

The Prairie Star

Newsletter

Volume 40, Issue 2

Spring & Summer 2023

Spring has Sprung!

By Chris Clingan
MCCB Director

I know many of you have had cabin fever this past winter! Well, if it makes you feel any better, it is safe to say that spring is finally here. Spring is one of my favorite times of year for a variety of reasons. You begin to see species of wildlife reappear that had either migrated or was hibernating. For some people, red-winged blackbirds are their official sign of spring. Others look for turkey vultures returning or even the first sight of a thirteen-lined ground squirrel running along the side of the road to let them know spring has arrived.



Hepatica. Hepatica americana

Did you know that there is a brief period when there are woodland wildflowers blooming before most other flowers? These early flowers are spring ephemerals. They are referred to as ephemerals is because they only last for a very short period. The reason for this, is that the plants need to complete their lifecycle before any tree leaves emerge and shade the forest floor. This creates a very short window of time to get out and go hiking to enjoy this unique time of year.

Some of the more common spring ephemerals are hepaticas, bluebells, spring beauties, trout lily, bloodroot and Dutchman's breeches. There are many more to discover as well! You can search for these flowers while enjoying hikes at Russell Wildlife Area, Quercus Wilderness Area, Cedar Bluffs Natural Area and many more areas throughout Mahaska County. Please remember to take only photos and not pick any of these flowers. Keep them there for everyone to enjoy. Also, please tag yourself and share your experiences on our Facebook page.

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WELCOME TO MCCB

Mahaska County Conservation Board would like to introduce two new staff members of the MCCB team.

KayLynn Sieber, Environmental Learning Center Attendant

KayLynn will be working in a brand new permanent, part-time position for MCCB. Her responsibilities will include working at the Environmental Learning Center on weekday evenings and on Saturdays, helping with evening environmental education programs and greeting visitors to the ELC. This enables our center to be open longer hours throughout the week! Please stop by and meet her when you visit the ELC.

Charlie Figy, Summer Conservation Technician

Charlie will be working as a full-time conservation technician this summer alongside our park rangers. He will help with park maintenance such as mowing, trimming and participating in many other tasks to help manage our Mahaska County parks. Be sure to give Charlie a wave or say hi if you see him!



KayLynn Sieber

Environmental Learning Center Attendant



Charlie Figy

Summer Conservation Technician

**Welcome to the Mahaska
County Conservation Board!**

Jennifer Peterson

Oskaloosa, Iowa



Serving since February 2023.

Eveland Access Cabins

1681 – 290th St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577



Apple and Birch Cabins are available for rent year-round. To view pictures of the cabins and to find rental information, visit the MCCB website:

www.mahaskaconservation.com
or call MCCB at (641)673-9327.



NATURE NOTES

Morel Mushrooms

by Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist

One of Iowa's favorite hunting seasons is coming soon – mushroom hunting! Warm, wet weather helps create a good mushroom hunting season. So do nature's other springtime signs such as budding lilacs, flowering trilliums, spring beauties, bluebells and dandelions. Morels are one of everyone's favorite fungi to eat and they can soon be found after a few sunny spring days.

What makes morel mushrooms appear? Why do they appear after a few sunny days after a rain? The answer is the sun's warmth makes them grow. Ground temperature plays the most critical role in mushroom development. (Some diehard mushroom hunters will leave a thermometer in the ground each spring to tell them when conditions are right). When the ground temperature is 58 degrees Fahrenheit, then it is time to go scouting for morels. However, if you don't keep track of the ground temperature, you can also count on the air temperature being in the 50's at night and 60's or higher during the day.

The morel "mushroom" is the reproductive part of the mushroom - the same way an apple is only one fruit on a whole apple tree. The main part of the morel mushroom is underground and consists of a web of hair-like fibers called mycelium. Mycelium is present even when we don't see any mushrooms on the surface. Mushrooms can have mycelia that stretch for miles and miles underground. Researchers believe the fruiting body (the part we like to eat) is grown in response to starvation or stress on the mycelium; a last effort to spread the spores and reproduce.

