



Spring IAN Workshop 2026

March 4th-6th



**Polk County Conservation
Jester Park Nature Center
12130 NW 128th St,
Granger, IA 50109**

Wednesday, March 4th - Offsite and Extended Learning Sessions

Option 1: Felting your own flower to fruit model

Rene Stroud, Pottawattamie CC Naturalist

Cost: \$16 **Time:** 12:00 - 4:00PM **Category:** V

Location: Jester Park Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center, 12130 NW 128 th St Granger, IA 50109

Use wet felting and needle felting to create your own flower model that turns into a fruit model. This model is a nice visual when teaching about pollination. **Participants will need to bring a small kick ball or playground ball that can be inflated and deflated.** Max 10 people.

Option 2: Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Park Tour

Polk CCB Staff

Cost: Free **Time:** 12:00 - 4:00PM **Category:** I

Location: Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, Natural Resource Headquarters, 11201 NE 118th Avenue in Maxwell, IA 50161

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt is a magnificent 8,800+ -acre wildlife area stretching for almost ten miles along the Skunk River. It is a rare and wild gem near the metro, representing a significant landscape-scale effort to restore and preserve a diverse mix of habitats. This unique tour will give you a behind the scenes look at the facilities that make this mission possible and some of the passionate staff behind the effort. Tour includes a visit to a seed cleaning and sorting facility, a 12,000-year-old wetland, a 150 year old historic church, a new natural playscape, and of course, plenty of spontaneous birding along the way. Limit 20 people.

Option 3: Science Center of Iowa

Science Center Staff

Cost: \$11 **Time:** 12:30-3:15pm **Category:** I

Location: Meet in the lobby, Science Center of Iowa - 401 W Martin Luther King Jr Pkwy, Des Moines, IA 50309

Join fellow naturalists for an engaging and interactive visit to the Science Center of Iowa. This field trip offers a behind-the-scenes look at how the center connects science learning with the natural world. Learn how the Science Center engages school groups and the public and discover ideas to bring back to your own programs. The tour will include a planetarium show (with insights on the planetarium technology and programming); live animal tour and care practices; and free time to explore their exhibits including a special traveling exhibit titled "AI: The Mind & Machine." Limit of 20 people.

Wednesday, March 4th - Offsite and Extended Learning Sessions

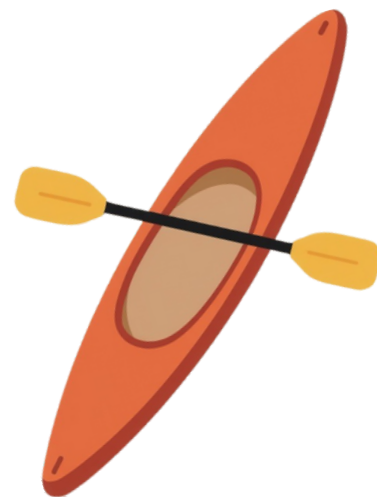
Option 4: Indoor Kayaking

Lewis Major, Polk CCB Naturalist

Cost: \$16 **Time:** 1:00-3:00pm **Category:** II

Location: Trail Point Aquatic and Wellness Center, 2006 S. Ankeny Blvd.
Building 5 Ankeny, IA 50023

Polk County Conservation works with the Trail Point Aquatic Center on the DMACC Ankeny campus to offer basic indoor kayaking classes during the winter months. Even as the snow flies, PCC is still able to provide paddling opportunities. This session will discuss the process of offering indoor paddling programs and give you time in the pool to paddle. Dress to get wet and bring a towel and dry change of clothes. Changing rooms are available at the pool and all paddling gear is provided. Limit 8 people.



Option 5: Behind-the-Scenes with Ambassador Animals at Blank Park Zoo

Blank Park Zoo Staff

Cost: \$26 **Time:** 1:00 - 4:00PM **Category:** II

Location: Blank Park Zoo 7401 SW 9th St, Des Moines, IA 50315

Blank Park Zoo offers year-round educational activities including camps, school visits, community and large group programming throughout Iowa and beyond. With nearly 50 species of ambassador animals, these species enrich the programs through wonder, connection, and empathy for wildlife. Join Zoo staff to learn how this organization is unique in how the education department works with ambassador zoo keepers to ensure that animal welfare is a priority and ethical practices are applied. There will be a presentation followed by tours of the ambassador animal building and education spaces. Participants are welcome to enter the Zoo by 10:00am, session will start at 1:00pm. Limit 20 people.



