

The Nature of Things

THE BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 26 Spring 2022

The Benefits of Scavengers, Nature's Cleaning Crew

By Ed Hach, North Unit Park Ranger

When you think of Iowa's wildlife, what are some of the first animals that come to mind?

It's unlikely for most of us that list would include turkey vultures, Virginia opossums, common snapping turtles, rainbow scarab beetles, striped skunks, quillback carpsuckers, carpenter ants, American crows, calico crayfish, and deer mice. Yet, despite the sometimes-unsightly appearance, unpleasant feeding characteristics, and often being branded as pests, these species and animals like them have an extremely important role in the local food webs and greater ecosystem.



Figure 1: Turkey vulture looking at a dead raccoon.
Photo by Larry Reis

Without scavengers, a vital part of the process of nutrient recycling would be missing. Though decomposers like fungi and bacteria are important in that they break down the remnants and most difficult parts of organic waste, the macro-organisms that we classify as scavengers take a large part in the cycle. Without scavengers, the micro-organisms would have to decompose the entirety of animal carcasses, animal droppings, and dead plant material by themselves. As we know, decomposers in large concentrations often produce foul smells, nasty sights, and byproducts that can be dangerous to other living organisms. Often, decomposing carcasses and other materials can pose a serious risk to human and animal health, with the increased volume of bacteria that can cause diseases.

That's where scavengers come in to save the day! Despite that many people would call them "ugly," animals like vultures and possums are specially adapted to eating flesh or fruits and plants that would be harmful to other animals. Though they can't digest material that's too rotten, they often begin the recycling of biomass by literally taking large chunks out of the equation, reducing the load on decomposers, thus reducing the spread of disease that could otherwise result. In fact, scavengers have been shown to reduce other threats, like the spread of parasites. When it comes to feces, whether from wild animals or livestock, beetles like the rainbow scarab feed on and relocate droppings in such a way that it lowers the survival rate of intestinal parasite eggs and larvae found in the material.

When it comes to aquatic environments, crayfish, snails and other invertebrates, turtles, and certain fish species help maintain water quality by eating dead fish, plants, algae, and animal droppings.

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Electronic versions and
email sign up are available at
our website
www.bentoncountyiowa.org



Figure 2: Crayfish that was
used for educational purposes
for 3rd grade.

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Figure 3: Benton County Conservation Animal Ambassador, Snappy, the snapping turtle.

Suckers and other bottom-dwelling fish, along with snapping turtles and crayfish, are often regarded as unwanted or of little value, but nonetheless serve an important purpose in the overall health of ponds, lakes, streams, and rivers. We may not always see their handiwork under the surface, but without these aquatic scavengers, our water bodies would be full of decaying fish and plants –yuck!

From the sky, we know turkey vultures serve as the mainstay of scavengers in Iowa, their superb sense of smell excellently tuned for finding carrion, and their featherless heads perfect for keeping good hygiene while feeding. Though crows feed mostly on insects and wild grains and fruits, they are also common and very abundant scavengers of dead animals and other foodstuffs that other animals may avoid. Likewise, there are species of raptors we may think of as strictly predators, but who also take on a scavenging role, particularly in the winter months. I'm sure we've all seen bald eagles picking at roadkill or a dead deer.

For mammalian scavengers, we often give them a bad reputation as pests or nuisance animals because of their tendency to get into our buildings or make a mess when they check out our garbage bins. After all, we have given raccoons the endearing nick-name of "trash panda," but like all creatures, they are just being opportunists to find a meal. Despite the annoyances we may experience from raccoons, skunks, possums, and rodents, we should note the benefits they bring to us and the environment. Though we certainly don't want them nesting in our houses or sheds, rodents are often vital for the dispersal of seeds in their foraging. Also, mice, squirrels, and other small mammals gnaw on bones, antlers, and horns for the calcium they contain, which in turn breaks down those materials much faster than they would otherwise. Opossums, skunks, and raccoons not only scavenge, but actively seek and feed on insects that can be harmful to humans, such as ticks.



Figure 4: Juvenile bald eagle eating a white-tailed rabbit.

For the wild canids like red fox and coyote, scavenging is a niche they fill from time to time as well. Though their diets consist overwhelmingly of prey like rodents and rabbits, they will also feed on dead animals they find. While coyotes do on occasion hunt larger game like deer, studies have shown that they feed on far more scavenged deer bodies than ones they've killed themselves. With their powerful jaws, coyotes not only chomp on the bones to get to the nutritious marrow, but are typically the ones to break open carcasses for the benefit of other scavengers like crows and vultures.