Ask most people what types of spring mushrooms they like best and they'll tell you the little grays or the big yellows. These "two" common mushrooms are different growth phases of morels from three different species: *Morchella esculenta*, *Morchella deliciosa*, and *Morchella crassipes*. The morels are probably the most prized of all edible mushrooms, possibly because they are so easy to distinguish from poisonous mushrooms or maybe because they taste so good!

By now you're ready to run out and find some right? Well, where do you start looking? Every mushroom hunter has their own secret mushroom hunting spots, and many of them are somehow associated with trees. Starting your search in the woods is a safe bet. Underneath dead elms are highly touted as *the* location to find morels. Morels can be found under a variety of trees: oaks, black locust, cherry, walnuts, hickories, ash, and birch to name a few. I have personally found mushrooms on the edge of the woods, deep in the timber and along wooded fence rows, but there has always been some species of tree around.

Another potential mushroom hunting hot spot could be a burned forest. A year or two after the burn seems to be a good time for good morel production.

Of course, there's also the theories we have heard over the years: the east-west fence line theory, the old apple orchard theory, the old railroad bed theory, the river bottom theory, and the trees with slipping bark theory. Morels are not very picky about where they grow, compared to other types of mushrooms. The truth about finding the best morel stash is..... that morels are where you find them. Good luck hunting this spring!



If you would like more detailed information about mushrooms in Iowa, the Iowa State Extension and Outreach website has a great online resource at:
<https://naturalresources.extension.iastate.edu/encyclopedia/mushroom-foraging-iowa>.



INVESTIGATE

Programs for Kids



Knee-High Naturalist programs are free activities for kids ages 5 and younger. The program activities are designed to help foster learning about nature and exploring the outdoors. Adults that bring the children to the program need to remain with them during the program.

Pre-registration is required to participate.

Call (641)673-9327 or
email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.

April 11 "Birds"

9:30-10:30 am
Environmental Learning Center

Kids will learn some fun facts about birds and play games related to the theme.

*Knee-High Naturalist Day Camps will be held on
June 12, 13 and 15, 2023.*

Check out page 5 for camp information!



Bring your lunch to the Environmental Learning Center from to dine in the Discovery Lab with the naturalist and a featured live animal that lives at the ELC. Following lunch, tour the ELC or take a hike on the trails!

12:00 - 1:00 pm

Tuesday, June 6th "Box Turtles"

Tuesday, July 11th "Corn Snake"

Homeschool Science Labs



Free monthly programs for your children that will provide hands-on learning experiences and excite them about science and nature. Registrations are needed!

Call (641)673-9327 or email
decook@mahaskacountyia.gov to sign up.

April 14 "Woolly Mammoths"

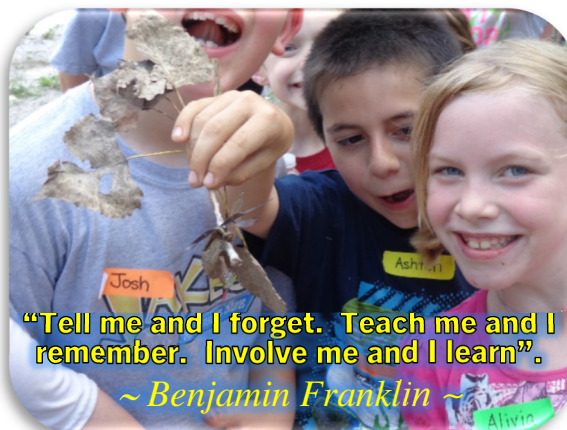
10:00-11:00 am or 1:00-2:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center

May 4 "Fishing @ White Oak"

11:30 am Lunch in picnic shelter
12:30-2:00 pm Fishing
White Oak Conservation Area
2647 Ventura Ave., Rose Hill, IA 52586

May 23 "Fossil Dig"

1:00-3:00 pm
Russell Wildlife Area
2254 - 200th St. Oskaloosa, IA 50577



"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn".

~ Benjamin Franklin ~



Summer Day Camps for Kids

To sign up for any day camp, contact the Mahaska County Conservation Board by calling (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov. Space is limited!

