

Earthtones

Summer 2018

Prairie Developments

A unique, widespread, historic, identifying feature of Iowa often tends to be overlooked or ignored. I am speaking of our tallgrass prairie.

Iowa is the only state wholly within the tallgrass prairie region. The signature deep, super-rich soil of this area allowed our state to become a primary crop producer in the country. Almost all prairie - over 99.9% - has been converted into cropland and other uses. That makes the small leftover pieces few and far between.

North America, South America, and Asia all have areas of grassland. Like here, these regions have deep soil that is now providing for their agriculture production.

Some of us crave the open prairie. Because of such people, many areas of Iowa have tried to restore the prairie on some of its original range.

Unlike replanting woodlands, prairie restoration requires a lot of patience. The first few years can be a struggle and you may not know how well you succeeded for an entire decade.

At Marr Park, we first attempted restoration in the mid '80s. The prairie to the west of the Conservation Center is the result of that planting. The area south of the Center had to be re-graded during construction of the building. The new seeding afterward including forbs (flowers) which were missing from the original planting. Some of those flowers have now nicely spread west.



Over time, the prairie can be taken over by weeds and/or the desired plants are no longer as healthy. The common method of maintaining a healthy prairie is regular controlled burns. Due primarily to uncooperative weather, this prairie had not been burned in years.

Maintenance staff took advantage of the one nice day in April. The fire took out the encroaching spruce trees and other woody growth. Wetter ground down the center of the section prevented the large patch of dogwood from burning.

By the following week, green sprouts had already sprung up from the still blackened ground. A couple weeks later, during field trips, the grasses reached over 18 inches.

An interesting development was how thick the prairie grew back. There's a general idea that the prairie is wide open and the woods are more closed in. My experience says the exact opposite. Many times I have walked through the woods, stepping easily around bushes and other plants. In the prairie, the plants constantly rub against you.

The new growth this year appears super thick. Almost waist high on me, it feels like I am almost swimming through it. I feel if a student would walk ten feet from me, lie down, I would not be able to figure out where he was. It will be interesting to see how this prairie develops over the summer.

By Pamela Holz, Naturalist

Plains Around the World

Think of grasslands and typically the American Great Plains will come to mind. But did you know there are actually different forms of grasslands and plains all over the world?

The tallgrass prairies cover Iowa and much of the Midwest. The prairie plants found here include big blue stem, Indian grass, switchgrass, lead plant, and coneflower, as well as hundreds more. Obviously, these grasslands are familiar to us. Further west, from Nebraska on, lies the shortgrass prairie. Deeper in the rain shadow of the Rockies than us, this prairie receives just enough moisture to keep it from being a desert (point of interest: if our rainfall was higher, we'd be a woodland state, not prairie). Besides the drier climate, the shortgrass prairie also has colder winters than our region.

The South American countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay have grasslands called Pampas. The plants here are very similar to ours, but the overall habitat differs from North American prairie. The region has higher humidity and receives more rainfall. This might explain the grasses being taller than even big blue stem.

Another type of shortgrass prairie called Steppes can be found in Asia. This region includes parts of Russia, Mongolia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. The short grass prairies in North America could be considered steppes. However, this habitat is generally more barren than our short grass plains.

While grasslands are present all over the world, it's clear they can be quite variable. Each of these different ecosystems support a whole different host of life, separate from one another. As different as they may be, however, they each have the same sense of awe that accompanies all wide open spaces.

By Brandie Bray, Coordinator

New Ranger

Zach Rozmus was born and raised in Southeast Iowa, and from a young age was addicted to anything in the outdoors. Some of his first outdoor experiences included group hunts during Iowa's gun deer season and pheasant hunting with his dad on the weekends. Zach's parents, Lenny and Mary Beth Rozmus, instilled in him a sense of pride in always leaving a location in better condition than what he found it, as nearly every weekend growing up was spent camping at one of Iowa's beautiful county or state parks.

After graduating from Highland High School, Zach went on to Kirkwood Community College where he graduated with an AA degree in Criminal Justice. Shortly before graduating from Kirkwood, Zach was hired by the Washington County Sheriff's Office as a Sheriff's Deputy. Zach worked for the Sheriff's Office for more than 5 years before he was presented with the opportunity to work in a position he always pictured himself doing. In March of 2018, Zach was hired as Ranger-Technician for the Washington County Conservation Board. This job not only allowed him the opportunity to further his career in law enforcement, but also his passion for conservation.

As a new member of the Washington County Conservation Board, Zach is focused on continuing a strong relationship with the community. Additionally, he hopes to make enhancements to our existing parks that would assist in ensuring the future of our dwindling pollinator populations, including honeybees.



Prairie Uses

From Native Americans thousands of years ago to the pioneers within the last two centuries, the prairie provided a range of services from grocery to pharmacy. Some plants, such as purple cone flower (Echinacea) and St. John's wort, are still being used today. Can you match the plant to one of its more interesting uses? Answers are on page 5.