Last but not least, invertebrates like beetles, ants, worms and even flies are also important scavengers. While it's vital that the larger vertebrate scavengers consume the major portions of flesh and other material, bugs break things down even further, before leaving what's left to the decomposers. And as mentioned before, insects like beetles are of the few that can feed on and process the droppings of other animals. Not only can these mini-scavengers take on the task of cleaning up animal remains and waste, but they are key in the recycling of nutrients from plant matter. Carpenter ants and termites are some of the only creatures that can break down dead or decaying wood.

The Benefits of Scavengers, Nature's Cleaning Crew

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While carpenter ants feed on other insects and dead vertebrates, they cannot actually eat the dead wood in which they excavate their nests, but this does produce a sawdust like material that is more easily decomposed. Termites, however, are specially adapted to consume the cellulose found in dead wood. Now, of course we don't want these little critters in our homes or structures, but they are very important in the forests. A common misconception about ants and termites is that they kill trees. That is false, as they only feed on dead wood, and though their excavations can reduce the overall density or structure of a tree, most of a tree's strength comes from the outer layers anyway, which is why a hollow tree can still be perfectly healthy! Invertebrates like ants, beetles, and earthworms are also responsible for breaking down leaf and other plant litter, turning the material into a rich organic soil. Of course, we cannot forget that all these bugs on land and in the water serve as the foundation of the animal food web, feeding everything from woodpeckers, songbirds, and bats; to frogs, turtles, and snakes; to fish, pheasants, turkeys, and everything in between!

So as you can see, despite what they do being a topic we may not like to think about, scavengers do us and the environment a great service. They clean up forests, fields, lakes and streams, ridding them of dead plants, animals, and organic waste. They reduce the spread of diseases, improve the health and quality of the soil, water, and air. All the while, they serve a vital role in processing and recycling nutrients back into the ecosystem. Scavengers, as nature's cleaning crew, may surely be some of our most unsung heroes!

Meeting Horses on the Trail *By Cecilia Dirks, Conservation Tech*

Spring is here! Trails throughout Benton County will be bustling with people enjoying the fresh air. Benton County Conservation is fortunate to be able to offer trails for hikers, bikers, dog walkers, and horseback riders at Winegar and Tobin Wildlife Area. Multi-use trails are not very common in Iowa, so proper etiquette when meeting other trail users can be intimidating. With some simple rules and communication, trails can happily be shared by all types of users. I travel the state with my horse and use many public trail systems, so I will share with you some of my experiences when meeting others on the trail.

Hikers: When meeting horses on the trail, the most important rule to remember is everything yields to the horse and rider. A horse has its own mind and can find anything on the trail scary. Horses are prey animals and they survive by being hyper aware of every threat around them. I will use my own horse, Sam, as an example. Sam is a high energy horse who notices everything. He once noticed a box turtle crawling through the leaves ten feet off the trail when we were riding in Missouri. He snorted and pranced by until we were far enough away that the terrifying turtle would not be able to attack him. People walking along a trail might seem normal to you and me, but for Sam, they might seem out of place. When a person is wearing a backpack, they look totally different and quite scary to a horse. When meeting someone, I will say hello and ask them how they are doing.



Figure 5: Cecilia and her friend riding horses in an open field.

Meeting Horses on the Trail *Continued from previous page*

This lets the person know I see them, and if they engage in conversation with me, sometimes it lets my horse know that they are just another human being, not a predator coming to murder us both. Walk calmly past us, do not rush past and don't try and creep by, this is how predators move.

Dogs: All dogs must be on a leash at all times in Benton County Parks. This is for the safety of everyone. Some horses are used to dogs while others will kick out or try to stomp dogs that come too close. It is very scary when riding to be approached by a barking dog. I don't want my horse to get bitten, spooked, or have him kick and injure the dog. A horse spooked by a dog could run for it, which could trigger the dog's chase instinct, which could escalate the horse's fear, and does not end well for anyone. It is best to step off of the trail and try your best to keep your dog calm and quiet. It is okay if your dog barks, they are animals with their own minds, too. Wait patiently for the horses to pass by and then continue on your way.



Figure 6 & 7: Horse riders enjoying the multi-use trails at BCC Winegar and Tobin Wildlife Area.

Bikes: Bikes are a tricky thing for a horse to process. They move fast and look very strange. I have almost fallen off when meeting a bike on a trail. The best thing to do when meeting horses when on a bike is to pull over as far as possible and dismount, letting the horses pass by. Once the horses are well past, you can continue on your way. If you come up behind horses, let them know as soon as you see them. If you are going fast enough to pass them, you will have to communicate with them on what they would like you to do. If someone needed to pass me, I would ask them to

walk their bike past while I had Sam stopped off the trail. For some horses, Sam especially, standing still when nervous is not an easy thing to do. If a horse is dancing around, keep a careful eye on the rider and be ready to stop or get out of the way at any moment. Once you are past them, you can continue on your way. Be prepared to meet them again on our trails due to switchbacks and looping trails. Don't be surprised if horses are scared of you and your bike. It is difficult to prepare to meet bikes on the trail. I don't have many friends willing to ride a bike alongside Sam until he realizes it isn't a big deal. Sam and I have been lucky to meet several nice bikers on the trail who talk sweetly to Sam and let us get a good look at the bikes so he can slowly start to realize they are not a threat.



