

Earthtones

Spring 2017

Taking Care of the Kids

Our rather mild winter has been encouraging to some wildlife. Birds such as the redwinged blackbird, the killdeer, and the turkey vulture have been observed returning early from their spring hideouts. Several other birds and even frogs have begun spring singing, announcing their readiness for the mating season.

Sooner or later, the first young of the year will appear. And with them, some questions may arise in regards to parental care.

The most primal goal of wildlife is to raise as many young to adulthood and thus, reproductive age as possible. Nature has two basic strategies to obtain this goal: high reproduction, low care or low reproduction, high care. Most animals fit somewhere between the extremes of these strategies.

Animals that utilize the high reproduction plan attempt to have extremely high numbers of babies, but provide no significant parental care to help them grow up. Most invertebrates, or animals without backbones, follow this strategy as do many cold blooded fish, amphibians and reptiles.

Many simple aquatic, or water, animals release thousands of eggs into the water in hopes a few of them will land in a livable spot. Other creatures, such as butterflies, may take their time to find just the right leaf for their egg. When the caterpillar hatches, it hopefully has sufficient food and has some protection against hungry predators. In these cases, interestingly enough, any parental care occurs before the egg is hatched.

Often, these animals with high reproduction rates will also see a corresponding high mortality rate. Thus, some other animals utilize the opposite plan.

This strategy can be seen with most birds and mammals. They expend a lot of energy in relatively few young, but by caring for them, they hope they have an edge on becoming adults.

The strategy on the amount of parental care is inversely related to the number of young can be noted here as well. Ducks, for example, may have up to a dozen fluffy ducklings that require just the basic care of protection from predators and being shown what to eat. Walking, swimming, and eating can all be done on their own.

Many songbirds, however, may have only four undeveloped chicks. Totally helpless, they even require mom and dad to help them digest their dinner at first.

While most birds reach adulthood within the first summer, some mammals take years. Many of these may only have one baby every few years. Primates may win the prize with the highest level of parental care. Excluding humans, the orangutan has the longest childhood, the difficulties of life in the Asian forests requires significant training.

While the high parental care strategy may sound ideal (we might be biased), it is offset by the dangers of any mortality. The loss of an offspring means a lot of energy, nature-wise speaking, has been wasted and the parents must attempt to start over. No method is a guarantee, which is why nature uses such a wide range of strategies to ensure survival.

Bye, Bye Baby

Sometimes the best course of action is doing nothing. Since we often equate action with success, it may be difficult to think a lack of it could possibly be helpful. However, in certain cases, that is just what is required.

As the months warm up, and spring hits full swing and melts into summer, wildlife populations soar with the overflow of this year's young. As a result, encounters between people and animals often increase. In most cases, the experience is enjoyed and the participants move on.

On the other hand, some situations place us on insecure footing. We wonder if merely noting the experience is enough or more is needed. The most comfortable spot for us to look for answers is within our own experiences and knowledge. Problems may arise when our personal limitations interfere, including insufficient information or the misconception that nature also follows the same rules for families we do.

One common mistake is thinking wildlife parents need to guard and protect their young most of the time. Thus, sightings of little ones alone may signify to us a lack of a parent to care for them. This occurs more frequently in deer and rabbits. The conservation office receives several calls during warmer months about potentially orphaned fawns and bunnies.

The worst decision one could make upon discovering wildlife young is to assume they are orphaned and take them into their care. First, this is against the law, and is so for very good reasons.

Often, the animal is not abandoned or orphaned but is left alone for better protection. Parents checking on a regular basis may draw the unwanted attention of predators. The young itself may be better camouflaged solo (newborn fawns even camouflage

their smell and mom's regular presence would transfer some of her scent to the fawn). Unlike human children, baby rabbits and deer may only eat once per day. Therefore, moving the animal takes it away from its unseen mother.

