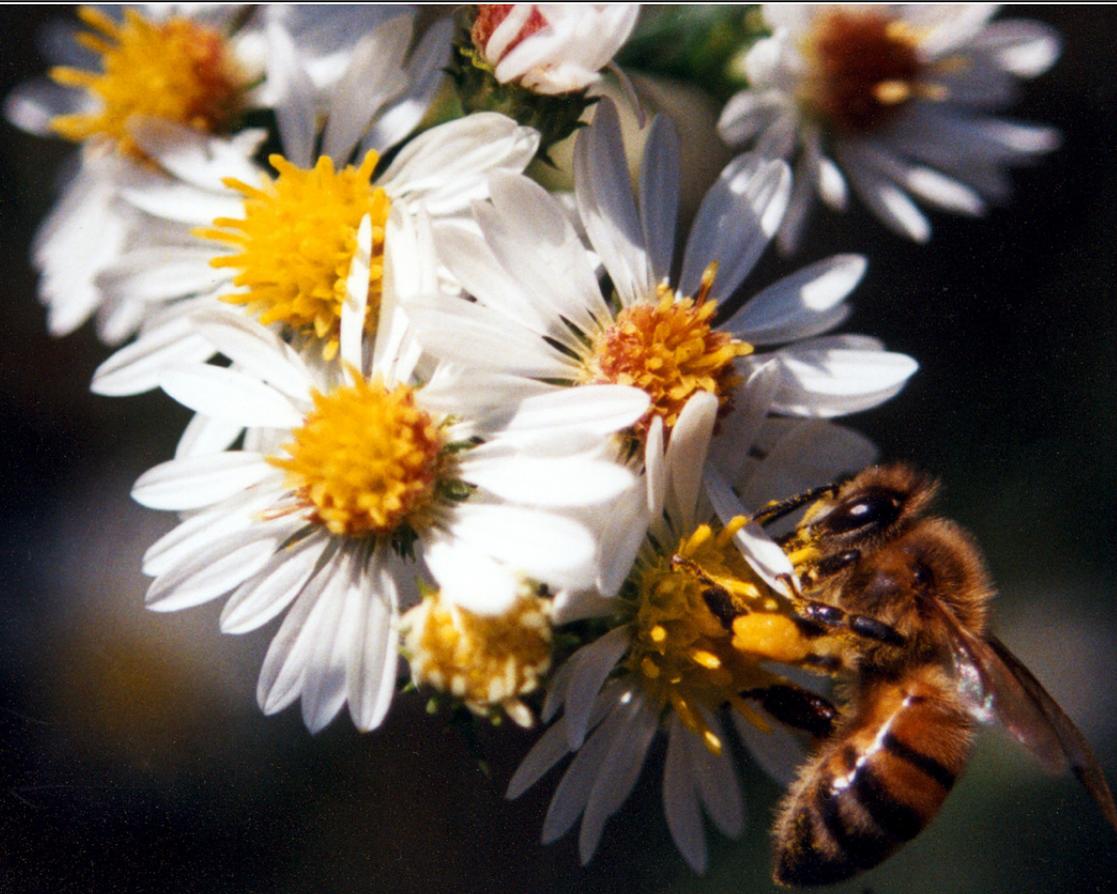


# Voices From The Ridge

Wapello County Conservation

Summer 2023



## Summer

Ahhhh Summer. Can't you just feel the vitamin D soaking into your pores? It seems to be that every year we wait.... and wait.... and wait for the summer season. The endless days on the water kayaking or fishing, camping with family, and cooking out with friends. What isn't there to love about summer?

Wapello County Conservation LOVES the summer season. There are so many different opportunities for everyone to enjoy. There are summer camps, the Pioneer Ridge Nature Center, trails, fishing, and so much more! We are expecting an exciting summer and can't wait to see everyone!

In this edition of Voices From the Ridge you will learn about all the exciting events taking place for Wapello County Conservation and the American Gothic House Center, our amazing animal ambassador friends, why you should put the Round Up away, and fun ways to enjoy your summer.

Summer will be over in the blink of an eye, so get out and enjoy it while you can!

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Starting May 27th- September 2nd the Pioneer Ridge Nature Center will be open **Saturdays** from 10AM-4PM!

