

Pathways to Nature

Spring-Summer 2002

Newsletter of the Webster County Conservation Board



From the Director's Desk.....

by Charlie Miller

Spring is in the air and summer is just around the corner. It is going to be a challenging year with the tight budgets but we have had so much support in the past, not only from the Board of Supervisors, but also from organizations like Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and Whitetails Forever that I'm sure we will survive. I can't forget to include groups like Daybreak Rotary, Noon Sertomas, W.C. Cruisers and the Fort Dodge Parks & Recreation Commission and it's staff. Many businesses and especially **you**, the general public, have been very supportive and a driving force in keeping the WCCB progressing over the years.

I believe the reason for all this support is because of the visionary Conservation Board and the dedicated staff. You can read their names on the back of the newsletter but that really doesn't tell you who they really are. It would take me this whole newsletter to explain everything each one of them does to make Webster County a better place to live but I would like to try to highlight some of their activities. For example, did you know that the Park Rangers, Dave, Matt and Pat, who are certified peace officers for the State of Iowa, not only drive around in the pickup (this is the comment they hear a lot) to provide security to park users, but they also do most of the maintenance on all the buildings, such as plumbing, electrical, roofing, siding and painting. They built the offices and bird blind, build the signs, build the nesting boxes, cut and split firewood for park users, build picnic tables, plow and shovel snow, clean bathrooms, mow grass, plant and prune the trees, and on and on and on. I hope you get my drift. These guys keep your County Areas looking good and in good repair. These guys not only do this at your 17 Webster County Conservation owned and managed areas totaling 1000 acres but also work with private landowners to help promote wildlife on their own areas.

Did you also know that the Resource Coordinator, Scott, is not only in charge of vegetation management and weed control in all the 1,200 miles of road ditches in the county but he also works with private landowners to promote and plant prairie species where they haven't existed for nearly a century. Just this past year he planted over 300 acres of prairie species on both private land and road ditches. He also coordinates with different organizations such as NRCS, PF and DU to help find funding for these private landowners.

Karen, your Naturalist, is in charge of the environmental programming for the Conservation Board. If you have any kids in school, they have almost certainly come in contact with Karen at one time or another. She has either been to one of their schools or they have gone out to one of the County areas for one of her programs. I would guess that they came home and told you all about it because she can really get them excited about their environment. You have all had the opportunity to enjoy many of her public programs that she presents during the year. If you haven't taken advantage of them you are missing out. I encourage you to attend the next one to see what you have been missing. This is just a touch of all that Karen does for the WCCB.

The Conservation Board members Orville, Mark, Joan, Brad and Dave are the ones who try to keep us focused and heading in the right direction. These are dedicated volunteers appointed by the Board of Supervisors, who don't get paid a dime, to represent the public and work tirelessly to keep the program running. I can't forget Cindy, the secretary, who answers the phone, keeps the books, and takes shelter reservations, or the summer help we get each year who help keep these areas groomed and clean, or our volunteer campground hosts who do a great job.

Next time you visit a WCCB area, I hope you think of and thank these employees and volunteers for their dedication and hard work. I know I appreciate them all.

DNR Update—Hunting & Fishing News

by Erika Anderson, conservation officer for Webster & Calhoun County

I can't believe 2001 is gone and 2002 has begun. With the exception of a couple snags here and there, the majority of the main hunting season went well in Webster and Calhoun counties. So, a thank you goes out to all the hunters and citizens who played it safe during the hunting season as well as helped me out with tips-it makes my job much easier and more productive!

I know the hunting season is drawing to a close when in the middle of winter I receive my packet of Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations for the office in Des Moines. Since I received a heads up so early, I thought I would pass it on to you (thought it might help the turkey hunters get in the mood). Much of the confusion in 2001 was due to the new licenses. Resident Turkey Hunting licenses will be sold through the ELSI license vendors beginning December 15, 2001. Only gun/bow combination licenses for Zone 4, archery only licenses and free landowner-tenant licenses will be sold all the way through until the last day of the season. Other licenses for Zones 1, 2, and 3 will be sold until the quota is full. Non-resident licenses are also sold through ELSI January 6-28, 2002. Remember that as with deer tags, turkey transportation tags must have the date of kill properly shown on the tag and attached to the turkey before it is moved, and must remain on the turkey until it is processed.

