



The Prairie Star

Newsletter

Volume 37, Issue 2

Summer 2020

Summertime at Mahaska County Parks

By Laura DeCook

MCCB Naturalist

Summer is upon us and the Mahaska County Conservation Board would like to invite you to explore our county parks. Did you know that MCCB manages over 1,700 acres of forests, wetlands, prairies, and parks? Within this land there are 21 separate parks, river accesses and wildlife areas with over six miles of maintained trails. The Mahaska County Conservation Board can guide you through some of these areas this summer during our summer programs. More summer programs are listed online on Facebook under "Mahaska County Conservation" and on our website www.mahaskaconservation.com. This website is a good place to see a listing of our summer programs and a place learn more about each county park.



The Environmental Learning Center is open for visitors Monday through Friday from 12:30 – 4:30 pm. Did you know there is a 1,000-gallon fresh-water aquarium featuring native fish inside the building? There is also an area featuring the mammoth bones discovered in Mahaska County, displays about Iowa's ecosystems, a variety of live animals, and much more! We have recently added a travelling prairie display with fun interactive activities. The ELC is located on the east side of Oskaloosa at 2342 Hwy. 92.

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Explore

Programs for All Ages

MCCB is offering outdoor summer programs in our parks and natural areas. While at programs, we will remain conscious of social distancing and disinfecting and expect the same of our participants. Participants will be asked to complete a short questionnaire relating to Covid-19 exposure prior to the start of each program. We ask that participants stay home if they are not feeling well or may have been exposed to Covid-19 within two weeks prior to the program. We aim to teach the public more about our county parks and show fun ways to enjoy and learn about the outdoors. We hope you can join us!

Program Registrations: (641)673-9326 ext. 2 or decook@mahaskacounty.org



1:00 – 2:00 pm

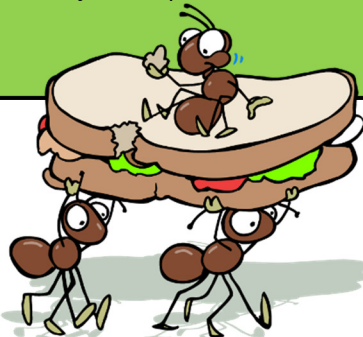
- July 7** Russell Wildlife Area Shelter House
2254 – 200th St., New Sharon
- July 9** Cedar Bluffs State Preserve
1235 – 280th St., Oskaloosa
- July 14** White Oak Conservation Area
2647 Ventura Ave., Rose Hill
- July 21** Quercus Wilderness Area
3139 Kent Ave., Oskaloosa

Bring your lunch to one of Mahaska County's beautiful parks listed above and enjoy the picnic while basking in nature's scenery. You will also want to bring a blanket or chairs to sit on. Reservations are not needed to join the picnics.



What do you call a 100-year-old ant?

ANSWER: Antique



Fossil Digging

Tuesday, July 7

10:30 am - Noon

**Russell Wildlife Area Shelter House
2254 – 200th St., New Sharon, IA**



Bring your family out to the Russell Wildlife Area by 10:30 am on July 7th to take a hike with the naturalist and search for fossils of plants and animals that lived here long ago. We will meet in the shelter house and then hike to a fossil site. You will find fossils such as crinoids, brachiopods and even bryozoans! **Please pre-register to participate.**

- Bring water to drink, sunscreen and a hat or sunglasses to help block the sun.
- Each person will receive a bag to hold fossils and an ID sheet (you may keep some fossils).

Cedar Bluffs Nature Hike

10:30 am – Noon

Thursday, July 9

**Cedar Bluffs State Preserve
1235 – 280th St., Oskaloosa**



Join the naturalist on a hike through the unique sandstone bluffs and canyons of this beautiful state preserve. We will stop at a look out platform over the Cedar Creek and Des Moines River and even a Native American burial mound. Make sure you have sturdy hiking shoes because we will venture off trail to hike up a creek to an area of cool moist air and mosses, ferns, liverworts, and a waterfall. Bring a water bottle, insect spray and sturdy hiking shoes (we will likely get dirty). **Please pre-register to participate.**



Experience Programs for All Ages

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We will also ask everyone to use social distancing at the programs.

