



THE PRAIRIE STAR



Monarchs & Milkweed

Monarchs and Milkweed: A Story of Survival traveling exhibit debuts at the Environmental Learning Center on Tuesday, July 24 at 12:30 pm. Visitors can see the exhibit during open hours until Wednesday, August 20.

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Board Members, Staff

Woolly Mammoth

Woolly mammoth bones discovered in Mahaska County can be seen inside the Environmental Learning Center. Come learn about this fascinating part of our history! (Right) A life-sized replica of a Woolly mammoth skeleton towers over visitors.



CONSERVATION CORNER

Mahaska County Conservation Welcomes a New Park Ranger



Steve Nugteren, (left) a Pella native and Dordt University graduate, started his career in the Rocky Mountains doing wildfire restoration and natural resource work. From there Steve accepted a job back in his home state of Iowa as a Park Ranger with the Boone County Conservation Board. In 2019 Steve, his wife Chelsey, and 3 daughters worked on a project together for a Christian non-profit in the Netherlands. In 2023 they moved back to Iowa. Steve worked this past year as a park ranger for the Army Corps of Engineers, but is excited to get back into county conservation (his grandpa, Leroy Nugteren served on the Mahaska County Conservation board for many years). Steve enjoys spending quality time with his family, hiking, camping, and helping on his in-laws family farm in South Dakota.

Green Iowa AmeriCorps Assist with County Park Improvements



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 William Penn University, the Mahaska Soil and Water Conservation District, the City of Oskaloosa, and Mahaska County Conservation.

This summer, GIA members have been planting native gardens at the Eveland Access cabins and Russell Wildlife Area, refurbishing the bird viewing blind at Maskunkya Marsh, and removing invasive plants from our county parks. We thank all the members for their hard work! The 2024 GIA team members include: Aubrey Brown, Christine Jaenette, Cheyenne Reak, Ryan Meinders (above left), and Josh DeCook (above right).

NATURE NOTES

Big Dipper Fireflies *Photinus pyralis*

by Laura DeCook, Naturalist



Fireflies are in the insect family of Lampyridae which consist of roughly 136 different beetles which flash over the United States and Canada alone. They are found on every continent except Antarctica.

The light at the end of fireflies flash in different patterns for each species. The pattern helps the same-species fireflies find each other for courtship. The flashes can be identified by how long the flash can be seen, what motion the light is making and how high above ground the flash occurs. The male firefly of the species *Photinus pyralis* or the Big Dipper firefly, the most common firefly in Iowa, beams a single half-flash during a forward rising flight movement. It looks like the letter "J." The female responds with a single flash.

The flashing light occurs because of an internal chemical reaction called bioluminescence. Amazingly, this light allows them to glow without wasting heat energy. An incandescent light bulb gives off 90% of its energy as heat and only 10% as light. If fireflies produced that much heat when they lit up, they would not survive. We don't often see fireflies before they reach adulthood, so you might not know that fireflies glow in all life stages. Bioluminescence is present throughout the entire life cycle; the eggs, larvae, pupae, and adult can produce light.

Fireflies over-winter as larvae buried in the soil and emerge in the spring. In summer, they pupate for about 2½ weeks within a small earthen cell before emerging as adults. The adult fireflies signal each other with their lights. Females wait on the ground for passing males to flash their signal, and then answer with their own specific signal. Then they meet up and mate. The female's eggs are laid on or slightly under the soil a few days after mating. Within 4 weeks, the eggs hatch and the larvae, once hatched, begin to feed until fall. Then they burrow underground and hibernate to start a life cycle over again.

Firefly Catching Tip:

If you catch fireflies to look at in a jar, pierce the lid with holes to help them breathe and consider adding a damp paper towel. After getting a good look, let them go after a while preferably keeping them for no more than an hour. Adult fireflies only live for a week or two, so staying in a jar for too long of time cuts into their ability to continue the life cycle.

PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES

September

17 **Billy and Molly: An Otter Love Story**

1:00-2:30 pm

Environmental Learning Center

This movie is a documentary story about love between man and wife, man and otter, and for the natural world. Through interactions of Molly's time with the Mail family, viewers will understand how animals — and the environment around us — heavily impact our lives. Feel free to bring snacks. Some refreshments will be provided. **Save your seat by signing up at decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or by calling (641)673-9327.**

October

19 **Halloween Bash**

1:00-9:00 pm

Eveland Access Campground

This annual event is so much for everyone in your family! During the day there will be carnival games, not-so-spooky contests, trick or treating to all the campsites, and a night auto tour to see the sights and listen to the sounds of the decorated campsites. If you go on the auto tour, you get to vote for your favorite campsite! More information can be found on the event flyer on page 12 of this newsletter.

