

Conservation Connection

Johnson County Conservation Newsletter

What We've Learned About Generous Donors Ruby and Leslie Perezek

Marci Trana – Naturalist

In 2021, Executive Director, Larry Gullett, received a call from the law firm caring for the estate of Ruby and Leslie Perezek. They had a check from the Lone Tree couple's estate for donation to Johnson County Conservation to "benefit conservation and recreation projects and land acquisitions in the southern half of Johnson County, Iowa." The quoted sentence above was the only information provided with the donation so naturally we worked to piece together some additional details about Ruby and Leslie that would help inform us of those more detailed interests and desires they may have had.

Ruby Darlene (Rath) Perezek was born to Clara and Charles Rath on January 30, 1922. Her obituary states that she graduated from Riverside High School and married Leslie the same year. It also states they lived on a family farm north of Lone Tree before moving to the town of Lone Tree in 1982 and that Ruby was a member of the Trinity United Methodist Church where she was the pianist for youth services. The obituary tells that she enjoyed visiting with friends, music, sewing, gardening, flowers, and the outdoors.

We spoke with those we could find who knew her, including the lawyer who managed her estate, her executor and mechanic, the director



Above: Left, Ruby Perezek, right Leslie Perezek. Images used from online obituaries.

of Ruby's senior living center, a past neighbor and friend, and a few relatives. The following information was gathered from these interviews.

She and Leslie had no children themselves; their wish was to have a portion of their estate used towards conservation and preservation in southern Johnson County. Ruby and Leslie spent their entire lives residing in Johnson County, their farm remains with family.

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A Note from the Director

Larry Gullett - Executive Director



On the cover page and pages four and five you will find an article about an incredibly generous donation to the people of Johnson County for the conservation of natural resources. The Perezek donation, made by the late Ruby and Leslie Perezek of Lone Tree, will be used to support conservation and recreation opportunities in the southern half of Johnson County.

The Conservation Board wishes to express their heartfelt thanks to the Perezek's for supporting conservation and wildlife in an era where support and understanding is needed more than ever.

As we near the end of summer our monitoring of water quality in Kent Park Lake is also coming to an end for this season. This year we had two Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) externs helping with monitoring of water quality in 31 locations within the lake and watershed. Cynthia Tsarpalas is a pre-service Geosciences teacher studying at the University of Iowa and Jim Glad teaches middle school math at the Isaac Newton Christian Academy in Cedar Rapids. We want to thank both of them for doing such a great job this summer in collecting and recording data for the water monitoring project.



Above: Cynthia Tsarpalas, geoscience teacher studying at University of Iowa.

The results of water monitoring are impressive since the lake restoration project was complete in 2020. Before the lake restoration the beach was not recommended for swimming half of the season. Since the restoration, the beach has been open for swimming every day through the season for three consecutive years.

Additionally, phosphorous inputs into the lake have been reduced thanks to catch basins upstream from the lake (see the table below for phosphate levels in each catch basin and different points of the lake from before and after the lake restoration project). Phosphorous is the nutrient that causes algae blooms when no rooted aquatic plants are present to recycle those nutrients. Pre-restoration, water clarity was barely good enough to see two inches in depth and today it is common throughout the summer to see six to nine feet deep.

While we have made great progress on improving the water quality in Kent Park Lake, there is still much work to be done. After the restoration effort it was discovered the campground shower house and dump station were also contributing excess nutrients and E. coli bacteria to the main lake. Additional analysis showed the shower house wastewater system was exceeding its design capacity all but one week of the