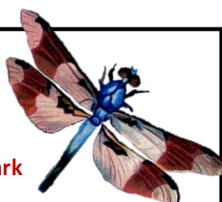
Dragonfly Hunt

Friday, July 10

10:30 am - Noon

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA



Caldwell Park has a fantastic seasonal pond that is the home for many aquatic invertebrates including dragonflies. We will look for dragonflies flying around the park and dip nets into pond water to see dragonflies at all stages of life...and maybe more critters, too! Participants need to bring water bottle, sunscreen, shoes that can get muddy, and an old towel for hand wiping. **Please pre-register to participate.**

Nature Bingo

10:30 am - Noon

Tuesday, July 14

White Oak Conservation Area

2647 Ventura Ave., Rose Hill



White Oak Conservation Area has a fun trail system around the 20-acre lake as well as shelter houses and a playground. Bring your family to participate in a scavenger hunt using a special Bingo card. Each participant will receive a Bingo card with pictures of things to find in the park. When you receive a "Bingo", find the naturalist to receive a prize. Participants are asked to bring a writing utensil such as a pen, marker, crayon. **Please pre-register to participate.**

Did you know?



Ants live in colonies like bees and each ant has a special job. Female ants are worker ants. They build ant hills, find food, take care of the young and protect their colony. The queen ant is also a female, but her job is to lay eggs after mating with the male ants. Not long after mating, the male ants die.

Basics of Bowfishing: Shooting the Bow

Friday, July 17

10:30 am - Noon

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA



Bowfishing is a continually growing outdoor sport. If you would like to learn the basics of shooting bowfishing bows, come join us! All equipment will be provided. Participants will be asked to use nitrile gloves while handling equipment as part of our Covid-19 prevention guidelines. This will be a fun activity for ALL AGES so sign up today! **Please pre-register to participate.**

Eveland Access Summerfest

Saturday, July 18

1:00 – 7:00 pm

Eveland Access Campground

2890 Galeston Ave., Oskaloosa, IA



The Mahaska County Conservation Board and the Muse Music Store is teaming up together to bring families a fun-filled event called the "Eveland Access Summerfest" which will be held at the Eveland Access Campground. This county park will provide a picturesque riverside setting as we enjoy a variety of outdoor summertime activities from 1:00 – 7:00 pm at the campground shelter house area. Bring a lawn chair to relax on, a picnic to eat, and enjoy live music by local artists played throughout the afternoon and evening. From 1:00 - 3:00 pm, Dutch oven cooking demonstrations will be held to show how to cook with and care for Dutch ovens. For more fun, outdoor games will be available to play all day. Please note that hand sanitizing stations will be available, and we are asking everyone to use social distancing at the event.



Investigate

Programs for All Ages

Program Registrations: (641)673-9326 ext. 2 or decook@mahaskacounty.org

Participants will be asked to complete a short questionnaire relating to Covid-19 exposure prior to the start of each program.

We will also ask everyone to use social distancing at the programs.

Quercus Nature Hike

10:30 am - Noon

Tuesday, July 21

Quercus Wilderness Area

3139 Kent Ave., Oskaloosa



Join the naturalist on a hike along the trails of Quercus (meaning oak) Wilderness Area. All ages are welcome to hike. If you bring a picnic lunch, you can also join us afterwards for the Picnic in a Park. Please bring bottled water, insect repellent and wear sturdy shoes for hiking.

Please pre-register to participate.

I Spy Hike

10:30 am - Noon

Thursday, July 23

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa



This is a fun program for all ages! Sign up for a time to go through a trail at Caldwell Park (times listed below) and hunt for things that do not belong in nature. Pretty easy.... or is it? Let us know what time you want to come and tell us how many people are coming with you along with a contact name and phone number. You will park behind the ELC in the south parking lot and follow the signs to where the I-Spy Hike will begin. ***Please pre-register to participate.***

10:30 am	11:15 am
10:45 am	11:30 am
11:00 am	11:45 am

Storytime In the Park

10:30 am - Noon

Friday, July 24

Russell Wildlife Area Shelter House

2254 - 200th St., New Sharon, IA



Kids (and adults) - dress up as your favorite storybook character and bring some books to read at Russell Wildlife Area. Participants will be able to choose a place to read in the park and enjoy the natural setting. Read aloud or to yourselves. Young kids can receive a beaded bracelet in a baggie to make as their own storytelling bracelet. (After reading a story together, ask your child to retell the story and after each comment, slide a bracelet bead to the other side of the wrist). It's a new twist to storytelling! This program is for all ages. I know of adults that would love to lay down on a blanket and read under a shade tree! You may want to bring water and snack. ***Please pre-register to participate.***

Selfie Scavenger Hunt

10:30 am - Noon

Tuesday, July 28

Eddyville Dunes Sand Prairie

901 N. Merino, Eddyville



Bring a phone to take photos of yourself as you find items on a nature scavenger hunt. You can walk with a group or on your own to find items on your list. This will be a fun challenge! Prizes will be given to anyone that takes selfies with everything on the list. If you do not wish to participate in the scavenger hunt, then join us for a hike! Please bring water, sturdy shoes, insect repellent and sunscreen. ***Pre-registration is needed to participate.***



Friends of Mahaska County Conservation – donated a television monitor and dry erase board for the ELC's Discovery Lab.

