

The Nature of Things

THE BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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A Tail of Two Oaks *By Karen M. Phelps, Naturalist*

I vaguely remember my early years. As far as how I got here, I can only speculate, as there are giant oak trees surrounding me in the nearby woods. I'd like to think some long-forgotten squirrel buried me here and then simply overlooked me during the winter months as he was foraging for food. It's been over two hundred years since I first burst forth from the rich, black soil of this river bottom area, now known to many as the Tobin Cabin area. Back then, it was simply known as Nesswe Neppe, the Point of Three Waters; a name given by the Fox and Sac Indians.

It's quite a beautiful area to wake up to every morning. The soothing sounds of Lime Creek as it slowly ripples by me to the East, only to meet up with the solitude of Lime Lake to my Southwest. There they then merge with the ever changing Red Cedar River directly to my South: Nesswe Neppe - a fitting name for an enchanting area. Over the years, I've opened my branches to many an animal from raccoons, snakes, birds, mink and squirrels, to name a few. I felt obligated to the squirrel, thinking he was perhaps a relative of the long forgotten giver of my life. Just the other day, I sighed as I heard the melodious sound of the Baltimore oriole emanating from up high in my branches. I truly hope it reached the ears and heart of the unknown female he was courting.

You may have noticed the "tail" emerging from my trunk in the above photo. Though I can't say for sure, but I think I started to grow that in about the 1980's. I know it was after the 1950's, because my "tail" is made of polyester, and that type of rope didn't become popular until the late 1950's. I think I can remember the day when someone strung a clothesline around my waist and simply neglected to ever take it down. I'm somewhat jealous of my friend the Pin oak, he not only has a tail made of cotton, but a hook as well.



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www.bentoncountyparks.com
or call us at:
319-472-4942 to be added
to our mailing list.

The Wonders of Leadplant *By Aaron Askelson, Naturalist*

Leadplant: *Amorpha canescens* Pursh

We are so excited that our prairie root display is finished. We hope it will be a beautiful showcase to educate people about the importance of our native prairies for many years to come. Our new exhibit was hand crafted by Dale Baldwin and is made of wood harvested from downed trees after the derecho windstorm of 2011. The oak wood was salvaged by our rangers and then Pierce Lumber of Belle Plaine donated their services to mill and dry the wood. Dale used the native hardwood to construct a one of a kind creation built specifically for our nature center. This display case houses the Leadplant root we received from the University of Northern Iowa's Prairie Roots Project.

The Leadplant is a small, shrub-like perennial prairie plant that is in the bean family. It is usually one to three feet in height with some small side branches. As the plant ages, and if it is not disturbed, it will become more and more woody. The new stems of the plant are a light green and covered in tiny white hairs.

These fine hairs seem to cover the entire plant, at times giving it a fuzzy or dusty appearance. This is where it is believed to have gotten its name because it looks like the plant has been covered

in white lead dust.

At one time it was

believed that the leadplant was an indicator that lead deposits were nearby. This of course was later found to be untrue.

Native American tribes found many uses for leadplant. One of the uses of the plant was a tea made from the leaves, which was believed to have medicinal properties that helped treat open wounds, eczema, rheumatism, pinworms, and neuralgia (nerve pain). They would also combine leadplant leaves and bison fat to smoke. While the Native Americans did not refer to it as Leadplant, some of them gave the plant the name "buffalo bellows", because the plant's blooming period, with its bright purple flowers, occurred in conjunction with when the bison were in rut and bellowing.



A close up of the leadplant, reveals a polinator's dream. Note the yellow tips of pollen beckoning to bees, butterflies and other insects. The distinctive leaf shape is indicative of legumes or members of the bean family.

Seasonal Employee Profile *By Josh Eimer, Nature Center Seasonal Staff*

My name is Josh Eimer. I am a new seasonal worker here at Benton County Conversation. I work mainly at the Nature Center, helping to maintain the grounds as well as the interior of the Nature Center. I am only employed during the summer because during the rest of the year I am an elementary school teacher. I teach 3rd grade at Coralville Central Elementary in Coralville, Iowa.

