

Earthtones

Summer 2016

Our Wonderful Watchable Wildlife

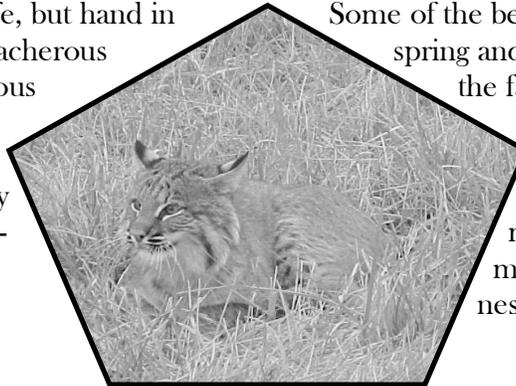
While many outsiders may think Iowa is merely a state of corn and beans, us locals know all those acres of farmland help us grow those trophy bucks over which those outsiders drool.

Deer and other animals abound in Iowa, if one knows where and when to look. Other states may have larger or more dramatic wildlife, but hand in hand with those animals may be treacherous terrain, sudden or widespread perilous storms, and even deadly animals themselves. The dangers of large predators may be obvious, but many forget that even large herbivores, approached too closely, can kill with horns, hooves, or mere size.

Iowa's population of wildlife, on the other hand, usually shy away from humans. In most cases, we have little to fear from our animals themselves; caution comes more into play with the diseases they may carry (such as rabies or Lyme disease). When the biggest animal most likely to chomp on you is a mosquito, watching wildlife becomes relatively safe and thus much more relaxing.

This does not equate to boring. Watching a fawn take its first steps. Spotting a killdeer nest well hidden in the gravel. Jumping back as a pheasant explodes in front of your quiet walk in the grasses. All these encounters and more can get the heart pumping and the adrenaline rushing. It's almost as if for a moment you have been invited to a secret world, a world that moves and howls and shifts mostly when no one is there to see it.

Our world of wildlife contains all the romance of serenades, the excitement of territory wars, the illusion of disappearances through camouflage, and even the violence of the hunter with tooth and claw found everywhere else. One need only to be patient, still, and pay attention.



Bobcat next to US 218

Some of the best times to watch for wildlife is in spring and fall during migration season. In the fall, many birds may lollygag their trip down south, providing ample opportunity to watch behaviors. Come spring, a good south wind may bring a wave of returning birds, motivated and distracted, eager to nest, and easy to watch.

Sunrise and sunset, the blurry edge between day and night, also abounds with activity. Many species we normally miss can be spotted then. In the summer, day animals move more in the cooler evening and morning hours. Spotting animals after dark can be done with a redlight flashlight. The harder to see red color prevents too much light disturbance that may spook or confuse creatures.

So, where to go? Best areas to visit would include mixes of habitats. The Kewash Trail provides a nice linear causeway allowing safe animal movement across fourteen miles. Raccoon, deer, foxes, and several rodents have been known to use the trail.

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Mother Goose on Nest, Marr Park

Clemons Creek Wildlife and Recreational Area, best known for its shooting range, has some amazing habitats

with both upland and lowland forest and prairie, marshes, pond, etc. All that diversity yields a variety of resident wildlife. Snakes sun themselves on the dike. Squirrels chatter in the trees. Even monarchs flutter through.

Marr Park's popularity and younger habitats discourages more sensitive animals. However, common wildlife reside and visit throughout the park, including deer, raccoon, chipmunks, geese, rabbits, squirrels, and many species of songbirds. Depending upon time of year and day, lucky watchers may also spot ducks, grebes, coots, coyotes, mink, muskrats, eagles, native sparrows, and much more. Some of these have higher tolerance for humans and can be approached closer than elsewhere.



Dragonfly at Marr Lodge

Pickier animals such as bobcat, otter, pileated woodpecker, and others can sometimes be found at areas such as Sockum Ridge, Brinton Timber, and Schmitter Heritage Area. Wetland species flock to English River Wildlife Area, for those interested in minimally structured hikes. Visitors to these areas will have the best experience if they are relaxed, quiet, and can tolerate hordes of mosquitoes.