- Registration is now open!
- Cost is \$10.00 per day/per child. Pay by cash or check to MCCB. (adult is free)
- Payment is due by the day of camp.
- Select one or more days of camp – it's up to you!
- Bring a snack and water bottle to camp each day.
- Camp details will be sent to all families that sign up.
- Children attending Knee-High Naturalist Camp must have an adult remain with them. For all other camps, kids may be dropped off no earlier than 15 minutes before camp starts and then picked up right after camp ends for the day.

Knee-High Naturalist Camp "Let's Explore Nature!"

June 12, 13 and 15, 2023

10:00 am – 12:00 pm (each day) at Environmental Learning Center

\$10.00 per day/per camper (adult is free)

Ages: 5 & younger (LIMIT OF 15 CAMPERS)



Monday, June 12: "Grow As We Go" - learn about animal life cycles & metamorphosis

Tuesday, June 13: "Water Wonders"- explore what lives in a pond next to the ELC

Thursday, June 15: "What's Wild?"- learn lots of cool things about wild animals

Jr. Naturalist Camp "Explore Mahaska County"



June 19, 20 and 22, 2023

9:00 am – 12:00 pm (each day) at various county parks

\$10.00 per day/per camper

Ages: 6-10 (LIMIT OF 15 CAMPERS)

Monday, June 19: "Habitat Hikes" at Environmental Learning Center

Tuesday, June 20: "Outdoor Skills" at Quercus Wilderness Area

Thursday, June 22: "Fishing & Fossils" at Russell Wildlife Area

Challenge Camp "Ultimate Outdoor Adventures"



June 26, 27 and 29, 2023

9:00 am – 12:00 pm (each day) at various county parks

\$10.00 per day/per camper

Ages: 11-17 (LIMIT OF 15 CAMPERS)

Monday, June 26: "Canoeing" at Russell Wildlife Area

Tuesday, June 27: "Fishing & Bowfishing" at Russell Wildlife Area

Thursday, June 29: "Camping Basics" at Eveland Access Campground



EXPERIENCE

Programs for Adults



Coffee Club at the ELC

9:00-10:00 am

Friday, May 5th

Friday, June 2nd

Friday, July 7th

Anyone is welcome to come out and enjoy the coffee, home-baked snacks and company! We have a fun time visiting and learning about fascinating things in nature and with MCCB. Bring a cup and a friend! Donations are appreciated to help purchase supplies for future Coffee Clubs.

We meet in the Environmental Learning Center's Discovery Lab (upper level). Feel free to tour the exhibits after having coffee. There are many great displays to see in the ELC! Reservations are not needed to participate.



O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

LUNCH & LEARN DAYS

Bring a lunch and a friend!

*Adults of any age are welcome!
Pre-registrations are appreciated for
supplies and seating.*

*Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 or
email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.*

Gardening – How To Grow Your Wallet

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, April 21, 2023

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Cathy Drost from Mahaska County ISU Extension will come and share information about a creative way to garden.

Paper Airplane Day Celebration

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, May 26, 2023

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Come and learn about the physics of flying paper airplanes from Naturalist, Laura DeCook. She will also guide you in folding your own airplane. How well will it fly? We will give them a flight test and find out!

William Penn Shotgun Sports

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

June 23, 2023

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

For the second year in a row, the William Penn Shotgun Sports team wins the National Championship and many other notable awards. Come and learn about this team's journey to the top ranks from their coach Steve Heaton and team member KayLynn Sieber.

Prairie Picnic (potluck luncheon)

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

July 14, 2023

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Bring a friend and a potluck item to share with the group. Drinks and table service will be provided. Naturalist, Laura DeCook will present information about prairies while we have a picnic. Let us know what food you plan on bringing when you sign up.



DISCOVER

Events for All Ages

Eveland Access Campground

OPEN

for the season at
12:00 pm on
Friday, April 21, 2023!

Sites are first-come, first-served at \$20 per night.

