



The Prairie Star

Newsletter

Volume 41, Issue 2

Spring/Summer 2024

Green Iowa AmeriCorps in Mahaska County

By Aubrey Brown

Green Iowa AmeriCorps Land & Water Steward Coordinator

Green Iowa AmeriCorps (GIA) is a statewide branch of the national service program AmeriCorps founded in 2009 to address several environmental issues that Iowa communities face through land and water stewardship and environmental education. Green Iowa AmeriCorps partners with various entities called host sites across the entire state where 11-month, 6-month, and 3-month summer members can gain valuable knowledge and skills while being able to help their communities. The Mahaska Partnership host site exists as a partnership with the City of Oskaloosa, William Penn University, the Mahaska Soil and Water Conservation District, and Mahaska County Conservation. In 2023, GIA and Mahaska County Conservation became official partners after discovering that our missions align and by forming a partnership, Mahaska County Conservation could receive additional



(Above) Some of the Green Iowa AmeriCorps team members from summer of 2023.

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help to preserve their parks while GIA members could receive mentorship on natural resource management and learn a variety of skills.

Last year, members were able to help with park beautification by painting structures and maintaining trails. This year there are many things in the works! Alongside Mahaska County Master Gardeners, GIA will be helping with planting an array of native grasses and flowers at the Eveland Access cabins. This will create beautiful scenery and increase habitat for Iowa's pollinators. Native landscaping at the Environmental Learning Center will be done as well! GIA has also been working with GIS to map the location and condition of all county park signs to help park users navigate to each park. Another way GIA has been using GIS is creating a park survey so that county park users can report any problems with the trails such as downed trees or sharing anything interesting that users find in the parks. We would love to hear about your county park endeavors! For now, you can find the survey on the "Links" tab of mahaskaconservation.com. We are hoping to add QR codes to access the survey at the county park entrances very soon!



(Above) An AmeriCorps member helping with park beautification at a Mahaska County park.

That is just a few projects GIA and Mahaska County Conservation are working together on; there are so many possibilities! GIA is very excited to work with Mahaska County Conservation and is looking forward to seeing the results of the projects.

Eveland Access Cabins
1681 – 290th St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577

A photograph of a small, single-story cabin with a brown roof and wooden siding. The cabin is surrounded by picnic tables and benches. The background shows a clear blue sky and some trees.

**Apple and Birch Cabins
are available for rent year-round.**

To view pictures of the cabins and find rental information, visit the MCCB website: www.mahaskaconservation.com or call MCCB at (641)673-9327.

**CAMPGROUND
OPENING
APRIL 19
12:00 PM
EVELAND ACCESS**

Check out Eveland Access Campground on Facebook for camping and summer event information!

NATURE NOTES

American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*

by Laura DeCook, Naturalist

The American Woodcock is a rather odd-looking bird with brown, black and buff-mottled plumage. They have large eyes set far back on the head, and a long bill. The male and female are similar in appearance, with females being a little larger and having a slightly longer bill. The woodcock is also known by other names such as a timberdoodle, bog snipe, brush snipe, and even Labrador twister. The woodcock is a member of the wading bird family, which includes common snipe, plovers and killdeer.



Woodcocks are migratory game birds. In Iowa, we generally do not see many of them over vast areas, but they are not as uncommon as you might think. In Iowa, the most woodcocks that we find are during the spring and fall seasons. These birds are either flying through the state toward southern wintering grounds in the fall or making their way back to northern nesting grounds in the spring. Some nesting does occur in Iowa.

Woodcocks are often solitary, staying by themselves and not forming into flocks or coveys like quail. They are active during the day and, periodically, during nighttime hours. During the daytime, they are usually found in moist, young forests with thick understory. They use their long, flexible-tipped bill to probe for the earthworms which make up the bulk of their diet. They also consume various insect larvae, ants, crickets, and beetles. During the night, they use nearby fields and openings to roost, feed and mate.

With the arrival of spring, woodcocks perform an amazing mating ritual at dawn and dusk each day. Aldo Leopold's "Sky Dance" essay in his book *A Sand County Almanac* give a great description of the woodcock dance:

"He flies in low from some neighboring thicket, alights on the bare moss, and at once begins the overture: a series of queer throaty peents spaced about two seconds apart, and sounding much like the summer call of the nighthawk.

Suddenly the peenting ceases and the bird flutters skyward in a series of wide spirals, emitting a musical twitter. Up and up he goes, the spirals steeper and smaller, the twittering louder and louder, until the performer is only a speck in the sky. Then, without warning, he tumbles like a crippled plane, giving voice in a soft liquid warble that a March bluebird might envy. At a few feet from the ground he levels off and returns to his peenting ground, usually to the exact spot where the performance began, and there resumes his peenting.