Trumpeter Swans on Crawford Pond during

The places listed above are just a few of the spots to watch for wildlife. However, even those semi-interested in wildlife may find something to see just outside their living room window. Rabbits grazing, birds tussling, and an occasional snake slithering might pass within sight. Squirrels often play tag among a town's trees. A few have even spotted a hawk having its meal or a fox passing through.



Coyote Pups at Schmitter

Plenty of opportunity to wildlife watch abound in Iowa. One need only to look, listen, and be open to whatever experiences that lay before them. Who knows, nature might just surprise you with a treasured memory.

For more information on wildlife and county parks, contact the Conservation Education Center office at Marr Park.

Our Wildlife Over Time

Shortly before Iowa became a state in 1846, several explorers and travelers remarked on the high number and diversity of Iowa's wildlife. As our land was gradually plowed, drained, or otherwise altered, the wildlife living upon that land changed as well. Here are some main Iowa highlights of a few well known game species.

- 1859 Black bears gone from Iowa
- 1860 Mountain lions gone
- 1867 Red foxes, a Great Lakes species, become common
- 1870 Bison gone
- 1871 Last elk heard spotted
- 1875 Less than half of Iowa's timbers remain
- 1879 Passenger pigeon disappears in Iowa
- 1880 Trumpeter swans gone
- 1880s Prairie chicken population soars
- 1885 Gray wolves disappear
- 1890 Otters gone except for Mississippi and Missouri Rivers
- 1890s Prairie chickens population plummets
- 1894 Last whooping crane nest
- 1900 Deer and beaver both disappear; bobcats rare
- 1900 Only 0.1% of Iowa's native prairie is left
- 1900 Pheasants accidentally released into wild in Iowa
- 1910 Turkey and Canada goose gone
- 1914 Last passenger pigeon dies in Cincinnati Zoo
- 1922 First European starlings seen
- 1925 Only 5% of wetlands remain
- 1928 Ruffed grouse essentially gone
- 1930s Deer escape from captivity and travel from neighboring states
- 1940s Iowa reintroduces beavers
- 1949 Beaver trapping season opens
- 1953 Deer hunting season opens
- 1955 Prairie chickens essentially gone
- 1962 Ruffed grouse re-introduced
- 1964 Canada goose re-introduced
- 1965 Turkeys re-introduced successfully
- 1974 Turkey hunting season
- 1985 State reintroduces otter
- 1987 Half our topsoil remains
- 1990s Trumpeter swan captive breeding program begins
- 2000+ Sightings of non-breeding bear, mountain lion, and wolf begin to increase



Summer 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 Center will be closed the following holidays: July 4 and September 5.

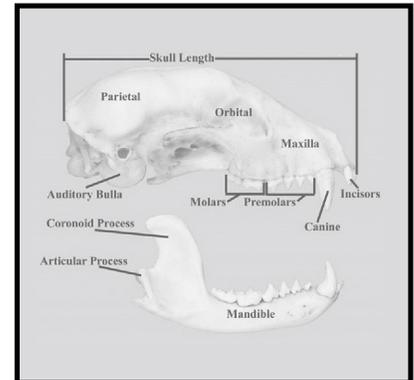
Also, note that reservations for Marr Park shelters and education center will begin to be taken for 2017 on October 1. Reservations are first come, first served. If no one is available to take your call, leave a message and we will return your call to confirm your date and location.

Sun., July 17 Evening Marr Park
Will Schmitt: 99 County Tour Concert

Iowa native Will Schmitt is planning on holding a concert in each of Iowa's 99 counties this summer. Besides a singer and songwriter, Schmitt has also hiked the majority of the Pacific Crest Trail (2015) and other significant places. Details of the concert will be forthcoming. Check out our website or watch area media for more information.