26 **BARK Ranger Costume Party & Talent Show**

2:00-3:00 pm

Eveland Access Campground

Bring your dog dressed up in a costume and have a fun time with your pet! There will be a dog craft to make and take with you, a costume parade and an opportunity to show off your dog's special talent! All dogs must be on a leash. You can learn more about the BARK Ranger program on our website and page 10 of this newsletter.



November

19 **March of the Penguins**

1:00-2:30 pm

Environmental Learning Center

This movie is a documentary that depicts the yearly journey of the emperor penguins of Antarctica. **Save your seat by signing up at decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or by calling (641)673-9327.** Feel free to bring snacks. Some refreshments will be provided.

PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

September



4 Knee-High Naturalists “Turtles”

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for kids ages 5 and younger. This month, the kids will learn how turtles are special animals called reptiles. We will have a craft, meet some live box turtles and watch a turtle race! Pre-registration is needed to participate. **Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**

11 Homeschool Science Lab “Pond Study”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for all ages of homeschool and online students. Join us this month to explore all stages of aquatic life that live in the water and mud of a pond near the Environmental Learning Center. We will take a short hike to do this “pond study”. **Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**

28 Youth Outdoor Field Day

8:00 am - 12:00 pm

White Oak Conservation Area

Bring the kids out to our 21st annual youth event for a fun morning of outdoor activities. This year, the location will be moved to the White Oak Conservation Area. Come hike the trails with your family and participate in fun activities such as tree identification, fishing, leave no trace, atl atl throwing and bowfishing, to name just a few! Cost is \$5 per child and you can pay by cash or check when you arrive at the event. Youth Outdoor Field Day t-shirts will be for sale online in September. More information can be found on page 11 of this newsletter.

October

2 Knee-High Naturalists “Fall Hike”

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for kids ages 5 and younger. This month, we will go on a nature hike to look for signs of the fall season and make a craft. Please dress for the weather! Our hike will be stroller-friendly. **Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**

PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

October (cont.)

16 Homeschool Science Lab “Fossil Hunt”

10:00-11:00 am

Russell Wildlife Area

This is a free program for all ages of homeschool and online students. Come and look for fossils at the Russell Wildlife Area to celebrate National Fossil Day! **Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**

November

6 Knee-High Naturalists “Woolly Mammoths”

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for kids ages 5 and younger. Kids will learn about Woolly mammoths that once roamed around our area. We will visit the life-sized skeleton, investigate real mammoth bones, and listen to a story. **Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**

13 Homeschool Science Lab “States of Matter”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for all ages of homeschool and online students. Kids will explore the states of matter: solids, liquids and gases. Get ready for some ooey-goopy fun with our hands on activity! **Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**



Environmental Learning Center

OPEN FOR VISITORS

Monday - Wednesday 12:30-4:30 pm

Thursday - Friday 12:30-7:00 pm

Saturday 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

September

6 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee, hot chocolate and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteering opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that shows your favorite color to take part in a door prize.** We meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.



13 O.W.L.S. "Tram Ride Around Oskaloosa"

10:30 am -12:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Adults of any age are invited to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program. This month, we are going to take a tram ride on the Oskaloosa Recreational Trail. We will begin at the Lacey Complex parking lot (next to the yellow sun) and end up back where we started. If you are able, a tram donation is appreciated. Please dress for the weather. **Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat on the tram. Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. Registration deadline is September 11th.**

October

11 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee, hot chocolate, and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteering opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that has fall colors or decorations on it to take part in a door prize.** We meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

25 O.W.L.S. "BARK Rangers"

11:00 am -12:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Adults of any age are invited to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program. Come and learn about the BARK Ranger program that creates fun opportunities for dog owners right here in Mahaska County. **Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat. Contact decook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.**

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

November

1 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee, hot chocolate, and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteering opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring your BIGGEST coffee cup or mug to take part in a door prize.** We meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

22 O.W.L.S. "Nature Notes from Cedar Bluffs"

11:00 am-12:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Adults of any age are invited to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program. This month, our guest speaker, Robert Leonard, will share about some of his volunteer projects and fascinating things he has seen on his daily excursions through Mahaska County's Cedar Bluffs State Preserve. **Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat.** Contact decCook@mahaskacountyia.gov or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.

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.

VOLUNTEER NEWS

What Can Volunteers Do?

