

Spring 2023

Conservation Connection

Johnson County Conservation Newsletter

Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Coming to Johnson County!

This spring, Johnson County Conservation is partnering with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to co-host the annual Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Workshop!

While the focus of BOW is primarily for women, the workshop is an opportunity for anyone 18 years or older to learn outdoor skills. The workshop courses this year will include beginner backpacking, fly fishing, boater education, driving & trailer backing, shotgun shooting, turkey hunting and a mentored turkey hunt, bowfishing, canning and preserving, Dutch oven cooking, kayaking, foraging, basket weaving, and more.

The workshop will take place over the weekend of April 21-23, at Camp Io-Dis-E-Ca, near Solon. The cost of the workshop is \$280 (shared bunk lodging) before April 3, and \$320 (no lodging) beginning April 3. The fee includes program materials, equipment, lodging and meals. Enrollment is limited to 120 participants. A limited number of scholarships are available that can reduce the fee by \$140.

Go to www.iowadnr.gov/bow to download a registration form, select classes and for more information on applying for a scholarship. For more information, contact Rachel Alliss at 515-729-6037 or Rachel.Alliss@dnr.iowa.gov.



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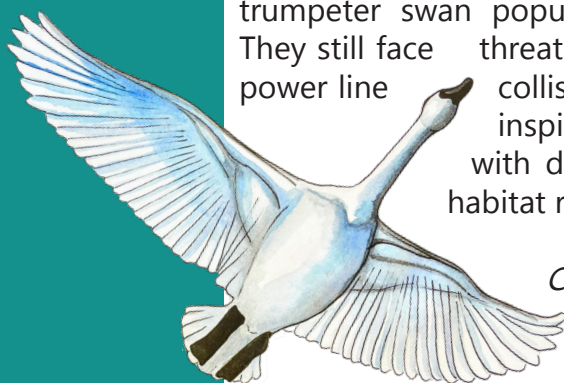
Celebrating 50 Years of the Endangered Species Act

2023 marks the 50th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, one of the strongest laws to protect wildlife. Since passage, this legislation has saved hundreds of species from extinction, and has paved a path for protecting and recovering species still today. Currently, there are over 1600 species listed as either threatened or endangered, however, there are so many victories to celebrate. In each issue of our 2023 newsletter, we'll highlight one of those success stories.

Conservation Success: Trumpeter Swans

Trumpeter swans once numbered in the millions, and had a nesting range that spanned coast to coast throughout the northern half of North America. Throughout the 1600-1800s, they were hunted en masse for the harvest of both meat and feathers, and by 1935, the population had plummeted to a mere 69 known individuals across all of the United States! The remaining swans were centered around Red Rock Lakes in Montana. Prior to restoration in the state, the last nesting pair in Iowa was seen in 1883. Trumpeter swans were on the first draft of the Endangered Species list in 1968, but after discovery of nearly 2,000 more swans in Alaska and Canada, they were removed from the list.

Restoration programs began in the 1930s and '50s, with swans and their eggs taken from Red Rock Lakes and distributed to suitable habitats in western states. In the 1980s, similar restoration programs began in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ontario. Iowa followed suit in 1993, led by the Iowa DNR in partnership with county conservation boards. Swans were released into prime habitats, releases often coinciding with wetland restoration projects, to help highlight the importance of these habitats to the entire ecosystem, including to swans, who need healthy wetlands for nesting sites. Today, global trumpeter swan populations have climbed up to 63,000. They still face threats, especially from lead poisoning and power line collisions, but their recovery serves as an inspiration to the possibilities that exist with diligent conservation partnerships and habitat restoration efforts.



Cedar River Crossing is a great place to see trumpeter swans, especially this winter thanks to the consistently open water on the Cedar River.

