



The Web

Newsletter of the Iowa Association of Naturalists
Winter 2020

Booming on the Prairie in Ringgold Country



Ringgold County Conservation is excited to host your Spring 2020 IAN Conference! Our county works diligently to bring new and exciting things to rural Iowa, including the Dagoon Trace Nature Center. This is the only facility of its kind in all the surrounding counties and it is an exciting addition to our community. The project included unique natural resources and creative funding alliances that have enhanced the cultural, recreational, and educational assets in Southern Iowa. The Dagoon Trace is an historic trail that runs north and south through central Iowa and Missouri, including Ringgold County. It was originally made by the migration of animals, such as bison. Later used by the pioneers, this was the road to change Iowa's civilization.

The Ringgold County Conservation Board works on a very limited budget and even more restricted staff, employing only 1 full-time person. The nature center was funded by multiple grants, memorials, businesses, and personal donations. No local tax dollars have gone into this project, an amazing accomplishment. The county also worked to find local contractors for the project to ensure that the funding for this project stayed in the county to benefit the local economy.

Our goal in building the nature center is to educate individuals so they will learn how to help sustain our natural resources and make choices that benefit them and the environment. Public attractions and educational opportunities in small Iowa communities benefit multiple groups of people and increase tourism in a neglected part of the state, increasing quality of life. As the most biologically altered state, Iowa needs to prioritize the restoration of our natural resources to ensure clean air, water, soil and healthy ecosystems for future generations.

In the past 50 years, the Ringgold County Conservation Board

has made great strides for conservation and outdoor recreation. Some of the milestones include 9 land acquisitions encompassing over 1,000 acres, development of recreational facilities (shelters, campgrounds, playgrounds), multiple trails (asphalt and natural), prairie and wetland restoration, Greater Prairie Chicken reintroduction, historical caboose restoration, 150 acre pollinator seeding, Environmental Education program development and the Dagoon Trace Nature Center.

Ringgold County has so much to offer visitors and community members. It is known for its breathtaking hills and diverse scenery. Visit the only county in Iowa with the Greater Prairie Chicken. The Dagoon Trace Nature Center is just a few miles from the famed Kellerton Grasslands Bird Conservation Area. This was the 1st designated bird conservation area in the nation and inhabits the only reproducing population of the Greater Prairie Chicken in Iowa that was once found throughout the state! We look forward to being your host in March 2020 for the Spring IAN Conference – Booming on the Prairie!



<https://www.cytimes.com/2015/09/08/science/the-fight-to-save-a-prairie-chicken.html>

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Name that Nature Center



Submit guesses to Michelle Berns at mberns@co.muscatine.ia.us.

Please use “Name that Nature Center” as the subject line. The sender of the first correct answer will win bragging rights in the next issue of The Web!

Nature Craft: Toilet Paper Tube Critters

This craft is great because it uses an easily supplied base material (toilet paper tube) and any assortment of additional materials you might have in excess at the moment. You could also go on a hike to collect small leaves, acorns, sticks, or grasses to include in the craft to give it a more natural feel.

Materials:
Toilet Paper Tubes
Markers or paint
Googly Eyes
Colored Paper
Glue Sticks
Miscellaneous Craft Materials



Instructions:

1. Decide what animal you would like to start with and color or paint the body.
2. Make any necessary alterations to the body of the tube (I folded mine for the squirrel's ears).
3. Draw and cut out any limbs, wings, teeth, tails, etc.
4. Glue them into place on the tube and add any additional features (pompom nose, pipe cleaner antlers, etc.)
5. Let it dry and enjoy your new toilet paper tube buddy!

Announcements

From the Fundraising Committee - Thank you for the participation in the Fall workshop. Here is a bit of info about the total. With the live and silent auction, stickers, Stump the Naturalist game, and sweatshirts we made a total of \$1382!!

Upcoming Workshops

March 18-20: Spring IAN – Ringgold County
April 15-18: Heartland Region NAI – Brandon, Manitoba
August 5-7: Summer IAN Lee County
November 4-6: Fall IAN Indian Creek Nature Center
Spring 2021: Jackson County
Summer 2021: Marshall County
Fall 2021: MEEC



Call for Presenters

Do you have a project or skill you want to share? Or do you know someone who would be a great presenter? Contact ExCom at iowanaturalists.org@gmail.com

Name that Creature!



Jackie Gautsch got the correct answer for last month's creature. It was a cucumber beetle!

