

Earthtones

Spring 2023

Signs of Spring

If you're like me, by February, you are not so patiently waiting for the first signs of spring. Though honestly, I am usually over winter by January. Nonetheless, we can generally count on the sight of leaves budding, birds singing, and butterflies migrating to let us know that spring is near. The next time you head outside, take the time to observe your surroundings, because there are always subtle signs that spring is on the way.

Backyard birds are one of the best predictors. In fact, there is an ancient proverb that says, "Bluebirds are a sign of spring; warm weather and gentle south breezes they bring." This tends to be true in the Midwest, as Bluebirds do not come north until all chance of winter has passed. We started hearing bird song in late February. Just last week I heard and saw my first red-winged blackbird of the season.



As the days gradually become longer, and the temperatures start to rise, the chorus will become louder. A chorus of birdsong will fill the air as the migrating birds return. Warblers, sparrows, yellowthroat, finch, woodpeckers and more! Even ducks and geese will start to return to our lakes and other bodies of water. In fact, a few geese couples have returned to Marr Park already!

Another sign that spring is coming are fresh buds on trees and the peak of green grass out of the ground, as they begin their fresh, new growth for the season. Some of the first trees to bud are the willows, silver maples, and red maples. Furthermore, once the lakes, ponds and wetlands thaw, the sounds of tiny amphibians, particularly frogs, can be heard singing at dusk.

If you're lucky, you may spot turtles basking in the sun as they emerge from hibernation!



Spring is also the time of year when wildlife species begin their mating and young rearing rituals. Keep an eye out for nests, especially those of turtles and birds. If you are lucky, you may even spot some little ones, such as fawns or fox kits. Later on in the nesting season, pheasant and turkey poults will be born. Remember though, it is never okay to pick up a wildlife baby. Rarely, have they been abandoned.

Apart from the obvious visual signs of spring, with spring comes its entrancing smells. Because Earth is waking up, you may notice a more pronounced "earthy" or dirt like smell outside. With warmer weather, dewy mornings and soft wet smells fill the air. Likewise, the sweet aroma of flowers can be taken in as they begin to bloom. As always, I encourage you to get outside and enjoy the beautiful weather that is sure to come!

By: Megan Jorgensen, Naturalist



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.

Thursday, April 13th **6:30 p.m.** **CEC**
Butterflies, Swallowtails, & Skippers

Join Clyde Pearce as he discusses butterflies and moths. Everybody seems to like butterflies, but do you know which ones can be deadly? There are also some you can eat! Clyde will tell us all about it!

Wednesday, May 3rd **9:30 a.m.** **CEC**
Toddler Time

Join us for our first Toddler Time since the fall! To kick things off for Spring, we will be learning all about springtime babies! Spring is the time when many of our wildlife mamas are preparing for little ones. We will read an adorable book and do a fun craft afterwards!

Thursday, May 18th **6:30 p.m.** **CEC**
Caves and their Wildlife

Clyde Pearce will be back at the Conservation Center to host a program about caves and the animals you may find inside! This event is free to the public and open to all ages.

Saturday, May 20th **At Dusk** **Shelter #3**
Movie Night at the Park

Join us for the first movie night of the camping season! At dusk, we will be playing the 2007 movie Daddy Day Camp! We encourage everyone to bring their own chairs or blankets to sit on, and their favorite snacks and drinks.

Thursday, June 1st **9:30 a.m.** **CEC**
Toddler Time

Join us for Toddler Time! This month, we will be learning all about how wildlife use camouflage to blend into their environments. We will read a book. Each toddler will go home with their own camouflage coloring packet. We will check out all the improvements to the Naturescape, too!

Saturday, June 17th **At Dusk** **Shelter #3**
Movie Night at the Park

Join us for movie night at the park. This month, we will be showing the 2010 classic Despicable Me. The movie will begin at dusk. We encourage everyone to bring their own chairs or blankets to sit on, and their favorite snacks and drinks.

Washington County Conservation Board

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Cody Smith, Ranger/Technician
Brett Johnson, Ranger/Technician
Jacob Adrian, Maint. 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.

Summer Camps 2023

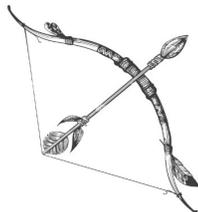
June 12th, 13th, 14th 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.
 July 5th, 6th, 7th 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Tadpole Camp (PK & Kindergarten: Fall 23)
 This camp is designed with the younger kids in mind. This year, they will travel to WCCB's Animal Planet where they will learn all about Iowa's wildlife! Each camp is limited to 15 participants. Registration with a \$20 payment is required.



June 21st, 22nd, 23rd 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
 July 19th, 20th, 21st 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Archery Camp (4th -8th Grade: Fall 2023)
 Offering two sessions this summer, archery camp will introduce kids to the sport of archery, or give more experience to those who already enjoy it. Kids will play games and compete in some friendly competition. Each session is limited to 15 participants. Registration is required with a \$20 fee.



