

The Prairie Star

Newsletter

Volume 37, Issue 1

Winter 2020

Natural Gems in Mahaska County

By Laura DeCook

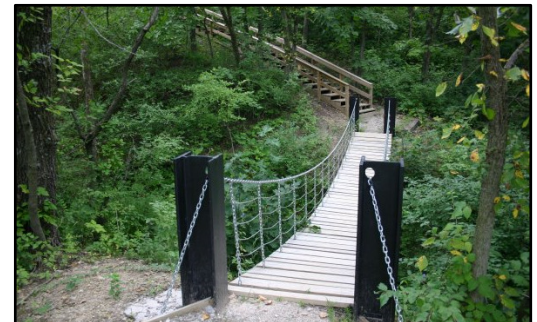
MCCB Naturalist

One of the definitions of a *gem* is “a person or thing considered to be outstandingly good or special in some respect”. So, what is outstandingly good or special regarding nature in Mahaska County? Mahaska County has a great diversity in plants and wildlife in its parks and natural areas and the Environmental Learning Center is becoming a unique place of its own.

The Mahaska County Conservation Board manages over 1,700 acres of forests, wetlands, prairies and parks for people to explore throughout Mahaska County. This includes 21 separate parks, river accesses and wildlife areas with over six miles of maintained trails. The daily park maintenance is done by our park rangers and seasonal employees. You may see them in the county parks mowing, trimming, burning and seeding prairies and food plots, and assisting campers at the campground, which are only a few of the things they do. They are the strong arms that keep our areas beautiful and maintained.

There are abundant wildlife and plants throughout Mahaska County. One of the unique plant species is Ground Pine, a clubmoss that resembles miniature coniferous trees, which is found at Russell Wildlife Area. Cedar Bluffs State Preserve is a fantastic area to look for spring woodland flowers. Dutchman's Breeches,

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Columbine, Mayapples and Bloodroot are common in this area. If you venture off the trail to explore creeks at Cedar Bluffs, you will find rare ferns such as Goldie's Wood Fern and Silvery Glade Fern, mosses, and lichens. Iowa's only terrestrial turtle, the Ornate Box turtle, resides in the Eddyville Sand Dunes. The North Skunk River, South Skunk River and Des Moines River are Mahaska County's three major rivers that are great places for fishing and boating.



The Environmental Learning Center at Caldwell Park is located on the east edge of Oskaloosa on Hwy 92. This is Mahaska County's newest gem for the county residents and visitors. The "ELC" is easily accessible right off the highway and also from the Mahaska Community Recreational trail that loops through Oskaloosa. When you visit inside the center, you will find information about Mahaska County's history, ecosystems, conservation and wildlife. Woolly mammoth bones were discovered in 2010 and bones from these mega animals are on display. Kids enjoy the opportunity to "dig up" replica mammoth bones in the bone-digging table. Another highlight inside the ELC is

a 1,000 gallon fish aquarium that gives an underwater view of some of our native fish species. Other animals such as snakes, salamanders and turtles provide educational opportunities. The ELC has a classroom called the Discovery Lab that is used for many educational programs. The lower level of the ELC has a larger classroom or meeting space and it is currently the location of a travelling snake exhibit.



Mahaska County has a lot to offer nature and outdoor enthusiasts. When you visit these areas, tell us about your experiences. A couple of great ways to connect with us is on Facebook (Mahaska County Conservation) or our website www.mahaskaconservation.com. Enjoy our county's gems!

Homeschool Science Labs

Monthly programs for your children that will provide hands-on learning experiences and excite them about science and nature!

February 6 & 7 "LEGO Molecules"

March 5 & 6 "Plant Adaptations"

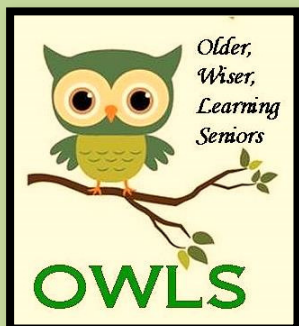
April 2 & 3 "Matter and Oobleck Experiments"

Pre-registrations are needed due to space and supplies. To sign up, call MCCB at (641)673-9327 Ext. 2 or visit our Facebook events page to find the online registration link. All sessions will be held in the Discovery Lab which is on upper level of the Environmental Learning Center.