Submit guesses to Michelle Berns at mberns@co.muscatine.ia.us.

Please use "Name that Creature" as the subject line. The sender of the first correct answer will win bragging rights in the next issue of The Web!

Naturalist Spotlight: Dakota Popp



My name is Dakota Popp; I grew up in a smaller town by Des Moines. Growing up in Dallas County, the naturalists had a big part in the school system and I always got excited to go spend time with them. In high school, I was blessed with the opportunity to go on the Wilderness Trek with Chris Adkins. After my first internship with Buena Vista County Naturalist Katie Struss, I knew that this was the field for me! Growing up spending most my time outside it was set in me early. In my free time, I love taking my camper and kayak out on adventures. I also have a hammock and am excited to go hammock camping this summer as well as setting it up to just take a nap and read.

In April 2019, I was hired as the Naturalist for Worth County. Something unique that we do is our ecology programs. Not a lot of counties are in the high school. The two local high schools both have an ecology class that I visit weekly and have units set up. I will take the students on mini field trips to help them see what I do and get them out of the classroom. The students will explore forestry, stream wading, mammology, small mammal trapping, prairie plants and more! We have a great relationship with the younger students and I believe that the high school students enjoy seeing us just as much.



Grapevine News

Angie Auel, new naturalist for Bremer County Conservation Board. She was working in Buchanan County as the Upper Wapsi Watershed Coordinator and Naturalist for the past nine years. Angie very excited to work in a new county and looks forward to all the opportunities there!

Please welcome Faith Henrichs, she has accepted a full-time Iowa 4H AmeriCorps EE Member term at the Wapsi River EE Center for Scott CCB. She is a recent Western Illinois University graduate!

Mitchell County Naturalist Chelsea Ewen Rowcliffe and her husband Bill will be adding a new "critter" to their wild farm this summer! Baby R is due in June.



IAN/ICEC Award Winners

“Ding” Darling Environmental Education Award – Clinton County’s Building Better Birders Cruises with Kelly J. McKay

Putting along the backwaters of the Upper Mississippi for the last three years you could find a huge pontoon with people pointing excitedly at what seemed to be just trees. Why was this pontoon crew so excited about trees? Well, they weren’t looking at the trees, but the awesome birds perching on the trees! Kelly J. McKay from Bio Research and Monitoring Center has teamed up with Mark Roberts and Chuck Jacobsen from Clinton County Conservation to create a free

program called, “Beginner Birder Cruises.” This program has been a huge success through the years, having four summer tours during the breeding season and four tours during the fall migration. Despite the horrible flooding in 2019 along the Mississippi, they still had 58 people



attend these two and a half to four-hour programs and found a whopping 120 bird species! They found 15 species of waterfowl and other water birds, eight species of raptors, five shorebirds, and seven woodpecker species! After finding such cool birds on the tours, there were several participants that became active citizen scientists and helped with Christmas Bird Counts and even the Nahant Marsh BioBlitz Project.

Outstanding Volunteer Award

The 2019 Outstanding Volunteer Award goes to Kelly J. McKay. Besides being the lead birder for Clinton County’s “Beginner Birder Cruises,” Kelly has volunteered for numerous other organizations such as Nahant Marsh, Big Sand Mound, the Audubon Society, and several other wildlife advocacy groups. For several years Kelly has participated in



all 23 days of the Audubon Society’s annual Christmas Bird Counts. That means spending 10 plus hours birding and then traversing the countryside from southern Illinois to northern Wisconsin to get to the next bird count location.

Speaking of location, Kelly is a member of an advisory board for a very special place called Big Sand Mound Preserve, south of the town of Muscatine, Iowa. This 510-acre paradise has sand prairies, wetlands, and woodlands that over 400 species of plants call home. Things such as the prickly pear cactus along with yellow mud turtles and eastern hognose snakes call Big Sand Mound Preserve home. Kelly helps preserve all these

plants and animals for future generations.

Future generations will hopefully be able to see things such as yellow mud turtles and the federally listed Kirtland’s Warbler. Kelly found an immature female Kirtland’s Warbler at the Soaring Eagle Nature Center in 2019, which is the first state record for Iowa! Congratulations Kelly on your spectacular find! May all your hard work and willingness to share your knowledge inspire the next generation.