This will be my third year of teaching since I graduated from the University of Iowa with a Bachelors in Elementary Education. I grew up in Southeast Iowa, in the town of Fort Madison. Outside of my busy schedule as a teacher and an employee here at Benton County Conservation, I like to enjoy several different indoor and outdoor activities. Some of those activities include mountain biking, running, hiking, camping, and reading. I am also very passionate about outdoor education.

I spent the last two summers working as an outdoor educator for the University of Iowa and their summer camp program. In the future I would like to pursue a full time career as an outdoor educator. During my time working for Benton County Conservation I intend to continue to learn more information about the world around us, as well as helping out with different projects around the Nature Center. One of my favorite responsibilities at the Nature Center is caring for the live animals. Cinnabar, the resident fox snake, willingly devours live mice or thawed frozen mice, and is always a joy to feed. The resident snapping turtle, false map turtle and painted turtles, keep visitors entertained as well. I will admit, cleaning the fish tanks isn't on my list of top ten fun tasks. While here, I have also learned the names of many of the prairie plants growing around the Center.

If you come by the Benton County Conservation Nature Center, feel free to come inside or find me around the yard and say hello. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have, or at least point you in the right direction of the person who can answer your questions.



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Iowa's Battle for Water Quality *By Matthew Purdy, Director*

Today in Iowa, we drive across the once tall-grass prairie state, and are reminded that our landscape is being stripped for the agricultural and economic benefit of the world. Iowa lacks the suburban sprawl commonly seen in other states, and allows for expansive farming environments to thrive. It has been documented for decades that Iowa has the smallest percentage of its original natural habitat of all fifty states (under 1%). Altering our native habitat to this degree has opened up Iowa to extenuating environmental consequences. For instance: increase in invasive & toxic species; loss of over ½ of our top soil, the rest estimated to be gone in 100 years; and finally the overwhelming water quality concerns that will effect over ½ of the state's population and cause many potential health concerns. (Cosner, S 2001, Iowa State University, online)

For years, it has been accepted as the common agricultural understanding that loss of Iowa's original natural environment is an unavoidable cost for maximum agricultural productivity. However, with the growing diversification of Iowa's economy and the continual increase of Iowa's water quality concerns, this understanding must change.

The first point to make is that most Iowans don't understand what's necessary to mitigate water quality issues in their back yard. It is important to note that farming practices are a large part of the problem, but farmers themselves are not. When dealing with this topic, even professionals find need to question and study their efforts continually. It is most important to focus on common practices for the masses. Many of our neighbors might be doing more than they are legally required and thus deserve credit for those efforts. However, much more should be done.

Conservationists fight on cultural and fiscal battlefields with their metropolitan & agricultural neighbors that span the global market in terms of perception and influence. This was recently witnessed through the Des Moines Water Works filing a federal Clean Water Act lawsuit in March, against the supervisors and drainage districts of Buena Vista, Calhoun and Sac counties. They allege excess nitrates from farm drainage tiles and drainage districts are polluting the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers, affecting over 500,000 residents. (Eller, D. May 19, 2015. Retrieved from Des Moines Register online) No matter your political stance; joint cooperation towards action, not discussion, is the only hope for meaningful change.

It's improbable to propose a one size fits all standard for water quality issues across Iowa. Only programs like the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP), & the Iowa Water and Land Legacy (IWILL), have crossed the fiscal & political barriers between agricultural and conservation views. These programs give (IWILL will when a tax increase happens) monies to both sides of the fence and remain a common ground for progressive change, while dealing with minimal/solitary fiscal appropriation through state funding.

