

# Earthtones

Spring 2014

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## *Wild Woodlands*

A trip west in Iowa along US Highway 20 reveals .... nothing. No towns, no farm houses, not even a gas station here and there for convenience. Just acres upon acres of flat, seemingly limitless, farmland.

From Waterloo, you eventually hit Webster City. However, countless miles before and after that, the towns are hidden several miles off the highway. The only signs of human life are other vehicles on the road and the occasional wind farm. Not even a cow moos in a pasture.

Living in southeast Iowa, it's easy to forget Iowa is primarily a prairie state. That seas of tall grasses once covered these gently rolling hills. That most likely our predecessors here were lucky first comers.

Washington County, like much of Eastern Iowa, historically was a mix of prairie and woodlands. Woods grew along the more sun and wind sheltered river valleys, where plenty of moisture was available.

The amount and location of Iowa's woodlands has changed over the last 10,000 years, since the end of the last ice age. During wetter years and less fires, woodland range expanded. At drier times and with more fires, the woods retreated. It is believed, on average, the acreage of woods was rather close to what they were at the time of settlement.

Because of the succession of prairie to woods, under certain conditions, in some areas of Iowa the amount of woods have increased since settlement. In the western two-thirds of Iowa, the prevention of fire along with planning wind breaks has created a

landscape dotted with more trees than historically. In the natural prairie-growing Loess Hills, near the Nebraska border, tress have actually become a weed species, disturbing and eroding the sensitive loess soil.

The first settlers to the state faced a semi-recognizable landscape, grasslands being completely foreign to them. This mixed landscape of Eastern Iowa offered the best of both worlds. The woods not only gave a sense of comfort and familiarity, they also provided wood for homes, other buildings, and firewood. The local prairies, on the other hand, provided incredibly rich, deep soil for their crops.

It is here, in the eastern third, that we have eliminated all by 28% of our woodlands. However, that is still a larger percentage than our wetlands (5%) or our prairies (0.01%).

The Washington County Conservation Board has divided its timbers into two categories: preservation and conservation areas. Our preservation areas, like Hayes and Brinton Timbers, have no land management. Our conservation areas, however, we do our best to manage for wildlife, recreation, and history.

Currently, we have just begun a Timber Stand Improvement area at the English Wildlife and Recreation Area. We hope to "set back the clock" and encourage maple seedlings to sprout. We have cut trees down in the area to allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor. Eventually, we hope to have a timber harvest to further benefit this young maple habitat.

*By Pamela Holz*

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*Washington County Conservation Board*

## Spring Wildflowers

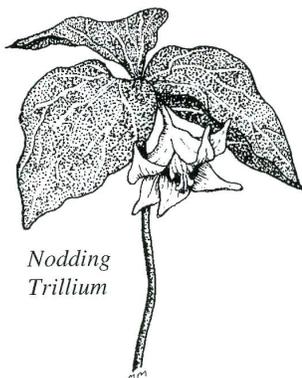
April showers bring May flowers. Or so they say.

More often than not, our best spring wildflower viewing is in late April. However, variations of the times differ depending partly upon the severity and length of winter. Some years, blooms peaked in early April. In comparison, this year, peak wildflower season may not be till May.

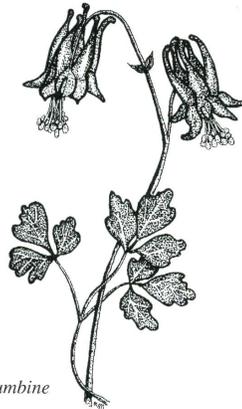
No matter when they bloom, timing is everything. Woodland wildflowers are all about competition. They are in a desperate race to bloom, get pollinated, and go to seed before the canopy of the trees grows shut, cutting off essential sunlight to the forest floor.

First and last flowers of the season have less competition, so have lower amount of “showiness.” They tend to be white and simple. By peak season, however, we can have blooms of purple, yellow, magenta, blue, and more. The flower design itself (shape, color, scent) all play a role in the flower’s main purpose: to attract pollinators.

Skunk cabbage is such an early bloomer that not only is there no competition for pollinators, there are hardly any pollinators to compete for. The bees and butterflies have yet to move. But.. the flies are out.



Since flies are not built for effective pollination, the cabbage has to make do. First, it attracts the bugs by putting up a stink. Then the flower is wide and roomy, giving the visiting fly plenty of chances to wander around and pollinate.



As the season progresses, some flowers focus on more and more specific pollinators. Flowers like spring beauty and violets have ultraviolet markings to attract bees. Droopy or tube-shaped plants like Virginia bluebells and columbine attract long-tongued insects such as butterflies. Add red to the shape, and hummingbirds will zoom right in.