Remember

- Dinnerware (plate & utensils)
- Reusable water bottle
- Snacks
- Freebie table items
- Cash for fundraising

Thursday, March 5th - Sessions at the Nature Center

8:30 - 9:15 AM - Registration

9:15 AM - Welcome, Announcements & Introductions

9:30 - 10:30 AM - General Session

Trees and Climate Change

Presenter: Melissa Burdick, *Executive Director of the Brenton Arboretum* **Category:** I

Once upon a time the Earth's climate changed at a glacial pace. Now, in the Holocene, aka the age of man, our climate is fluctuating widely and wildly with the undeniable, persistent, and problematic trend of getting steadily hotter. In the olden days – like really, really olden prehistoric days – it took a millennium or more for the Earth's temperature to change by a degree in either direction, allowing plants multiple generations to evolve adaptations or “move” to more accommodating regions. But now, thanks to shifts in the atmosphere that have been sped up by human activity, temperatures are changing much faster than plants with long lifespans can adapt to. In this program we will examine how climate change is affecting tree populations around the world and what conservationists are doing to try to stay a step ahead. We'll also learn how we can use trees to help combat climate change in our own backyards.

10:30-10:50 AM - Break

10:50 - 11:40 AM - Concurrent Sessions

Wellness with Horses

Presenter: Liz Peitzman, *Polk County Equestrian Center Manager* **Category:** III, IV

Room: Classroom C

This session explores how mindful, nature-based interactions with horses can support emotional well-being, stress reduction, and self-awareness. Participants will learn how horses' natural sensitivity and responsiveness encourage presence, connection, and balance, and how equine-assisted wellness experiences can be adapted for a variety of audiences and settings.

Lights Out Iowa! Saving Iowa's Birds and Pollinators

Presenter: Laura Beskow, *Lights Out Ames* **Category:** I & II

Room: Classroom B

Every spring and fall, billions of birds migrate at night, navigating through the night sky. Excess light from cities like Ames causes confusion and disorientation which often lead to death from window collisions or exhaustion. However, Ames can work together to prevent bird deaths! Join us in turning off non-essential lighting and advocating for a switch to bird-friendly lighting where possible, and learn how to bring a similar program to your city!



Hawk ID: Learning the River of Raptors

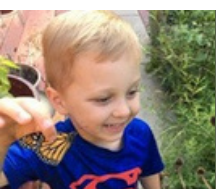
Presenter: Mike Havlik, *Dallas County EE Coordinator & Naturalist* **Category:** I

Room: Classroom A

Have you ever looked up at a hawk and said, “That’s not a red-tail.” There are more than a dozen different kinds of hawks that migrate through Iowa. This fun, fast-paced program will give you identifying field marks for different hawks in flight. Every participant will make their own field guide while Mike draws it on an overhead projector.



11:40-12 PM - IAN Group Picture



Naturalists...

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

Visit us at www.iowanaturalists.org

Thursday, March 5th - Sessions at the Nature Center

11:40-12 PM - IAN Group Picture

12:00 - 1:30 PM - Lunch & Business Meeting

Pasta bar with salad and breadsticks (\$17 per person).

GF and vegetarian options.

1:30-1:50 PM - Break

1:50- 2:40 PM - Concurrent Sessions

Recruit, Retain, Reactivate: How to Increase Participation in Outdoor Activities

Presenter: Rose Danaher, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources.

Category: III, IV

Room: Classroom B

Iowa DNR's Outdoor Skills Specialists will discuss how R3 principles are used to create lifelong outdoors people. We'll share tips on marketing, class development, and materials, resources and training available from your state game and fish agency.

Soil Health: What is it, why do we care, and how to we improve it?

Presenter: Hillary Olson, *State Soil Health Specialist- Iowa* **Category:** I

Room: Classroom C

Demonstrations will show the importance of creating conditions through management activities to support strong soil aggregates, which leads to faster water infiltration, less runoff and healthier soils.

Hawk Watch

Presenter: Mike Havlik, *Dallas County EE Coordinator & Naturalist* **Category:** I

Room: Classroom A

This is the field companion session to the morning's ID program. Participants will travel to an outdoor area and put their new skills into practice in a no judgment zone. Everyone is welcome. Participation in the earlier Hawk ID is not a prerequisite. Some binoculars provided.