As conservationists, we must realize that we can employ an inherently short sighted view of all agricultural practices. This conservation view can be seen as offensive and lacking any educational standard for farming practices. In the same token agriculturalists often have a short sighted view regarding proposed conservation practices. Specifically dealing with common concepts of tiling, cover crops & buffer strips when opposed to a short-term agricultural survival stance. Basically, people stick with what they know, or with what they think they know. This is the dilemma we must face when searching for a permanent solution to water quality concerns through education and tax dollar assisted agricultural experimentation. If we could stop illegal farming of right of ways, ensure mitigation of metropolitan & agricultural storm water runoff, repair defunct waste treatment facilities, stop the tiling and clearing of virgin ground, and start buffering every waterway; our water quality issues would drastically improve. Daunting, right? Getting so many entities to voluntarily submit to new regiments that are not understood regarding management seems difficult, if not impossible, without legislative assistance.

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Outdoor Cooking at its Finest *By Scott Bahmann, Deputy Director/Ranger*



Patrons to Rodgers Park may have noticed that the former ranger residence and garage at the park have been removed, leaving an empty slab where the garage was located. This cement slab is the foundation for what is hoped to be the biggest and best outdoor cooking facility in Benton County. The facility will be used for fundraising events, educational programming and by anyone from the general public that enjoys cooking their food outdoors.

The project is slated to begin construction during the 2015 camping season and is hoped to be completed for the annual Rodgers Park Labor Day fund-raiser. An outdoor grill will be available for the grilling enthusiast, while those of you willing to try your hand at pizza will have the opportunity to utilize the brick pizza oven.

Using the existing 24'x24' cement slab, plans are to erect a 20" sitting wall bordered by nine-34" columns around the perimeter of the area. This will increase the seating area for friends and family to congregate and enjoy the outdoors, providing an alternative to current shelter use. Funding for the project is from Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) funds, Benton Community Foundation, Red Cedar Chapter Izaak Walton League and Friends of Rodgers Park.

The outdoor grilling station will be available for use by any park patron, but as with anything in the park, we ask that you respect these conveniences and leave them better than you found them. If you would like further information about this project, please send an email with your inquiry to: info@bentoncountyparks.com, with the subject "grilling".

Basic Pizza Crust Recipe

Ingredients

3 1/2 to 4 cups bread flour, plus more for rolling (Chef's Note: Using bread flour will give you a much crisper crust. If you can't find bread flour, you can substitute it with all-purpose flour which will give you a chewier crust.)
1 teaspoon sugar
1 envelope instant dry yeast
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 1/2 cups water, 110 degrees F
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus 2 teaspoons

Directions

Combine the bread flour, sugar, yeast and kosher salt in the bowl of a stand mixer and combine. While the mixer is running, add the water and 2 tablespoons of the oil and beat until the dough forms into a ball. If the dough is sticky, add additional flour, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the dough comes together in a solid ball. If the dough is too dry, add additional water, 1 tablespoon at a time. Scrape the dough onto a lightly floured surface and gently knead into a smooth, firm ball (approximately 5 minutes).

Grease a large bowl with the remaining 2 teaspoons olive oil, add the dough, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it in a warm area to let it double in size, about 1 hour. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and divide it into 2 equal pieces. Cover each with a clean kitchen towel or plastic wrap and let them rest for 10 minutes then roll to desired size.

December 2013–February 2014

Bodeker Yard

Benton County, Iowa

Young Visitors from the Forest



Little Jerry

The Blue Jay repeated this harassing behavior, jumping on the defenseless juveniles three more times until finally, as if getting his message through, flew off into the woods.

Bill, who frequents my yard slightly less often than Little Jerry, can be seen hopping on the ground and collecting scattered sunflower seeds. He will then jump up on the trunk of the suet tree to stuff the goodies into the bark, only to be gobbled up by everyone else at the feeders later in the day. An occasional squirrel has even found Bill's stash.