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|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Aster | A. Used to treat insanity |
| 2. Bedstraw | B. Indicated best sites to grow corn |
| 3. Big bluestem | C. Paste put on bee stings |
| 4. Blazing star | D. Used to cure dizziness |
| 5. Buffalo grass | E. Put on dog bites to prevent rabies |
| 6. Compass Plant | F. Love charm |
| 7. Ground cherry | G. Favorite food of our state bird |
| 8. Mountain mint | H. The dense root mats were used for sod houses |
| 9. Pasque flower | I. Believed to attract lightning |
| 10. Prairie fringed orchis | J. Freckle removal |
| 11. Prairie Sage | K. Smoke used to drive away mosquitoes |
| 12. Spiderwort | L. Fed to horses to increase endurance |
| 13. Stiff goldenrod | M. Avoided by hunters as spikes would get into the meat (or pants) |
| 14. Switchgrass | N. Some species change color when exposed to radiation |
| 15. Thistle | O. Treated nervous exhaustion, especially in blue eyed fair haired women |

Thank Yous

- * To the family of Chrystal Barber—a memorial of arborvitaes has been planted at the jetty on the mini-lake
- * Randy and Wendy Thomas for animal figurines
- * For monetary donations: Ronald Crawford, Barbara Rosko, Joseph Grimm, Larry and Nancy Wasmund, and Kirk Derut

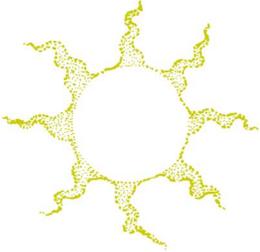


Arborvitaes in memory of Chrystal Barber

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 Center will be closed for Labor Day, Monday, September 3.

Sat., July 28 10:00 a.m. CEC



Sun Study

Face the heat head on and discover all sorts of interesting facts about the sun. We'll explore heat and light and do some experiments. Actual activities will depend upon the weather that day, but if clear, will include a solar oven. For all ages.

Sun., August 12 4:00 a.m. Marr Park

Early Morning Showers

The Persied Meteor Shower will be peaking this weekend! Best viewing time is during the early morning hours when the Earth is moving directly into the debris field. Meet the naturalist at the mini-lake parking lot before sunrise at 6:00 a.m. to enjoy watching the most popular meteor shower of the year. For those interested, the naturalist will share meteor shower information, celestial facts, and even stories inspired by the night sky.

Sat., Oct. 6 7:00 p.m. Marr Park

Halloween Hike: The Nocturnal Olympics

Earlier than usual, this event is fun for the entire family. See back page for more information.

Kewash Alert

Bids have been approved for the paving the east section of the Kewash Nature Trail. Once construction begins, that section of the trail will be closed. We will publicize the closing through local media, our website, and Facebook page. After construction, we will begin work on re-seeding and re-planting the disturbed edges.



Washington County Conservation Board

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Zach Rozmus, 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.

Our Local Prairies

One of the best ways to gain a better understanding of our native prairies is to visit them. Fortunately, the Washington County Conservation Board has several prairie properties under our management.

Sadly, we have little in the way of remnants. Less than one tenth of one percent of Iowa's prairies remain. We do have some sections along the Kewash Nature Trail that are original prairie (many remnants are found along right-of-ways). Clemons Creek Wildlife and Recreation Area also contains a small section of unplowed prairie.

The rest of our prairie areas, then, are restored prairies. These areas we planted and maintain as prairies, including regular controlled burns.

Schmitter Heritage Area, having never been plowed, has a great advantage for prairie restoration. Once soil is disturbed, re-introducing prairie becomes significantly harder—prairie seeds do not like “fluffy” soil. Schmitter’s soil, then, is already primed for prairie. In addition, there remains the distinct possibility of native prairie seeds, long dormant, to awaken and sprout once conditions are right.

English River Wildlife Area has large areas of restored prairie and associated wetlands. Our most primitive area lacks a trail system so visitors should be prepared.



Rubio Wildlife Area and Clemons Creek each have restored prairie. At Clemons Creek, it's a nice climb up to view the grassland, but the way back down is much easier. And, as mentioned on the front page, Marr Park also has restored prairie.

Student Poetry

At the end of the school year, the naturalist visited Wellman Elementary's 4th grade class. We focused on using nature as inspiration for creativity, using poetry as the end product. Below find some of the results.

Fresh
Lovely
Outstanding
Wonderful
Earthy
Refreshing

I dreamed
I was the sky
Over a lake
Making a home
For the Sun

Birds
Calm, Chirping
Flying among the trees
Swiftly jumping on the branches
Happy

I dreamed
I was a tree
Feeling the damp soil
Beneath me
The birds singing sweetly
Above me



I feel the breeze on my face
I hear the crunch of leaves
I see the beautiful nature
Swaying through the day
And I am happy

Answers to page 3

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

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

Closed Tuesday-Wednesday

Halloween Hike: Nocturnal Olympics

Saturday, October 6

6:45 p.m.— 8:30 p.m.

Marr Park

Once again, our annual Halloween Hike will begin at the Lodge. The Hike will then pass around the mini-lake and end at the Conservation Center. This event is a not-so-scary edutainment alternative to traditional Halloween activities.

This year, we will see how we compare to nocturnal animals and their adaptations. Between navigating in the dark and finding food, the night life is full of challenges. Explore several of these abilities at the stations along the trail.



The trail will be lit with luminaries and trail guides. Since we will be heading to a new moon, participants are welcome to bring flashlights.

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.

For more information, contact 319/657-2400 or wccbnaturalist@gmail.com