting microsatellite data indicated that Iowa and Wisconsin deer were closely related and that breeding between populations was occurring. However, the maternally inherited mtDNA was not as closely linked between the Iowa and Wisconsin populations, demonstrating that the majority of genetic transfer was from bucks from both sides of the Mississippi crossing the river to breed with does. Bad news for Iowa deer enthusiasts, since bucks are more likely to be carriers of CWD than does. As of spring 2013 all CWD test positive deer from Iowa have been captive deer from high fenced “deer farms” and shooting preserves, but this study underscores the importance of continued CWD testing of Iowa’s wild deer populations.



### Bobcats in a Forest Near You

Author: Stephanie Linde

Researchers at Iowa State University and the Iowa DNR combined information from the Iowa bowhunter survey with satellite imagery to build models that describe habitat and relative abundance of bobcats in the agricultural landscape of Iowa. Published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management 2012 (Habitat modeling used to predict relative abundance of bobcats in Iowa, Authors: Stephanie Linde, Steven Roberts, Todd Gosselink, and William Clark)*, the team found that bobcats were most often associated with forest habitat surrounded by grasslands. Bobcat population density was high where there were high numbers of cottontail rabbits and low near towns. Bobcats avoided crossing large expanses of plowed row-crop fields. The models suggested that future range expansion of the bobcat population may be possible in some northern Iowa counties where connected forest and grassland habitats still exist. Results from the model have been used by the Iowa DNR to set harvest quotas on a county by county basis.

## Snakes in the Grass

Author: Tricia Knoot

Researchers from Iowa State University studied the use of conservation buffer strips in corn and soybean fields by snakes. Grassed waterways at 31 sites in Washington County, Iowa were monitored for this study. These waterways were dominated by exotic cool season pasture grasses, such as smooth brome, with small amounts of native plants like giant ragweed and goldenrod. Their data was published in the journal *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*, 2011 (*A multiscale approach to understanding snake use of conservation buffer strips in an agricultural landscape*, Authors: Tricia Knoot and Louis Best). The researchers captured 119 individual snakes of 5 different species in the grass strips. In order from most to least abundant, they were the brown snake, the eastern garter snake, the plains garter snake, the smooth green snake (an Iowa species of special concern), and the fox snake. Their findings suggest that wider grassed strips will attract and hold more snakes. Snake numbers (especially smooth green snakes) increased with increasing amounts of dead grass in the waterways and crop residue coverage in surrounding fields. This extra cover may provide the snakes more protection from predators. Plains garter snakes were found most often in grassed waterways farther from wooded habitat. While most studies of conservation buffer strips have focused on their use by birds and butterflies, this research suggests that buffers can also contribute to snake conservation efforts.



## Grazing is great for Grasshopper Sparrows

Author: Torre Hovick

Researchers from Iowa State University, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Illinois studied patch-burn grazing systems in the Grand River Grasslands of southern Iowa, to look at the effects of this management practice on the nesting ecology of grasshopper sparrows. Throughout the study, pastures were grazed by cattle from May to September and prescribed burns were conducted in the spring. In the patch-burn grazed treatment, 1/3 of each pasture was burned sequentially each year, so the entire pasture was burned over the course of 3 years. In this system cattle preferentially grazed the new growth of vegetation from recently burned sections, allowing the unburned sections of the pasture to grow taller and thicker. Grazed-and-burned treatment pastures were burned completely every 3 years. Findings were published in a 2012 *Journal of Wildlife Management* (*Effects of fire and grazing on grasshopper sparrow nest survival*, Authors: Torre Hovick, James Miller, Stephen Dinsmore, David Engle, Diane Debinski, and Samuel Fuhlendorf). Previous research has shown that grasshopper sparrows select grassland habitats with moderate vegetation height (not too short, not too tall). This study found higher nest survival in the patch-burn grazed fields than in pastures burned completely every 3 years. The authors recommend decreasing overall vegetation cover (by grazing) if increasing nesting habitat for grasshopper sparrows is a management goal.



### Des Moines/Raccoon River Watershed: May-June 2013

**Contact:** Rosalyn Lehman, executive director, rlehman@iowarivers.org; 515.724.4093

This is the second year Iowa Rivers Revival is facilitating the Master River Stewards Program. The eight week course will focus on riverine systems, including skills to paddle and navigate rivers, restore aquatic habitat, improve water quality, and understand policies related to floodplains, river protection and restoration.

