



Volume 39, Issue 1

Winter 2021-22

## Ice Fishing Can Cure Your Winter Blues

By Laura DeCook

Naturalist

While we wait for warmer weather to return, why not bundle up, be adventurous and go ice fishing? Catching fish through the ice is a favorite way for some people to catch fish to eat. Mahaska County residents are fortunate to have quite a few nearby lakes and ponds in the Mahaska and surrounding counties to use for ice fishing. Mahaska County Conservation Board has ponds available for public ice fishing. Some popular fishing areas include Russell Wildlife Area and the White Oak Conservation Area.

Mahaska County resident, Matt Waite, takes his family fishing year-round. He shared with me what he likes about ice fishing. Matt said, *"I think it's the mystery and wonder of it, especially on a new lake or on one you don't fish open water on very much. You walk out on the ice and it all looks the same on the surface. So, you sort of learn the lake through maps and then slowly explore one hole at a time to find the right cover that's holding fish and then convince them to eat at a time of year when their bodies aren't telling them to feed a lot. And on the surface it all looks desolate and bleak, but underneath, the fish are moving around from one depth to another, bugs are surprisingly active and there's actually a lot going on under that surface that looks so unwelcoming. And fish caught through the ice are the best eating too!"*



Morgan Waite ice fishing.  
Photo courtesy of Matt Waite.

(Continued on p. 2)

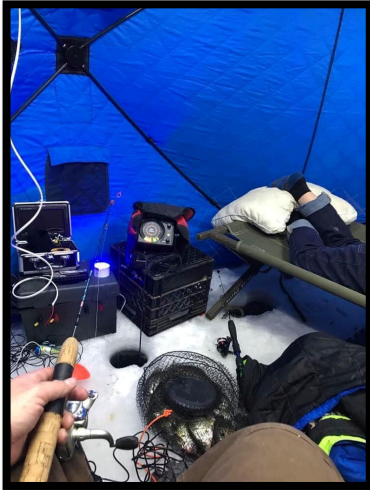
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(Ice Fishing continued)



The Waite family finds comfort in their ice fishing shelter.  
Photo courtesy of Matt Waite.

When you go ice fishing you try to find the perfect fishing spot to catch fish. This is often next to a submerged tree, a boulder pile or some other underwater structure where fish like to hide. Once you have selected a place to fish, drill a hole through the ice until you can see open water. A hand or an electric auger can do the trick. Next, unpack your sled and find your tiniest lures, jigging rods or tip-ups to catch the fish. More fish have been taken through the ice using live minnows on the jigs more than any other bait. However, wax worms, meal worms, night crawlers, and frozen minnows also work well.

You will probably want to get out a bucket or some other portable seat so you can sit down comfortably and look down into the hole to see what's happening. A skimmer is helpful to keep the hole clear of the ice and slush that forms during the day. Sometimes multiple holes will need to be made to find the fish. Once they are found, catching them can keep you busy!

While ice fishing, some people like to keep their bait moving all the time. There are special 'thrumming' rods available to help you do this, but you can move the bait yourself easily. Gently allow

your bait to go to the bottom of the pond or lake and allow it to stay there for a while. After several minutes, 'trigger' or make your line pop up and down a little bit. Then if nothing happens after a few more minutes, raise your line up to a new depth to about four feet higher than where it was. Repeat this process until the bait is right up, nearly in the hole.

Some people don't mind ice fishing outdoors, but some enjoy the warmer comfort of sitting inside an ice shelter. Everything you need is within an arm's reach inside the shack: the fish finder, bait bucket, tackle box, snack and hot chocolate or coffee. If you have a lot of luck catching fish, you could even cook fresh fish on a camp stove and eat a great meal out on the ice!



William Waite shows off his catch.  
Photo courtesy of Matt Waite.

## *Eveland Access Cabins*

1681 – 290<sup>th</sup> St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577



The Apple and Birch Cabins are available for rent year-round. To view pictures of the cabins and to find up-to-date information on renting, visit our website [www.mahaskaconservation.com](http://www.mahaskaconservation.com) or call MCCC at (641)673-9327.

# Nature Notes

## Bird Feeder Pests

**By Laura DeCook**  
Naturalist

I think it is very relaxing to sit by a window and watch birds visiting a bird feeder. However, sooner or later, some enjoyable bird watching moments can be disrupted by “unwanted visitors” at the feeder. The common bird feeding complaints about the presence of sparrows, starlings and squirrels are understandable because these animals scare off birds that you want to see and steal their food. Let me share some information about each of these bird feeder “problems”.

House sparrows and starlings are not native to the United States and will out-compete or even kill many of our native birds. They are not protected by law and can be trapped or otherwise safely removed.

