

# Earthtones

Winter 2018

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## *Warm Winter Opportunities Abound*

If this winter keeps on the same track—relatively warm and dry—we may face opportunities to get a glimpse of nature we may not normally see in a typical winter.

First, our outdoors experiences will be much more comfortable. We will be able to stay safely outside longer and with less restriction from several layers of clothing. We wouldn't also need sufficient time afterwards to warm up, huddled around a hot cup of cocoa (though, admittedly, that activity can be rather soothing). Those of us less tolerant of cold/wet weather will certainly enjoy being out and about more.

More sunny days mean more intake of vitamin D and moods less prone to seasonal depression. Our physical and mental health will be stronger (which will help fend off the cold and flu germs likely to be also multiplying in this weather).

Those of us who suffer from seasonal allergies can walk freely through prairies and woods without windblown pollen interfering with easy breathing.

The drought also means less snow and ice to shovel and travel through. This includes not just driving, but also hiking through the woods and prairies. Snow, depending upon the type, can either amplify or muffle sound and thus cause confusion as to what is actually happening nearby.



Several animals use snow as insulation on cold days or protection from predators. For example, meadow mice make tunnels under the snow to keep relatively warm and safe. Without the snow, our visibility extends farther into the leafless woods. We can better spot those deer and foxes watching us from a distance. We may see squirrels digging up their stored acorns.

We may be getting less birds at our feeders, but we have more opportunity to see their natural behavior. Woodpeckers spiral up a tree searching for tasty dormant insects. Hyper chickadees flutter among branches, calling out their name. Hawks roost along roadsides on the lookout for a dinner of small creatures. Even robins may pop out of their woody winter residence to visit our lawns.

Early indicators have suggested a higher than normal migration of snowy owls in our state. One individual was spotted locally but unfortunately was hit by a car. Other owls have been spotted across the state.

Those of us who look forward to outdoor winter recreation may be frustrated with a mild winter. Others may be concerned over what such a winter means in the long run. Both perspectives are valid, but should not deter us from appreciating whatever nature is willing to give us. Savoring the outdoors is an important piece in saving it. Fortunately, the county has over 2,000 public acres for all to enjoy.

*By Pamela Holz, Naturalist*

## *Foster Woods Project*

Progress continued at Foster Woods over the last few months. Most recently, with the warmer fall, the seeding has sprouted and is now providing soil stabilization for the winter. On the north bank, a retaining wall has been installed which will be the pond-side edge of the new shelter, to now settle over the winter and be built early next summer. This represents the last piece in the currently planned project.

Fish will likely be stocked next spring when the water levels allow. It was great to see ripples on the pond this fall, an early indication that wind will help keep it oxygenated. That, along with the decreased leaves, deeper average depth, and increased sunlight should all work to lessen the likelihood of further issues with winterkill. We ask public cooperation in not stocking any fish, which is both illegal and stands to ruin the pond for everyone.

We do encourage those able to stop by and see the improvements. Once spring hits, we expect a pleasing increase in the number and diversity of wildflowers in the woodlands due to volunteer efforts in assisting us in opening up the understory. That, in and of itself, should serve to attract more visitors to the area, and be a huge benefit to our environmental education program. This year now past also provided an unexpected bumper crop of fall nuts. We are confident a new generation of oak trees is about to be born at Foster Woods!



*Culverts along west shore of Foster Woods pond*

**Washington County  
Conservation Board**

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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.*

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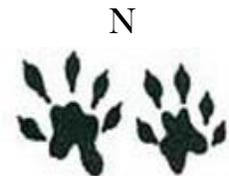
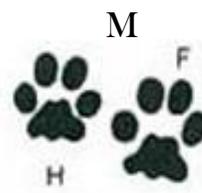
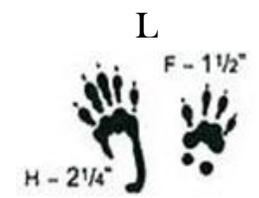
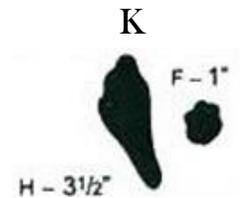
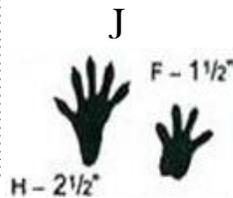
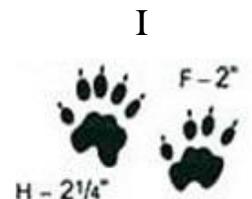
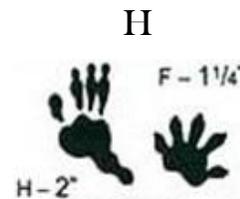
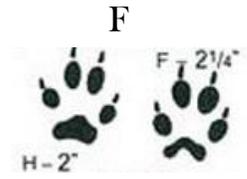
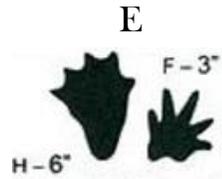
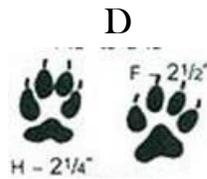
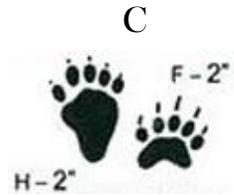
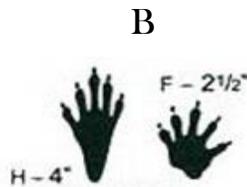


*Clearing on west side of pond*

### Who's Visiting?

Can you guess what animal made the following tracks? Answers on page 5.