There is no party hunting allowed during turkey season. In other words you must shoot your own tom. Resident hunters with a valid license can however, assist other resident hunters with a valid license. The most important thing about spring turkey season from my point of view is that it is one of the most dangerous seasons. Whether you are a turkey hunter, or just someone who likes to enjoy the woods during turkey season it is a good idea to follow the 10 tips to Defensive Turkey Hunting:

1. Never stalk a turkey.
2. Eliminate the colors red, white and blue from your clothes. Red is the color most hunters use to differentiate a gobbler's head from the hen's blue colored head.
3. Never move, wave or make turkey sounds to alert another hunter to your presence. A quick movement may draw fire.
4. Never attempt to approach closer than 100 yards to a roosting turkey. The wild turkey's eyesight and hearing are much too sharp to let you get any closer.
5. Assume every sound you hear is made by another hunter. Once you pull the trigger, you can never take back the shot.
6. Be particularly careful when using a gobbler call.
7. When selecting your calling position, don't try to hide so well you cannot see what is happening. Eliminating movement is your key to success, not total concealment.
8. Select a calling position that provides a background as wide as your shoulders, and one that will protect you from the top of your head down.
9. Avoid all unnecessary movement. You are visible to turkeys and other hunters when you move.
10. Never shoot at a sound or movement. Be 100% sure of your target before you pull the trigger.



Feel free to call me with any questions. I may be reached at (515) 571-0127. Have a safe and fun spring!

Roadside Report—IRVM

by Scott Gebers, Roadside Manager

This winter has been a long warm winter. This weather has caused me to think of a whole lot of projects that can be done. Unfortunately all of the projects that I have thought up will take about a lifetime to complete. There has, however been some progress made for attainable goals for this year.

The first project that we will try to get completed is the planting of Nelson Avenue. With ISTEA seed, we have enough seed available to finish planting Nelson Avenue from just south of Kennedy Park to Harlan Rogers sports complex. This planting will have about 8 different types of grasses and around 30 different types of wild flowers. Our plantings will be taking on a new look in Webster County. Instead of the traditional tall grass prairie, we will be moving more toward a mid-grass prairie. This evolution will result in more obvious flower populations and will increase the safety factor in roadside plantings. Currently some of the grasses that are planted can reach 8 feet in height; the newer plantings will feature grasses that don't grow that high, usually only to about 3-4 feet. This will allow for better visibility yet accomplish the same goals of the IRVM program, reduce erosion and weed competition, while improving water quality.

The second project we will be working on is CRP. WOW!! At this time, we have well over 900 acres signed up to be put into CRP of one type or another this spring. "Great job" to everyone who has enrolled some of these potholes and filter strips. If this keeps up, Webster County will have plenty of wildlife for everyone to enjoy.

Once again we will be getting seed from the ISTEA grant. This grant for ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act) grant allows UNI to purchase a large amount of seed which is then divided among the counties that request it and have an IRVM plan on file with the state DOT office. Webster County usually receives about 10 acres worth of seed, but this year we have put in for an additional 10 acres worth of seed. If anyone would like to do a wildflower planting in the ditch in front of his or her house, give me a call.

Once again, IRVM is looking for summer help to assist with the county spray program. This requires a category 6-pesticide license and a valid driver's license. If you are interested, please call for an application.



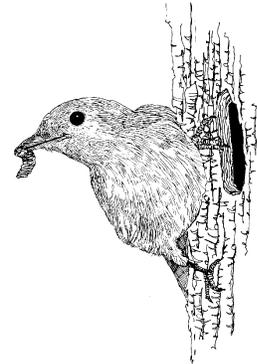
EE Info.

Books & Literature

Listen to the Land—by Larry A. Stone. A selection of 25 years of naturalist writing in the Des Moines Register; 200 pages and a 16 page color photographic portfolio; 7x10 size soft cover. To order, call toll free 1-888-396-6354.

A Country So Full of Game—by Dr. James Dinsmore, Dept. of Animal Ecology at ISU. Historical information regarding wildlife as documented since pre-settlement times; very informative. Univ. of Iowa Press.

"Iowa-specific" booklets—published by Iowa Association of Naturalists. Native information giving a good overview on many topics categorized under Environmental Issues, Biological Communities, Plants, Wildlife and People, Natural Resources Heritage, and Wildlife. Available at Extension office or at 515-294-5247 or at www.exnet.iastate.edu or call Karen at 576-4258.



APRIL

20th (Sat.)—EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

Join the naturalist for a day filled with various activities that will help you celebrate one of the blessings of God's handiwork, the Earth. No pre-registration required.

- **7:00am—Birdwatching**

Meet at the handicapped viewing our feathered blers, tanagers, orioles, walking shoes; bring binoculars and field guides and enjoy a couple hours of birding.



at Brushy Creek Recreation Area fishing dock parking lot for a morning of friends, residents and migrants like war-grosbeaks, kinglets, etc. Wear good lars and field guides and enjoy a couple

- **10:00am—Wildflower Walk at Skillet Creek Indian Mounds**

Meet at the Skillet Creek Indian Mounds parking lot for an invigorating hike up a hill of the Des Moines River valley. There will be wildflower interpretation and cultural interpretation of the recent and ancient history of this area.