Yeti Adventures

Kristen Morrow - Naturalist



Adventures of a yeti-keeper: Each year, people always ask how the yeti gets into the depths of JCC parks. Lucky for her, she always has a chauffeur: me. My preferred mode of transport is to strap her to an ice fishing sled and ski her back. The lack of snow and the soggy conditions made it tricky this year, and I ended up switching to a wagon. The days I get to spend moving the yeti



are my favorite all season. I saw a flock of about 40 trumpeter swans honking as they buzzed over Cedar River Crossing on February 20. The next

day, placing the yeti at Pechman Creek Delta, flocks of hundreds of white-fronted geese flew overhead. Just as joyful to me is reading the adventures the seekers are having. Hearing about the foxes they encountered, the tracks they saw, the new park they fell in love with, these are just as satisfying to me as the personal joy I get from heading out with the yeti. Over 70 people found the yeti this year. Here are some snippets of their adventures:



Adventures of the Jones Family:

"It was a beautiful Saturday to go for a hike. The fun part of these adventures is trying to not only figure out which park but



Adventures of the Kinney Family:

"We love the yeti hunt. Sometimes I wonder if my sister-in-law and I love it more than my boys. We participated a couple years ago and we're so excited to see it back. We never knew either of these parks existed until the yeti hunt. The giant trees were so beautiful and we are excited to return later in spring and summer." **Photo:** The yeti hunt at Ciha Fen.



Adventures of the Murray Family:

"Our six-year-old spotted her first and was pretty startled (then excited) which was adorable. Our three-year-old thinks that he spies yeti everywhere. We saw a lot of great migrating birds today; trumpeter swans, snow geese, and sandhill cranes flew over and called to us. Tons of bald eagles, too!" **Photo:** The yeti hunt at Cedar River Crossing.

then finding the park in the rural country roads. It had snowed so the Cedar River Crossing park was a fun challenge, from walking across the wetlands and almost giving up after a couple hours. We thought we found her a couple times due to the snow that stuck in the trees. We fist-bumped on two occasions only to find out it was not her. We laughed and had a wonderful time breathing in the fresh crisp air, seeing all the animal tracks. We finally found the river and there were a flock of geese that took off from the water and it was magical. The water splashing and the geese honking echoed in the woods. But no yeti. We thought she just had to be in this location but no luck so off we went to walk around the marsh and venture off the path towards the river again and there she was! After hiking 3.5 miles we were very happy to see her! **Photo:** Yeti hunt at Cedar River Crossing.



Adventures of Linda Dirsh and Karen Schutte

"We trudged through swiftly running water, getting our feet soaked ... (it was fun). ... We hiked [2+ hrs] around the perimeter of the land. We also took in the Iowa River. It was a blast!" **Photo (left):** The yeti hunt at Pechman Creek Delta.



Ranger Update: Wood Ducks Abound

Aaron Ohlsen - Ranger

The wood duck (*Aix sponsa*), in my opinion, is one of our most beautiful species of North American waterfowl. Males, or "drakes," have colorful plumage that feature a white-outlined, green-crested head with various shades of iridescent green, purple, and blue. Along with their head, males have a chestnut brown breast with white speckles, a metallic blue speculum patch on each of their wings, and many other bold identifying markings. Females, or "hens," on the other hand have a slightly crested gray head with a distinctive white tear drop around both eyes. Their bodies are mostly grayish-brown, with a white-speckled breast. Hen wood ducks, like the drakes, also have metallic blue speculum patches on their wings.

The wood duck is a common migrant and summer resident to our state and can be found living in areas where there is a mix of water and forest habitat. Creeks, shallow ponds, slower flowing rivers, and wetlands surrounded by forest habitat are some prime examples.

Wood ducks frequent many of the Johnson

County Conservation areas, and one of the main areas they utilize is F.W. Kent Park. Spring migrants begin appearing in the area around March and nesting follows in April and extends through July. Wood ducks are cavity-nesters, meaning they make their nests inside of a structure such as a hollowed-out tree. Because natural nesting cavities are hard to come by today, we help out the wood ducks by providing wood duck boxes near water. Once the eggs hatch, the ducklings jump down from the nest box and make their way to water. The mother wood duck then calls the ducklings to her. In natural cavities, these ducklings may jump from heights of over 50 feet without injury!