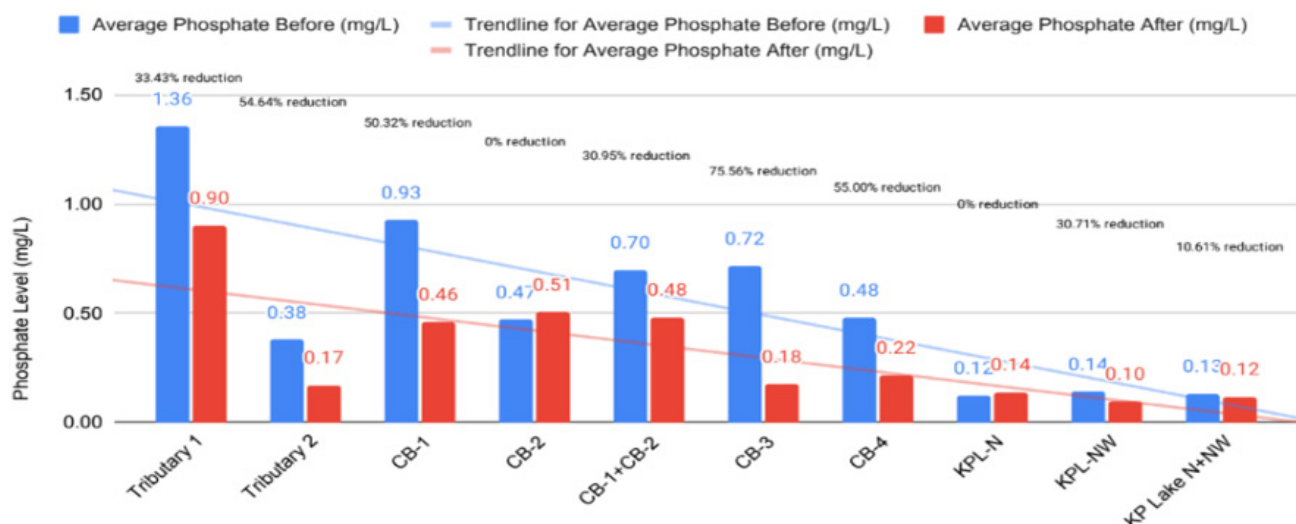


Above: Jim Glad, local middle school teacher, monitoring water quality at Kent Park Lake.

season each year. As such, the shower house was closed, and a design process started to replace the facility with a wastewater system adequate to protect the lake. Hopefully, we can replace the old shower house and restroom facility within the next two years.

Average Phosphate Before and After F.W. Kent Park Lake Restoration

Data averaged from 2014-2016 and from 2019-2021



In more recent years, Ruby made frequent stops at an auto mechanic shop in Lone Tree to visit, sometimes just stopping by to give attention to the office staff's dog. Ruby shared with her mechanic that her husband, Leslie loved hunting and fishing. She was frugal and spirited, she loved birds, flowers, and the Chicago Cubs. In all of the interviews we were told of Ruby's love of animals and the outdoors. She even trained a crow to walk with her when she was outside, and she taught it to "talk!" She loved children and the neighborhood kids would ride their bikes to her home to visit with her. She loved to tell her extended family a story about her and Leslie sitting under a big sycamore tree when they were dating. Ruby spent her final years in a senior living center in Iowa City, passing away on April 3, 2021.

Leslie Charles Perezek was born to Mary and Charles Perezek on October 31, 1916. His obituary states that he farmed the family farm in Lone Tree before moving to town. He was a life-long member of the NRA and was a member of the First Methodist Church. He loved the outdoors. Leslie passed away in 2002. All of those we spoke to had fewer memories and details about Leslie, but we found an article in the Daily Iowan from 1935 listing Leslie as a contestant in the Johnson County 4-H Club Show. He was listed as singing and playing guitar.

Additionally, we were able to find information on both Ruby and Leslie's family history going back to the countries their ancestors immigrated from. We found this information through free online sources and the book, *Lone Tree Iowa The Pioneers and Their Decedents, in Fremont, Lincoln, and Pleasant Valley Townships area Johnson County, Iowa 1837 – 1900*. Ruby's family history can be traced back to her grandmothers and grandfathers. The Vogt's (maternal, John and Anna) settled in Riverside, Iowa from Germany (John) and what is now Czech Republic (Anna). The Rath's

(paternal, John and Lena) settled in Riverside, Iowa. Lena was born in Davenport, IA. No birth records aside from date of birth could be found for John. Leslie's family can be traced back even further to his great-great-great grandmother and grandfather on his maternal side, settling in Johnson County from Germany. Leslie's paternal side can be traced back to his great-grandmother and father who settled in Johnson County from current day Prague, Czech Republic. In looking over Johnson County 1900's plat maps, we located several parcels labeled with the names of the Leslie's ancestors showing a long-time generational presence in Southern Johnson County. Current Johnson County Conservation staff and board members did not have the pleasure of meeting Ruby or Leslie, but we hope to fulfill their wishes, sustain their memory, and continue their legacy by turning their generous donation into conservation and recreation actions in southern Johnson County.