Figure 8: Cecilia's horse, Sam, pictured with a sunset and prairie.

Multi-use trails are so important for horseback riders. We value every chance we get to enjoy beautiful areas. Please remember that everyone has their own way of doing things, so if you are unsure, ask! Do not be afraid to talk to horseback riders as they approach you. Ask them what they want you to do. Get out and enjoy the trails this spring, and thank you in advance for being patient with our horses. See you on the trail!

Benton County Conservation Foundation Needs You!

Benton County Conservation Foundation is reestablishing! In the past, this was an active group that assisted our Benton County Conservation Department in many ways. We have a number of exciting projects going on today and anticipate many more in the future!

We need people who value conservation, our county, and have a vision for the future. If this seems like something you want to be a part of, the Foundation is hosting a meeting March 29th at 7PM, at the Nature Center! Please stop by and learn more about the group. If you have questions, email foundation@bentoncountyparks.com or call 319-472-4942

I Found A Baby Animal...What Do I Do?!

By Faith Henrichs, Naturalist

So you found a baby animal that seems like it needs help...what now? If you think the animal is orphaned, the best thing to do is to leave the animal alone if it's not in immediate danger. Observe the animal for 36-48 hours at various times of the day. Many times, mothers will leave their young unattended while they are searching for food. While this seems like a long time, wild animals are great mothers and a baby's best chance of survival is with its mother! They will come back! After 36-48 hours, if the baby animal hasn't moved or is making distress calls, it's time to call someone. The most important thing you can do when calling about potential injured/orphaned animals is by providing detailed information including: type of animal, location, when you first noticed the animal, behaviors of that animal and any other information that may be helpful. All cases are different and we encourage you to call us at 319-472-4942 if you have wildlife concerns. We can help you determine if the animal needs help and guide you through what to do next.



Figure 9: A young Virginia opossum that BCC staff helped rescue from a window well in Atkins.



Figure 10: Juvenile great horned owl that was nesting in Urbana. This owl was about ready to leave its nest.

When encountering wildlife in need, it's important to remember not to talk to, hold, or pet the animal. If you must touch the animal to remove it from danger, put a blanket over the animal and pick it up while wearing gloves. When wild animals are injured and captured, they are under extreme distress so it's best to leave them alone in a closed container with holes, placed in a dark, quiet room away from other animals and people. Please never attempt to feed the animal as this could lead to illness or death. Wild animals, especially babies, have very specific diets and eating patterns. Unless you are properly licensed and trained, feeding orphaned or injured animals puts them at serious risk. Never attempt to keep and/or raise a wild animal on your own. It is **ILLEGAL** to try to keep a wild animal without the appropriate permits, plus it lowers their chances of survival.

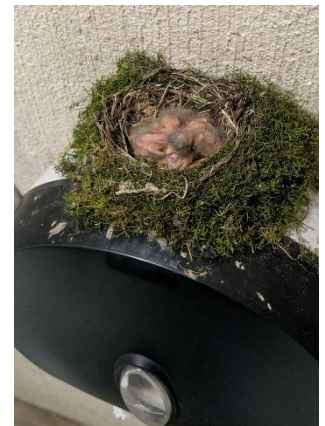


Figure 11: Eastern Phoebe hatchlings that nested in Hoefle-Dulin Area restroom. Rather than moving the nest, we temporarily closed the restroom.

I Found A Baby Animal...What Do I Do?!

Continued from previous pages

Some of the most common calls of orphaned animals are squirrels and rabbits. If you find a squirrel or a rabbit that you feel might need help, here are a few infographics from the Iowa State Extension Office to help you figure out if an animal needs a rescue:

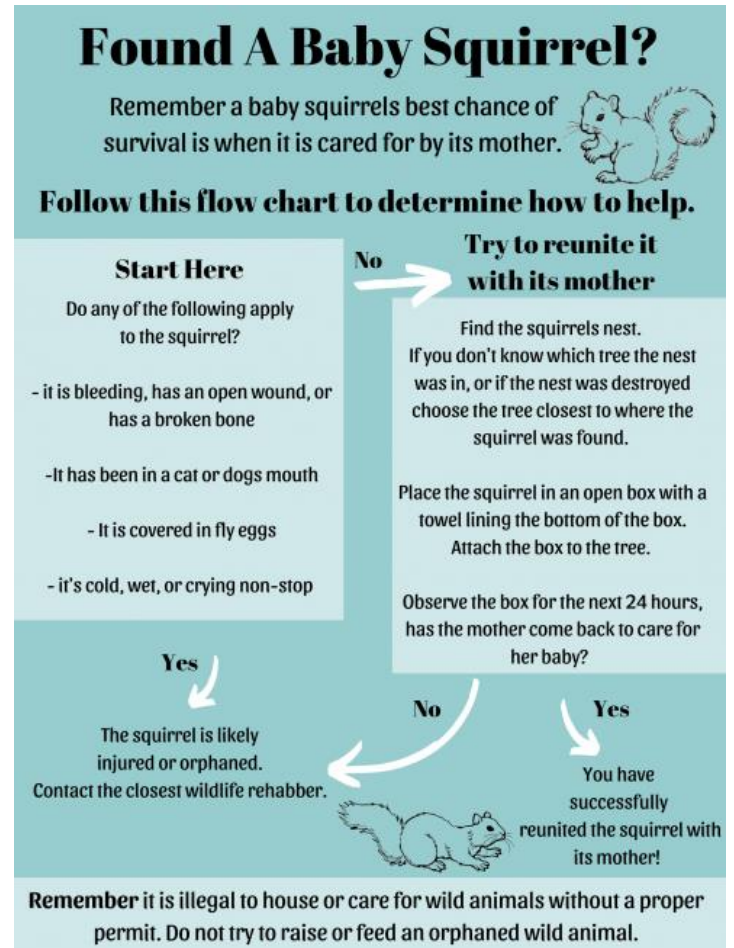
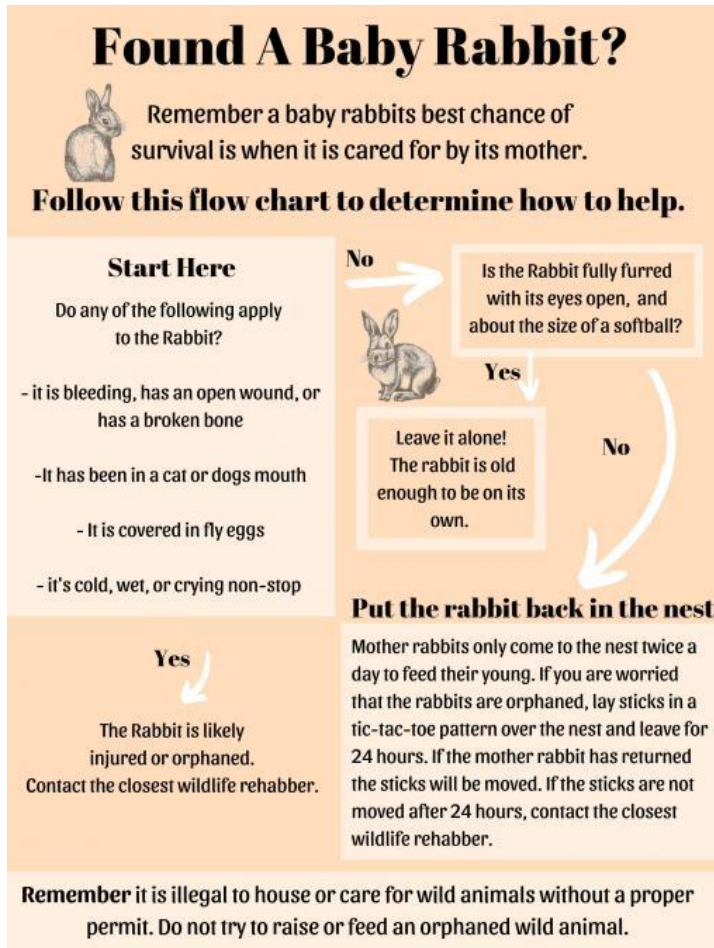


Figure 12 & 13: infographics provided by Iowa State Extension Office to help you figure out if a baby squirrel or baby rabbit need a wildlife rehabber.

CAMPING SEASON IS ALMOST HERE!



Benton County Conservation Parks open for camping on April 15th, 2022 and close October 31st, 2022. All campsites are first-come, first-served. Campsites are self register at the kiosk in campgrounds.

\$16/night for any electric site

\$10/night for any non-electric site

Scan the QR code for rules before you go!



BCC Naturalist Win Award *by Aaron Askelson and Faith Henrichs, Naturalists*

The Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN) and the Iowa Conservation Education Coalition (ICEC) awarded Benton County Conservation and Iowa Education Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired with an IAN/ICEC Award for Excellence in Environmental Education. The award is the Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education School Award for Outstanding Whole-School Environmental Education Program. The IAN/ICEC Awards for Excellence in Environmental Education are awarded annually to recognize incredible contributions to the advancement of environmental literacy in Iowa.