Explore Programs Just for Adults



*Hey adults,
do you enjoy nature?*
**Then the OWLS
program is for
YOU!**

The OWLS - Older, Wiser, Learning Seniors, is a monthly group program. It is designed for adults and senior learners with an interest in science, nature, conservation and historical topics. Programs are presented monthly by the MCCB Naturalist and guest speakers. The programs will be held on the lower level of the Environmental Learning Center.

Wednesday, January 29th
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

"Be Safe, Secure & Scam-Proof"

Presenter: Melissa Adams, Spring Creek Arms & Defensive Dames

Wednesday, February 26th
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

"Fighting Forest Fires"

Presenter: Ben Hoskinson, Wildland Fire Fighter, US Forest Service

Wednesday, March 25th
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

"Honey Bees"

Presenter: Tina Marshall, local beekeeper

Wednesday, April 29th
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

"Bison of the Prairie"

Presenter: Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist

For detailed descriptions of these events, go to Mahaska County Conservation on Facebook or www.mahaskaconservation.com.



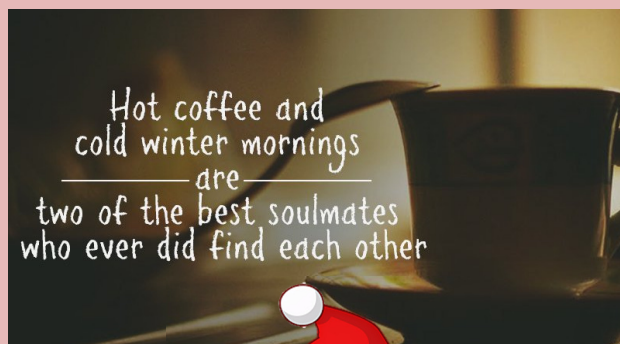
Join us at the **Coffee Break!**



9:30 - 10:30 am
**Environmental
Learning Center**

January 10
February 14
March 13
April 10
May 8

Stop by and visit the ELC, fill up a cup of coffee and indulge in something tasty! This special time is set aside for adults that would like to visit the ELC and talk to others that enjoy nature. It's a perfect time to learn more about the conservation board, its parks and programs, and how you can volunteer.





Explore Programs Just for Kids

Detailed program descriptions are found at Mahaska County Conservation on Facebook and our website www.mchaskaconservation.com.

Critter Cafe



12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Bring your lunch to the Environmental Learning Center to dine with the naturalist and a featured live animal that lives at the ELC. Following lunch, you will be able to take part in a nature lesson that relates to the current season.

Friday, January 17	"How Animals Move"
Friday, February 14	"Animal Valentines"
Friday, March 20	"Woolly Mammoths"
Friday, April 10	"Planting Flowers"

Perfect for Parents & Young Kids,
Homeschool Families, *Day Care Kids*
and kids on school break!



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

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

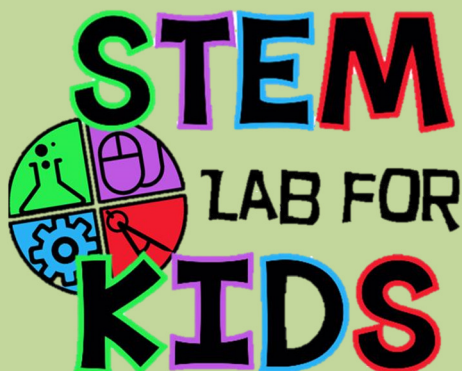
January 8	<i>Hibernating Animals</i>
January 22	<i>Groundhog Predictions</i>
February 5	<i>How to Make Bird Food</i>
February 19	<i>What's Wild?</i>
March 11	<i>Wildlife Water Safari</i>
April 8	<i>Recycling</i>
April 22	<i>Animal Aerobics & Trail Hike</i>

Q: Why do scientists think hummingbirds hum?

A: Because they can't remember the words!

Q: What do you call a funny chicken?

A: A comedi-hen!



**Fun and educational science activities
for kids ages 8 and older!**

Friday, **March 20 (10-11:00 am)** "Whose Scat is That?"