STUDY FINDS
CAMPERS
REALLY ARE
HAPPY



Eveland Access Summerfest

3:00 – 8:00 pm

Saturday, June 3, 2023

Eveland Access Campground

2890 Galeston, Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577

The Mahaska County Conservation Board and Muse Music Store is hosting the 4th annual summertime festival called Eveland Access Summerfest to celebrate the summer! This will be a fun day packed with FREE LIVE MUSIC, yard games, Dutch oven cooking demonstrations and food vendors right next to the Des Moines River. *For more details, go to page 8 of this newsletter!*

Explore the Solar System! (3 days)

Wednesday, July 5, 2023

10:00-11:00 am & 1:00-2:00 pm

Thursday, July 6, 2023

10:00-11:00 am & 1:00-2:00 pm

Friday, July 7, 2023

1:00-2:00 pm & 6:30-7:30 pm

Environmental Learning Center

2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577

Come and experience our solar system in a way that you have never seen! MCCB is offering the public an opportunity to go inside a digitarium (see photo) and view the solar system in a 360-degree viewing room. It's incredible to find yourself submersed in outer space while digital images surround you! Reservations are not needed. Stop by during one of the dates and times listed above. Please park behind the ELC and enter the main lower-level door.



Digitarium

SUMMER CAMP FOR TEACHERS!

JULY 25, 2023

9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS JULY 14TH!

Fishing
Archery
Fossil Digging
Nature Hiking
Canoeing
ELC Tour & More!



Sign up by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327
or email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.

Teachers and paraeducators in Mahaska County and surrounding areas are invited to come and have fun (as much as your students would) at a FREE summer camp with Mahaska County Conservation!

Pair up with another teacher/paraeducator in your school to compete in fun activities against other teams for bragging rights and a trophy! Bring a backpack with lunch, water, sunscreen, and attire for canoeing. All other supplies will be provided. No experience is necessary!

Camp will take place at the ELC in the morning and at Russell Wildlife Area in the afternoon.

Mahaska County Environmental Learning Center - 2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Russell Wildlife Area - 2254 - 200th St., New Sharon, IA 50207

MOVIE NIGHTS!

AT THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

STARTS AT 7PM

FRIDAY, JUNE 23

FRIDAY, JULY 14

MOVIES TO BE ANNOUNCED

- POPCORN
- INDOOR VIEWING
- EASY PARKING
- TOUR THE ELC



DISCOVER

Events for All Ages



**EVELAND ACCESS
SUMMERFEST**

JUNE 3, 2023
3:00 - 8:00 PM

LIVE MUSIC:
PERFORMANCE EMCEE: STACEY CRAIG

3:00-4:00 PM SISTERS B
4:15-5:15 PM JAKE SCHRODT
6:00-8:00 PM ROBERT DEITCH

AFTERNOON EXTRAS FOR EXTRA FUN!
BAGS TOURNAMENT
YARD GAMES
MUSIC LESSONS IN SHELTER HOUSE
SNO BIZ
MAHASKA KETTLE CORN
SMOKIN FATTY'S BBQ

3:00 PM DUTCH OVEN COOKING DEMOS
4:00 PM DUTCH OVEN FOOD SAMPLING
5:00 PM SMOKIN FATTY'S BBQ MEAL (FREE-WILL OFFERING)