I have deeply enjoyed these young visitors over the course of the past two months, from the first day they showed up to just this morning! The changes I have witnessed in both their plumage and personality are remarkable. I wonder what happens to these birds when they're not in my yard, are they visiting other feeders? Has someone else been appreciating their progress from portly baby to gawky teenager? Observing Little Jerry and Bill, getting to know them personally, has proven a wonderful way to pass the time during the frozen days of winter. I so hope they'll stick around through the spring, but by then I probably won't be able to distinguish my young visitors from any other adult Red-headed Woodpeckers anymore.

~by Coralee Denise Bodeker

During the past couple of months, many Red-headed Woodpeckers have shown up daily to my yard and frequented the feeders. They've become such constant visitors that I've given two of them names. The first to appear and be named was "Little Jerry," an aging juvenile, and then came "Bill," a younger juvenile with a more reddish-brown head than Little Jerry. Adult Red-headed Woodpeckers have an unmistakable deep red head without the slightest hint of brown, black or grey. The juveniles of winter have ruddy brown/black heads with the telltale red just beginning to show on their napes. Adult Red-headed Woodpeckers have prominent, defined patches of black and white on their wings and snow-white bellies, while juveniles sport white patches peppered with grey and black, making them appear somewhat dirty and scruffy. The juveniles' round, fluffy bodies make them easy to distinguish, too, from the sleek adults.

Through my observations, I have discovered that Little Jerry seems to enjoy hanging out just above the suet cage, clinging motionless to the tree {a good way to avoid feeder bullies}. I have watched him stay in that one spot for well over ten minutes at a time. He also enjoys the Yellow Maple trees in the front yard. One day he was on the ground at the base of a maple eating snow by picking up one blob at a time and shaking it down his throat. On another occasion Little Jerry and a third, nameless juvenile were scared out of the trees by a Blue Jay. The two landed just beyond the feeders on my driveway. Both birds started innocently pecking at the gravel, their round bodies almost flat against it. The Blue Jay quickly spotted them, swooped over to one, hovered and then fell atop him.



Adult Red-headed Woodpecker

'A Prairie Girl's Notebook' is inspired by 'A Naturalist's Notebook' penned by John Schmitt & found in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Living Bird journal.

BENTON COUNTY IRVM

Pale Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*)

Prepared By:

Ben Bonar

Pale Purple Coneflower is one of Iowa's most iconic prairie plant species. Growing up to 3 feet tall, this plant easily stands out in diverse prairies due to its light purple flowers. This plant prefers mesic to dry soils that are well drained. They are also extremely drought tolerant once their taproot is formed.

Many prairie plants have unique associations with other prairie species. Pale Purple Coneflower is an excellent nectar source for hummingbirds and butterflies. Its leaves are also a necessary food source for the larva of the Ottoe-skipper butterfly.

Pale Purple Coneflower Quick Facts:

- Classification: Forb
- Life Cycle: Perennial
- Flower Color: Purple
- Bloom Time: June, July
- Soil Preference: Mesic to Dry
- Sun Exposure: Full Sun to Part Shade

Ottoe-skipper Butterfly



Pale Purple Coneflower can make an excellent addition to landscaping, rain gardens and native prairie reconstructions. However, there are a variety of ways you can get them started!

There are three different ways that you can establish native prairie plants on your site. These include starting them from seed, plugs or bare root plants. Each can be bought from native plant nurseries around the state. Starting from seed is the most difficult but often is more cost-effective. Plugs are young prairie plants that are grown in small pots and come ready to transplant. Finally, bare root plants are mature plants that have been grown for the intention of transplanting. They often come packaged in soil and must be planted as soon as possible.

Gardening Tips



Leadplant *Continued from page 2*



Since leadplant is in the bean family, it is a great plant to have around in a prairie because it helps to fix nitrogen into the soil through the nodules in its roots. The plant can tolerate a small amount of grazing and is very fire tolerant. The amazing part of this plant that we are so excited to show people is the root structure, which can extend deep into the soil providing excellent soil stabilization and erosion control. Plants have been known to have root systems that extended 15 feet into the soil. Our root is almost that long; making it an excellent specimen to be on display in our nature center.