The honor of the Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education School Award goes to Iowa Education Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Benton County Conservation for their collaborative Conservation Field Days and virtual Programs. The field days have attempted to expand the students' knowledge of the outdoors, things they can do in nature, and how they can enjoy it safely. With the ongoing pandemic, the program had to shift gears and adapt with virtual based programming which included topics such as Iowa prairies. Some highlights from past programs include feeling and holding animal pelts and mammal skulls, along with wild edibles hikes, canoeing at Rodgers Park, cooking food with solar ovens, and other programs.



Figure 14: Todd Frank and Wendy Miller from Iowa Education Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Naturalist Aaron Askelson and Faith Henrichs from BCC accepting their award.

Benton County Conservation joins a long history of outstanding environmental educators in the state of Iowa. The environmental education award is named in honor of Sylvan Runkel. Runkel co-authored four seminal books on Iowa plants and natural history. He was insightful educator who believed strongly in the value of direct experience with the environment.

What Does a Naturalist Do? *by Aaron Askelson, Naturalists*

When people ask me what I do for a living I often get quizzical looks after I tell them that I am a Naturalist. Before they have a chance to let their mind wander on what they think I do for a living I usually state that I lead school field trips and teach kids how to fish and canoe. Although this is clearly a simplification of what I do, it is definitely part of my job but there is much more. Some people confuse us with the Iowa DNR or even our own Park Rangers.



Figure 15: Middle school students canoeing on the Upper Iowa River during a River Raiders trip.

As Naturalists in the county conservation system, we are in charge of all the environmental education and outreach. We wear many hats while fulfilling our roles as Naturalists. The majority of our time is spent working with the school children of Benton County. We arrange in school visits where we have the opportunity to share some of our knowledge of the natural world with them. Our main goal is to get kids outside and spark an interest in nature, our busiest time of year is during the spring and fall field trip season. Getting the kids outside and having fun in nature at our parks for field trips is our main goal. We love to take advantage of the nice weather if we can and get the kids out of their classroom and outside.

What Does a Naturalist Do? *Continued from previous page*

Whether it is doing leaf rubbings with kindergarteners or talking to 7th graders about fossils, we try to make the activity fun and educational. Most of our visits in the preschool through 2nd grade groups usually begin with us reading a book about the topic we will be discussing for example hibernation or the metamorphosis of the monarch butterfly.

One of the best things about working with kids is the funny stories they share, whether made up or real. While reading a book to a group of kindergarteners about animal tracks, I posed the question to the class if they could guess which animal had made the track we were looking at in the book. I called on the boy to my right and he stated with confidence “It was a fox.” As I turned the page to reveal what animal it was, his face lit up as he saw the picture of a fox. He burst out “Nailed it!” and did a mighty fist pump. It was hard to keep a straight face in front of the class in light of his enthusiasm. While reading a story to a group of preschoolers one boy thought it was appropriate to pick a scab that was on my leg. Needless to say, this kind of threw me through a loop. I had to ask the entire class to take three big scoots back and gather my thoughts. Many of the stories involve embellishments of animals they have seen in the wild lots of the animals that do not exist in Iowa for example sharks, tarantulas, lions, and many bears. Others revolve around something their parents or grandparents did. Grandpas seem to be responsible for many of the outlandish tales relayed to us. Every visit to the schools could be an episode of “Kids Say the Darndest Things.”

Between the school visits and the field trips there is plenty of planning and boring emails. But I wouldn’t trade my job for anything. Getting to see the joy on a kid’s face after catching their first fish or the first time they held a crawfish is a pretty good reward. Or when two students learn to control their canoe as they float across a lake and come ashore with a great sense of accomplishment. Those type of rewards can’t be beat.

So, when people ask me about my job, I try to keep it simple and I don’t mention the fishing pole fixing, chain sawing, toilet cleaning, preschool scab picking, weeding, and all the other fun stuff we do.



Figure 16: Kid holding up a fish she had just caught at Rodgers Park during a program.

Enjoy the Great Outdoors Responsibly!

by Faith Henrichs, Naturalists

Have you ever gone on a hike and the trail had lots of litter and dog poop everywhere? Or went fishing and there were Styrofoam bait containers and old fishing line scattered all along the shore? How did that make you feel? Did that take away from your outdoor experience? Did you find yourself cleaning up after others? If so, thank you for being a good steward!



Figure 17: Leave No Trace logo from lnt.org.

As the weather gets nicer, our parks get busier. We love to see so many people getting outside and enjoying our parks and natural areas! Science has shown time after time that going outdoors renews our spirits, connects us with nature and all of its amazing beauty. With growing park visitors, comes negative land impacts when done without care. It’s not that one time that someone cuts a trail or throws a banana peel into the woods, but when these actions are repeated time after time, the impacts add up quickly and take a long time to fix. So what can we do to make the least amount of impact in natural areas? By following and promoting Leave No Trace! Leave No Trace (LNT) addresses land impacts and provides people with techniques and skills to enjoy the outdoors responsibly.