Sources: Johnson County Supervisor Jon Green loaned us both the *Lone Tree, Iowa: Pioneers and Their Descendants* (purchased by Jon's Grandparents) and the *1901 Atlas of Johnson County* (found in an attic of a family home). Online sources of information were found at findagrave.com, myheritage.com, The Daily Iowan, Wittich Funeral Home, and Sand H Funeral Services. We thank Michael Brenneman, Earl Swantz, Betty Herring, Lindsey Stieger, and Patty Krantz for taking the time to tell us what they recalled of the Perezek's so we could tell a little of their story



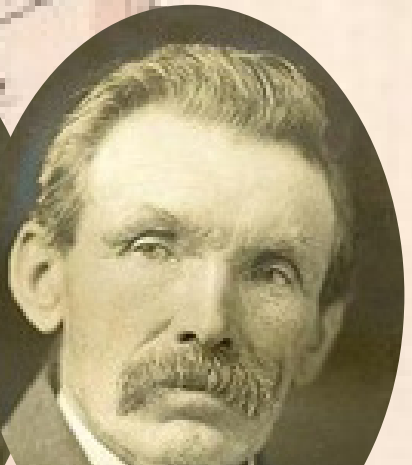
JOHN M. VOGT
(RUBY'S GRANDFATHER)

Daniel H. Thell

2-40



SCHUESSLER FAMILY CIRCA 1900



AGATHA ADAM MARY MICHAEL
(LESLIE'S MATERNAL GREAT-GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS)



SCHUESSLER FAMILY CIRCA 1915

Finding Peace In Nature

A Personal Narrative on a Life-changing Backpacking Trip to Idaho

By Kate Richards - 2023 Trek Participant

In 2018, my older sister, Beth, returned home after a 10-day backpacking trip to Idaho. Seeing her bright smile as she crawled out of a fifteen-passenger van surrounded by other teens shocked me. How could she be smiling after sleeping in a tent, cooking her food on a campfire, pooping in the woods, and hiking over five miles up a mountain each day? I thought, all with no phone service? I was puzzled by her excitement, so I asked her why she seemed so happy. She responded, "because I am happy. Being in a place so big and remote makes my problems seem so small." The whole week after Beth returned home she spent sharing the joy Idaho brought her through stories and pictures. Seeing the way the trip changed her, I was eager to find the same thrill she did. Her words inspired my 12-year-old self, and I was determined to go on the same trip as her once I was old enough.



Four years later I was presented with the opportunity to attend the same Idaho trip she once went on. Without a doubt, I signed up and soon got selected. I spent the next several months training for the trip. I went on many practice hikes with my 40 lb pack, ran countless laps around the track, and lifted weights in the weight room. I strived to get in shape for the treacherous backpacking. Before I knew it, it was finally time to go to Idaho!

At the crack of dawn, we departed for the mountains. I hugged my parents goodbye and loaded into the same van my sister once did. Feelings of excitement rushed my body, and nervous thoughts clouded my brain. I was eager to get to experience something new, but I was terrified of the change. Growing up, my family and I traveled a lot. I have been to many places across the nation, ranging from the deserts of Arizona, to the coasts of West Virginia. Every time I go somewhere new, I get uneasy. My body has to adjust to the new environment. However, once I reached the mountains in Idaho, those feelings of nervousness fled my mind. It was like I belonged. I wasn't scared. I didn't miss home. I found my Idahome. I felt safe and at peace. I knew it was where I was supposed to be.

Throughout the whole trip, there wasn't a single time where I ever regretted my decision on going. I loved every single minute of it. Yes, every single minute. I even loved each of the



times I was deeply challenged physically and mentally. Some of my biggest challenges were having to dig a hole to poop, drinking every drop off food out of my bowl, struggling to stay warm at night, trying to stay cool in the heat of the day, searching for dry clothes after falling into the ice cold lake, combating the millions of mosquitoes, fighting the pain of sunburn, and battling to see after being stung in the eye. Even after being trapped in the same clothes for six days and my body odor that came with the inability to take a shower, I still had a smile on my face. It was then that I truly realized what my sister was talking about. Even though my body was going through a lot of discomfort, I didn't want to be anywhere else. I felt happiness in the mountains and disconnected from the world. I was at peace with nature and all my worries were gone.