June 26th- June 30th 9:00 am.-12:00 pm.
 Aug. 7th- Aug. 11th 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Dragonfly Camp (1st & 2nd Grade: Fall 2023)
 As wilderness explorers, campers will investigate the landscape, and learn new things about wildlife. Activities include fishing, orienteering and crafts! Registration with a payment of \$30 is required. There is a maximum of 15 participants.



July 10th- July 14th 9:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m.
Kestrel Camp (3rd & 4th Grade: Fall 2023)

As detectives, campers will investigate the wilderness. Along the way, they will be tasked with solving "cases." Campers will get to go fishing and kayaking. Registration and a payment of \$40 is required. The camp is limited to 15 participants.



July 24th- July 28th 9:00 am- 2:00 pm.
Mink Camp (5th-8th Grade: Fall 2023)

This one is for the big kids. Campers will be divided into WCCB tribes. During the week, each tribe will battle against each other in survivor themed tasks. Some will test their ability to survive in the wild, others will challenge their knowledge of wildlife and the environment. Registration with a payment of \$40 is required. The camp is limited to 15 participants.



Questions or concerns? Give us a call at 319-657-2400!

Registration forms are located on the WCCB website & Facebook page.
 (co.washington.ia.us/170/conservation)

Wood Duck Boxes

A useful habitat management tool utilized by WCCB, is the installation of wood duck boxes at several of our wildlife management areas. Though we have had wood duck boxes for several years, we didn't begin collecting data until 2020. With this information, we were able to assess the use and success of the nesting boxes. These original wood duck boxes were constructed out of wood and had to be replaced every 2-3 years. Seven management areas were chosen as sites for wood duck boxes. Those sites are as follows, Marr Park, Crawford Pond, Foster Pond, Clemons Creek, English River, Rubio, and Schmitters. Each site had a varying number of wood duck boxes installed.



The data collected following the 2020 and 2021 nesting seasons indicated that though the nesting rate was above average at 65%, only 56% of the nests were successful. Many were abandoned, with some having not been used at all. Immediately, we began to wonder what could be done to improve the success rate of the boxes during subsequent nesting seasons. In 2022, we decided to install wood duck boxes made out of poly-wood recycled lumber. Data showed us that 88% of the new boxes were utilized, with an overall success rate of 70%. We concluded that wood ducks prefer the polymer boxes over traditional wooden nesting boxes. While the cost of the polymer boxes is higher, we have not had to replace any of the boxes.



The next time you decide to install wood duck boxes, consider purchasing poly-lumber wood duck boxes. You may have a better nesting rate like we did!

Blue Bird Trails

Bluebird houses are on the rise at WCCB. Since the beginning of 2023, the staff at WCCB has been in the process of building and repairing blue bird houses. Approximately 40 houses have been constructed and 10 repaired. The houses have been installed along established trails in the following parks: Marr Park, Foster Pond, Schmitter Heritage Area and Clemons Creek shooting range.

All 50 houses will be monitored weekly to see how successful blue birds are in Washington county. Blue birds are not the only native birds that use these houses, Tree Swallows, Tufted titmouse, Chickadee, Carolina and House Wrens and Nuthatches all may. Records will be kept on all the native nesting cavity birds.



The House Sparrow and European Starlings are non-native species. Their aggressiveness for nesting sites are the primary reason for bluebird population decline. Other nuisances that drive out nesting birds away from the houses are paper wasps and mouse nests.



You may think installing a bluebird house would be a great addition to your backyard or several on your own plot of land! While

that is true, bird houses must be monitored to accommodate only native birds. Otherwise it may do more harm than good if you install a house for only a house sparrow to nest in and run off that beautiful bluebird that you enjoy watching while you have your morning coffee.

If you plan on installing any bird houses on your property we recommend you research as much as possible before installation. A great resource to start your research is North American Bluebird Society. Happy Birding!

By: Jacob Adrian, Maintenance Technician

Spring Word Scramble



WBNIAOR

BLLAMURE

WFLORE

PLITU

NERGE

MLOBO

PLRIA

LFBTUTREY

NIAR

DREGNA

EBE

YMA

GNRIPS

HSSNIEUN

YBNUN

CAMHR

EDES



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2943 HIGHWAY 92
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Electronic Service Requested

Summer Center Hours
(Beginning May 1)

Tuesday-Thursday
8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Friday-Saturday
9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Sunday–Monday
Closed

Spring Word Scramble Answers

WBNIAOR

Rainbow

DREGNA

Garden

BLLAMURE

Umbrella

EBE

Bee

WFLORE

Flower



YMA

May

PLITU

Tulip

GNRIPS

Spring

NERGE

Green

HSSNIEUN

Sunshine

MLOBO

Bloom

YBNUN

Bunny

PLRIA

April

CAMHR

Charm

LFBTUTREY

Butterfly

EDES

Seed

NIAR

Rain