What else can a person do besides trap birds to resolve this problem? This common complaint can usually be solved with changing the type of feeder you are using and maybe the type of food you are offering the birds. You must first determine what is attracting the birds and move it or build a barrier between the bird and what is attracting it. Try using small, tubular feeders with small perches. Large birds cannot cling to the small perches and are often discouraged from the feeder. House sparrows do not particularly like hanging feeders so try setting up a ground feeding station far away from your hanging feeder and place different foods in both feeders. By eliminating cracked corn, you can discourage blackbirds and sparrows. Starlings are not as fond of a soft suet compared to a hard suet cake. Keep in mind, these ideas are intended to lure the unwanted birds away from your feeders. Because we don't want to deter the native winter songbirds from feeding in our back yards, convincing unwanted bird species not to use the feeders takes trial and error.

Squirrels are another wildlife animal very common at feeders. Some people truly enjoy their presence, finding their balancing acts along icy branches and deck railings amusing to watch. These squirrels may receive their own seat at an outdoor dining room table. Many squirrel feeders provide a place for their furry bottoms a place to sit to they can enjoy their meal. Squirrels are territorial and the few squirrels you see at your feeder will keep other squirrel clans out of the yard.

If you prefer to save the bird food for the birds, there are a few things you can do. Squirrels can jump more than four feet to reach a feeder and can climb any wooden post. Keeping your feeder away from places the squirrels can jump from is important. The use of metal posts and clothes lines will slow squirrels down, but they are not squirrel-proof. Try wiring your feeders shut so the squirrels cannot open them. Baffles placed above and below the feeders can also help keep them out of feeders. I have also read about creative ideas such as coating the pole holding the feeder with Vaseline to make the pole too slippery to access. That would be a fun sight to see! Sometimes, people think “if you can't beat them, join them” and set out feeders especially for the squirrels. Corn cobs are a treat for squirrels to eat and corn cob feeders are simple to make.







# Experience Programs for Adults

If pre-registrations are required, call (641)673-9327 or [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov).



## O.W.L.S. *Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls*

*Pre-registrations are appreciated.  
Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 ext. 2 or  
email [decook@mahaskacounty.org](mailto:decook@mahaskacounty.org).*

*Bring a lunch and a friend!*

### **Restoring Treasures**

11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, January 14, 2022

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Judy Groenendyk will be our guest speaker to talk about restoring furniture at her Oskaloosa shop called Brushed by Jude. She will talk about and demonstrate how she can transform something old into something new. Come and see her amazing talent!

### **George Daily Auditorium**

11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, February 11, 2022

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Andy McGuire will come and talk about the George Daily Auditorium in Oskaloosa. He will talk about the history of George Daily and share some of the activities for the community currently held at the auditorium.

### **Eddyville Dunes Sand Prairie**

11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, March 11, 2022

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Come and learn about one of Mahaska County's natural treasures as Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist, shares information about the Eddyville Sand Dunes Prairie.

## Coffee Club *at the ELC*



**9:30-10:30 am**

**Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Friday, January 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Friday, February 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup>**

Join us at the "Coffee Club" for coffee, refreshments and fellowship!

Enjoy the coffee, snacks and company. We have a great time visiting and learning about fascinating things in nature and what is new with MCCB. Bring a friend!

Donations will be appreciated to help purchase supplies for future Coffee Clubs.

We meet in the Environmental Learning Center - feel free to look around after having coffee. There are many great displays to see in the ELC.

Registrations are not needed.



# Investigate

## Programs for Kids

If pre-registrations are required, call (641)673-9327 or [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov).



*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. Adults that bring the children to the program need to remain with them during the program. Pre-registration is required to participate.*

**10:00 – 11:00 a.m.**

**at the Environmental Learning Center**

**December 14** *“Snakes Are Fun!”*

**January 4** *“Pajama Day & Sleepy Winter Animals”*

**February 1** *“Stuffed Animal Tea Party”*

**March 8** *“Maple Syruping”*



### DONATIONS ARE NEEDED

to help feed the live education animals at the Environmental Learning Center. Let us know if you can help. Thank you!

- Night crawlers
- Minnows
- Frozen mice

# STEM

## LAB FOR KIDS

**Fun & educational science activities for kids in kindergarten and older!**



**NO SCHOOL DAY FOR SOME MAHASKA COUNTY SCHOOLS!**

*Pre-registration is required to participate and an adult must accompany children.*

**“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn”.**

*~ Benjamin Franklin ~*



# Investigate

## Programs for Kids

If pre-registrations are required, call (641)673-9327 or [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov).