2:40-2:50 PM - Break

2:50 - 3:40 PM - Concurrent Sessions

Chasing Aurora

Presenter: Jess Lancial, *West Des Moines Parks & Recreation Naturalist* **Category:** I

Room: Classroom C

Did you know you can sometimes see the Northern Lights right here in Iowa? Over the past year, several geomagnetic storms have made Aurora viewing possible across the state. Join Naturalist Jess Lancial—from curious newcomer to dedicated Aurora chaser—as she shares some of fascinating science basics behind the Northern Lights. Learn how to use free apps to track and predict Aurora activity, discover tips for capturing stunning photos with your camera or smartphone, and enjoy a collection of breathtaking Aurora images.

Symbolic Monarch Migration

Presenter: Bobbi Donovan, *Story County Naturalist* **Category:** II

Room: Classroom B

Learn how to participate in a Symbolic Monarch Migration program, volunteer and classroom engagement, and Story County's experience with this program.



Questions???? Workshop Chair:
Raina Genaw, rainagenaw@gmail.com

Thursday, March 5th – Sessions at the Nature Center

The Art of Jester Park

Presenter: Missy Smith, *Jester Park Nature Center Coordinator* and Lewis Major, *Polk County Conservation Naturalist* **Category:** I
Room: Classroom A

Providing park visitors with high quality public art that arouses curiosity about our natural world is the mission of Polk County Conservation's art committee. From zero art, to a popular sculptural trail, an indoor gallery, and an annual rotating art program, Jester Park now offers an impressive and diverse array of public art to its visitors. This session will introduce you to both the indoor and outdoor art pieces, the benefits of public art, ways to start an art program, and answer any other questions you may have.

3:40 - 3:50 PM - Break

3:50- 4:40 PM - Concurrent Sessions

Understanding and Teaching Basic Geology

Presenter: Cindy Blobaum, *WisCorps Environmental Education Program Manager* **Category:** I and II
Room: Classroom A

Review basic geology concepts with activities including model earth-making (with your bodies), the rock cycle with easy to assemble cheap kits, the ice age across Iowa and more!



How to Conduct a Bird Sit

Presenter: Sunday Ford, *Sioux County Conservation Naturalist* **Category:** II
Room: Classroom B

Using Jon Young's model, we will discuss bird language and introduce the idea of a "bird sit". If the weather allows, we will conduct our own bird sit outdoors. This is an activity that can be done in public programs and field trips. Currently, the Sioux County Conservation Board does a sound map with students. This is the next level of reading and mapping our natural surroundings, but focusing on birds.

All About Youth Corps

Presenter: Sara O'Connell, *Polk County Youth Corps Coordinator* **Category:** III
Room: Classroom C

The highs, lows, and buffalos of coordinating a Youth Corps program. Helpful tips and insights into managing and coordinating opportunities for high school students.

4:40-4:50 Break

4:50-5:40 PM - Concurrent Sessions

Building a Better Fire

Presenter: Dave Murcia, *Scott County Conservation Naturalist/Wapsi River Environmental Education Center Director* **Category:** I
Room: Classroom A

Fires have long been carried through history and tradition for survival. Modern times and uses now dictate whether fires are even necessary. Humans can mitigate for wildfire, habitat degradation, wildlife impacts, and even enhance recreational experiences by minimizing fire impacts all together.



Thursday, March 5th – Sessions at the Nature Center

4:50-5:40 PM - Concurrent Sessions

Grant Writing 101 - YOU CAN DO IT!

Presenter: Patrice Petersen-Keys, *Polk County EE Coordinator* and Lewis Major, *Polk County Naturalist* **Category:** III

Room: Classroom C

Grants can provide funding to allow you to do amazing projects that otherwise may be unachievable. If you are “grant curious” or just have creative ideas but never any funding, this session is for you. We’ll start from the beginning and give you the tools and confidence to start applying for grants. We’ll cover funding sources, writing, editing, justifying, establishing need and justification, budget, timelines, partnerships, project execution, marketing and transferability. This session will give the strategies needed to be a competitive grant writer and start getting your creative projects funded.

Naturalist Leadership Roundtable

Presenter: Amy Loving, *Director of Education at Nahant Marsh* **Category:** III

Room: Classroom B

This session is designed for naturalists who have transitioned into administrative and supervisory roles and are navigating new responsibilities such as staff management, scheduling, marketing, and reporting. Participants will gain practical tools and resources to build confidence in their leadership skills while engaging in open discussion with peers facing similar challenges. Together, we’ll explore strategies, share solutions, and strengthen the support network for professionals growing beyond field-based work.