1. Beaver
2. Bobcat
3. Black bear
4. Coyote
5. Deer
6. Fox
7. Muskrat
8. Opossum
9. Otter
10. Rabbit
11. Raccoon
12. Skunk
13. Squirrel
14. Woodchuck



**What do you always leave behind because they are dirty?**

*Your footprints.*

**What do you get if you try to cross a mouse with a skunk?**

*Dirty looks from the mouse!*



Shelter retaining wall from underground road

## Winter Calendar

*Temporary Center Hours: The Conservation Education Center will be on limited hours through the month of January. Unless staff is available, the Center will be open Tuesday–Friday, 8:00 till noon.*

*The Center will return to normal winter hours in February: Tuesday–Saturday, 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.*

*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.*

Sat., Jan. 13                    1:00 p.m.                    Marr Park

### *Ice Fishing Fun*

Explore ice fishing during this program that is open to all ages. We'll have pre-drilled holes and ice fishing poles for those that need them. Local experts will be available to assist. In addition, take your turn in a shelter to experience underwater cameras and Vexlars. Afterword, warm up in the Center with some hot cocoa.

Sat., Jan. 27                    10:00 a.m.                    Marr Park

### *The Moons of January*

2018 is starting off a bit looney. At the end of January, right off the bat, we will see a full moon, a blue moon, a super moon, a blood moon, and the Wolf Moon... all at the same time. Come on Saturday to learn all about this early morning January 31st lunar eclipse. Discover how the movements of the Earth, moon and sun cause these occurrences, why we call them by these terms, and other related astronomical facts. Find out how to best view this event and what you can and can't see.

March–May                    Open hours/by appointment                    Conservation Education Center

### *Turtles: Secrets of the Shell*

This traveling exhibit will be featured at the Conservation Center. See back page for more information.

Sat., March 10 10:00 a.m.                    Marr Park

### *Small Wonders: Turtle Excitement*

This program is geared towards preschoolers (age 3–5) and an adult friend or relative. Turtles and the traveling exhibit will be featured in this hour and a half program. Participants will experience a story, hands-on exploration, live specimens, craft, and a short hike.

## **Watch For Upcoming Programs**

Our *Night Prairie Burn* will once again be scheduled for early April. Keep an eye out for the date in area newspapers, radio, and on our web.

*Day Camp registration* forms will be available on Monday, April 2. For preschoolers to current 6th graders, these fun nature summer camps often fill quickly. Request to have a form sent to you on the 2nd by contacting the naturalist at [wccbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net](mailto:wccbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net).

## Help Our Wildlife

Nearly 8,000 Iowans put their money where their mouth is and supported the state's Wildlife Diversity Program. Last year, the program yielded almost \$150,000 in donations to wildlife conservation.



Unlike fish and game, nongame wildlife have no licenses, fees, or other taxes collected by state or federal government to financially fund supporting programs. The main source of revenue for nongame in the State of Iowa has been the Chickadee Checkoff.

Formally known as the Fish and Wildlife Tax Check-off, this option was created in 1982 to allow people to make a charitable donation to wildlife conservation in Iowa out of their tax refunds or by tacking a few dollars on to any taxes owed. When filling out the state income tax form, just look for the contribution line (usually somewhere between lines 55-60) and write in any dollar amount next to Fish/Wildlife.

This program has statewide responsibility for all the wildlife that can't be hunted, fished or trapped and includes a variety of wildlife such as tiny butterflies to the majestic falcon. Learn more about the program at [www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity](http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity).

Please consider donating to the Chickadee Check-off this tax season and supporting wildlife conservation in Iowa. Every bit helps—the average donation last year was slightly above \$18. Your donation goes directly to the Program, with no administrative or processing fees.

Answers to page 3:

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

## Thank You!

### Halloween Hike

A wonderfully warm fall day greeted our 185 visitors to our annual Halloween Hike. Thanks to all who helped and contributed to this fun, educational event.

#### Donations

SACHA  
Fareway  
Walmart  
Duane Hammen

Noon Kiwanis  
HyVee  
Sass Family Farms  
Pizza Ranch

#### Volunteers

Wayne Brock  
The Dolan Family  
Don Kline  
Jeff Koepp  
Linda Finke  
Angela and Emma Langstraat  
Boy Scout Troop 234

Deb Stanton  
The Donkersloot Family  
Jim Blakeney  
The Holz Family  
WCDC

#### Other Donations

Whitetails Unlimited for monetary donation for shooting range improvements



Participants listen at a Halloween Hike station

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD  
2943 HIGHWAY 92  
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Electronic Service Requested

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## *Traveling Turtles at Marr Park*

Coming this March, the Conservation Education Center will once again be hosting a traveling exhibit, *Turtles: Secrets of the Shell*.

Visit to learn all about turtles, here and around the world. Discover the mysteries of their shells, how they are grown, how they help, and also how they restrict the turtles abilities. Also covered is their evolution, other adaptations, their life cycle, threats, and turtles in culture.

We will be hosting this exciting exhibit through Memorial Day weekend.

Tours and special programs will also occur. Special programs are available upon request. Contact Naturalist Pam Holz for more information.

This exhibit is provided for Iowa nature centers courtesy of the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in association with the Smithsonian Institution and the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act.