There are 16 strategically placed wood duck boxes in Kent Park, all available for these beautiful creatures to call home. After each breeding season, once the ponds and wetlands have frozen, Ranger Charles Bray and I conduct a survey to inspect each box for wood duck usage. If the boxes have been used, there will be some eggs, egg shells, and down feathers left as evidence. This year's survey, conducted



Above photos: Outdoor enthusiast and wildlife photographer, Diane Zumbach was at the right place at the right time when she was able to capture this incredible moment of wood duck hen and ducklings jumping out of their box at Kent Park. **Top photo:** Diane Zumbach also caught this moment of hen and ducklings swimming in Kent Park.

in early February 2023, revealed great news: in the 2022 breeding season, 15 out of the 16 wood duck boxes produced a successful wood duck hatch! The one box that was not successful was succumbed to predation by a raccoon. A lot of hard work from JCC staff goes in to making these areas what they are, and when we see results like this, it makes all the hard work worth it.



Above: Eggshell remains provide evidence of wood duck nesting. **Right:** Ranger Aaron Ohlsen inspects a wood duck box in Kent Park and puts in wood shavings for the next nesting season.

New wood shaving bedding was put in the wood duck boxes for when these beautiful dabbling ducks return from migration to the area sometime this spring. I urge you to come to Kent Park or one of JCC's other areas to come see the beauty for yourself.



THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO TIRELESSLY WORK TO MAKE OUR LIVES AND JOBS RUN SMOOTHLY...

**JCC'S
UNSUNG
HERO
OF THE
SEASON!**

ALICIA CLAUß-BARTELS

Field Worker II - Two Horse Farm



ALICIA IS THE QUIET FORCE BEHIND ALMOST ALL OF THE UPKEEP AT OUR NEWEST CONSERVATION AREA, TWO HORSE FARM. IF YOU HAVE NOT BEEN THERE YET THEN YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW THAT CONTAINED WITHIN THE 83 ACRES IS A VICTORIAN GARDEN COMPLETE WITH A KOI POND! CAN YOU BELIEVE ALICIA CARES FOR ALL OF THIS! A ONE-WOMAN-SHOW, SHE CAREFULLY CARES FOR THE LAND, OUTBUILDINGS, AND 1800'S FARM HOUSE, ALIKE. ALICIA HAS A WONDERFUL SMILE AND IS READY TO HELP REGARDLESS OF THE REQUEST FROM THE JCC TEAM. WE WOULD NOT HAVE SUCH NICE AREAS WITH OUT HER! THANK YOU, ALICIA!

Nature Buds with NCJC

Kristen Morrow - Naturalist

"Our nature teachers are here! Who remembers what we talked about with them last month?" I had just walked into the classroom laden with teaching supplies, alongside JCC AmeriCorps Naturalist Liz McVey, ready for another gleeful program with preschool students. At least ten kids' hands shot up, and one, unable to contain herself, shouted "footprints!" "That's right," the teacher said. "And what did we want to remember to tell them this month? What did we find outside?" Again, hands burst into the air, and this time, excitement even higher, many kids cried out without waiting. "Bunny tracks!" "A bunny running!"

It was another moment that I'm lucky to have as an educator, a moment where you realize that you may have made a difference, and helped a new curiosity to clink into place in a young mind. These preschool students attend the early learning program with the Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County (NCJC). At the start of 2023, our JCC education crew launched into a new education partnership with NCJC: Nature Buds with NCJC.

The JCC education crew has hosted a general Nature Buds program for nearly a decade now. This program, free and open to the public, is designed for three- to five-year-old kids and an accompanying parental figure. Held at Kent Park monthly, the program immerses the child and mentor in a nature topic. We've seen evidence from 'graduates' of the Nature Buds program that it is impactful, and can help play a role in cementing excitement and passion for the natural world into their developing brains. However, the Nature Buds program is also limited in its scope. Though free and open to all, the program requires an adult with the flexibility to take a weekday morning outing to Kent Park, a privilege many don't have. So, to

help broaden the reach of Nature Buds, JCC is taking the program into the community.

The Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County have been amazing partners. Right away, they were eager to build this opportunity for their kids, and the teachers and administrative staff have been extremely helpful, kind, and excited. JCC Naturalists will go into four of NCJC's early learning classes each month, providing programs to 64 three- and four-year-olds. In the spring, the kids will venture to Kent Park for a day immersed in nature, and will review topics they learned about in the classroom programs with real world examples.

The first two months of the new partnership have gone wonderfully. In January, the kids learned about animal tracking, and excitedly ran around their rooms seeking tracks and matching track patterns to the animal responsible. They passed around pelts and scat replicas, skulls and antlers, bones and feathers and sheds, learning about the other clues animals leave behind. Two teachers in the four-year-old classrooms shared that they had been looking for tracks in the playground each snowy day in anticipation of the program.

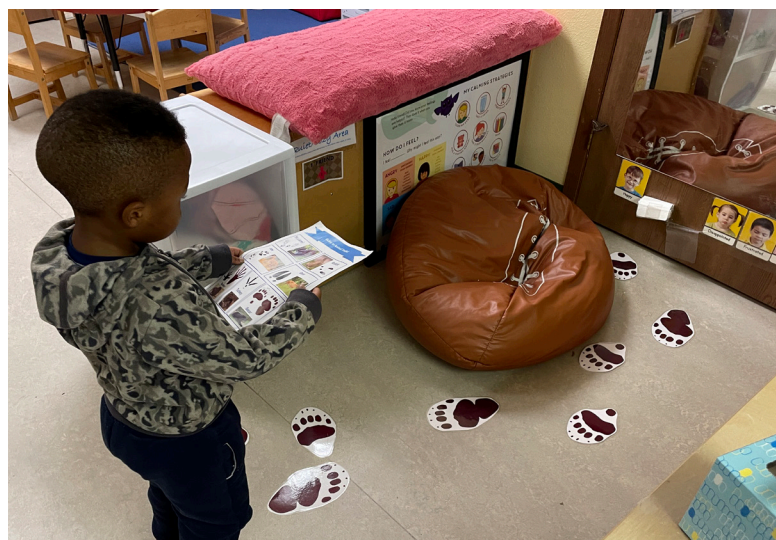
In February, the kids learned about reptiles, and got to meet live turtles and snakes for their first time. Each of the kids greeted the animals with bright smiles, and nearly every student wanted a chance to touch or hold the snake. Yet to come this spring, the students will learn about worms and mud, songbirds and nests, and wetlands and prairies.

We're so excited to get to see these fun and joyful students month after month, for two consecutive years. We're also excited to see what impact consecutive nature programs like

this may have on the students. Our hope is that they can help to cement a curiosity and wonder for the natural world, and help to instill an identity as a naturalist into each of the kids.

We're looking forward to building more partnerships with NCJC and similar organizations, with the goal to broaden nature education and provide repeat nature experiences throughout a child's development. Stay tuned for more such adventures to come!

Clockwise from top right: AmeriCorps Naturalist Liz McVey leads a reptile program and introduces 3-year-olds to milksnake Lucy; a boy meets ornate box turtle Dolly; during an animal track program, a boy looks for tracks in the classroom; delighted girls meet milksnake Lucy with big grins; inspired by the book *The Girl Who Wore Snakes*, this girl braved Sniffles the fox snake around her neck; during the animal tracking program, kids inspected wildlife clues.



IDAHO WILDERNESS TREK 2023

JULY 3 - 12
2023

Johnson County Conservation naturalists lead high school students on a immersive 10-day backpacking trip to Idaho's Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. Students will participate in stewardship projects, experience wilderness and the ecology of the area, and gain valuable outdoor skills.

ARE YOU READY FOR ADVENTURE?

- 1 Email kmorrow@johnsoncountyiowa.gov for your application today! The application and letter of support are due Friday, April 15th.
- 2 Learn more about the trip! Attend the parent/ student informational meeting at 5:30 pm on March 20th at the Conservation Education Center in F.W. Kent Park.
- 3 Final application selections will occur in early May.



HELP MAKE THIS TRIP A REALITY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS!