If you get a chance, come out and view this wonder of the prairie. The leadplant, among many other plants, helped make all our precious topsoil in the Midwest. Although less than one percent of our native prairies remain, it is important to educate ourselves how we can restore some of it and bring back as many of the diverse species as possible to help our fragile ecosystems.



TOP: Another view of the leadplant as it grows in the wild of its native prairie habitat.

BELOW: The prairie root display is the focal point of the Nature Center display area. The display case, custom built by Vinton native, Dale Baldwin, showcases the over 12-foot long root of the leadplant. The leadplant and root display was grown at the University of Northern Iowa's Prairie Roots Project. The 2-year old plant was acquired from the UNIPRP, after Aaron Askelson wrote a grant explaining the need for the display at the Benton County Nature Center.

Hannen Park's Forgotten Island *By Logan Hahn, Hannen Lake Park Ranger*



The North end of Hannen Lake Park reveals a small island where park patrons can relax and enjoy a variety of activities.

The red arrow points to the island in this aerial view of Hannen Lake Park.



Any hiking enthusiast who has gone exploring on Hannen Lake Park's trail system has probably noticed a small piece of land at the North end of the lake which is surrounded by what appears to be a moat. Upon crossing the small footbridge to the island, a person is awash in the tall grass and brush; so thick to even see through.

When the small island at the North end of the Lake was built, it came about as a byproduct of the excavating that needed to be done to install the large culvert/sediment basin in that area. The island's purpose was to provide nesting habitat for waterfowl, and to slow water entering the lake. However, with a few improvements, the island would be another great reason to go exploring in the park. Recognizing this, we got to work getting the property a little more usable.

The first order of business was to remove some of the taller invasive brush and grass in the area. This took some doing, but we finally got it done. After that was finished, we concentrated on removing any old or broken lumber on the bridge that led to the island and replacing it with new lumber. A picnic table and two bird feeders were placed on the island and two shade trees were recently planted.

When complete, the island will be a great addition to the existing trail system at Hannen Lake Park. Some activities that could be enjoyed at the area include, picnicking, bird watching, stargazing, and fishing. As you can see, we are constantly striving to make improvements to our area with the public in mind. Feel free to contact us with any thoughts or ideas you may have. Volunteers are always welcome to help with the updates.

Iowa's Battle for Water Quality *Continued from page 4*

Only a steadfast approach toward joint cooperation of agriculturists, conservationists, economists & politicians can better our State's water quality situation.

Iowa has an agricultural success in its future due to its environment. However, that success can only be measured by the lasting protection provided to that environment.

A Tail of Two Oaks *continued from page 1*



Pin oak at the Tobin Cabin area sporting a knotted cotton rope and red shepherd's hook on the opposite side.



People rarely notice my tail, as you have to look close to see it. But Pin oak's hook - why it's hard to miss! I knew it was going to happen, as I remember when someone tied that shepherd's hook around him to hold their lantern. Again, it served such a great purpose, no one thought to take it down, and over the years, my friend simply grew around it.

I've heard of people discovering old plows or saw blades emerging from trunks of trees hundreds of years old. I wonder how much longer my polyester tail will last - certainly not as long as Pin oak's hook!

As you can see from the pictures, my friend has had some serious battles over the years. His vertical scar runs from his base clear up his side to the tops of

his far reaching branches. He also has that strange circular scar directly behind his hook. He refuses to tell me how he got those and I must not have been paying attention when it happened. I think the vertical scar was a lightening strike which I'm glad wasn't me. Those hurt when they happen, and the sound of the thunder and sizzle of the strike are too much for me to bare. We oaks are tough, but all this combined and I'm surprised Pin oak is still with us.

