

# Earthtones

Autumn 2016

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## *Living Wildlife Feeders*

A tour through a pet store will show a vast array of toys designed for “enrichment” or the intellectual stimulation of our animal companions. Supposedly, these toys help reduce boredom for animals not adapted for a life boxed up in a terrarium, cage, kennel, or whatnot.

In comparison, wild animals rarely face boredom. Between scavenging for dinner and watching out for predators, life can be rather intense. At least the animals are adapted for this life and their feeding behavior fits accordingly.

This does not mean to say that wildlife will not take advantage of an easy meal, if given the chance. As a result, we can draw animals to wildlife feeders, for our enjoyment.

Although feeders may help wildlife during a harsh winter or before a storm, the main benefit is ours. Feeders, being not a natural way to feed in most cases, supplement the animals’ wild diet.

For those of us wanting also to help increase a population, other methods usually need to be utilized. More habitat for homes help, such as nest boxes, grassy strips, and so forth. Another way is the food plot.

The idea of a food plot came from primarily from hunters interested in increasing the availability of a specific game animal. Deer, pheasant and quail, for example, are some of the local species benefited by area landowners’ food plots.

A food plot is basically a set aside piece of property where some sort of wildlife beneficial food crop is

planted. The crop is left unharvested and as it ripens, wildlife hopefully visit and feast upon it. Unlike wildlife feeders or laying out supplement grains, this method taps into the natural feeding style of the animals themselves. Thus, the plot becomes a preferred food source and adds to the amount of naturally occurring food.

The Conservation Board plants several food plots across its properties. Most are in hunting areas, but a couple plots are planted at Marr Park for demonstration and as a wildlife attractant. Common crops include sorghum, beans, and sunflowers. One year we planted turnips at Marr Park and discovered deer found turnips very tasty treats.

While the emphasis may be on game species, they are not the sole beneficiaries. Many other nongame munch as well. For example, think of sunflower plots which target doves. If we step back and think of the primary seed in birdfeeders, it’s sunflower. Unlike in the feeders, this seed is available in its natural source, something birds will instinctually be drawn to. A sunflower food plot will attract a wide variety of songbirds.

When we plant wildflowers, caterpillar food plants, and other garden enhancements for pollinators, we are using the same concept as a food plot, only the food this time is not a form of our own crops and the focus is not game.

We all have different interests in wildlife, but whatever our target species, we no doubt are also helping many other species as well.

*By Pamela Holz*

## *Fiscal Year Highlights*

The Conservation Board was very busy, as always, during the last fiscal year (July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016). Here are some highlights of our annual report.

- \* The five staff members during the fiscal year reached over a century of experience
- \* Camping revenues continued to increase, this year by over \$6,000
- \* Revenues for the two Marr Park shelters were up slightly
- \* Center rentals and visitors were similar to previous years
- \* The educational program met with over 11,000 people
- \* Total expenditures for \$671,619, of which \$511,917 was from our operating budget (the tax-asking portion)
- \* Revenues were up to \$229,791
- \* Projects include:
  - ◆ Finished arches for the Ainsworth-Marr Park trail
  - ◆ Replaced latrine at Sockum Ridge
  - ◆ Reconstructed the upper road at Sockum
  - ◆ Paved the last section of road at Marr Park
  - ◆ Enlarged the parking lot for Mary Marr Lodge
  - ◆ Made improvements along the Kewash
  - ◆ Finished payment on the Center roof project



- ◆ Fixed the study pond to eliminate fish, create habitat, and improve favorable access to students
- ◆ Purchased a used truck in anticipation of enlarging staff
  - \* Other items of interest include:
    - ◆ New website design and notification feature
    - ◆ Summer intern overlapping the current fiscal year
    - ◆ Budgeting and hiring of new staff position of a ranger/technician