Nowadays, we all can get caught up in the hustle of life. We often get consumed by social media, money, drama, popularity, work, school, sports, and whatever else you can think of. But nature provides a space to step away from the worldly distractions and realign your mind with what truly matters. This trip to Idaho provided me with a space to do so. I realized some of the most important life lessons, met some of my new best friends, got so much stronger, and discovered my deep love for backpacking, trail work, and the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness.



Top of page 6: Mountain view from Kooskooskia Meadow; **bottom of page 6:** all 11 participants fit into a two-person tent, giggling all the while; **clockwise from top of page 7:** two participants work to clear a blown-down tree from the trail. The crew cleared over 100 trees in three days; the crew breaks from trail work to enjoy a mountain-side lunch with a view; the author cutting a blow down with a handsaw; the crew climbed to the old lookout tower on Grave Peak; crew members filter water from the lake -water filtration was one of the many camp tasks the teens learned to do independently.



A Paddle on the Des Moines

By Maura Arnold - Seasonal Naturalist Intern

Throughout the summer, Johnson County Conservation naturalists enjoyed a second year of collaboration with United Action for Youth SPARK! program. In June, United Action for Youth (UAY) SPARK! Program Coordinator, Dustin Eubanks and JCC Naturalist, Marci Trana, organized an overnight trip to Ledges State Park to lead students on a kayak paddle down the Des Moines River. The trip was designed to provide a local adventure experience for eight teenagers from the Iowa City area who had already participated in local paddling programs with JCC. This paddle was set to be one of two larger skills-based capstone events for the summer.

Our day started in the UAY parking lot. The newly acquired JCC bus was loaded with camping gear and a kayak trailer. The kids were loaded up with their own gear including comforts from home, more camping essentials, and activities to pass the time during the two-hour drive to our destination. Once we arrived at the campground, we pulled up to the large youth group site and it was all hands-on deck. The kids unloaded their personal belongings while Marci, Dustin, Tony Branch (UAY Youth Engagement Director) and I began the unloading the camping gear. In no time the bus was empty, and it was time to set up the campsite. Earlier in the summer this group of kids had also practiced setting up tents and their newly acquired skill showed! Each pair

worked smoothly and without extra help. As tent construction was in full swing, Dustin set up an outdoor kitchen complete with a stove and pantry full of everything needed to make camp nachos! Lunch was a major hit and exactly what the group needed for the seven-mile Des Moines River paddle.

Now it was time to get on the river. We put the kayaks in at a small ramp north of Madrid. The whole group helped by unloading the boats and were fitted for Personal Flotation Devices (PFD's). After all the driving, unpacking, and waiting, the kids were ready. It was obvious the kids were excited to get out on their kayaks. Dibs were being called for specific boats and paddles were in hand. The boats were carried down the ramp in teams of two. Once the kids were on the water Finn, a very avid young outdoorsman, took the lead. A few girls chose to group together as they paddled slowly down stream, and others enjoyed their solo time zig-zagging through the water. On the first half of our trip down the river we saw a plethora of wildlife. At one point along the river someone pointed out that they saw a deer. From our distance it seemed to be a young buck and we could see a path down the bank it must have taken to get to the river's edge. The group watched reverently as we drifted toward him.

Four miles into the paddle it was time to find a place to stop and make dinner. After many



river bends, one provided a large sand bar with a huge fallen cottonwood tree. The group wasted no time moving into roles. The tree called for some to climb and sit. One group explored the entire area and the rest prepared for dinner. The first step was lighting a fire, so the group gathered sticks of various sizes, as well as thin strips, almost like fine strings, of hardwood from the fallen cottonwood tree for kindling. The teens set to work to try and ignite the fire with flint and steel, persevering through the inevitable trial and error of this new skill. Their teamwork and determination paid off when the sparks took to the kindling and flames spread to the sticks. When dinner was done,

we packed up our things, making sure to leave no trace, and continued our journey down the Des Moines River.