Sat. August 27 10:00 a.m. Conservation Education Center
Skulls and Their Stories

Learn how to read a skull in the hands-on, investigative program. We'll cover the basics of skulls, the unique features of mammals skulls, and analyze the differences to draw conclusions about lifestyle, diet, and even identification. Actual skull specimens will be examined. Participants are welcome to bring their personal, decently clean skulls for identification.



Sat. Oct. 15 Evening Marr Park
Annual Halloween Hike

Our hike this year will travel from Shelter 3, near the softball diamond, through the pines that border the park in the west, ending at the Conservation Center. Luminaries and the not-quite full moon will light the woodland path, making travel through safer and more fun. More information on this hike will be forthcoming in the next newsletter, in area media, and on our website.



Wildlife Safety for All

For the last century, Iowa has had few major concerns in regards to its wildlife and human safety. All of its large animals—bison, elk, mountain lion, wolf, and black bear—disappeared from the state within the first four decades after statehood. While a few of these animals have been spotted in the state in recent years, none of them have threatened any person. (To place these dangers in perspective, dog attacks far outnumber the risks of these animals within the entire United States).

Iowa does have four venomous snakes. However, three of them barely have populations in the state anymore. Encountering one of them has just about the same odds as winning the lottery. The fourth, the timber rattler, is also limited on where it can be found. None of them give lethal bites though medical treatment will be needed.

The black widow and the brown recluse are the two spiders to watch out for. The black widow, however, prefers undisturbed sites so is unlikely to be seen. The cold-intolerant brown recluse is thus more dangerous as it stays in and around active buildings. Again, neither of these are likely to be fatal.

Other creatures may not be dangerous themselves, except for the potential of transmitting disease. We, on the other hand, can accidentally harm wildlife. Sometimes just getting too close can cause the animal to use up precious energy reserves. As they run, fly, or hop away from our curiosity, they use energy. This places them in a more precarious position if they encounter a true danger, such as a predator. Who knows what will make the difference between survival and death?

At times, we might try to help by feeding the animals. While backyard birdfeeders supplement diets, other wild animal feeding is generally not advised. Luring chipmunks, raccoons, and other animals to campgrounds and picnic areas creates a whole set of issues. These include the possibility to transmit diseases to pets and vice versa, training animals to get into food containers left unsupervised or spread garbage, and changing their behavior by eliminating their natural fear of humans. In addition, often these foods are unhealthy to the animals and effect their longevity and overall health. Feeding bread to ducks, for example, fills their stomachs without beneficial nutrients.

Finally, if traveling elsewhere, a little research on your vacation spot's local wildlife can save you headaches, or worse, later on. Just like we rarely have information posted on what we consider common, the same could be true of other areas, even those with potentially dangerous wildlife.

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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.

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2943 HIGHWAY 92
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Electronic Service Requested

Summer Center Hours

Thurs.—Sat., Mon.
10:30—6:30

Sun.
1:00—5:00

Attract Wildlife to Your Yard

Properly done, we can give wildlife a hand, beautify our yard, and add some entertainment value to backyard viewing. All this by creating backyard habitat.

Birdfeeders may be the most common method, but are most efficient when we keep them and the areas below them clean to prevent disease transmission. Other food sources can include dead trees to attract insects and therefore insect-eaters, flowers for nectar and pollen, and plants for browsers. Nut and berry trees and bushes add shelter as well as food.

Other useful shelters include rock and brush piles, grasses, places for underground burrows, and even thorn patches. Also consider places for animals to raise their young. These can be older trees, nesting



boxes, wetlands, water gardens, and food plants for caterpillars.

Water is another essential to consider. Of course, any water source needs to be kept clean. Stagnant water will also attract breeding mosquitoes, not the type of wildlife most of us desire. Still and running water will attract different types of animals. Even small puddling areas are useful for butterflies to get important minerals.

Don't forget to manage for environmentally friendliness, such as cut down on pesticide use and other chemicals, prevent excessive water run off through rain gardens and well planned plant placement. Try to avoid excessive watering by using plants that can handle our area's amount of rainfall. Think natives. Avoid using plants that can "escape" from the garden and spread elsewhere.