Enjoy the Great Outdoors Responsibly!

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Oftentimes, people associate LNT with backpacking or backcountry camping, but LNT applies anytime you go outside. We can practice Leave No Trace by following these set of guidelines every time we venture outdoors:

1. Plan ahead and prepare

- This is probably the most important principle. If you aren't prepared, you are more likely to cause a negative impact. For example, if you bring your dog, make sure to bring a bag to clean up after them.
- Know the rules and regulations before you go. You can read Benton County Conservation rules [here](#) before you visit one of our properties.
- Be aware of the weather, how long you plan to be out and know your route. Most importantly, tell someone where you will be, with who, and for how long.

2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces

- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, sand, dry grasses, and snow.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Benton County Conservation has already established good campsites for you so there is no need to find one while enjoying our parks!
- Stay on designated trails. Going off trail encourages others to follow your path which hurts sensitive plants, can cause erosion, aids in the spread of invasive plants and, can get yourself and others lost.
- Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when trails are wet or muddy, so dress accordingly!

3. Dispose of waste properly

- Carry in, carry out! Pack it in, pack it out! In other words, you should leave with what you brought.
- Pick up after yourselves and your pets and carry it home with you. Studies have attributed pet wastes to instances of water pollution sufficient enough to exceed water quality standards. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one day's pet waste can contain several billion fecal coliform bacteria, along with Giardia and the eggs of roundworms, hookworms, and tapeworms.
- Burning trash is NEVER acceptable. Pack it in, pack it out!



Figure 18: Raccoon meme about stealing camping food.

4. Leave what you find

- Take only pictures, leave only footsteps!
- Preserve the past: observe, but do not touch, cultural or historic structures and artifacts.
- Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them. Who doesn't love the excitement of discovering a unique rock or a cool feather? Leave it for others to find and enjoy! Did you know that it's illegal to have most Iowa bird feathers in your possession without proper permits?

5. Minimize campfire impacts

- Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings. All of our campsites have one.
- Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand or provided firewood and make sure to burn all wood to ash. Be sure to put out campfires completely before leaving.
- There should never be trash in your fire ring. Pack it in, pack it out! Do you see the theme?

Enjoy the Great Outdoors Responsibly!

Continued from previous page

6. Respect wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance and never follow or approach them. Instead, follow the Rule of Thumb: make a thumbs up, extend your arm all the way, close one eye, and see if you can hide the animal with your thumb. If you can't hide the entire animal with your thumb, take a few steps back and try again. When you can hide the whole animal, this means you are a safe distance from wildlife.
- Never feed wild animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, changes their natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Ground squirrels are cute until you are sitting next to your day pack and they are in your bag stealing food.
- Protect wildlife by storing food and trash securely. I always clear the picnic table of food and utensils and put the trash bag in my car overnight. This eliminates raccoons getting into your food and licking your marshmallow fork while you sleep! (This happens more than you'd like to know.)

7. Respect other visitors

- Let nature's sounds prevail! Avoid loud voices and noises (unless in bear country). This includes blaring music through a speaker. If you prefer music while spending time outdoors, bring a pair of headphones.
- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience. We all enjoy the outdoors differently, so be mindful of others.

Doing anything to minimize your impact is better than doing nothing at all. Leave No Trace isn't rules, regulations, or black and white. It's about doing what we can, with the knowledge we have, to minimize our impact in the natural spaces where we choose to spend our time.

To learn more about Leave No Trace, visit Leave No Trace or join us at the Nature Center on June 18th at 10am to learn more about LNT while hiking and camping, whether you are in the front country or backcountry. Registration is required by calling 319-472-4942 or by emailing info@bentoncountyparks.com

**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE THAT PARTICIPATED
IN THE HANNEN LAKE ICE FISHING TOURNAMENT,
OUR MANY DONORS, AND BCCB STAFF AND
VOLUNTEERS FOR MAKING THIS EVENT
POSSIBLE!**

**CONGRATULATIONS TO NATAN BERGMAN AND
JAYDEN BERGMAN FOR YOUTH LONGEST
BLUEGILL AND LYDIA POLSEAN AND KEVIN
BERGMAN FOR ADULT LONGEST BLUEGILL.
SEE YOU ALL NEXT YEAR, FEBRUARY 11, 2023
FOR OUR NEXT ICE FISHING TOURNAMENT AT
HANNEN LAKE PARK!**



Figure 21 (to the left): Ice fishing tents during the 2022 Tournament.



Figure 19 & 20 (above and below): Youth ice fishing winners.



Conservation Board Members

Dan Hill: Vinton, Member
Mike LaGrange: Vinton, Member
Denni Randall: Belle Plaine, Chair
Randy Scheel: Garrison, Member
Becky VanWey: Brandon, Member

The Benton County Conservation Board meets the second Monday of every month at 5:00 pm at the Nature Center. Meetings are open to the public.