Valerie Brandt – donated child-sized scissors for crafts.

Kristi, Aiden & Grayson Cox, Nollanne Rust, and Deacon & Drake Cox – hunted for night crawlers and donated them to feed animals at the ELC.

Steve Dixon – donated a log with a hole made by a woodpecker.

Linda Fox – donated stickers, magazines, and pictures for education programs.



Discover Programs for All Ages

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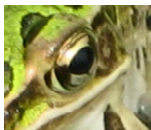
We will also ask everyone to use social distancing at the programs.

"Close-Up" Game on the Trails

10:30 am - Noon

Thursday, July 30

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa



This program is for all ages. Join us for a new twist to a hike around Caldwell Park (location of Environmental Learning Center). Participants will receive a photo of something up-close and you will need to figure out what it is and find it in the park. We will park and meet on the south side of the ELC. **Please pre-register to participate.**

Rainbow Wind Chime Craft

10:30 am - Noon

Friday, July 31

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa



Would you like to make a wind chime craft to hang up at home? We will paint sticks to make awesome-looking wind chimes. It is a simple and easy craft to make and decorate your special area at home! This can be fun for all ages. All supplies will be provided, but you are encouraged to bring paint brushes, so we do not have to share. **Please pre-register to participate.**

Wetland Wonders at Maskunkya Marsh

10:30 am - Noon

Tuesday, August 4

Maskunkya Marsh
2395 Snyder Ave., Oskaloosa



We will explore the Maskunkya Marsh to see what insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds, and mammals live in and around the marsh. Prepare to get your hands and feet dirty as we scoop muck out of the marsh to search for micro invertebrates. It is sooo much fun to do this! To be prepared for this program, please wear old clothes and shoes, bring water to drink and a hand towel to clean your hands. **Please pre-register to participate.**

Cell Phone Game on the Trails

10:30 am - Noon

Thursday, August 6

Environmental Learning Center,
Caldwell Park
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa



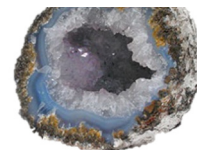
This hike is for all ages. Join the naturalist on the south side of the ELC to learn how to play the cell phone game on the Caldwell Park trails. Basically, each person/group will have a destination to go to in the park. Then you will contact the naturalist by phone and then you will be forwarded a clue of something to find in the park. Once you find it, take a photo, and bring it back to the ELC. You/your group will then have another puzzle to complete successfully. When you complete everything then you receive a prize! Make sure you bring a cell phone. **Please pre-register to participate.**

Nature Show & Tell

10:30 am - Noon

Friday, August 7

Russell Wildlife Area Shelter House
2254 - 200th St., New Sharon, IA



What have you found interesting in nature? Bring the item you found or take a picture and bring it for everyone to see. We will sit in the shade at the Russell Wildlife Area and share stories about our awesome nature finds. **Please do not bring feathers, bird nests, eggs, or any other parts of birds that are protected. Please do not bring protected animals. This is illegal. Please pre-register to participate.**

Animal Tracks

10:30 am - Noon

Tuesday, August 11

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa



Join us as we explore Caldwell Park for animal tracks outdoors. We will make plaster of Paris track molds on the ground and make more from rubber molds for participants to take home. Each participant will receive their own supplies, so sharing will not be necessary. **Please pre-register to participate** due to a limited amount of supplies.



Experiment Programs for All Ages

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Storytime Under the Pines

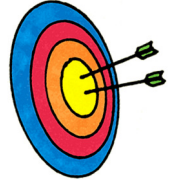
10:30 am - Noon
Thursday, August 13
Russell Wildlife Area Shelter House
2254 – 200th St., New Sharon, IA



Join the naturalist and guest readers for a Storytime under pine trees at Russell Wildlife. It is a fun place to hang out in the shade! We will take a short hike from the parking lot to the pine trees. You will likely want to bring water to drink, a snack to eat and a blanket to sit on. **Please pre-register to participate.**

On Target with Archery

10:30 am - Noon
Friday, August 14
Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa



This activity is for all ages. Join the naturalist on the south side of the ELC to learn how to shoot a bow and arrow. You will learn about archery safety, how to stand and hold a bow while shooting, and the basic equipment needed to shoot. All supplies will be provided. Participants will be asked to wear nitrile gloves while shooting to help with keeping equipment sanitized. **Please pre-register to participate.**



GRAY-HEADED CONEFLOWER is a common native plant in Iowa's prairie remnants and prairie reconstructions. This plant's habitats include moist to slightly dry black soil prairies, clay prairies, thickets, woodland borders, limestone glades, and areas along railroads, particularly where remnant prairies occur. Gray-headed Coneflowers tend to colonize in the more disturbed areas of these habitats. This plant is often found growing in areas of former prairies where all or nearly all the original plants have disappeared.