5:40-6:00 Break (Do NOT line up for dinner until 6!)

6:00 PM Dinner, IAN/ICEC

Awards Ceremony to follow

Taco bar (beef, chicken, or grilled veggies) with GF corn tortillas and rice and beans (\$18)

7:30 PM Game Night

After dinner come over and join us at the Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center for game night! Try your hand at axe throwing or bouldering. We will also have a variety of games set up such as bags, giant Jenga, and more. Bring cash for drinks and snacks provided by the fundraising committee!



Friday, March 6th - Sessions at the Nature Center

8:00 AM - Breakfast at hotel

8:45 - 9:00 AM - General Announcements

9-9:10 AM Break

9:10-10am - Concurrent Sessions

How to Offer a Rain Barrel Workshop- Part I

Presenter: Lewis Major, *Polk County Naturalist* **Category:** II

Room: Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center



Ever wanted to offer a rain barrel workshop in your county but didn't know where or how to begin? This session will cover everything you need to know about offering a hands-on DIY rain barrel workshop. We'll cover how to get barrels, workshop structure and set up, class outline, tools, materials, construction, safety, rain barrel use, installation and maintenance. All this while you observe a barrel being constructed along the way. After this session you'll be ready to offer a workshop of your own.

Young Stewards

Presenter: Kyle Neuendorf, *Boone County Naturalist* **Category:** II

Room: Classroom A

Young Stewards is a summer youth volunteer program to inspire the next generation of Iowans to manage, care, and advocate for our native landscapes. It provides a meaningful summer experience that opens their eyes to what we know as Iowa's wildness. Educationally the program allows them to learn about the land and the techniques used to steward them. This includes invasive species removal, planting plugs, seed harvesting, and introducing fire to the landscape.

Right message. Right time. Right place.

Presenter: Jessica Lown, *Polk County Community Outreach Supervisor* **Category:** III

Room: Classroom C

Let's talk marketing. Many naturalists are asked to promote their entire park system, not just their programs. And the myriad of tools and techniques available can be so overwhelming! In this session you'll wrap your head around the fundamentals of branding and marketing, so you can strategically target your efforts. You'll learn how to work within some basic parameters and follow a plan each year, making your marketing efforts feel less intimidating and more empowering.

10-10:10 AM Break

10:10 - 11 AM - Concurrent Sessions

How to Offer a Rain Barrel Workshop- Part II

Presenter: Lewis Major, *Polk County Conservation Naturalist* **Category:** II

Room: Outdoor Wellness & Recreation Center

Ever wanted to offer a rain barrel workshop in your county but didn't know where or how to begin? This session will cover everything you need to know about offering a hands-on DIY rain barrel workshop. We'll cover how to get barrels, workshop structure and set up, class outline, tools, materials, construction, safety, rain barrel use, installation and maintenance. All this while you observe a barrel being constructed along the way. After this session you'll be ready to offer a workshop of your own.



Friday, March 6th - Sessions at the Nature Center

10-11 AM - Concurrent Sessions

Chichaqua Research

Presenter: Cassie Cook, *Polk County Conservation Ecologist* **Category:** I

Room: Classroom C



Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt is a nearly 10,000-acre wildlife refuge in the heart of Iowa managed by Polk County Conservation. This park has a range of habitats including tallgrass prairie, sedge meadow, riparian woodland, oak savanna, wetlands, and creeks. As such, this park makes an amazing location to study and monitor wildlife usage and activity. From sandhill cranes to ornate box turtles and monarch butterflies, this large natural area is incredibly diverse in the wildlife species it supports. Research and monitoring information helps inform our land managers on how to make sound decisions for habitat restoration and preservation. Come learn about the vast variety of research studies and wildlife monitoring efforts that occur at the Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt from one of Polk County's Ecologists and discover more about this natural amenity in Iowa's most populous county.

Education Critter Care

Presenter: Heidi Anderson, *Polk County Conservation Naturalist* **Category:** II

Room: Classroom A

Using a live education animal during a program can make a lasting impression amongst our audience. However, caring for these live animals can be challenging for a variety of reasons. Polk CC naturalists will share our "critter care" protocol for feeding, cleaning and maintenance of our education ambassador animals. We'll leave time for you to tour our critter room and see our set up.