Donate your gently-used outdoor/backpacking clothing, such as lightweight hiking pants, fleece jackets, rain jackets/pants, long-sleeve lightweight button-up shirts, and hiking boots. These items will add to our stash of backpacking clothing we are able to loan out to students for the trek. The cost of these personal gear items can add up quickly, and every item we can loan helps to make this trip possible for more students.

You can also donate directly to our Wilderness Trek Scholarship Fund. Contact kmorrow@johnsoncountyiowa.gov for more information on how you can help.

Mother's Day Hike at Phebe Timber!

Stroll through spring ephemeral wildflowers and make your own mother's day bouquet

Sunday, May 14th from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

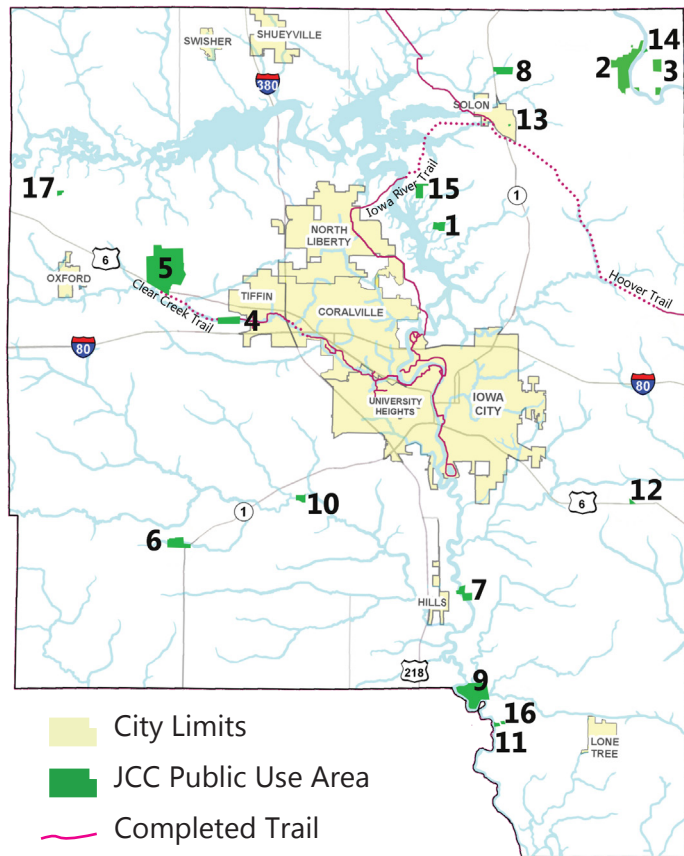
Parking is limited - carpooling is appreciated -

see event page for sign up

*Flower stems provided by
Cardinal Flower Farm
and Jude's Scott's
wooden daisies!*

JCCB Public Use Areas

1. Cangleska Wakan	132 acres
2. Cedar River Crossing	560 acres
3. Ciha Fen Preserve	81 acres
4. Clear Creek Conservation Area	87 acres
5. F.W. Kent Park	1,062 acres
6. Frytown Conservation Area	94 acres
7. Hills Access	40 acres
8. Malinda Reif Reilly Fen & Prairie	100 acres
9. Pechman Creek Delta	380 acres
10. Phebe Timber	27 acre
11. River Junction Access	12 acres
12. Scott Church Park	5 acres
13. Solon Prairie	3 acres
14. Sutliff Bridge & Access	1/2 acre
15. Two Horse Farm	83 acres
16. Walker Park	3 acres
17. Williams Prairie Preserve	21 acres



- City Limits
- JCC Public Use Area
- Completed Trail
- Proposed Trail
- Rivers

Paved Trail Segments Managed by JCC

Clear Creek Trail	1.3 miles
Hoover Trail	6 miles
Iowa River Trail	3.5 miles

More information about JCC public use areas can be found through our website:

www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation

Program/Event Guide

How to Sign Up:

Programs are free unless a fee is listed. Sign up for all programs is online at the link below, unless stated otherwise. To sign up, **click or scan** the QR code to the right or go to: <https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events>. For questions or sign-up help, call **319-645-1011**.



Program/Event Accessibility

Do you require any specific accessibility measures in order to comfortably participate in these programs? Reach out to us at 319-645-1011 for assistance.