EVELAND ACCESS CAMPGROUNDS
2890 GALESTON AVE.
OSKALOOSA, IA 52577

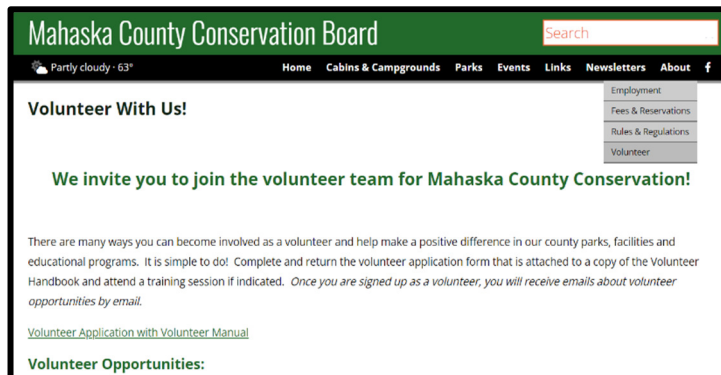
CAMPING AVAILABLE FIRST-COME, FIRST-SERVED
\$20/NIGHT

CALL MCCB AT 641.673.9327 FOR MORE INFORMATION



VOLUNTEER

Information & News



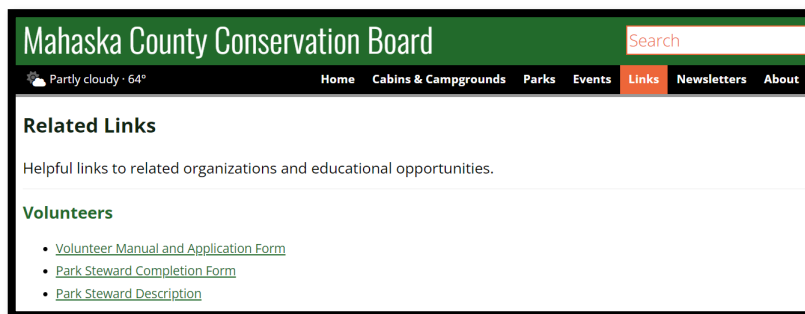
Finding volunteer information is now easier to do!

1. Go to the MCCB website www.mahaskaconservation.com.
2. Hover over the "About" tab and select "Volunteer".
3. You will find information about volunteering!

Volunteer Opportunities:

Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov to learn more.

- **Environmental Learning Center Hosts** - This volunteer position helps greet visitors at the ELC. We will plan a schedule around your available hours and our open hours of operation. You will need to complete a volunteer training session and background check to be an ELC Host.
- **Park Stewards** - This volunteer position allows you to "adopt" one or more Mahaska County Conservation areas and become stewards of those natural areas. This program allows the freedom to work according to your own schedule and interests with the guidance of MCCB staff. All training, tools, equipment, and expertise necessary for volunteers to carry out stewardship duties are provided by MCCB. You will need to complete a volunteer training session to become a Park Steward. **Park Stewards are asked to complete a Park Steward Completion Form after a volunteer activity in one of our county parks.**



Find the Park Steward Completion Form Here!

1. Go to the MCCB website www.mahaskaconservation.com.
2. Select the "Links" tab.
3. You will find the link for "Park Steward Completion Form".

- **Environmental Education Volunteer** - This volunteer position helps the naturalist with educational programs, field trips and public events. There are endless opportunities all year long! You will need to complete a volunteer training session and background check to be an Environmental Education Volunteer.
- Help feed educational animals at the ELC
- Photograph/video event activities
- Feed birds at ELC bird feeder
- Clean up pollinator garden at ELC
- School field trip volunteers in late April through May
- Summerfest at Eveland Access event on June 3 (help with family games/activities, set up/take down, parking vehicles)



MAHASKA COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

Open hours are 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Monday through Friday or by appointment.

Mahaska County's programs and facilities are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on non-discrimination regarding race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, and handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Mahaska County Conservation Board or the office for Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington D.C. 29240.

The Prairie Star

The Prairie Star is the quarterly newsletter of the Mahaska County Conservation Board and is emailed to those persons on our mailing list. There is no charge for the newsletter, although contributions to help defray costs are greatly appreciated. Please help us by keeping us informed of any change of email address or if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter.

Mahaska County Conservation Board MEETING DATES

MCCB's monthly board meetings begin at
7:30 p.m. Public is welcome to attend.

April 6, 2023

May 4, 2023

June 1, 2023

July 6, 2023

Lower level of the Mahaska County
Environmental Learning Center
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577

*Dates and times are subject to change.
Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 for more information.*

Mahaska County Conservation Board

Willie Van Weelden, Oskaloosa,	Chairperson
Steve Dixon, Oskaloosa	Vice-Chairperson
Curt Jager, Eddyville	Secretary
Linda Fox, Rose Hill	Member
Jennifer Peterson, Oskaloosa	Member

STAFF

Chris Clingan	Director
Laura DeCook	Naturalist
Tommy VanRenterghem	Park Ranger
Jason Ryan	Park Ranger
Dorothy Wedgewood	Administrative Assistant
KayLynn Sieber	Environmental Learning Center Host
Charlie Figy	Summer Park Technician

Mission Statement

The primary mission of this organization shall be to create an awareness of our natural environment, encourage a state of harmony between people and their natural communities, develop and implement public conservation policy, maintain the public's investment in our natural resources, and strive diligently within the budget restraints to provide adequate services for the environmental education and enjoyment of the citizens of Mahaska County.