## *Thanks to our Summer Volunteers*

### Summer camp helpers

Olivia Pacha  
Nichole Nickelson  
Samantha Holz

Randi Jenkins, our summer intern

### Litter Pick Ups at Marr Park

Bows and Bullets 4H Club  
Faith Baptist Youth Summer Serve Program

Jim Blakeney  
Massey children: Ethan, Marty, Lydia, and Hannah

Everyone who have helped in small ways of picking up litter, moved sticks off trails, notifying us of trail

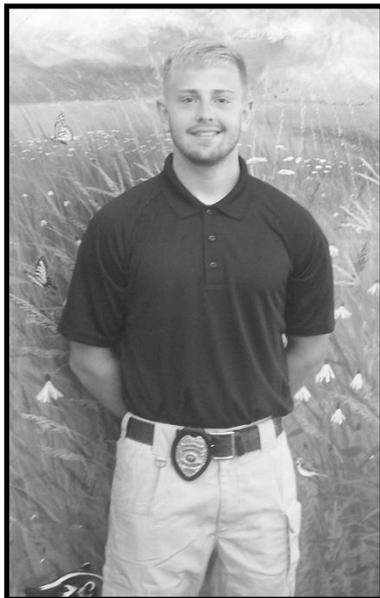


## Introducing Jayse Horning

On August 31, we added a much needed new position to our staff when Jayse Horning became our first Ranger/Maintenance technician. Jayse is no stranger to the Conservation Board. He had spent three of his summers working for us. Another summer at Lake Darling has added to experience in parks management and ranger duties. This previous background of our areas, maintenance needs, current staff, and standard procedures will help make his transition to full-time permanent proceed more smoothly.

Jayse is a graduate of Midprairie High School with a recent degree in park and natural resources from Kirkwood Community College. He was studying animal ecology at ISU when he landed the ranger/maintenance tech position. In his free time, he may be found hunting, fishing, trapping, or just cruising on his ATV.

Jayse is looking forward to working in Marr Park again as well as our outlying areas. He is happy to serve Washington County. Be sure to say hi to Jayse while visiting our parks. We are excited to have him join our staff and can't wait to have him become law enforcement certified this coming winter. He'll be on his full ranger duties this coming spring.



**Washington County  
Conservation Board**

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Craig Capps  
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Pamela Holz, Naturalist  
Fritz Engel, Maint. Technician  
Kathy Dolan, Center Coordinator  
Mark Even, Park Ranger  
Jayse Horning, Ranger/Technician

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.

*Two duck hunters out on the marsh duck hunting. One says to the other, "we're not having much luck today getting any ducks." The other one says, " maybe we're not throwing the dog high enough."*



## Water, Water Everywhere

Interestingly enough, many of our properties have some sort of water body or waterway. Such features provide a wide variety of possible activities, including fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and more. Here is a listing of our primary water bodies and helpful tidbits.

*Marr Park:* our main area features several different types of water habitats for different reasons. Thomas Marr Lake, the largest body of water here provides some nice eatable size fish. Remember bass must be 15 inches to keep.

The fish in our smaller pond, next to the Lodge, are still growing. The alterations done when the pond was rebuilt has improved visibility, access and fish habitat. While few of the fish are of keeper size, they do love to bite. It's a great place to bring kids for a successful fishing venture.

During migration, the ponds may have ducks, geese, grebes, coots, herons, and other bird visitors. Turtles, snakes, and frogs may also be seen as they search for good hibernation spots.

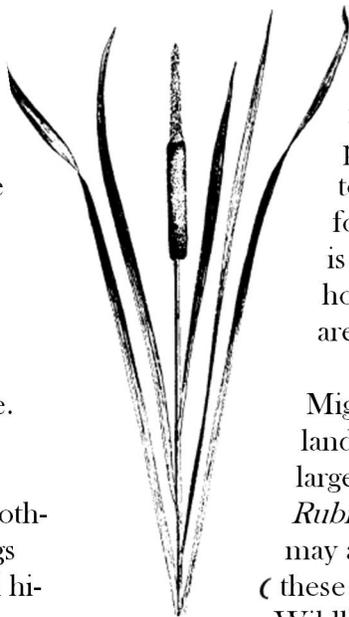
Several wetlands located throughout the park also contain amphibians, reptiles, and many other tiny water creatures. The study pond, located southwest of the center, was remade over the summer for water insects and accessibility.