IAN/ICEC Award Winners

Bohumil Shimek Environmental Educator Award - Michelle Helscher 5th grade teacher at Louisa Muscatine Elementary School

Mrs. Helscher has a strong interest in monarch butterflies and participating in Monarch Watch's monarch tagging citizen science project. Each year she and students, with help of Louisa County Conservation, tag butterflies and learn about monarch biology, habitat, and conservation.

She is a strong advocate for the outdoor classroom, pollinator garden, and small prairie that is located behind the school. Mrs. Helscher continually wants to improve this space for the students, so that it is a beneficial area for them to explore. She also utilizes this space and is occasionally able to take her students out to learn in this environment. Additionally, she recognizes that this space is important for monarchs and other pollinators and teaches her students about prairie habitat.

This year she expanded her monarch lessons by participating in the Journey North Symbolic Migration Project. Her students and the rest of the 5th grade created a classroom butterfly and sent it in. This project aims to unify students across North America while teaching youth about monarch migration and conservation. Each year classrooms across the US and Canada send one large classroom butterfly and many life-sized (one per student) on a symbolic migration to Mexico. During the same time monarchs are making their annual fall migration, the symbolic butterflies are making their way to Mexico. Once in Mexico, the butterflies get delivered to classrooms near the monarch sanctuaries. They will "overwinter" with students in Mexico and return to the US in the springtime when the real monarchs begin to migrate back north. The 5th graders at Louisa Muscatine Elementary school are one of two schools in Louisa County that have symbolic monarchs migrating! Mrs. Helscher helped her students create the butterflies and sent in all the information, so her students could partake in this unique project. In addition to monarch education, she also participates in other Louisa County Conservation field trips and classrooms programs throughout the year. Her support of environmental education and monarch conservation efforts have a lasting impact on her students. Thanks to her love of these butterflies and her participation in our programs, the 5th graders at Louisa Muscatine Elementary School get exposed to current environmental issues and get to experience some the wonders of nature.

Chris Holt Youth Environmental Education Award—Jefferson County Conservation's Camp Kyle



Kyle Longerbeam was a 25-year-old man from Fairfield, Iowa, and had a love for all things outdoors. As he was growing up, his family lived in town and their hobbies did not include spending time outdoors. He had to work to create opportunities to be outside and pursue his passions. In his younger years, he met many local mentors who encouraged him in his journey. After high school, he chased his dreams by moving to Alaska in 2011 in hopes of becoming a hunting guide, own some land, build a home, and to obtain his license as a pilot. He achieved all of that and more in just five years. In December 2016, the plane he was piloting never arrived in Anchorage and after a day of extensive searching, debris was found in a lake located just miles from the runway. There were no survivors. The Longerbeam family and friends paired up with Jefferson County

Conservation to create an opportunity for youth, just like Kyle, who may not have parents, grandparents, or extended family to take them hunting, fishing, trapping, and on other outdoor adventures. This one-day event was on Saturday, June 22nd - Kyle's birthday. The event was open to youth entering 5th-7th grade. Participants first were able to shoot .22 rifles with the local Hunter Education Instructors and participate in a team building activity. Then they were given a compass and map which marked the location of their lunch pack hidden somewhere along the park's trails. After finding lunch in Kyle's backpack and eating trailside, they hiked to the archery range. They were able to learn about archery and shoot several rounds with instructors. Next, participants helped tear down the archery gear and got ready for the next activity: paddling. Participants were able to canoe and kayak at Bonnifield

IAN/ICEC Award Winners

Chris Holt Youth Environmental Education Award—con't...

Lake. After working on different strokes, having a few races, and playing paddling games, participants learned how to do a T-Rescue. Next on the agenda was a presentation prepared by Kyle's family talking more about his journey to Alaska and what life was like for him. After the presentation, participants learned some fire building skills and wrapped up the day with s'mores. Camp Kyle's 16 participants gathered with the volunteers for a group picture.

The largest surprise for Jefferson County Conservation staff, Camp Kyle volunteers, and Kyle's family was the honor that the campers held for Kyle. During the hike after they found Kyle's pack, one of the participants asked if they could wear Kyle's pack. They looked at a friend and asked, 'Do I look like Kyle?' During the presentation, participants were interested and engaged with the details of Kyle's life in Alaska and the simple tasks that needed to be done to survive. After the presentation, questions went on for nearly thirty minutes before we had to interrupt and move on to the next activity. After reflecting on the day, we realized that Kyle became a legend to those participants. Kyle had a love and passion for the outdoors that he fueled throughout his life. This camp hopefully refueled that fire and passed it along to the next generation. This was the first of many Camp Kyles which will be held in the future.



Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education Award – Sacred Heart Catholic School

Kay Rose, a former Sacred Heart cook, was instrumental in conceptualizing the project and securing funding. After receiving financial support and curriculum guides from the Bee Cause Project, Sacred Heart installed the observation hive which allows the bees to gather, deposit pollen and nectar in the hive, and be viewed safely by the public within the Sacred Heart complex. This is the only bee observatory in Clay County.

Sacred Heart is a Pre-K through sixth grade school. Every teacher is using the beehive observatory throughout their respective curricula. Within the science curriculum, sixth graders are studying the colony and what is required by bees to maintain a hive. Fifth graders are learning where the bees come from and how far they must travel to the flowers as it aligns with the social studies curriculum. The fourth grade used the beehive to examine characteristics of teamwork required by bees. Every bee has a job and if they don't do their job the hive could collapse. The fourth grade utilizes these concepts in their classroom as the class must work together and everyone has a job to do. Second and third graders are studying what native flowers the bees visit and if we have any native flowers around the Spencer community. Both classes went on a field trip with the Clay County Conservation Board naturalist to two different wildlife areas. While there, they observed native plants that the bees may visit. The kindergarten and first grade classes explore the biology of insects and their benefits to the environment. These students use the

observatory to study insect anatomy through firsthand observation of the parts of an insect. The observatory is benefiting each one of the classes at Sacred Heart. The teachers are embracing the opportunity to use this hands-on direct learning in their classrooms.



This may be Sacred Heart's first year of having bees in their school, but that doesn't stop them from using the opportunity to explore with the students in every class. It was a group effort to get the beehive into the school and they have certainly embraced it through stewardship and learning by doing.

IAN/ICEC Award Winners

Outstanding Interpretative Print Media – Story County Conservation



This year's Outstanding Interpretative Print Media Award goes to Erica Place, the Outreach Coordinator for Story County Conservation. As many of us know, putting together a newsletter is no easy task. From the content, design, and graphics making everything flow smoothly is not easy. In the summer of 2017, Story County Conservation gave their newsletter a facelift and started printing it in full color. Erica has changed the styling, graphics, and content and that has increased the number of newsletters disseminated to the public. Newsletters were sent out to 1,871 households, 535 businesses, and 581 electronic versions in 2017. In 2019, newsletters went to 1,958 homes, 535 business, and over 1000 electronic versions. Nancy Franz (a Story County Conservation Board Member) said she liked the new newsletter because it "detailed updates on county conservation projects to help funders and other stakeholders see the impact of their support." A Story County Supervisor, Lauris Olson, even sent in a letter of recommendation for Erica. In that letter, Lauris said, "The graphics anchoring articles and regular sections compliment, rather than compete, with the primary content. And the written content itself shares just enough commonality in tone to create smooth transitions between sections without smothering the style of individual writers."

Quite the compliment coming from Lauris, since she was a professional journalist for over two decades that specialized in print and on-line publications.

New Program Idea - Woodpecker Boxes

Jimmy Wiebler, AmeriCorps Naturalist at Nahant Marsh, recently added a new feature to our Bird Beak Adaptations program that teaches students about woodpecker anatomy. Most students are aware that woodpeckers have strong and sturdy beaks that help them to chisel holes in trees for nesting or to search for food. What most students don't realize is that woodpeckers have very long, sticky tongues that help them to gather invertebrates from deep inside tree cavities. Students begin this program by learning about this amazing adaptation. After a brief lecture, students are arranged into groups in which they will work on building a woodpecker beak and tongue using various materials. The object of the activity is to collect bird seed from inside a shallow box, and the only way the students can access the bird seed is by using the materials provided to go through the ½ inch holes of the attached nylon-coated hardware cloth (think of it as a giant suet cake). Students work out this puzzle by choosing from materials such as chopsticks, Popsicle sticks, clothespins, long-handled spoons, pipe cleaners, masking tape, and tongue depressors. Students are not given any instruction on how to make their beak and tongue. They must brainstorm ideas and be creative to develop a solution to the problem. At the end of the program, the facilitator helps the students reflect on the activity and compare and contrast their beak designs. This program complements Next Generation Science Standards and is best suited for K-8th grade. If you are interested in building your own woodpecker box or have questions about this activity, please contact Jimmy at jwiebler@eicc.edu.





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Planting the seed of environmental stewardship by communicating the meanings and relationships in natural, cultural, and historical resources.