

# Earthtones

Spring 2019

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## *Singing for Spring*

After the past winter, it would be natural to want to believe the cardinals singing “pretty pretty pretty” at the tops of trees are celebrating spring. But, no. They sing for a much more basic reason—for love.

Spring for many animals, including songbirds, is the prime breeding season. Many can't wait to get started. Some nest as soon as weather permits. Others are keyed by day length. No matter what initiates it, the main activity peaks in spring.

Even our migrants follow suit. In the fall, they dilly-dally their way down south, taking their time. Come spring, they rush to return. A good south wind may bring back a wave of returning species to our timbers, grasslands, and waterways.

While all our birds are pairing up or have paired up, the attention grabbers tend to be the singers. Unlike other calls birds may make, songs are strictly designed for the breeding season. They mark territory, they hopefully scare off rivals, and they attract mates. Some birds know their songs instinctually while others must pick it up from their parents and neighbors.

Humans speak by using their voice box, or larynx. While birds have this same part, it serves only to prevent them from choking. Their beautiful songs come from a structure deeper in the throat, just above the lungs, called the syrinx.

Scientists, apparently in a moment of romanticism, named this unique structure after a Greek myth.

Syrinx was said to be a wood nymph pursued by Pan. She begged the gods to free her from his unwanted advances and they turned her into reeds along the shoreline. Pan cut the reeds and made the first pan flute, hence the musical association.

While all birds have a syrinx, some are more well developed and intricate than others. Because of this, these birds can amazingly sing two different notes simultaneously. In addition, the song producing portions of these birds' brains are larger as well. These birds can also time their breathing with their song. These mini-breaths enable it to sing for several minutes without any apparent interruption in its song.



While spring is the best time of year to hear bird song, there is also a best time of day. Most songbirds like to start their day at the crack of dawn. Called the “dawn chorus”, as sunlight gradually increases during sunrise, more and more birds join in the song. Eventually, so many birds will be singing, you'll be wondering how they can tell each other apart in all the noise.

As spring winds down into summer, our birds will sing less. However, until the fall chill hits, they will regularly be singing away rivals, reminding their neighbors where the “fence line” is, and, on unfortunate occasions, be looking to replace a lost mate.

*By Pamela Holz, Naturalist*

## Our Director's First Words

When I accepted the job as Director of Washington County Conservation in November of 2018, I knew that once my excitement settled I would be in for several changes. At times, change can seem very daunting, but for me, I saw this change as an opportunity. In both my personal life and professional life, I've always enjoyed facing a new challenge, whether that be learning a new craft or submerging myself into a project that forces me to adapt and learn. The position of Executive Director has proven in a very short amount of time to be a perfect blend of challenge and evolution.

Embracing the daily challenges as director isn't always easy, and fortunately I have a great staff I can lean on when necessary. I'm blessed to have an experienced staff whose knowledge and proven work history have been critical during my transition. As Director, one of the most important tasks I can achieve is building upon the foundation I inherited. Recently, I've taken steps toward that goal by hiring a new Center Coordinator, Randi Jenkins, and a new Ranger Technician, Cody Smith. I'm confident that both of these additions to our staff will be building blocks toward the goal of continuing our strong foundation.

In the coming months, Washington County Conservation looks to see the completion of the Kewash Paving and Enhancement Project, the construction of a new trail head at the Kirkwood Regional Center, and the continued face lifts at Foster Woods and Fern Cliff.

*By Zach Rozmus, Director*



*Harmony with the land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left.... You cannot love game and hate predators; you cannot conserve the waters and waste the ranges; you cannot build the forest and mine the farm. The land is one organism.*  
- Aldo Leopold

### Washington County Conservation Board

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Pamela Holz, Naturalist  
Randi Jenkins, Center Coordinator  
Fritz Engel, Maint. Technician  
Jayse Horning, Ranger/Technician  
Cody Smith, 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.