*Willow Pond:* County owned, we manage this fisheries just off the Kewash Trail. The fisheries is now recovered from pond improvements and several shore improvements were made this summer. Keep an eye out for some tree plantings coming up as an Eagle Scout project.

Other nice fishing areas include *Foster Pond* adjacent to the Henry County border and *Crawford*

*Pond* which is privately owned but publicly managed. Both these area are accessible off Highway 218 and are solely fishing and picnicking.

For a little more remote fishing, you can hike to the *Clemons Creek Area* pond or either of the *Schmitter Heritage Area* ponds. These areas are less likely to be heavily fished and can have good success summer or winter.



We also have two accesses to the Skunk River, *Brighton* and *McKains*. Though fishing can be done from shore, most people boat. While our ponds all are restricted to electric motors, no such restriction exists for the Skunk. The Skunk River Trail also is conveniently signed for you so you know how far up and downstream the next accesses are.

Migrating bird life can be found on the wetlands at *Clemons Creek Area* (featuring our largest marsh), *English River Wildlife Area*, and *Rubio Wildlife Area*. Other associated wildlife may also be seen at these places. All three of these areas, however, also offer public hunting. Wildlife watchers should take care when visiting these parks during hunting seasons.

For those into geology or stream formation may find a visit to the lower *Fern Cliff* parking area interesting. Crooked Creek, at that point, runs nearly south to north, a direction our deep primal selves may find puzzling. Ages ago, the creek used to flow into the Iowa River following the usual path of most rivers in Iowa. Until one of its headwaters eroded to a tributary of the Skunk. Water takes the easiest path, and in this case, that meant changing direction and flowing west into the Skunk at Coppock. The link to the Iowa then dried up.

Whatever your interest in water, you can probably find it in at least one of our properties.

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD  
2943 HIGHWAY 92  
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Electronic Service Requested

***Winter Center Hours***

Thursday–Saturday  
8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Sunday and Monday  
Closed

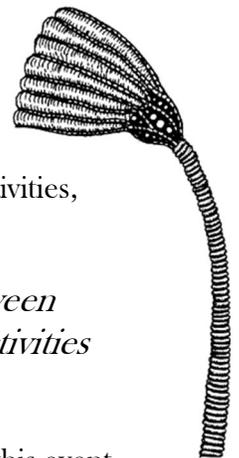
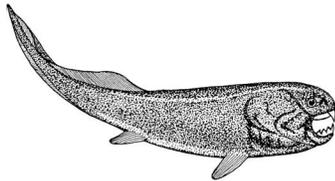
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***Halloween Hike: Oceans of Iowa***

***Saturday, October 15***

***6:45 p.m.– 8:30 p.m.***

***Marr Park***



This year's Halloween Hike features a near full moon and a lovely hike through the west pine trail as we discover the underwater periods of Iowa's geological past. This event is a not-so-scary edutainment alternative to traditional Halloween activities.

The evening begins at Shelter 3, next to the softball diamond. Learn about Iowa's distant past when warm shallow seas covered the state and the size of the animals that lived there then and in oceans now. Practice your swimming skills before you head down the trail to explore the Paleontology Dig. Further on the trail you'll meet creatures from the past in Filter Feeder Frenzy and Devonian Dangers. However, be sure to watch out for Sharks.

Finish at the center for more activities, crafts, and refreshments.

*Enter the trail anytime between 6:45 - 8:00 p.m. Center activities will continue till 8:30.*

Volunteers are also needed for this event. Call if you would like to volunteer. .

For more information, contact 319/657-2400 or [wccbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net](mailto:wccbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net).