### WINTER break Camp!



ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2021

1:00-4:00 PM

MOVIE & POPCORN

FUN WITH ICE

WINTER CRAFTS

ENERGY & MOTION EXPERIMENTS

TOUR DISPLAYS AT THE ELC

**SIGN UP TODAY!**

*Pre-registration is required to participate & an adult must accompany children.  
Contact MCCB to sign up! Call (641)673-9327 ext. 2 or email [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov).*

## Homeschool Science Labs

*Monthly programs for your children that will provide hands-on learning experiences and excite them about science and nature! Call or email to sign up.*



### **GEOLOGY ROCKS!**

January 6, 2022 @ 10-11 am or 1-2 pm

### **WHAT IS A HABITAT?**

February 3, 2022 @ 10-11 am or 1-2 pm

### **DIGESTIVE SYSTEMS**

March 3, 2022 @ 10-11 am or 1-2 pm

### **ANIMAL ADAPTATIONS**

April 7, 2022 @ 10-11 am or 1-2 pm





# Discover Opportunities for Volunteers

For more information, call (641)673-9327 or [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov).

## Volunteer opportunities are available with the Mahaska County Conservation Board!

Check out this list of some things you can do to help us:

- ✓ Light cleaning at the Environmental Learning Center
- ✓ Public program greeter
- ✓ Public program helper (set up/take down)
- ✓ Flower garden maintenance
- ✓ Event photographer/videographer

If YOU are wanting to volunteer for MCCB, stop in to see us at the ELC or contact us and we will send you an application form. All interested people will be asked for information for a background check and participate in an annual volunteer training.



Games

Refreshments



Prizes

### MCCB's Annual Volunteer Training "Our Volunteers are Sweet!"

Monday, January 24, 2022  
1:00–2:00 pm OR 6:30-7:30 pm

Sign up to attend  
and become ready  
to volunteer all  
year in 2022!



## LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

VOLUNTEERS ARE INVITED TO A

## VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DINNER

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2022

6:30–8:00 PM

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

RSVP AT ( 641) 673-9327 OR [DECOOK@MAHASKACOUNTYIA.GOV](mailto:DECOOK@MAHASKACOUNTYIA.GOV)

# Thank You!

## Event Donors & Volunteers

### Youth Outdoor Field Day

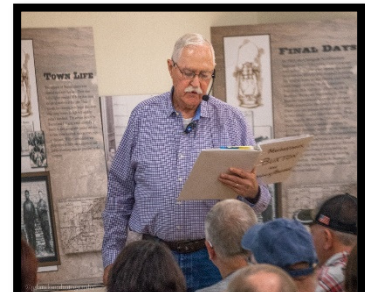
Iowa Department of Natural Resources  
Oskaloosa Fire Department  
Mahaska County Sheriff's Office  
Iowa Prairie Rose Dutch Oven Cookers  
Mahaska County CERT  
Poppy's Barn Yard  
Spring Creek Arms  
Defensive Dames  
Oskaloosa Disc Golf  
William Penn University  
Nelson Pioneer Farm & Museum  
Mahaska County Master Gardeners  
Oskaloosa Trees Forever  
Oskaloosa Central United Methodist Church  
Swim's Sports Awards & Screen Printing  
Verna Conry  
Ron Groenendyk  
Pat Kitman  
Suzette Striegel  
Lona Brager  
Shirley Kelderman  
David Wilke  
Kent Boucher  
Michaela Henke  
Steve DeJong  
Ron VanHeuvelen  
Margaret Spiegel  
Adam Haroldson  
Catherine Fergusson  
Chris Roorda  
MaryJane Sullivan  
Linda Fox  
Susan Knox

### Halloween Bash at Eveland Access

Eddyville Volunteer Fire Department  
Mahaska County Sheriff's Office  
Mahaska Drug  
Legacy Real Estate Group  
Walmart, Oskaloosa  
Doug Drummond  
Norma Drummond  
Michaela Henke  
Peggy Wright  
Susan Knox  
MaryJane Sullivan  
Linda Fox  
Gary Conry  
Verna Conry

### Buxton – The Coal Mining Town That Once Thrived

Doug Wilson  
Margaret Spiegel  
Nelson Pioneer Farm Board Members  
Friends of Mahaska County Conservation  
MaryJane Sullivan  
Mark Sullivan  
Susan Anderson  
Rodney Anderson





### 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 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.

### 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.*

## MCCB Meeting Dates:

### Mahaska County Conservation Board Monthly Meetings

Begins at 7:30 p.m. – Public is welcome to attend.  
Meetings are held in the lower level of the Environmental Learning Center at Caldwell Park.

December 8, 2021

January 6, 2022

February 3, 2022

March 3, 2022

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

## Mahaska County Conservation Board



Linda Fox, Rose Hill

Chairperson

Peggy Wright, New Sharon

Vice-Chairperson

Willie Van Weelden, Oskaloosa

Secretary

Steve Dixon, Oskaloosa

Member

Curt Jager, Eddyville

Member

### STAFF

Dave Sedivec

Director

Laura DeCook

Naturalist

Tommy VanRenterghem

Park Ranger

Jason Ryan

Park Ranger

Dorothy Wedgewood

Administrative Assistant