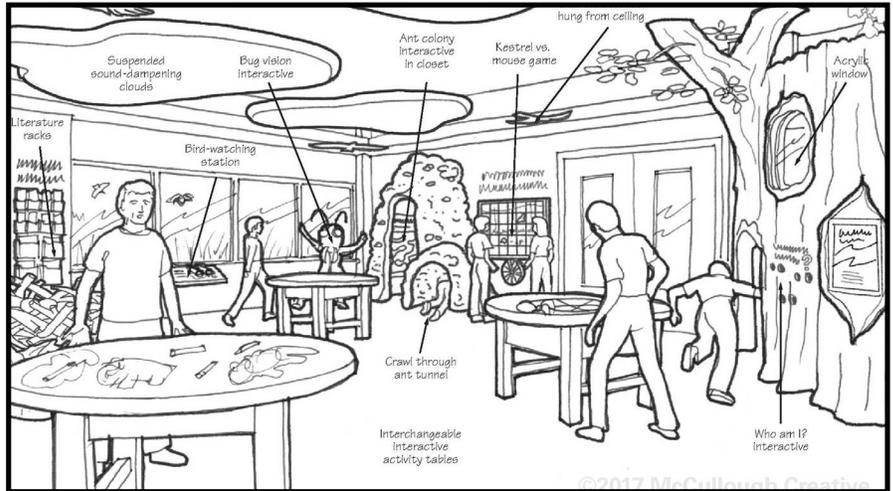
This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

## Bits and Pieces

A big thank you to Linda McNeil for a generous financial donation.

We are now also on Facebook. Find us at <https://www.facebook.com/washingtoncountyconservation/>

By the end of the season, Phase 1 of the new displays for the exhibit Hall should be installed. These include several educational games and a life size ant hill. See picture right.



## Spring Babies

*First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage.* Can you name what we call each animal's babies? Then, find that name in the search-a-word? Answers are on page 4.

F	E	L	O	P	D	A	T	D	F	O	Y	F	H	R	G
A	W	G	J	T	B	I	H	E	I	S	A	W	A	L	R
P	C	K	I	R	R	L	P	L	N	J	I	O	G	W	C
T	E	L	G	A	E	N	M	A	G	G	O	T	C	M	N
F	L	T	E	L	Y	G	Y	W	E	D	Y	H	K	Y	D
B	T	U	S	L	N	K	N	P	R	R	T	C	Q	G	E
Y	U	J	O	I	C	E	I	S	L	F	A	K	N	S	N
H	Q	R	L	P	H	G	O	A	I	N	W	I	L	Q	T
C	M	S	M	R	E	N	R	G	N	I	L	K	C	U	D
S	O	W	L	E	T	V	O	F	G	R	G	M	T	A	I
G	F	D	L	T	A	C	A	G	E	U	D	B	A	B	H
F	L	O	W	A	S	P	H	D	Y	J	E	L	U	R	P
S	H	A	T	C	H	L	I	N	G	O	E	N	R	F	E
I	R	N	U	T	S	P	O	F	N	E	N	P	K	G	N
A	D	B	P	Q	S	H	J	G	M	Y	S	I	C	O	F

### Animal

1. Bird
2. Butterfly
3. Deer
4. Dove
5. Dragonfly
6. Duck
7. Eagle
8. Fish
9. Fly
10. Frog
11. Goose
12. Mosquito
13. Opossum
14. Owl
15. Rabbit
16. Spider
17. Swan
18. Turkey

## 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.

Fri., Apr. 12                      7:30/8:00 p.m.                      Marr Park North East Prairie

### *Night Prairie Burn*

We'll meet at the shop area first to discuss the wonders of prairies, the importance of prairie burns, and the techniques of controlled burns. At 8:00 p.m., we will start the burn. If the wind is in the right direction, we will even attempt to demonstrate the nature of a prairie fire using a marshmallow. *Caution: this fire usually burns very quickly; if you are late you may miss it.*

Sat., May 4                      8:00 a.m.                      Hayes Timber/Kewash Trail

### *Migrating Bird Hunt*

Join us as we listen to end of the dawn chorus and search out birds returning to our timbers as well as those passing through. The Kewash Trail is an excellent wildlife corridor for migratory birds so perhaps we'll spot some elusive warblers. Of course, we will have to stop and enjoy the wildflowers in bloom as well. Binoculars will be available for those who need them. Meet at the large parking lot on 5th St. in Washington.

June 7-9                      Iowa

### *Free Fishing Days*

Sponsored by the Iowa DNR, for these three days, fishing licenses are not needed. All other fishing laws apply.