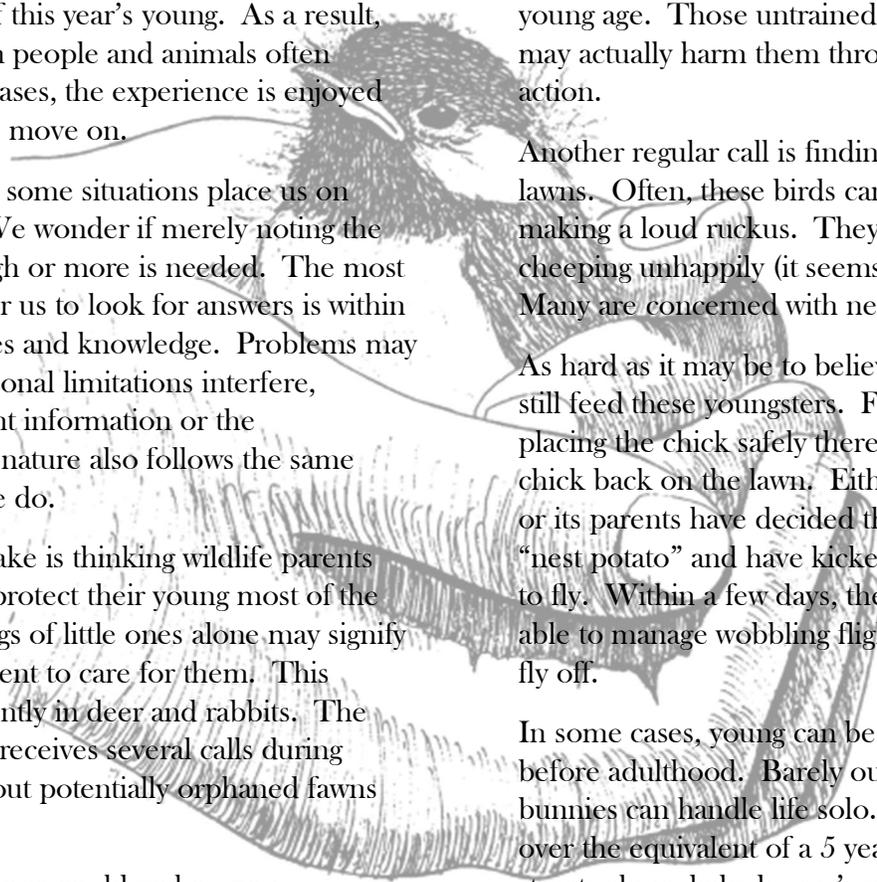
In addition, animals have specific dietary requirements and personal care, especially at a young age. Those untrained trying to care for them may actually harm them through the wrong diet or action.

Another regular call is finding young birds on lawns. Often, these birds can not quite fly and are making a loud ruckus. They hop across the yard, cheeping unhappily (it seems) the entire time. Many are concerned with neighborhood pets.

As hard as it may be to believe, mom and dad will still feed these youngsters. Finding the nest and placing the chick safely there will often result in the chick back on the lawn. Either the chick is restless or its parents have decided they did not raise a "nest potato" and have kicked it out to help it learn to fly. Within a few days, the youngster is usually able to manage wobbling flights and will eventually fly off.

In some cases, young can be on their own way before adulthood. Barely out of the nests, young bunnies can handle life solo. While we may fret over the equivalent of a 5 year old wandering the streets alone, baby bunny's mom has no such qualms. As long as the kid can find food (oh, look, it's the green stuff under its paws), that's good enough for mom to decide to focus on a new batch of kids.

So, remember, when in doubt in an encounter with this year's young, the best course is simply to do nothing.



Hiking Hither and Thither

The Conservation Board maintains several properties with hiking trails. Can you figure out which popular hiking area fulfills each of the following clues? (Hint: some clues may have more than one answer and some parks may apply to more than one clue). See page 4 for answers.

Clues

1. Our only park with a portion of the trail asphalted.
2. These trails are closed to horses and bikes February 1–April and during wet times.
3. A nice little gem located entirely within the city limits of Washington.
4. As part of a current, detailed enhancement project, new trails will be added to this park’s pre-existing solo trail.
5. Caution should be taken when deciding to hike this timber’s lowest trail in spring due to possible flooding from the nearby Skunk River.
6. Usually used for louder reasons, this area’s trails weave amazingly through the diverse habitat of upland and lowland timber and upland and lowland prairie.
7. ADA-accessibility and artistic accents are just two features of our most popular park’s most popular trail.

Our Popular Hiking Parks

- A. Brinton Timber
- B. Clemmon’s Creek Wildlife and Recreational Area
- C. Foster Woods
- D. Hayes Timber
- E. Kewash Trail
- F. Marr Park
- G. Sockum Ridge

Washington County Conservation Board

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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.

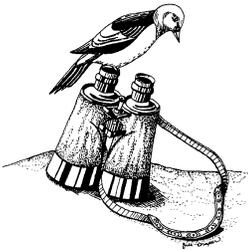
If you would like a copy of
this newsletter in larger
print, please contact our
office.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

*Walking: the most ancient
exercise and still the best
modern exercise.
— Carrie Latet*

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 the closed for the following holiday: May 29.