Find us online at:

www.bentoncountyiowa.org or
www.mycountyparks.com

Find us on Facebook: Benton County Conservation

Conservation Staff

Shelby Williams	Director
Aaron Askelson	Interpretive Naturalist
Faith Henrichs	Interpretive Naturalist
Ed Hach	North Unit Park Ranger
Layla Hagen	East Unit Park Ranger
Camryn Grubic	South Unit Park Ranger
Zach Parmater	Conservation Tech/Ranger
Cecilia Dirks	Conservation Tech

Email anyone on staff by using their first initial combined with their last name
@bentoncountyparks.com

Benton County Conservation
5718 20th Ave. Dr., Vinton, IA 52349 (319)-472-4942



Iowa's County Conservation System

There's no better way to celebrate Iowa's unique 99 County Conservation System! Each week we will focus on just one of the 99 Counties and will explore some of the opportunities they provide.

Follow the [My County Parks Facebook page](#) to participate in this great virtual adventure!

Newsletter Update:

If you wish to continue to receive a mailed paper copy of this newsletter, please contact our office via phone or email to remain on the paper mailing list.

Newsletters can be found online at: www.bentoncountya.gov under conservation department - newsletters tab.

We will email newsletters from now on, sign up at: www.bentoncountya.gov under conservation department - newsletters tab or [click here](#).

Calendar of Events Spring 2022

All programs are **FREE** of charge unless a price is listed.

Registration is required and masks are strongly encouraged when indoors.

Eco-Extravaganza: Feelin' the Heat With BCC

Saturday, April 23rd, 11-2pm at Benton County Nature Center

Smokey the Bear will be there... Will you?

Come learn about fire safety, play games, make crafts and much more! This event is free and is suitable for the whole family. Local firefighters will be on site with gear and the VFW Post 8884 will have food available for purchase. We will also have volunteers selling baked goods for the Hoefle-Dulin shoreline project. Curious how to manage your prairie with fire? There will be a demonstration prescribed burn at 1pm, weather permitting. Registration is not required for this event.

Flora, Fauna & Females: Flower Frolic

Saturday, May 7th, 10am at Rodgers Park - 2113 57th Street Trail, Vinton, IA 52349

Come make new gal pals with us! Join BCC Naturalist for a guided spring ephemeral wildflower hike at Rodgers Park around the lake. While this program is geared towards women, everyone over the age of 8 is welcome to join. Please meet at the boat ramp on the south side of the park. Please wear sturdy shoes. This program is weather dependent. Registration is required by calling 319-472-4942 or by emailing info@bentoncountyparks.com

Bark in the Park

Tuesday, May 10th, 5:30 - 7:30pm at Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area - 3139 57th Street Trail, Urbana

Come explore Wildcat Bluff with your four-legged friend! Leave your paw print on BCCB's very first "Dog Library" and make your own homemade dog treats! This event is free, but is accepting donations to go towards stocking Wildcat Bluff's Dog Library. **All dogs must be on a leash at all times and have proof of rabies vaccination.** To register, please email info@bentoncountyparks.com or call 319-472-4942.

Izaak Walton League Sportsman Day

May 21, 8:30-10:30am at Izaak Walton - Red Cedar Chapter

Are you looking for some outdoor fun? BCC Naturalists are leading archery sessions and prairie hikes from 8:30-10:30. Other activities include face painting, Nerf Gun target range, BB gun range, scavenger hunt, and a demo campsite area. Kids are welcome all day with adult supervision and may participate if able to do so safely with parent or guardian. For questions or more information, visit [Facebook.com/iwla.rcc](https://www.facebook.com/iwla.rcc) or call Joe Redenbaugh at 319-504-0827.

Reptiles & Amphibians - Blirstown Library Program

June 6th, 2pm at Blirstown Public Library - 305 Locust Street NW, Blirstown, IA

Come learn about some of Iowa's reptiles and amphibians with Benton County Conservation Naturalists. Learn about their incredible adaptations and how to help them in your own yard. This program will include live animals from the Benton County Nature Center. This program is in conjunction with Blirstown Public Library's Summer Reading Program.

Critter Camp

Tuesday June 7th - Thursday June 9th, 9am-12pm at Benton County Nature Center - \$20 per child

Does your child love nature and exploring outside? Is your child going into 1st or 2nd grade? This camp is exactly for them! If you are interested in signing up for summer camps please visit <https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Benton.aspx> or call us at 319-472-4942 for more information. All registrations must be done online and be made ONE WEEK PRIOR to start of camp.

Dragonfly Camp

Tuesday June 14th - Thursday June 16th, 9am-2pm at Benton County Nature Center - \$25 per child

Does your child love nature and exploring outside? Is your child going into 3rd, 4th or 5th grade? This camp is exactly for them! If you are interested in signing up for summer camps please visit <https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Benton.aspx> or call us at 319-472-4942 for more information. All registrations must be done online and be made ONE WEEK PRIOR to start of camp.