It is soon too dark to see the bird on the ground, but you can see his flights against the sky for an hour, which is the usual duration of the show."

Most people have access to woodcock habitat, on private or public grounds. If you are unfamiliar with this bird or have never witnessed its courtship display, it is worth the effort to watch them!



American Woodcocks walk with a rocking motion so they look like they are dancing! Researchers aren't sure why woodcocks bob this way, but some believe that it may help them hunt by disturbing earthworms.

PROGRAMS FOR KIDS



Insect Olympics

April 9 @ 9:30-10:30 am

Kids will learn about the amazing abilities of insects and have fun with Olympic-style activities. **FREE PROGRAM!**



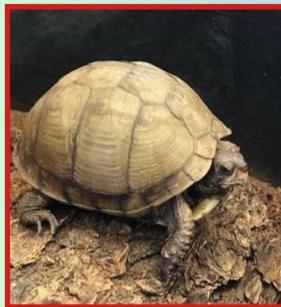
Knee-High Naturalist Day Camps

June 10, 11, 12

Kids will learn about nature and wildlife at these summer camps. More information is on page 6 of this newsletter.



Saturdays at the



Live Animal Feeding May-August

1:00 pm on Saturdays

Come watch us feed our ambassador animals!

Fish	Snake	Turtle
May 4	May 11	May 18
May 25	June 1	June 8
June 15	June 22	June 29
July 6	July 13	July 20
July 27	August 3	August 10
August 17		

Homeschool Science Lab

"Fossil Hunt"

At this FREE program, kids will learn how the Russell Wildlife Area was once a rock quarry and is now a great place to enjoy nature and find fossils. All supplies will be provided, but feel free to bring your own. Hand trowels work great!



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

**Friday, April 5, 2024
1-2 pm
@ Russell Wildlife Area**

Homeschool Science Lab

"Fishing Day"

**May 2, 2024
1:00-3:00 pm @
Russell Wildlife
Area Ponds**

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

Fishing Supplies are provided, but you may bring your own.



**"Woo hoo!
We are
signed up
for summer
camps!"**



**Are your kids
signed up for
summer camps?**

**If not, turn the
page for
information!**



PROGRAMS FOR KIDS



KIDS SUMMER CAMPS

- Registration is now open!
- Cost is \$10.00 per day/per child.
- Pay by cash or check to Friends of Mahaska Co. Conservation.
- 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 Day Camp



June 10-12, 2024
10:00 am - Noon (each day)
\$10/day per camper (adult is free)
Ages 5 & Younger (limit 15 campers)

- Monday, June 10: Wild Animal Safari @ Environmental Learning Center
- Tuesday, June 11: Fishing & Fossils @ Russell Wildlife Area
- Wednesday, June 12: Let's Go Camping @ Quercus Wilderness Area

Jr. Naturalist Day Camp



June 17-19, 2024
10:00 am - 1:00 pm (each day)
\$10/day per camper
Ages 6-10 (limit 15 campers)

- Monday, June 17: Plants & Pollinators @ Environmental Learning Center
- Tuesday, June 18: Camp loway @ Environmental Learning Center
- Wednesday, June 19: Lake Hike & Fishing @ White Oak Conservation Area

Challenge Day Camp



June 24-26, 2024
10:00 am - 1:00 pm (each day)
\$10/day per camper
Ages 11-17 (limit 15 campers)

- Monday, June 24: Fishing @ Russell Wildlife Area
- Tuesday, June 25: County Park Service Project Day (TBA)
- Wednesday, June 26: Canoeing at Russell Wildlife Area

Detailed camp information can be found on Facebook and our website
www.mahaskaconservation.com.

Scan the QR Code to sign up.

For questions and to register by phone or email, contact us
at (641)673-9327 or decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.



PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

COFFEE CLUB

AT THE ELC

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 Mahaska County Conservation. 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.

I can't explain this with science, but the cup you drink your coffee out of matters.



Friday, April 5
Thursday, May 2
Thursday, June 6
Thursday, July 11
Thursday, August 1



O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

Adults of any age are welcome!

Pre-registrations are appreciated for supplies and seating.

For questions or registrations, call (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.

Homemade Maple Syrup

11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Friday, April 19, 2024

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Come and learn how easy and fun it is to make maple syrup from tree sap. Naturalist, Laura DeCook, will share her knowledge on tapping trees in Mahaska County. Participants will be able sample some fresh maple syrup!

Underwater Critters

11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Friday, May 24, 2024

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

After eating lunch, Naturalist, Laura DeCook, will lead everyone in a fun, indoor activity to explore what lives in a pond.