This adds another layer of complexity to bloom times. The flowers need to bloom before the trees leaf out, but they also need to wait for their pollinators to arrive. Insects vary in how they overwinter, from eggs, pupae, or as an adult. Hummingbirds must migrate back from the tropics. Therefore, when specific pollinators are ready will also vary depending on how they recover from winter. If flower and pollinator are out of sync, less seeds will be produced for us to enjoy next year.

Fortunately, in Washington County, we have several places to enjoy woodland wildflowers. A hike within Washington at Hayes Timber can reveal many cool species: spring beauty, Dutchman’s breeches, giant trillium, bellwort, toothwort, phlox, jack-in-the-pulpit, purple, white and yellow violets, dogtooth violet, geranium, mayflower, buttercup, and the aptly named carrion flower.

These flowers and much more can be found on longer hikes at Brinton Timber or Sockum Ridge. If the trails are dry, wildflowers at these parks can be enjoyed on horseback. Both parks allow bikes as well, but it’s much harder to identify flowers at a bicycle speed.

Please remember that the wildflowers in our parks are for everyone to enjoy. Transplanting is not only illegal but often unsuccessful with these delicate plants.

## Thanks to the Following

- \* Ace and More for trees for fish habitat
- \* EBD for pallets for the shooting range
- \* Tom Anderson, Jim Millice and Lee Holz for help with moving and installing the Smithsonian exhibit
- \* Anna and Samantha Holz for assistance with Stewart Literacy night

## Award Congratulations

In early spring, the Washington County Conservation Board received an award for Outstanding Environmental Education Program for a county with two or less naturalists. This award is sponsored by the Iowa Association of Naturalists and the Iowa Conservation Education Coalition. This is the third time the county has received this award.

Naturalist Pam Holz accepts award during IAN workshop



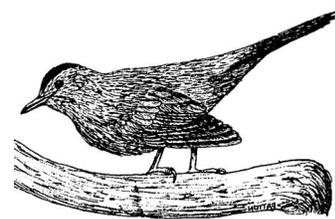
Doug Moothhart has been an active member of a horse riding club for years. Over the last six years, he has initiated collaboration with the Conservation Board to improve Brinton Timber for trail riding as well as for other park users. Because of his efforts there, he has been awarded Trail Warrior by *Trail Blazer* magazine. More information on his award is in the April edition of the magazine.

## The Call in the Woods

What's noisier than a whopping crane? A trumpeter swan! Can you match the woodland birds below with the English version of what their songs sound like? Answers on page 4.

### Birds

1. American woodcock
2. Baltimore oriole
3. Barred owl
4. Bobwhite quail
5. Brown thrasher
6. Chestnut-sided warbler
7. Eastern pewee
8. Eastern towhee
9. Gray Catbird
10. Indigo bunting
11. Northern cardinal
12. Ovenbird
13. Rose-breasted grosbeak
14. White eyed vireo
15. Yellow warbler



### Calls

- A. Bob-WHITE
- B. Cheer-up, cheeralee, cheer ee o (melodic)
- C. Chick, per-wee-tee-o, chick
- D. Drink your tea
- E. Drop-it, drop-it, cover-it-up, cover-it-up, pull-it-up, pull-it-up
- F. Fire, fire, where? Where? Here, here, see it? See it?
- G. Here, here, come right here, dear
- H. Me-ow
- I. Pee-a-wee
- J. Peent
- K. Pleased, pleased, pleased, pleased to meetcha
- L. Purty, purty, purty
- M. Sweet, sweet, sweet, little-more-sweet
- N. Teacher teacher teacher
- O. Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all

# Spring Calendar

The Washington County Conservation Board meets the second Thursday of each month. Meetings are held at the Conservation Education Center in Marr Park at 4:30 p.m.

The Conservation Education Center will be closed for the following holidays: April 20, May 26, and July 4.

Sat., April 26 10:00 a.m.  
Marr Park

### Small Wonders: Prairie Puzzles

This fun program is for preschool-aged children (3-5 years) and an adult friend or relative. This session will focus on the amazing world of prairies. We'll learn who lives here, take a hike, and make a craft. May include some exposure to mud.



Sun., April 27  
Conservation Center

### Last chance to see Smithsonian Exhibit

The traveling Smithsonian Exhibit, *Listening to the Prairie: Farming in Nature's Image*, closes to the public this Sunday. Be sure to come out before then to enjoy and learn.

Fri., May 9 4:30-8:30 p.m. Central Park  
**Kidzfest**

Sponsored by the Washington County Hospital and Clinics. Stop by and see our booth on the Square!

Fri- Sun., June 6-8 Marr Park  
**Take a Kid Fishing**

This is the DNR free fishing days—anyone may fish without a license (Note: all other fishing laws apply). During normal open hours of the conservation center, you will be able to check out fishing poles to experience fishing for yourself, family and/or friends. Brief instruction will be available if desired. Poles only available. No bait.

Wed., June 11 Marr Park  
**Handicap Fish Day**  
Sponsored by the Izaak Walton League.