This native prairie flower grows up to 4' tall when in bloom. The long slender stems are slightly ridged. The flower head is initially light green or grey, but later becomes dark brown. The blooming period occurs from early to late summer and lasts about 1-2 months. There is little or no floral scent – although the seed heads release an anise scent when they are crushed.

Many kinds of insects visit the flowers, especially bees. Other insect visitors include wasps, flies, small butterflies, and beetles. These insects suck nectar from the flowers, although the bees also collect pollen and some beetles feed on pollen. The caterpillars of the Silvery Checkerspot butterfly feed on the foliage, as well as the caterpillars of some moths. Gold Finches occasionally eat the seeds, while some mammals that live on a plant diet eat the foliage and flowering stems, particularly groundhogs and livestock.

Yellow Coneflower is an excellent choice for a wildflower or pollinator garden because of its long blooming period and attractive yellow flowers. It also grows easily from seed and is a good dependable starter. The entire plant is delicately constructed and tends to sway or flutter in the breeze.



BALD EAGLES are a common sight in Mahaska County. They are seen year-round soaring high in the sky and nesting in trees along the rivers each spring.

Eagles glide in the sky using thermals, or rising currents of warm air or up-drafts. They can travel up to 35 miles per hour and as high as 10,000 feet in the air. Several eagles soaring together is called a “kettle of eagles”.

A bald eagle’s tail helps it fly and maneuver in the sky. The tail feathers are spread into a wide fan to create the largest surface area possible and to increase the effect of catching rising warm air thermals and up-drafts while in flight. The tail also helps serve as a brake while landing and helps them control their flight while hunting in the air.

Did you know that eagles have approximately 7,000 feathers on their bodies? Their feathers are lightweight, hollow and serve them well in keeping them warm in the winter and cool in the summer. They can change the angle of their feathers to maintain a comfortable body temperature. While eagles sun themselves on cold winter mornings, they rotate and lift their feathers to make air pockets which help insulate themselves or they tighten the feathers against their body to reduce the insulating effect. The feathers enable eagles to live in cold environments. They do not migrate due to cold weather, but to find better sources of food. Each winter, eagles arrive in Iowa from their nesting grounds in Minnesota and Canada.

At the Environmental Learning Center, we often show the Decorah Bald Eagle live nest cam throughout the afternoon. Stop by to see how much the eaglets have grown this summer! There is also a Bald Eagle mount for you to see up close.

Eveland Access Cabins

1681 – 290th St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577

Cabin Rental Prices:
Sunday-Thursday \$60/night
Friday-Saturday & Holidays \$75/night
Week stay \$420
2 night minimum/3 nights on holidays
For reservations call MCCC at
(641)673-9327 Ext 1.

The Apple and Birch Cabins are available for rent year-round. To view pictures of the cabins and to find more information on renting:
www.mahaskaconservation.com.



WISH LIST

FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

- Frozen minnows for fish feeding
- Frozen mice for snake feeding
- Nightcrawlers for salamander and turtle feeding
- Craft supplies
- Archery and bowfishing rests
- Archery arrows with practice tips
- Archery arrow fletching

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.

MCCB Meeting Dates:

Mahaska County Conservation Board Monthly Meetings

Begins at 7:30 p.m. – Public is welcome to attend
Environmental Learning Center (lower level),
Caldwell Park



**July 9, 2020
August 6, 2020
September 3, 2020**



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



MAHASKA COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER HOURS

12:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Monday through Friday or by appointment.

The Mahaska County Conservation Board meetings are open to the public. Visitors are always welcome and encouraged to attend. The board meets the first Thursday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at the Environmental Learning Center. Please note: these dates are subject to change.

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.

Mahaska County Conservation Board



Curt Jager , Eddyville	Chairperson
Linda Fox , Rose Hill	Vice Chairperson
Peggy Wright , New Sharon	Secretary
Willie Van Weelden , Oskaloosa	Member
Steve Dixon , Oskaloosa	Member

STAFF

Dave Sedivec	Director
Laura DeCook	Naturalist
Tommy VanRenterghem	Park Ranger
Jason Ryan	Park Ranger
Dorothy Wedgewood	Administrative Assistant
Emily Van Der Veer	Musco Seasonal

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.