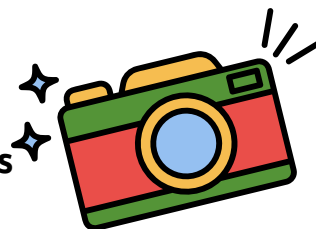
11-11:10 AM Break

11:10-12 PM- Concurrent Sessions

Snapshot Dubuque Iowa: Engaging Volunteers with Trail Camera Images

Presenter: Jason Denlinger, *Dubuque County Conservation Naturalist* **Category:** I

Room: Classroom C



Snapshot Dubuque Iowa is a new citizen science initiative that allows volunteers anywhere to classify the thousands of images collected from a network of trail cameras installed in several Dubuque County Conservation areas. Naturalist Jason Denlinger was motivated after assisting with a similar project in Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique and after learning about Snapshot Wisconsin at a Winterfest session. Jason will share his experience with the project for anyone interested in starting something similar.

Phenomena Blitz: Live!

Presenter: Tiffany Morgan, *Iowa PBS* **Category:** II

Room: Classroom A



You've heard of a bio-blitz, but now you can try a Phenomena-Blitz! Join Iowa PBS's Iowa Science Phenomena (iowaphenomena.org) and Jester Park Naturalist as we take you through a hands-on example of an on-site Phenomena-Blitz. Bring your mobile device and learn just how easy it is to host one of these events in your county!

Jester Park ORWC: A Hub for Outdoor Recreation & Wellness

Presenter: Patrice Petersen-Keys, *Polk County Education Coordinator* **Category:** II

Room: Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center

Discover the myriad of recreational opportunities available at the Jester Park Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center (ORWC). This session will provide an overview of the ORWC's diverse offerings, designed to engage all ages and experience levels. Learn how this facility serves as a gateway to adventure, featuring rental services for water-based activities like kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding in the summer and cross country skis and snowshoes in the winter. During the session you will get a chance to try out the popular archery and axe-throwing ranges, which provide structured ways for visitors to practice new skills and engage in target sports. You can also challenge your friends to bouldering wall twister.

Friday, March 6th - Sessions at the Nature Center

12 PM - Lunch/Depart

Gateway Market boxed lunches (\$16), GF and vegetarian options

1 PM- Optional Post-Workshop Destination

Brenton Slough Birding

Presenter: Patrice Petersen-Keys, *Polk County Education Coordinator* **Category:** II

Location: 8801 Y Ave., Grimes, IA



INHF in partnership with Polk County Conservation and the Brenton Family recently purchased 1,113 acre Brenton Slough. It is a rare opportunity that an area of this size and quality located in a rapidly growing area can be protected. The slough and other water bodies on the site are a mecca for migratory birds, amphibians and other wildlife.. Over 200 bird species have been documented along with nesting Sandhill Cranes and Blandings Turtle. Join in a casual exploration of this unique space that is not yet open to the public.

Lodging

Red Lion Inn & Suites Grimes

251 SE Gateway Dr, Grimes, IA 50111

(515) 986-9900

To book a room call and mention that you want a room that is blocked for "IAN".

20 rooms are available for the Spring IAN Workshop on Wednesday, March 4 and Thursday, March 5

\$125.00 per night

Alternate Lodging

Jester Park Cabins (cabins have been taken off MCP.COM so IAN members can book their stays)

Three modern cabins (Hickory, Cedar, Pine) @ \$115 a night (2 night minimum) - sleeps 6

ADA accessible main level with 1 queen bedroom.

Furnished basement (not ADA accessible) with 1 queen futon and 2 twin beds.

Bedding provided

Two modern bathrooms with shower (ADA accessible bathroom on main level).

Towels provided.

One modern cabin - Oak @ \$150 (2 night minimum) – sleeps 8

ADA accessible main level with 2 bedrooms - 1 room w/ queen bed, 1 room w/ 2 twin beds.

Furnished basement (not ADA accessible) with 1 queen and 1 queen bed.

Bedding provided

Two modern bathrooms with shower (ADA accessible bathroom on main level).

Towels provided

Call Zoey at Polk CCB to reserve a cabin. 515-323-5300

TRU by Hilton (no block of rooms has been reserved for these locations)

701 NE Gateway Dr, Grimes, IA 50111

(515) 608-8784