Game Day

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Thursday, June 20, 2024

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Join us for a fun time playing board games, card games, and eating snacks. You are welcome to bring your favorite game to play! We hope to have a smorgasbord of snacks, so please bring some goodies to share. Coffee, lemonade and water will be provided.

Green Iowa AmeriCorps

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Thursday, July 25, 2024

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Green Iowa AmeriCorps has been working with Mahaska County Conservation since the summer of 2023. They have been involved in many conservation projects. Come and learn from an AmeriCorps member what they have been doing in Mahaska County.

PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES



The American Buffalo
“Into the Storm”

1 - 3 pm
April 18, 2024

Sign up to attend by contacting
 (641)673-9327 or
 decook@mahaskcountyia.gov.

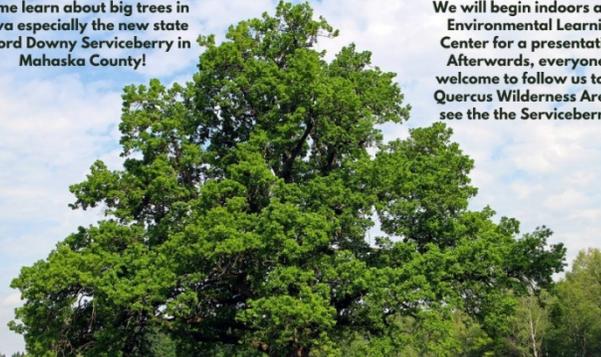
Come to the Environmental Learning Center to watch the Ken Burn’s documentary that explains how Americans in the early 1900’s worked to save the national animal from extinction.

Iowa’s Big Trees

Guest Speaker: Bailey Yotter, Iowa NRCS State Forester

Come learn about big trees in Iowa especially the new state record Downy Serviceberry in Mahaska County!

We will begin indoors at the Environmental Learning Center for a presentation. Afterwards, everyone is welcome to follow us to the Quercus Wilderness Area to see the the Serviceberries.



Tuesday, April 30th @ 6:00 pm
 Environmental Learning Center, 2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577

OUTDOOR FAMILY PROGRAMS

6:00 - 7:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center

May 30 - Pond Study
 Discover amazing things that live in a pond.

June 13 - Bowfishing Basics
 Learn how to shoot a bowfishing bow. Equipment is provided.

June 27 - Dutch Oven Picnic
 Pack a picnic for your supper, learn how to cook Dutch oven-style and enjoy a sample for dessert.

July 11 - I-Spy Hike
 Test your skills on an outdoor I-spy hike!

July 25 - Meet A Snake
 Come and meet Oscar the corn snake. He loves to be held and be in photos!

August 8 - Animal Tracking
 We will make plaster tracks and look for signs of wildlife in Caldwell Park.

August 22 - Turtle Races
 Ready, set, go! Which box turtle will win the race?



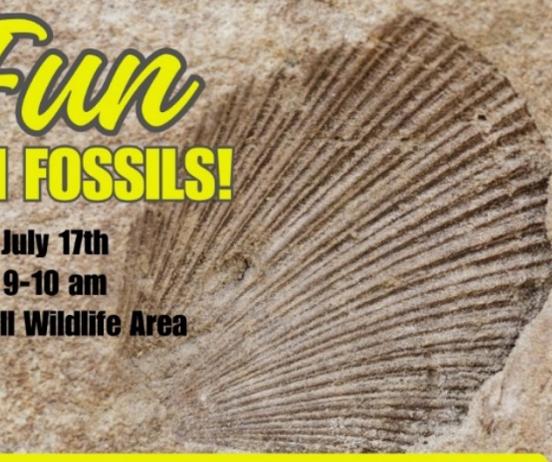
Registration is appreciated by calling (641)673-9327 or emailing decook@mahaskcountyia.gov.

Fun WITH FOSSILS!

July 17th
9-10 am
Russell Wildlife Area

Let’s dig for fossils! Digging trowels will be provided, but please bring water and a hat for shade!

To sign up, call (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskcountyia.gov.



Discover Nature in Iowa!