## Washington County Conservation Board

**Office:** 319/657-2400

**Fax:** 319/657-2500

**E-mail:** wccb@iowatelecom.net

**Website:**  
co.washington.ia.us/departments/conservation

**Members:** Lyle Moen  
Liz Kaufman  
Craig Capps  
Bill Nickell  
Barb Donkersloot

**Staff:** Steve Anderson, Exec. Director  
Pamela Holz, Naturalist  
Fritz Engel, Maint. Technician  
Kathy Dolan, Center Coordinator

Washington County Conservation Board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at the Conservation Education Center. Visitors are welcome.

*The WCCB is an Equal Opportunity Employer.*

If you would like a copy of this newsletter in larger print, please contact our office.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

Answers to page 8:  
1. J 2. G 3. O 4. A 5. E 6. K 7. I 8. D  
9. H 10. F 11. L 12. N 13. B 14. C 15. M

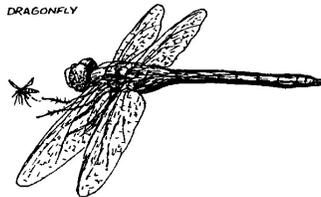
## Summer Day Camps

These nature camps will be designed around the natural world at Marr Park and will be fun as well as educational. Activities will include hikes, games, crafts, fishing, and exploration. Students will also create their own camp t-shirt. Light refreshments will be served each morning.

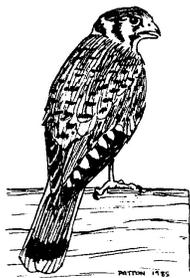
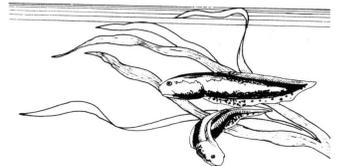
Each camp is limited to 12 students. Camp runs from 9:00 a.m. till noon, Monday through Friday. Camp fee is \$25 per student. (Exception is Tadpole Camp: see below right).

Pre-registration is required for all camps.

*Dragonfly Camp:* Camp will focus on the different animal groups. For students entering 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> grade  
 Dates: June 16–20 or  
 July 14–18



*Tadpole Camp:* This camp is for 4-5 year olds who have yet to start kindergarten. We will focus on exploring the natural world with our senses. Parents or other adult friends are welcome as well.  
 Dates: T-Th: June 10–12 or  
 T-Th: July 1–3 or  
 W-F: August 6–8  
 Times: 9:00 - 10:30 a.m.  
 Limit: 8      Cost: \$15



*Kestrel Camp:* This summer, we will work ourselves up the food chain to become Top Predator. For students entering 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> grade  
 Dates: June 23–27 or  
 July 21–25

*Mink Camp:* Theme this year is how to use nature skills to survive a zombie attack. Includes regular camp activities, canoeing, survival, and two-way radio exploration. For students entering 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> grade  
 Dates: July 28–August 1



For more information on these camps or to receive a registration form, please call the Naturalist at 319/657-2400 or e-mail [wcbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net](mailto:wcbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net) If your child has special needs, please let us know when you register.

### Scholarships Available

The Washington Noon Kiwanis is offering scholarships for those with financial need.

### Volunteers are Needed

For safety and liability reasons, we would like at least one volunteer to assist in each camp. Anyone 14 and older can assist. *Anyone volunteering for a week will receive a paid registration for the child of their choice.*



WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD  
2943 HIGHWAY 92  
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

**Return Service Requested**

*Center Hours after May 1*  
Mon Thur Fri Sat  
10:00–6:30 p.m.  
  
Sunday  
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
  
Tues Wed  
Closed

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***Blocking out the Moon***

In the youngest hours of April 15, the Earth and moon will be playing shadow tag. Earth will win.

As we recall from elementary science class, the moon projects no light of its own. Instead, the sun's light bounces off the moon's surface, making it visible to us.

This reflection also causes the moon's phases. When the moon is located between the Earth and sun, the reflected side faces sunward and opposite of us: new moon. When the moon is behind the Earth, we see the fully lit side of the moon: full moon. When the moon is off to our side, we see the half moon. Because of variations in the moon's orbit and its size, it seldom crosses directly in front of or behind the Earth.



On April 15, the three heavenly bodies will be lined up, with Earth in the middle. Around 1:00 a.m., the Earth's shadow will inch across the surface of the moon. It'll sort of look like a cookie with a bite taken out of it. About an hour later, the moon will be completely in shadow, giving off an orangish glow. At roughly 3:30, the process will repeat itself in reverse and be done by 4:30.

Here's an added tidbit: If you were standing on the moon at this time, you would observe a solar eclipse instead. Except here, Earth's shadow would be attempting to block out the sun's light. The sun would win that one.

We'll actually have a partial solar eclipse of our own on October 23. The new moon will be crossing in front of the sun shortly before sunset.