**HOST AND GREET VISITORS
AT THE ENVIRONMENTAL
LEARNING CENTER**

HELP WITH PUBLIC EVENTS

**HELP FEED ANIMALS AT
THE ENVIRONMENTAL
LEARNING CENTER**

**HELP CREATE NEW
PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES
FOR THE COMMUNITY**



**HELP WITH EDUCATIONAL
PROGRAMS**

**HELP KEEP OUR PARKS
CLEAN OR HELP WITH PARK
PROJECTS AS A PARK
STEWARD**

**HELP WITH NATIVE
GARDEN CARE AT OUR
COUNTY PARKS**

**HELP WITH LIGHT DUTIES
AT THE ENVIRONMENTAL
LEARNING CENTER**

New Volunteer Training

If you would like to join our volunteer team, come to our one-hour training on **Monday, September 9** at the Environmental Learning Center. Please sign up for one of two sessions. **Call (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov to reserve a seat.**

Afternoon session 1:00-2:00 pm

Evening session 6:00-7:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center Host Information

Thank you volunteer Hosts for helping at the Environmental Learning Center. Your smiles and helpfulness are so appreciated to our staff and visitors! To schedule yourself to host in the upcoming months, go to this link on our website:

www.mahaskaconservation.com/links/

MCCB UPDATES

New BARK Ranger Program Is For The Dogs



BARK Ranger dog tags
\$10 each at the
Environmental Learning Center



The BARK Ranger Kick-Off event on June 29 was a huge success! Thank you to all the participants, Nate Peterson, DVM who talked about outdoor dog care, event donors, Wag-On Pet Photography, and our volunteer Valinn McReynolds that helped start this program. There were 19 dogs at the event! Check out the details of our fun October event on page 4.

BARK Rangers is a program to encourage people to take their dogs on hikes in parks. Our program is related to the National Park System's BARK Ranger program, but we are using county parks since Iowa does not have any national parks. Program participants can earn certificates by completing activities with their dog *and* they can even purchase special BARK Ranger swag. We have special dog tags for participants to purchase at the Environmental Learning Center.

To find Mahaska County parks with BARK Ranger activities, go to this link on our website: www.mahaskaconservation.com/links/

Donations Needed to Help Finalize Funding For Nature Playscape

Mahaska County Conservation has received grants to help fund 70% the needed expenses to build an all-inclusive nature playscape next to the Environmental Learning Center. We are on the home stretch!

YOU can help us reach our goal of \$500,000.00 by donating TODAY! Every dollar that you donate will be matched up to \$40,000 by the George Daily Trust. **Thank you!**



venmo

Donate to the playscape now
by scanning the QR code!



YOUTH OUTDOOR FIELD DAY 2024



YOUTH OUTDOOR *Field Day*

Join Us for a Morning of FUN Outdoor Activities
at White Oak Conservation Area



SEPTEMBER 28, 2024

8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

2647 Ventura Ave., Cedar, IA 52543

FISHING

**LEAVE NO
TRACE**

**HUNTING SAFETY
TRAIL**

DISC GOLF

**ATL ATL
THROWING**

BOWFISHING

**TREE
IDENTIFICATION**

**WATER
SAFETY**

\$5 per child (cash or check to MCCB) | Register and pay at the event.

Event t-shirts will go on sale online beginning Sept. 1.

Watch Facebook and our website www.mahaskaconservation.com for details.

**AND MORE
ACTIVITIES!**

For more info: 641-673-9327 | decook@mahaskacountyia.gov

HALLOWEEN BASH 2024

Boool You Are Invited to

HALLOWEEN BASH *at Eveland Access*

1-3 pm	Carnival Games (tickets on sale at event)
2 pm	Contests: Decorated Pumpkin (bring to event) Worm Pie Eating Witch Cackle
3 pm	Kids' Costume Parade
3:30 pm	Spooky Stories with Mrs. Fox
4-5:30 pm	Trick-or-Treating around campground
7-9 pm	Decorated Campsite Auto Tour (free-will donation at entrance)
9:15 pm	Decorated Campsite Awards in Shelter House

Saturday, Oct. 19 / 1:00-9:00 pm

Carnival, Trick or Treating, Contests, , Spooky
Stories, Night Auto Tour, Vote for Best Campsite

Eveland Access Campground

2890 Galeston Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
For information call 641-673-9327

MAHASKA COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

Mahaska County Conservation Board & Meeting Dates

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

MCCB's monthly board meetings begin at 6:00 pm on the third Monday of each month. Public is welcome to attend. Meetings are held in the lower level of the Environmental Learning Center, 2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577.

August 19, 2024
September 16, 2024
October 21, 2024
November 18, 2024

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

Mahaska County Conservation Staff

Director	Chris Clingan
Naturalist	Laura DeCook
Park Ranger	Tommy VanRenterghem
Park Ranger	Steve Nugteren



We give a big thank you Connor Gittings, Summer Conservation Technician, (above left) and Logan Sandeen, Musco Intern, (above right) for all the great work they did in our parks this summer!

Discover Nature in Iowa!



MAHASKA COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Ph: (641)673-9327

OPEN HOURS

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



The Prairie Star is the 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.

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.