The Master River Steward program will build on a network of river experts in various partner agencies and organizations. It will help adult learners collaborate to protect and improve Iowa’s rivers, so that current and future generations can enjoy these resources. Visit IRR’s website to view an outline of last year’s program: <http://iowarivers.org/education/river-stewards/>

#### Feedback from 2012 pilot participants:

- *“Great class, thoroughly enjoyed each and every session.”*
- *“Great leadership. Great resources/readings. Great speakers. Great group.”*
- *“This was a fantastic program. I came in with no expectations, but left every night excited to share what I learned with others... Thanks so much for putting this together. I will become active in the stewardship of rivers at a far greater level due to this program.”*

**Registration Cost:** Participants will pay a fee of \$50 which will include program materials. Participants will be expected to attend each session and there will be “homework” assignments following each class – materials will be provided.

**Sponsorships:** There are opportunities for organizations and groups to sponsor aspects of the program, such as general program support, participant registration costs (reducing the costs for individuals you recommend or others interested in participating), a meal for one of the evening programs or program materials and supplies. [Sponsorship details.](#)

**Funding for this program** has been provided by Metro Waste Authority, Des Moines Water Works, DNR IOWATER, and the Polk County Conservation Board.

#### Program Details:

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>TENTATIVE Location</u>
1	Introduction to MRSP/Watersheds and Landscapes	Tues, May 14	5:30 - 9:30 p.m.	DM Metro Waste Conf. Ctr
2	River Form and Function	Tues, May 21	5:30 - 9:30 p.m.	Neal Smith NWR
3	Navigating Iowa Rivers/River habitat and wildlife	Sat, June 1	10 a.m. - 4 p.m.	Big Creek SP & DM River
4	River Chemistry and Monitoring	Tues, June 4	5:30 - 9:30 p.m.	Jester Park Lodge & Saylorville Lake
5	Water policies/water treatment	Tues, June 11	5:30 - 9:30 p.m.	TBD: local farm location
6	Stream & Riparian Area restoration/river wildlife cont.	Tues, June 18	5:30 - 9:30 p.m.	Raccoon R (Walnut Woods State Park)
7	Project Planning and review	Sat, June 22	10 a.m. - 4 p.m.	DM Metro Waste Conf. Ctr.
8	Post training follow-up, project sharing, and evaluation	TBD	5:30 - 9:30 p.m.	TBD

# My Favorite Green Things!

By Jessica Wagner, Jackson County Naturalist

In the past this segment of the newsletter is devoted to those of us who stumble upon a cool new gadget or gear that is more environmentally friendly. Well instead, I want to share the many green ideas I gathered from Susan Salterberg, UNI CEEE and Kristi Cooper, ISU Extension who lead the pre-workshop session 'Train-the-trainer' at Spring IAN in Dubuque County this past March.

These ladies as well as the others at the workshop bounced so many ideas off each other; I thought the IAN newsletter would be a good place to share some of my 'favorite green things'.

## Alternative gift giving ideas

Make it yourself – jams and salsas, homemade cleaners and laundry soap, bar soaps, scarves and socks, etc... I think people always appreciate hand made things because of the time put in to making it.

Silent auctions – all your gifts at the holidays come from silent auction or other fundraiser events you attended throughout the year! You donated money to a good cause and you marked a gift off the list. Better yet, look for the handmade/locally made auction items – there are always lots of those! Be sure to check out the silent auction planned for this Septembers MECC!

Farmer's Market – buy gifts locally and support your community. Buy in bulk when in season and preserve yourself. Or match items for themed gifts; i.e. apples from the farmer's market to go with a vintage cookbook you found at the second hand store!



## Plan a Green Party

Send electronic invitations (by email or a free website e-vite)

Prepare an Iowa-grown meal. Search out your farmers markets, talk with your neighborhood gardeners and farmers, and try new recipes. Goal: as many Iowa food products used as possible! What a conversation starter at the dinner table 😊

I am sure most of you use your dishes when hosting, but for some, disposables are easier, especially with larger groups. Next choose compostable products over Styrofoam and other throw away items. We just purchased compostable Earth-to-go cups and Taterware plates and silverware for our annual soup supper here in Jackson County – ask me in a couple months how well the table ware decomposes in our compost bin!

This is just a sampling of the bountiful tips and ideas UNI CEEE Reclaim Your Holidays has. Visit their website at <http://www.uni.edu/ceee/hometown/reclaim-your-holidays/reclaimyourholidays> for a lot more ideas. And if you have some ideas yourself on 'green' gift giving and party hosting, share it with the rest of us!

Check out the IAN Web Site: [www.iowanaturalists.org](http://www.iowanaturalists.org)

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**Interested in serving on ExCom?**

Are you interested in serving in 2014 or would like to nominate someone? If so, please contact Kelly Dix at [Kelly.dix@pottcounty.com](mailto:Kelly.dix@pottcounty.com). Elections will be held at the November 15th business meeting in Marshall County.



*Naturalists* – planting the seed of environmental stewardship by communicating the meanings and relationships in natural, cultural, and historical resources.