Monday, **April 27 (10-11:00 am)** "Homemade Dog Treats"

Call to sign up! (641)673-9327 Ext. 2 or online at
<https://forms.gle/75DmmeVcizRKpQRc9>



Explore Programs Just for Kids

Detailed program descriptions are found at Mahaska County Conservation on Facebook and our website www.mahaskaconservation.com.

Just for kids

DRESS UP PROGRAMS!

Superhero Animals

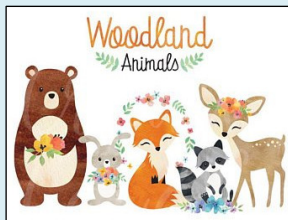
Monday, January 20
11:00 am – 12:30 pm
Environmental Learning Center



Boys and girls are invited to dress up as superheroes and come out to the Environmental Learning Center to participate in a program that will teach them about AMAZING things wild animals do to survive. Your superhero can match his or her strengths with animals in fun contests and games. We will have lunch after the program, so bring a lunch with you.

Woodland Animal Tea Party

Friday, February 21
10:30 am – 12:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center



Boys and girls are invited to a tea party at the Environmental Learning Center! Join in on the fun by coming dressed up in your finest attire. Feel free to bring a friend or stuffed animal to sit with you. *Your animal can dress up, too!* We will have games and activities based around the woodland animal theme. Since it is a tea party, refreshments will be provided. Pre-registration is appreciated. Sign up at this link: <https://forms.gle/2VHFDMrt4iyvLviW6> or by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327 ext. 2.

Explorer Nature Hike & Picnic

Friday, March 27
10:30 am – 12:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center



Dress up as an "explorer" (and for the weather) to join the naturalist on a nature hike around Caldwell Park. Following the hike, we will have a picnic lunch so bring a lunch with you! Pre-registration is not needed.



Kids' Science Project Exhibitions

at the Environmental Learning Center

Turn on your creative and science-thinking minds to plan and build a STEM science project display to be shown off at the Environmental Learning Center.

Kids of any age can sign up one time (first-come, first-served) to be one of four projects to be displayed each month from January through April. Sign-ups are found at this online link:

<https://forms.gle/6RkkoCMFWeuwuVBq8>
or call MCCB at (641)673-9327 Ext. 2

The topics for each month will be:

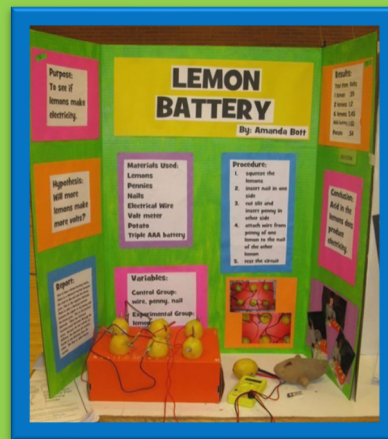
January "Energy & Motion"

February "Solar Systems"

March "Weather"

April "Ecosystems"

- Create a project like you would make for a science fair.
- Public visiting the ELC can write comments about your project.
- Show off what you have learned about science!



Winter Programs for all ages

Coal Mining

Monday, March 30
6:30 – 8:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center



Guest speaker, Mr. Doug Wilson, is returning to the ELC to give a presentation on "Coal Mining". Last October, Mr. Wilson gave an excellent presentation about Coal Mining on the Muchiknock Creek. Now he is returning to explain how coal is taken out of the ground and what families experienced as coal miners. Mr. Wilson has been studying coal mines from this area of Iowa all his life. His presentation will be very informative and include photographs and artifacts that he has collected over the years. Refreshments will be provided. There is no cost to this program and registrations are not needed.