If you're ever at the Tobin Cabin area, please take a moment to stop by and marvel at our unnatural appendages. If you listen closely, you may hear some of our stories about all the things we've seen and experienced over the years. The landscape has changed dramatically during those years, and I've lived through them all. When two cabins were first built near me in the 1930's, I was concerned my life would come to an end. But these families respected me, their children played in my sturdy branches, and in return I provided much needed shade and a place to rest under. I've since given the forest creatures food and shelter, as have countless other

oaks, hickories and walnut trees in the area. Squirrels continue to harvest Pin oak's and my acorns. They continue to bury them and forget to forage for them during the winter months, thus leading to a new offspring of oaks over the years. Many of my friends have succumbed to disease or strong storms over the years. The derecho windstorm of 2011 that swept through this area destroyed many of my friends, but I somehow held fast. That was a scary afternoon, and thankfully I can't remember too many days like that. I enjoy my spot at the point of three waters. I invite you to come out and listen and grow along with me. There are so many things to learn and stories to be told, let's grow old together.

A Runner's Resources in Benton County *By Ryan Tresnak, Guest Writer*

My name is Ryan and I am the Vinton Pizza Hut manager. To keep in shape I picked up running about six years ago. I signed up for a trail run at Pine Lake in Eldora, IA during my first year and fell in love with trail running (thankfully that was the only falling I did)!

That experience opened my eyes to all the opportunities we have here in Benton County. Since then I have found that many of our parks have trails that are well groomed and suited for running - Rodgers Park and the Old Creamery Trail near Vinton, Hannen Park south of Blainstown, Wildcat Bluff Park along the Cedar River (where there is also a great disc golf course), and the trails at Minne Estema, north of Vinton yet also on the Cedar River, are a few of the parks that I enjoy utilizing. Pizza Hut in Vinton, hosts three different runs throughout the year: the October 5K, the October 10mile/50K, and the March 10K. Check out our website at www.vintonpizzahutruns.weebly.com all of which proceeds go to helping fight world hunger.

Without the great park systems and fantastic trails in the Benton County Parks, our runs would be plain and less exciting. I would encourage you to go off road and give trail running a try. It keeps your mind occupied, increases your endurance and improves your balance, plus getting back to nature clears your mind!

Why not take a minute when you're in the parks to stop in and make sure to let a park ranger or staff member know how much you appreciate the great job they are doing for our community.

'Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?
Run in such a way as to get the prize!'

Mom's Awesome Berry Pie *By Zach Parmater, Conservation Technician*



Pie Filling

4-6 Cups Berries of your choice

2 Cups Sugar (or to taste)

1/4 Cup Corn Starch

Gently fold berries and sugar together. Place in refrigerator

Add 1/4 Cup Corn Starch prior to placing in pie shell.

Pie Crust (makes two to three pies)

4 Cups Unsifted Flour

1 TBSP Sugar

2 TSP Salt

1 3/4 Cup Crisco

1/2 Cup Water

1 TBSP White Vinegar

1 Large Egg

Put flour, sugar and salt in large bowl. Mix well with fork or pastry blender. Add shortening until ingredients are crumbly. In small bowl, add water, vinegar and egg. Combine the two mixtures until all ingredients are moist. Divide into five portions and shape into patties. Wrap and place in refrigerator with filling for at least 30 minutes. When ready to use, unwrap and lightly flour each side and roll to desired size. Add filling, top with additional pie crust, pinch edges and make slits in top. Bake for 35-45 minutes at 350° F until golden brown and center starts to bubble.

Construction Underway at Wildcat Bluff *By Jon Geiger, Park Ranger*

We have recently begun construction at Wildcat Bluff Park. We are currently raising the grade of four of our electrical campsites to get them level and usable by the fall of 2015 camping season. This project began in mid-June and will be under way until it is finished.