With dusk approaching, the famous High Trestle Bridge lay just two miles downstream. As the group paddled under it, the wonderous light installation on the bridge twinkled down from the unique structure 13 stories above the river. By now the river was covered in a light blanket of fog and the sky was reaching twilight. Each teen had a headlamp clicked on for visibility and safety, and the kayakers drifted downstream as flecks on light over the surface. The sky above the kayakers was every shade of blue



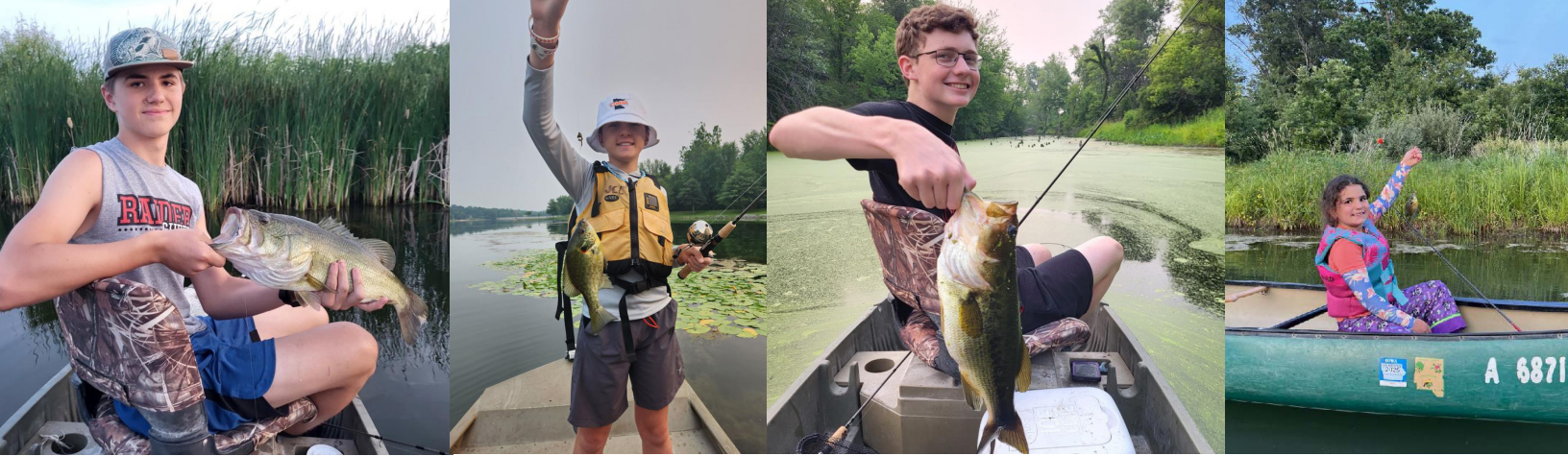
and the sweeping clouds held onto the sun's pink light. The beauty of the evening made for another moment of reverence for the river and surrounding land.

As the last splash of sunshine faded, we made it to our takeout point. Although it was late and everyone was tired, they all jumped in to help at the boat ramp. Some grabbed boats to heave them out of the water, some gave paddlers a hand out of their boat, and others started carrying empty boats up to the bus. The kayaks were loaded on the trailer with ease and in no time, we were on our way back to the campsite.

After a night of rest, we enjoyed a warm breakfast before the sky turned gray and rain began to fall. The rain changed our plans away from a morning hike to a morning bus ride through Ledges State Park. Enjoying Iowa's natural

beauty from our little bus was just as lovely. Seeing the towering sandstone ledges for the first time prompted awe-filled comments from the teens. "This place is cool." "I can't believe this is Iowa!" "I wonder if anyone climbs here?" Our trip to Ledges State Park proved to be an unforgettable adventure that left participants worn out but invigorated from navigating the gentle currents and glimpsing Iowa's rugged beauty, to experiencing the challenges of outdoor living. The teens returned home with a renewed sense of adventure and a fresh respect for the outdoors.





JCC Rangers Hook New Anglers

By Olivia Mayo - Seasonal Ranger Intern

Johnson County Conservation rangers have partnered with Pass It On! Outdoor Mentors to provide children with unique and engaging fishing experiences this summer. Pass It On! Outdoor Mentors is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to get kids outdoors with the help of experienced mentors. Johnson County Conservation has been a part of various activities through this organization, especially with those involving hunting and fishing.

This summer we hosted fishing programs where we took 30 kids paired in groups of two kids per mentor to guide them. For these programs, we pulled canoes and kayaks to the more elusive back ponds of Kent Park. These ponds are harder to reach, and few people paddle them, making the program of fishing by canoe and kayak here a very unique experience. The ponds where the programs took place were chosen by the fish species of interest and especially beautiful areas to create a more positive and personalized experience for each kid.

During the events, the kids fished in these back ponds for a few hours with their mentors on the water. Awards were given out for the biggest fish, most fish caught, and first fish reeled in. Participants also received free goodie bags with extra fishing supplies and the bonus of taking the program fishing pole home at the end of the night to encourage them to go fishing again.