Sat., May 6 9:00 a.m. Marr Park

Marr Park Bird Exploration

Love to watch the flutter the wings? Enjoy the spring (and fall) migrations and the potential of spotting something new? Whether you are just starting out as an active birder, want to brush up on your identification, or just enjoy the company of others also interested in our feathered friends, this program will have something for you. We'll briefly touch upon migration, Marr Park birds, and any participants' questions before spending most of the time stalking the bird life within the park. Some binoculars available, for all ages.

Sat., June 17 10:00 a.m. Kewash Trail

Wellness Hike

We'll be promoting all our hiking trails have to offer in this hike starting from the Kewash/Hayes/Sesqui Park parking lot. While hiking the Kewash Nature Trail, we'll cover the wide range of benefits hiking offers and discuss other Conservation Board properties, their trails, and special qualities. Mostly, we'll enjoy some time outside in the fresh early summer air. For those interested, we'll touch on improvements to the Kewash, view restful Willow Pond, and hopefully spot a resident creature or two.

Sun., July 2 1:00 p.m. Conservation Center

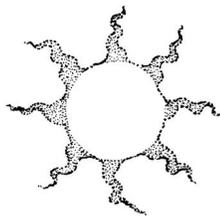
Iowa Ice Ages

Let's take a break from the heat and discover the fascinating world of glaciers. We'll take a close up look at glaciers, at the times in the past when glaciers ruled over the Northern Hemisphere, the effects they had on the land and life then, and even how the remnants of those past Ice Ages are still with us today. An excellent program designed for the entire family.



Watch For Upcoming Programs: In August, North Americans will be honored with a special celestial event—a solar eclipse. While most of Iowa is not in the direct path of full eclipse, we still will have some excitement to see. See the next newsletter, or online, for our programs on this spectacular event.

Thank you!
Thanks to Linda McNeil and
ML Dahlin for their donations
to our projects.



Answers to page 3
1. E 2. A & G
3. D 4. C
5. A 6. B
7. F

Summer Day Camps

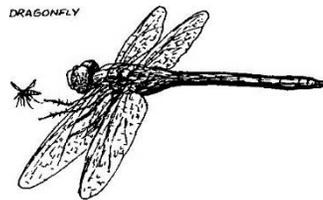
These nature camps will be designed around the natural world at Marr Park and will be fun as well as educational. Activities will include hikes, games, crafts, fishing, and exploration. Students will also create their own camp t-shirt. Light refreshments will be served each morning.

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.

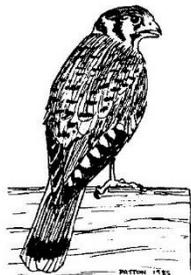
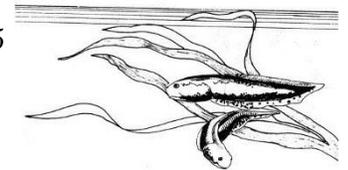
Dragonfly Camp: Campers will explore the four basic elements of earth, air, water and fire as we discover the nooks and crannies at Marr Park.

For students entering 1st–2nd grade
 Dates: June 26–30 or
 July 10–14



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. Relatives over 18 are welcome as well.

Dates: W–F: June 7–9
 W–F: July 19–21
 Times: 9:00 –
 10:30 a.m.
 Limit: 8 Cost: \$15



Kestrel Camp: Activities will focus on the different natural connections in this exciting camp.

For students entering 3rd–4th grade
 Dates: June 19–23 or
 July 31–Aug. 4

Scholarships Available

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

Mink Camp: Theme this year is Compete and Cooperate. Includes regular camp activities, canoeing, survival, and two-way radio exploration.

For students entering 5th–7th grade
 Dates: July 24–28



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.*



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

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
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Electronic Service Requested

Spring Center Hours

(Beginning May 1)

Thurs.—Sat., Mon.

10:30—6:30

Sun.

1:00—5:00

Hiking Health

Here are some good reasons to get out and about this spring. A nice 30 minute hike in the woods or along the prairie provides some wonderful health benefits for you. Here are some of those.

- ◆ Improves heart health
- ◆ Increases health of muscles
- ◆ Lowers risk of several diseases, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, depression, osteoporosis, and back pain
- ◆ Assists with weight control
- ◆ Helps you live longer
- ◆ Slows loss of bone density



- ◆ Improves sleep
- ◆ Increases energy level
- ◆ Increases amount of vitamin D received
- ◆ Slows aging
- ◆ Tones muscle

Of course, let's not forget less tangible benefits of getting a peek into the world of nature. You can watch chipmunks go about their business of gathering nuts or spot a hawk diving for dinner.

Less noticeably, but perhaps most important, being out in nature regularly forges connections to the land that can last a lifetime. We gain a sense of place so that revisiting feels much like coming home. What do we want more than to just belong?