CEC Open Hours

Saturdays, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Memorial Day weekend-August

Come explore the Discovery Room, visit the education animals, hike the Storybook Trail, and check out the bird blind!

April

Becoming an Outdoor Woman

Friday, April 21 - Sunday, April 23
Camp Io-Dis-E-Ca, Solon, IA

Open to those 18 years or older, this IDNR workshop features courses in backpacking, fly fishing, boater education, foraging, and more. Go to www.iowadnr.gov/bow for more information, or contact Rachel Alliss at 515-729-6037 or Rachel.Alliss@dnr.iowa.gov.

May

Insect Week

Monday, May 1 – Saturday, May 6
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Come out each day to explore self-guided insects activities, including insect drawing,

how to build an insect, insect adoption opportunities, insect stories on the storybook trail, and scavenger hunts. Be sure to check out the finale of this insect week by attending the Saturday ISU insect zoo event.

Art Group

Tuesday, May 2, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Bobwhite Shelter, Kent Park

The new art group is a chance to form community and share space with like-minded adults while working on independent art projects. Attendees should bring their own art supplies and a project they want to work on, or come prepared to paint the landscape!

Iowa State University Insect Zoo

Saturday, May 6, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Join us in welcoming the ISU insect zoo to Kent Park. If you are curious to learn more about our six-legged friends this is the event for you. To learn more about the ISU insect zoo ahead of your visit be sure to check out their web page here: <https://www.ent.iastate.edu/insectzoo/>. Consider packing a picnic lunch to enjoy after!

Spring Ephemeral Hike

Friday, May 12, 4:30 PM
Cangleska Wakan

Learn more about the identity and natural history of the spring wildflowers in bloom on this two-mile forest hike.

Garlic Mustard Pick-nic

Saturday, May 13, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Cangleska Wakan

Come help us pull out invasive garlic mustard, and then eat it! We will have a short training on how to manage this plant before removing as much of it as we can from the woodland. Afterward, we will have samples of garlic mustard pesto along with some more imaginative uses for this plentiful green.

Phebe Timber Mother's Day Hike

Sunday, May 14, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Phebe Timber

Join us to celebrate mothers everywhere. Learn about the cultural and natural history of Phebe Timber. See spring wildflowers, then consider building a bouquet for someone you love. Live spring flower stems will be provided by Cardinal Flower Farm and Heartwood Flowers crafted out of walnut, spruce, and aromatic cedar are available while materials last. Bring a small vase or a bottle from your recycling bin. (\$7 for a live flower bouquet, \$35 for heartwood flower stem.)

Art Group

Tuesday, May 16, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Red Haw Shelter, Kent Park
See May 2 event for details.

Spring Migration Public Bird Banding

Saturday, May 20, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Join federally permitted bird banders to learn about bird research and conservation and see birds up close! Come and go as you please.

June

Free Fishing Weekend

Saturday, June 3, 7:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Angler's Parking Lot/Boat Ramp, Kent Park

Join JCC Park Rangers and learn to fish; no fishing license is required over free fishing weekend. JCC will have fishing rods, tackle, and bait. Use our equipment or your own.

Art Group

Tuesday, June 6, 10:00 AM -12:00 PM
Whip-poor-will Shelter, Kent Park
See May 2 event for details

Great Iowa River Race

Saturday, June 10, 10:00 a.m.
Sturgis Ferry Park, Iowa City

The 9.25-mile race on the Iowa River is open to canoes, kayaks, and paddle boards. The course starts at Sturgis Ferry Park and ends at Hills Campground. The entry fee is \$35 per person before April 1, \$40 after, and includes a t-shirt and lunch. There is no day-of registration, and all registration closes June 7th. Rentals are available for \$10 while they last. To learn more and to register, scan the QR code below or visit: <https://paddleguru.com/races/GreatIowaRiverRace2023>





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Shooting stars are in peak bloom during the first half of May. One of the best places to see them in Johnson County is around the Conservation Education Center at Kent Park, where a restored population thrives in the sunny prairie. You may see some queen bumblebees "buzz pollinating" them too!