Dutch Oven 101 & Dinner

Friday, April 24
6:00 – 8:30 pm
Environmental Learning Center



Have you ever wanted to learn how to cook and bake with a Dutch oven? Here is your chance to learn all about it at this hands-on 101 class. We will cover Dutch oven care and tips on how to use them. If you have your own Dutch oven, bring it along with a recipe of your choice and you will receive help in making it. If you don't have a Dutch oven, come anyway to see what it's all about! Food prepared at this class will be shared as a potluck. Please bring your own table service items. For questions, call MCCB at (641)673-9327 Ext. 2. Pre-registration is required! Sign up by calling MCCB or at this website:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=TccZ4sQS60O3XE1fYcfaO528vncd4RltDXwhnDz7eZUMjIKOFdOVTdKtK1GN UdSWIRKSjFWNDdBUy4u>

Stroll in the Park

Monday, April 27
12:30 – 1:30 pm
Environmental Learning Center

After lunch, bring the kids and strollers to join the naturalist on an afternoon stroll on the bike trail. Kids can take part in a nature scavenger hunt as everyone gets some fresh spring air. We will park and meet in the back of the Environmental Learning Center. When our walk is finished, feel free to look around the ELC. *Anyone* is welcome to join us on the walk!



Thank You

With gratitude, the Mahaska County Conservation Board extends our appreciation to the following people and businesses for their donations and volunteer time.
Thank you!

Halloween Bash Volunteers & Donors:

Charlie Van Dorn	Barb Vander Wilt
Eddyville Fire Department	Mary Jane Sullivan
Oskaloosa True Value	Peggy Wright
Mahaska Drug	Adam Anderson
Whet Your Pallet	Ashley Chenoweth
Oskaloosa HyVee	Karen Powell
Linda Fox	

And thank you to all the campers that decorated their campsites for the weekend – they looked awesome!

Youth Outdoor Field Day Sponsors & Volunteers:

Mahaska County Pheasants Forever
Mahaska County Izaak Walton League
Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
Bowfishing Association of Iowa
Oskaloosa Police K-9 Unit
Oskaloosa Fire Department
Skunk River Retriever Club
Gateway Church of the Nazarene
Nelson Pioneer Farm & Museum
Mahaska County Master Gardeners
Oskaloosa Trees Forever
Oskaloosa Hy-Vee
Oskaloosa Fareway
William Penn Wildlife Ecology Club
Swim's Sports Awards & Screen Printing
Tackle Boxx Bait & Archery Shop
Benton County Conservation
Jerry Rempe
Les & Kim Sytsma
Marion & Marj Striegel
Glenn & Susan Knox
Pella Rolscreen Foundation
Spring Creek Arms

Other donations:

Jeff Pierson – Fishing pole donation
Mike Eaton – Bird book donations

Did you know?

GROUNDHOGS....

- They live in a large burrow called a sette.
- They are active during the day and spend time underground mending and expanding their settes.
- They eat a large variety of vegetation and supplement their diet with insects, snails and grubs.
- They use a shrill whistle-like warning call to alert other groundhogs of danger. The call gives them a nickname "whistle pig".
- They are one of few animals that enter a true hibernation during the winter.





IOWA JUNIOR NATURALIST

These wonderful outdoor learning opportunities are for kids 6-18 years old. Participants will receive a colorful Iowa Junior Naturalist Patch and Certificate of Achievement upon completion.

Earn a patch!

Program Attendance

- Participants must attend 3 different programs. Check out this newsletter to find out information about all of our programs!

Independent Activities

- 6-12 years old – complete 2 independent activities
- 13-18 years old – one independent activity; must be a formal volunteer commitment totaling 1 or more hours

Awards

- All the above requirements must be completed in a 12-month period. (Jan. 1, 2019 – Dec. 31, 2019). An award celebration will be held at the end of the calendar year.

Brochures to record your participation are available at public programs and at the Environmental Learning Center.

Eveland Access Cabins

1681 – 290th St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577

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

For reservations call MCCB at (641)673-9327 Ext 1.

Cabin Rental Prices:
Sunday-Thursday \$60/night
Friday-Saturday \$75/night
Week stay \$420
2 night minimum/3nights on holidays



WISH LIST

FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

- Child-sized scissors
- Frozen minnows for fish feeding
- Frozen mice for snake feeding
- Nightcrawlers for salamander and turtle feeding
- Vacuum cleaner for carpet and rugs at the ELC

The Prairie Star

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

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



January 7, 2020
February 6, 2020
March 5, 2020
April 2, 2020



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

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.



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.

**A large-type version of this newsletter
is available on request.**

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



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Park Ranger

Dorothy Wedgewood

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Winter 2020



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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Mahaska County Conservation Board



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