MAHASKA COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER
 2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
 Ph: (641)673-9327

NEW HOURS

Monday - Wednesday	12:30-4:30 pm
Thursday & Friday	12:30-7:00 pm
Saturday	10 am - 2 pm
Sunday	CLOSED

PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES

Muse PRESENTS **MAHASKA COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD**

EVELAND ACCESS 2024

SUMMER FEST

MUSIC BY THE RIVER

June 1st, 2024
12:00 pm to 10:00 pm

LIVE MUSIC LINE UP:

- Blind Faith Explorer** - Modern Acoustic Rock
- Annie Vander** - Country
- Ashlyn** - Alternative
- Gemma Brice** - Indie Pop
- Nick Ryan** - Country
- Noah Mizelle** - Old Outlaw Country
- Jake Schrodt** - Outlaw Country
- Smokesville** - Country to Rock & Roll

ACTIVITIES
BINGO
SAND VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT
CORN HOLE TOURNAMENT
FOOD FOR KIDS AND ADULTS!
DUTCH OVEN DEMOS
FREE WILL DONATION MEAL

Eveland Access Campgrounds
2890 Galeston Ave
Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577

Scan QR and get your ticket
FREE EVENT

info: sup@musemusicstore.com
641-676-MUSE

ABOUT OUR EVENT

The dynamic duo of Mahaska County Conservation and the Muse Music Store presents the hottest ticket in town - the 5th annual Eveland Access Summerfest on Saturday, June 1, 2024!

Get ready for a music extravaganza at Eveland Access Campgrounds by the Des Moines River.

From noon to 10 pm, groove to various music genres, savor scrumptious local eats, join fun tournaments, and shout "BINGO" an unforgettable day out!

MUSIC

Get ready for a musical rollercoaster in this edition! We've got a mixtape of local talents spanning from indie pop to rock, with a sprinkle of old country vibes. While most acts are homegrown, we've also snagged a few gems from neighboring states.

- NICK RYAN**
- SMOKESVILLE**
- GEMMA BRICE**
- JAKE SCHRODT**
- ASHLYN**
- NOAH MIZELLE**
- ANNIE VANDER**
- BLIND FAITH EXPLORER**

REGISTER AND GET YOUR TICKET

Scan QR and get your ticket

FREE EVENT

info: sup@musemusicstore.com
641-676-MUSE

Picnic in the Park

Mondays in July
11:00 am - Noon

Bring your lunch and join Mahaska County Conservation for a great time in a county park!
EACH DAY YOU JOIN US, YOUR NAME GOES INTO A DRAWING FOR A MAMMOTH PRIZE! PRIZE WINNER WILL BE DRAWN ON JULY 29.

- July 1 @ Quercus Wilderness Area**
3139 Kent Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
- July 8 @ Eddyville Dunes Sand Prairie**
2200 Memory Lane, Eddyville, IA 52553 (by cemetery)
- July 15 @ Russell Wildlife Area**
2254 - 200th St., New Sharon, IA 50207
- July 22 @ White Oak Conservation Area**
2647 Ventura Ave., Rose Hill, IA 5256
- July 29 @ Caldwell Park**
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 51577 (Prize winner selected!)

Cancellations due to weather will be posted on Mahaska County Conservation's Facebook page.

Disc Golf

18-Hole Adventure
AT CALDWELL PARK

***Watch for a date and time for this fun summer program!**

FREE for all ages to learn how to play disc golf. Equipment is available to use.

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

2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577

VOLUNTEERS

There are many ways you can become involved as a volunteer and help make a positive difference in our county parks, facilities and educational programs.

Volunteer Opportunities:

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.

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.





Mahaska County Environmental Learning Center

2342 HWY. 92, OSKALOOSA, IA 52577
641.673.9327



Mondays	12:30-4:30 pm
Tuesdays	12:30-4:30 pm
Wednesdays	12:30-4:30 pm
Thursdays	12:30-7:00 pm
Fridays	12:30-7:00 pm
Saturdays	10:00 am - 2:00 pm
Sundays	CLOSED

Come and see Woolly mammoth bones found in Mahaska County, the 1,000 gallon fish aquarium, live animals, and so much more!

The Prairie Star

The Prairie Star a newsletter of the Mahaska County Conservation Board and is emailed to those persons on our mailing list. There is no charge for the newsletter. Please help us by keeping us informed of any change of email address or if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter. You can contact us by calling (641)673-9327 or by emailing decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.

Mahaska County Conservation

Mahaska County Conservation'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.

Mahaska County Conservation Board MEETING DATES

MCCB's monthly board meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

April 15, 2024
May 20, 2024
June 17, 2024
July 15, 2024
August 19, 2024

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

Steve Dixon , Oskaloosa	Chairperson
Curt Jager , Eddyville	Secretary
Linda Fox , Rose Hill	Member
Jennifer Peterson , Oskaloosa	Member
Chuck Webb , Oskaloosa	Member

STAFF

Chris Clingan	Director
Laura DeCook	Naturalist
Tommy VanRenterghem	Park Ranger
Jason Ryan	Park Ranger
Dorothy Wedgewood	Administrative Assistant
Rosemary Miller	ELC Attendant
Ashley Hunter	ELC Attendant

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.