Leave No Trace Awareness Workshop

Saturday June 18th, 10am at Benton County Nature Center

Do you enjoy camping, hiking and other fun outdoor recreation activities? Want to learn more on how to be a better land steward while enjoying the outdoors? Come join BCC Naturalist for a morning of learning about proper ethics for outdoor recreation and camping. Participants will learn the 7 Principles of Leave No Trace set by the Center for Outdoor Ethics and then do a LNT activity at the Nature Center. Participants are encouraged to bring a reusable water bottle and dress for the weather. This program is free and family friendly. Registration is required by emailing info@bentoncountyparks.com or by calling 319-472-4942.

River Raiders - Upper Iowa River Kendallville to Decorah

Fontana Training Day: June 16, 5:30 - 8pm (mandatory)

Upper Iowa River Trip: June 21-23 ; Age: 11-13. Cost: \$90. Pre-register required.

Adventure awaits around every bend! Explore the Upper Iowa River from Kendallville to Decorah. Youth will canoe, camp, cook outdoors, and learn wilderness skills on this two-night, three-day excursion. Participants will paddle their way around winding bends, rapids, scenic waterfalls, cold springs, and 200-foot chimney bluffs. The trip fee includes tents, food, canoes, life jackets, paddles and transportation. Enrollment is limited to 12 participants. Participants must attend the training day on June 16. The training will include camping and paddling basics, menu for the trip itinerary, and what to pack.

Pond Study - Blirstown Library Program

June 28th, 6pm at Hannen Lake Park - 1949 Ben/la Rd, Blirstown, IA 52209

Join Benton County Conservation Naturalists to explore macroinvertebrates that live in Hannen Lake. Macroinvertebrates are aquatic insects that tell us about water quality. Come out to Hannen Lake on June 28th to get first-hand experience at catching macroinvertebrates with nets and view them up close! This program is in conjunction with Blirstown Public Library's Summer Reading Program

Youth Boundary Waters Wilderness Canoe Trek - NE Minnesota

Fontana Training Day: July 14 at 4pm (mandatory)

Boundary Waters Trek: July 23rd – 30th

Ages 14-18; Cost \$500; Registration limited to 5 youth. Pre-register required.

Embark on an adventure of a lifetime in the largest designated wilderness in the lower 48 states! Participants will be guided through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness by Naturalists from Buchanan and Benton County Conservation Boards. Participants will paddle across wilderness lakes, portage canoes and packs over rugged land trails, fish for fun and food, read maps, use compasses, live in tents without leaving a trace, cook meals in wilderness areas, and learn about the ecology of this magnificent area. By weeks end, youth will better understand the value of the wilderness to people, and to loons, moose, wolves, black bear, and other wildlife that inhabit this special place. Tents, backpacks, canoes, cooking gear, food, and transportation from Fontana Interpretive Nature Center and Benton County Nature Center are provided. If you have some canoeing experience, are able to carry 40+ pounds, and possess the strength and spirit to explore, this trip may be for you! Limited stipends and scholarships opportunities are available, and are listed on the website registration - www.buchanancountyparks.com. Registration includes only a \$100 deposit – final payments of those selected to participate will be due in May.

Youth interested in this trip are asked to submit a 2 paragraph (no more than 4 paragraph) explanation of why they are interested, what they think they might gain, and what they think wilderness means to Sondra Cabell at scabell@co.buchanan.ia.us. Participant selection will be made based on this submission by May 1, and deposits for those not selected among the limit of 5 participants will be reimbursed in full. For more information, call 319-636-2617.

Stipends and scholarships are available to help offset costs.

- Iowa Assoc of Naturalists – www.iowanaturalists.org under Programs tab (\$50-\$500 amounts while available)
- Friends of Fontana Park – 2 @ \$250 - Available to those who participated in River Raiders.
- Benton County Conservation Foundation 2 @ \$250 available
- Private Scholarship - 1 @ \$250

Benton County Conservation Adventure Camp

August 9th - 11th for kids going into 6th, 7th and 8th grade

\$80 per child - includes travel, food and lodging

Join us on a 3 day, 2 night trip to Eden Valley Refuge in Clinton County. Adventures include: a pontoon ride on the Blue Heron to explore the Mississippi River, view birds and find mussels, paddle on the 13 passenger voyager canoe, go caving and rock climbing and much more! Participants will meet at the Benton County Nature Center on August 9th and travel together to Eden Valley Refuge. Kids will learn valuable camping and survival skills along the way. If you are interested in signing up for this event, please visit <https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Benton.aspx> or call us at 319-472-4942 for more information. All registrations must be done online and be made ONE WEEK PRIOR to start of camp.