In total, three events were held, each with a 10-kid capacity (parents were also welcome to join) and six mentors available to help the kids fish. Program times spanned from morning to evening as the weather got warmer. All fishing poles, life jackets, and bait were supplied for this event as well as any other necessary equipment.

Pass It On! Outdoor Mentors has hunting opportunities too. For more information about the program and future events, check out the Pass It On! Outdoor Mentors website at: <https://outdoormentors.org/>.



Reflections on Two Horse Farm

By Kara Grady - Local Environmental Writer

A dragonfly escorted my car down the hill as I made my way to Two Horse Farm in Solon, IA. As I parked beneath the trees surrounding the farmstead buildings, I immediately caught sight of a red-headed woodpecker. Already my trip seemed full of promise, and I prayed it was a sign that I might find some wildflowers as well.

But for this one trip, hunting up spring ephemerals was a secondary task. The real reason I'd come to the farm was to witness the historic land transfer that today is marked by several colorful flags set in a circle on the property. Flags that denote not just earth and water but mark the seven acres of prairie and woodland that were donated to the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, the first land donation of its kind to exist in the state.

With my head bent against the wind, I march along the mown prairie paths, and it takes me some time before I discover the first flagpole. Watching the colors whip in the wind, a church hymn from my childhood rises up in me, a song of peace at seeing things made right with the world.

As I continue to wander through the prairie and woods, stopping to admire the first leaf of a trout lily poking its way above the leaves, I ponder the significance of my own co-creative partnerships with my friends and with the land. I imagine Native American families revitalizing their culture and language, just like many in Minnesota are doing. I imagine small organic family farms interspersed with native dwellings and restored prairies. I imagine healing the earth and our torn human bonds all at once. And I hope that all of Iowa, will eventually, make history.



Building Better Birders Workshop Series

Fri/Sat Sept 23/23, 2023

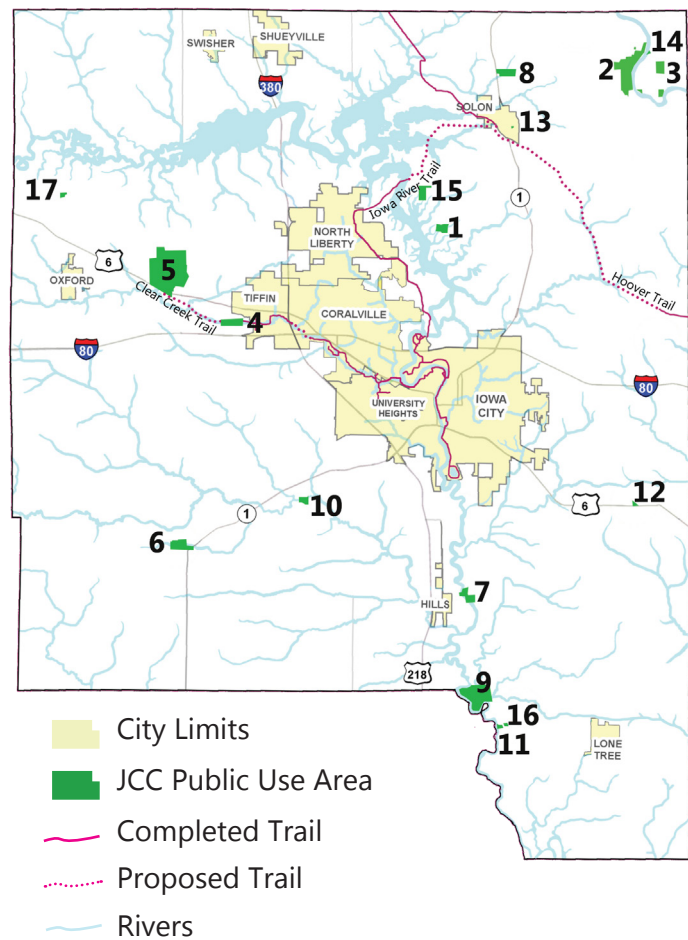
Fri: Nocturnal Raptors of Iowa | PM Owl Prowl
Sat: AM Bird Hike | Diurnal Raptors of Iowa | Live Raptor Program | Midwest Raptor Population Trends Using 40 Years of Christmas Bird Count Data

Sat May 18, 2024

AM Bird Hike and Bird Banding | Warblers of Iowa | Flycatchers, Vireos, Swallows, and Similar Species of Iowa | Shorebirds of Iowa | PM Bird Hike

JCC 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



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**.