- **7:00pm—Frog & Toad Survey**

State Park Meet at the boat ramp with a flashlight and old shoes. Join us ent areas and learn more aobut these ear at identifying Iowa's frogs and essary.



at Dolliver Memorial

area of Dolliver Park as we survey the frogs of differ- interesting amphibians. Test your maybe try catching some if nec-

MAY

18th (Sat.)—BRUSHY CREEK FISH DERBY

This event is targeting a limited number of 11-14 year olds who want a great fishing experience which includes boat fishing, filleting, fish ID, safety, and activities. Contact Chad Kelchen at (515) 543-8298 for registration or details.

Public E E Programs

Webster County Conservation

JUNE

11th (Tues.)—PRAIRIE WALK at Kalsow Prairie, 7:00pm

The awakening of Iowa's early summer prairie plants is worth witnessing. See some of the hidden surprises this prairie remnant has to offer and learn about how the plants were used long ago.

24th-28th—DAY CAMPS at Dolliver Park (south lodge)

Polliwog Camp, for ages 6-8; 9:00-11:30am; offers kids hands-on outdoor activities. Cost is \$15. Call 576-4258 for more info. or to register.

Tadpoles Camp, for ages 9-11; 12:00-3:00pm; offers kids outdoor fun and understanding. Cost is \$15. Call 576-4258 for more info. or to register.



29th (Sat.)—CANOEING the Des Moines River, 9:00am

Traverse the Des Moines River in a quiet, unobtrusive way—paddling a canoe. We will meet at the boat ramp at the Deception Hollow State Area, located south of Lehigh event. Cost is



Moines River in a quiet, unobtrusive way—paddling a canoe. the boat ramp at the Deception Hollow State Area, located off county road P53. We have 6 canoes available for this free. Call to register; limited space.

JULY

9th (Tues.)—PRAIRIE WALK at Kalsow Prairie, 7:00pm

Witness the awesome diversity of one of Iowa's prairie and seek out new plants while learning about their uses and importance. This area is so vast and interesting!

16th (Tues.)—OWL PROWL at Brushy Creek State Area, 8:00pm

Meet at the parking lot by the handicap fishing pier upon entering from the west entrance. Join the naturalist in a new location for "owling". We'll start off the program with a program on owls—their characteristics, types, status, etc. Then we'll attempt to call them and patiently wait for a response. The threatened long-eared owl was once found in this location.



15th-19th—DAY CAMP at Brushy Creek State Area, 1-5:00pm

Adventure Camp, for ages 12-14, offers various activities including fishing, backpacking, canoeing, archery, and outdoor survival skills. Cost is \$15. Call 576-4258 to register.

Plant in Particular

By Sarah Magennis, Resource Aid

Early last fall, while walking along a creek bed, I noticed a vine crawling up and around a fallen tree. Dangling from the vine were spiny green pods, about two inches long, some of them burst open at the bottom. After a little investigation I learned that the plant I'd encountered was wild cucumber.

Though wild cucumber is thought of as weed, you won't usually find them around urban landscapes. They require a moist environment with partial shade in order to grow. (This would explain why I'd found it along the creek bottom.) In order to reach the sunlight that it needs, it climbs using tendrils, which naturally wrap around anything the vine touches. The vines can reach lengths of 15-25 feet long.

Wild cucumber is also referred to at times as "squirting cucumber." This is because when the seedpod is dry and ripe it bursts open and "squirts" its four large seeds into the air! Despite its name, the wild cucumber is not edible or related to the cucumbers we eat.

Critter Corner

By Sarah Magennis, Resource Aid

As springtime approaches, the critters will start to emerge from their winter sleep. But not all animals hibernate. In fact, a lot of mammals will go into a state of dormancy called **torpor**. Torpor, unlike hibernation, is just for short periods of time and body temperature doesn't drop as low as it would with hibernation. Mice, moles, raccoons and skunks are a few mammals that do not "truly hibernate." They reduce their need for food by sleeping deeply for periods from a few days to a few weeks.

Hibernation occurs over long periods of time where body temperature lowers close to ambient temperatures (temperature of the air.) The largest "true hibernator" is the woodchuck or groundhog. Curling into a tight ball, their heart and breathing rate, body temperature and metabolism reduce to extremely low levels. They do not emerge from their hibernating den until early spring (according to legend on February 2 or Groundhogs Day.) Chipmunks and ground squirrels are also true hibernators.

Bears are often associated with hibernation and yet they don't truly hibernate at all! They are just too big. It would be too expensive energy wise. Like heating a house, it would take more energy heating the house all the way up from off, then to just leave the heat running a little. Bears only lower their body temperature four or five degrees, thus keeping them more energy efficient.