Currently we have hauled in approximately 600 ton of fill dirt, bringing the area up to grade. We plan to haul in roughly 60 ton of black dirt to dress the area up and plant grass seed as soon as it is done. We will also bring in 32 ton of base rock and 32 ton of road stone to reestablish the road way. The roadway has been raised four feet in order to get the grade where it needed to be to establish level sites. We hope that once this project is complete, patrons will use these sites more often and find their experience more enjoyable. Once the project is complete we will have to allow a few weeks for the grass to become established. Once we determine that the sites are stable and the grass is established, we will open the sites for camper use.

Along with the site reconstruction we are currently breaking ground on our new playground area. We have found it extremely beneficial to work on these two projects simultaneously as we



Looking East, several campsites at Wildcat Bluff Park were raised four feet to bring the sites to a level grade. Top soil was replaced using fill from the playground addition.



Looking Southeast, construction begins on the new playground at Wildcat Bluff Park. Top soil removed from the site was placed at the campsite renovation project north of this area.

have been able to use the dirt that we have removed from our future playground site as top soil for our site reconstruction project.

We have removed the top twelve inches of black dirt from the future playground area. This is necessary to provide children with a safe playing surface. By adding four inches of pea gravel to the bottom of this area, it will help provide adequate drainage. We will then place landscape fabric which will provide a weed barrier. We will then top off the area with eight to ten inches of playground mulch.

When complete, this area will be large enough to support four different pieces of playground equipment. We have already purchased a swing through our Wildcat Bluff Foundation account, funded entirely through fund raisers and donations. Once the swing is placed and the playground is up and running, we will continue to raise money to help fund new equipment which may include a slide, climbing bars, etc. We feel that this playground will be very

beneficial to the park and its patrons and has been needed for quite some time.

If you are out and about feel free to stop by and see the progress that has been happening at one of our most popular river parks. If you are interested in making a donation for future improvements to the park, contact our office at 319-472-4942 or email us at info@bentoncountyparks.com

Wild Parsnip: Simply a Nasty Plant *By Josh Eimer, Nature Center Seasonal Staff*

If you have been following conservation news you may have heard the term “invasive species” come up a time or two. Commonly you will hear names of different plants or animals come up in these news stories and the report will give reasons why these plants or animals are harming our native wildlife. Some of these horrendous plants and animals include, but are not limited to: Garlic mustard, Canada thistle, Zebra mussel, Silver carp, etc..

One plant that is less commonly talked about but is equally threatening is Wild parsnip or *Pastinaca sativa*, for those Latin enthusiasts. To cut to the chase, Wild parsnip is most definitely a foe and a very serious threat to Iowa’s grasslands and prairies, as well as to humans. Despite the bountiful yellow flowers and the abundance of these plants, they are a danger and should be treated as one.

Wild parsnip frequently invades open areas with a lot of sunlight, making Iowa’s prairies and roadsides a prime location for their growth. Not only are these plants a threat to Iowa’s prairies and

grasslands, they are threat to humans as well.

Wild parsnip has a chemical

that, when combined with UV light, causes an inflammation of the skin, similar to a severe sunburn. Some of the symptoms of “Parsnip Burn” include blisters a day or two after exposure, and discoloration of the skin that can last up to 2 years.



To avoid a parsnip burn, precautions need to be taken when working in an infested area, these include: wearing long sleeves, gloves, pants, and covering as much skin as possible, working at night to reduce the amount of UV light exposure, and finally washing off the juice from the plant as soon as contact is made. If you are unfortunate enough to get a parsnip burn, treat the burn the same as a severe sunburn by covering the area with a cool wet cloth, avoid rupturing blisters for as long as possible, and cleaning and protecting the blisters if they do burst. So, next time you hear a news story about an invasive species in Iowa and the story talks about Emerald Ash Bore or Purple Loosestrife, also think about Wild Parsnip and the threat it poses to Iowa’s prairies and grasslands, as well as to you and your family.

Above: Images of burns derived from Wild parsnip.