Our goal is to make our programming accessible to the entire community, regardless of disability or difference. Please call 319-645-1011 or email jccnaturalists@gmail.com to discuss how we can create an inclusive environment for you or your family.

September

Fall Migration Bird Banding Event

Saturday, September 16, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Join federally-certified bird banders for a chance to see birds up close and learn about avian data collection! You'll also learn about fall migration, bird adaptations, and how to bird identification. This is an open house event, so come and go as you please. Bird banding is weather dependent so keep an eye on our Facebook page in the event of weather related cancellations or delays.

Building Better Birders Workshop

Friday, September 22 & Saturday, September 23

Join in full or in part sessions on Friday and Saturday as we learn all things birds! See mycountyparks.org event registration for a full breakdown of the sessions.

October

CEC Open Hours

Saturday, Oct 21, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Come out to explore the CEC and enjoy the splendor of peak fall colors throughout the park. The CEC will be open for free self-guided exploration. The Storybook Trail will be up, and

spooky pumpkins will be hiding amongst the prairie and forest as part of the Annual Pumpkin Scavenger Hunt.

Raptor Meet & Greet

Saturday, Oct 21, 10:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Whip-poor-will Shelter Area, F.W. Kent Park

Learn about two different birds of prey with Raptology. This program will take place outside in the Whip-poor-will Shelter area, just north and across the road from the Conservation Education Center entry. In poor weather, it will be in the CEC. This program is an informal "meet-n-greet" style and no registration is required. No dogs permitted in the area during the time of the program.

November

Coiled Basketry

Friday, November 17, 9:00 AM – 1:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park
Fee: \$10

Learn a technique to make coiled baskets from natural materials and how to preserve them. Each participant will be given all of the supplies required to create a small decorative basket we will make during class. Photo credit: Lee Turnbull, coiled basket from past class.



Volunteer Events

Prairie Seed Harvests

Helping to harvest prairie seeds allows volunteers to take up an active role in the restoration of our county's native ecosystems, and all collected seed is used for JCC's restoration projects for the next year. The task itself is easy for all ages of volunteers, and no background experience is necessary. Some events require hiking between one and two miles over uneven and mildly sloped terrain. For anyone with mobility limitations, the Senior Seed Harvests are best, and will feature harvest options very close to parking areas. All locations are subject to change based on seed conditions. Updates will be shared via email with all registered participants. Events dependent on weather and dry seed conditions.

Prairie Seed Harvest Dates/Locations:

Wednesday, Sept 6, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, Sept 27, 2:00-3:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, Oct 4, 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Williams Prairie State Preserve, F.W. Kent Park

Monday, Oct 11, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Valley View, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, Oct 18, 9:00 – 11:30 a.m.
Cedar River Crossing, F.W. Kent Park

Senior Seed Harvest
Wednesday, Oct 25, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Full(ish) Moon Seed Harvest
Wednesday, Oct 25, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Senior Seed Harvest

Wednesday, Nov 1, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.
High Point, F.W. Kent Park

Saturday, Nov 5, 9:00 – 11:30 a.m.
Evergreen Landing, F.W. Kent Park

Sunset Seed Harvest
Wednesday, Nov 8, 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.
Knight Prairie Pavilion, F.W. Kent Park

Senior Seed Harvest
Wednesday, Nov 15, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.
Knight Prairie Pavilion, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, Nov 15, 10:00-11:30 a.m.
Williams Prairie State Preserve

Volunteer Monarch Tagging

We need volunteers to help us catch wild monarch butterflies for tagging! Tagged butterflies will journey 2,000 miles to their winter home in Mexico. This activity is great for all ages and is a great way to support Monarch butterfly research. Events are dependent on weather conditions and location may be changed depending on monarch activity. Locations include Cedar River Crossing, Two Horse Farm, or Kent Park, and are determined week-of by monarch conditions. Updates will be shared via email with all registered participants.

Wednesday, Sept 6, 9:00-10:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Sept 13, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Sept 20, 9:00-10:30 a.m.





Johnson County Conservation
2048 HWY 6 NW
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The tattered wings of a Great Spangled Fritillary show a full season of flight at Cedar River Crossing's South end.