Sat., June 22                      10:00 a.m.                      Marr Park

### *Small Wonders: The Ants Go Crawling...*

This fun program is for preschool-aged children and an adult friend or relative. This session will celebrate the beginning of summer through the study of ants. We will use the new Ant Hill Exhibit as a launching pad for our exploration. The session will also include a story, games, craft, and a short hike to look for ants and other small creatures.

*Answers to Page 3*

	<p><u>Baby name</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hatchling</li> <li>2. Caterpillar</li> <li>3. Fawn</li> <li>4. Squab</li> <li>5. Nymph</li> <li>6. Duckling</li> <li>7. Eaglet</li> <li>8. Fingerling</li> <li>9. Maggot</li> <li>10. Tadpole</li> <li>11. Gosling</li> <li>12. Larva</li> <li>13. Joey</li> <li>14. Owlet</li> <li>15. Bunny</li> <li>16. Spiderling</li> <li>17. Cygnet</li> <li>18. Poult</li> </ol>
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## Summer Day Camps

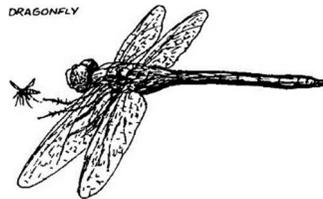
These nature camps are designed around the natural world at Marr Park and will be fun as well as educational. Activities will include hikes, games, crafts, fishing, and exploration. Students will also create their own camp t-shirt. Light refreshments will be served each morning.

Each camp is limited to 12 students. Camp runs from 9:00 a.m. till noon, Monday through Friday. Camp fee is \$30 per student. (Exception is Tadpole Camp: see below right). Registration opens April 1.

Pre-registration is required for all camps.

*Dragonfly Camp:* Campers will discover the Super-heroes of nature as well as in themselves. Whose the biggest, fastest, strongest, weirdest, etc?

For students entering 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> grade  
Dates: June 24–28 or  
July 29–August 2



*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.

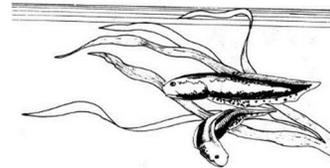
Dates: M–W: June 17–19

M–W: July 1–3

Times: 9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Limit: 8

Cost: \$20



*Kestrel Camp:* This camp on Hunters and Gatherers will have campers exploring the past, interrelationships between animals, and much more.

For students entering 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> grade  
Dates: July 8–12

### Scholarships Available

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

*Mink Camp:* This year we will focus on Bigfoot and You. Discover the mystical, the fantastical and the myths that surround us. Includes regular camp activities such as canoeing, survival, and two-way radio exploration.

For students entering 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> grade  
Dates: July 22–26



*For more information on these camps or to receive a registration form, please call the Naturalist at 319/657-2400 or e-mail [wccbnaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:wccbnaturalist@gmail.com).*



WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD  
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AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Electronic Service Requested

***Spring Center Hours***

*(Beginning May 1)*

Thurs.—Sat., Mon.

10:30—6:30

Sun.

1:00—5:00

Closed Tuesday-Wednesday

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## ***Spring Burns***

One sure sign of spring is the smell of smoke. Unlike many places out west, most of our local fires are intentional and helpful. Why?

Around here, most of the fires are in prairies or grasslands. Iowa is the only state in the nation located wholly in the tallgrass prairie region. Over 80% of the state was covered in prairie at the time of settlement. The prairie is what gave us our rich, deep soil.

However, because of the nature of the prairie itself and of the changes we made over time to the land, periodic controlled burns are needed to maintain the prairie as prairie. Without such controls, the area may be taken over by undesirable plants or even trees.

Early spring fires burn off these unwanted plants, as prairie plants begin to grow later in the season. Controlled burns also eliminate excessive thatch, or dead grasses, opening up areas for ground nesters. Many prairie plants also produce more seeds after a fire.



Although prairie fires can burn very hot and travel quickly, they do not burn deeply. In woodland fires, you often need to watch for underground roots that may be smoldering. With prairies, that is not the case. The fire travels solely on the surface. This is fortunate for the underground creatures that retreat to their burrows till the flames pass.