Top Right: Wild parsnip emerging

Below Right: Wild parsnip in a ditch in full bloom (Late May to June)

Bowfishing; A Different Spin on Bowhunting *By Karen M. Phelps, Naturalist*

Laura, a friend of mine, has been after me for some time to join her in the art of bowfishing. I've hunted deer, bear and turkey with a bow, and sincerely enjoy it. Every year, I look forward to bowhunting for deer in the fall. When I hunt with my bow, I use sight pins to help me align the shot, so the thought of using a bow to fish, and then doing this without sight pins caused me some concern - and not for the fish.

I mentioned going bowfishing to my husband Marc, and he reminded me that he used to bowfish years before we met and assured me I could do it and I would enjoy it. So with renewed encouragement and a zest for adventure, the three of us went to Wynot, Nebraska for a weekend of bowfishing on the Missouri river. I mean, why not? We had a great guide, Maryln Wiebelhaus, that spent 3 full days on the river with us, getting us into areas of fish that were an angler's dream come true. We put our boat on the Missouri river, off the ramp in the town of Yankton, SD, down river from their hydroelectric dam. I had only been bowfishing one other time with Laura prior to this great adventure.



Bowfishing against a breathtaking sunset: An angler uses a compound bow setup for fishing.



Karen and her Bighead carp

Sight pins are not necessary with bowfishing, as generally, you don't have enough time to align your pins on the fish - you instinctively just shoot in the direction that the fish is in the water. Polarized sunglasses are vital, as you need to be able to see into the water to determine where the fish are - they don't all just hangout on the waterline waving their dorsal fin at you, attracting attention to themselves like a neon sign at an all night cafe. Now water has an interesting element to it known as refraction. In essence, things are not in the water where they appear to be. You need to account for this when shooting your arrow into the water at the fish; guess where the fish is in relation to where it appears to be. In time and with practice, this becomes second nature (I'm still on first nature shooting).

The arrow is attached to a string via a glide on the shaft of the arrow, allowing the string to move up and down the arrow. This string is then coiled onto a fishing reel. When you draw back your bow, you need to make sure that you have depressed the release on your fishing reel, or when you release the string, all this uncaged energy will snap your line, and you loose your arrow (I speak with the voice of authority on this matter). Whether you hit your target or not, you reel the line back in, just as you would using a fishing pole.

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Bowfishing *Continued from page 14*



Laura, Karen and Marc: All in a day's fun

During our three-day bowfishing foray we shot nearly 100 fish. All the fish we shot were various types of rough fish or non-game fish; Fish that the general population would usually not consume. Many of the fish are invasive and over populate the waters, starving out the desirable game fish or native fish. The fish did not go to waste however, as the Bald eagles hovered in nearby trees, awaiting the spoils of our catch. At the end of each day, the eagles graciously accepted our gifts after we returned the fish back to the water.

The three of us joined forces again to participate in a bowfishing tournament on the Des Moines river near Oskaloosa. Even though we didn't win, it was another fun day spent with friends on the river.

When bowfishing close to home, I will be feeding the Bald eagles at the MacBride Raptor Center near Solon. The Center will be getting the rough fish we shoot to feed the eagles in their care. For more information on bowfishing, check out the following websites: bowfishiowa.com, www.amsbowfishing.com, iowadnr.gov, or traveliowa.com.

A Snapshot of Summer Camps



Conservation Board Members

Dan Hill - Vinton, Member
Jean Ohlen - Blainstown, Chair
Mark Pingenot - Vinton, Member
Denni Randall - Belle Plaine, Member
Randy Scheel - Garrison, Member

The Benton County Conservation Board meets the second Monday of every month at 5:30 at the Nature Center. Meetings are open to the public.

Conservation Staff

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| Matthew Purdy | Executive Director |
| Scott Bahmann | Deputy Director/Ranger |
| Karen Phelps | Interpretive Naturalist |
| Aaron Askelson | Interpretive Naturalist |
| Jon Geiger | River Parks Ranger |
| Logan Hahn | Hannen Park Ranger |
| Zach Parmater | Conservation Tech |

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