## Eco Art

Freshly picked strawberries, photo taken by Sunshine Laursen



Ecological art, like all art, will hold a different meaning for everyone. The important thing for this feature is that it brings awareness to an ecological issue or wonder. From poems to paintings, photos to sculptures, and all things in between we want you to submit your take on eco art and maybe see it featured here! Please know that by submitting your work you are giving permission for Wapello County to use this work in the newsletter as well as on other platforms to help promote the natural areas and our community.

## Ask The Naturalist



*What is heat lightning and does it only happen in summer?*

*-Addi J.*

*Addi, the truth of this long-told myth is that heat lightning isn't really a thing! This silent storm in reality is just the reflection of light off of distant clouds. Although the lightning is produced from a thunderstorm, we cannot hear the thunder due to it being too far away for our ears to pick up the loud rumbles and cracks..*

*- Sunshine Laursen*



To submit your questions for the naturalist and/or if you want to submit some of your original eco art, send them on over with the subject line "For VFTR" to [wapellocountynaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:wapellocountynaturalist@gmail.com) Art can be submitted through a photo or a scanned copy. Please make sure to include your signature on any art.

# Summer Fun!

Days are getting longer, the sun is getting warmer, and almost all things in nature are dressed in green! This next season is another opportunity to experience life to the fullest and make endless memories to keep in your back pocket when snow days arrive once again. Keep your sunscreen and water bottle on hand during your summer adventures!

## Activities

### Indoor:

- Make smoothies
- Shadow puppet show
- Read a book
- Water color painting
- Hide and Seek
- Drink a root beer float
- Take a lazy afternoon nap
- Make critter toast

### Outdoor:

- Star gazing
- Swimming
- Lemonade stand
- Campfire
- Climb a tree
- Paint with mud
- Cloud watching
- Most importantly... explore!



## Critter Toast



# Weeds: Friend or Foe



The beautiful summer sun is shining, and you are spending your afternoon looking out over your perfectly manicured lawn. You bask in the beauty of it until you see it, the dreaded weed peaking its bright yellow head up in the middle of your yard. It feels like a never-ending battle. The constant weed spraying, pulling, leaf blowing, and hours on the mower just to have it all start up again next week. But what if I told you it didn't have to be that way? We often think of weeds as eye sores that need to be dealt with, but in actuality they can often benefit you, your yard, and the local wildlife. While not all weeds are good, many have plenty of good attributes.

The most common summer "weed" that comes to mind are dandelions. Their vibrant yellow flowers can be seen sprouting in yards year after year, leading many people to spray herbicides to stop them. Dandelions can be very beneficial to yards because their root structure can be up to 3 feet long! This deep root structure loosens hard packed soil, aerates the earth, and helps to stop erosion. They even pull calcium from deep in the soil and allow other plants to benefit from it as well. Not only can they benefit the soil, but they are also packed with health benefits. These health benefits include being a natural diuretic, immune boosting, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and antioxidant. Dandelions can be eaten raw, steeped into teas, and made into jelly. The jelly is often referred to as "tasting like sunshine and honey," and what is more summertime than that??

My personal favorite "weed" is chicory. This beautiful blue flower is often found sprawling along roads and driveways. This plant also has a deep taproot system that can aid in drainage. People have also used it as a forage crop for livestock. You may have heard it referred to as "poor man's coffee." While it is not necessarily a coffee substitute, the roots have been dried and made into teas throughout history. Chicory contains prebiotics, making this tea great for digestion. Studies have also found that chicory is beneficial for immunity and heart health.

One of the first plants to start popping through the snow-covered ground is purple dead nettle. While the name can be intimidating, these little purple plants have historically been used for a variety of medical treatments. Purple dead nettle can be identified by its square stem, opposite heart or spade shaped leaves, leaves that turn a reddish purple towards the top, and small stature (about 2-8 inches tall). It can be found growing just about anywhere in patches. Historically, purple dead nettle has been used as an astringent, diuretic, and to stop bleeding. Today, many people gather this little purple plant to make into salves to help heal bruises, cuts, and sores. Not only is purple dead nettle useful medicinally, but it also provides pollinators with nutrition early in the season.

Herbicides often kill the plants that pollinators need to survive, and it has been shown to have toxic effects on amphibians and fish. Some components of herbicide have been shown to be toxic to plants that they aren't intended to kill like soybeans, cotton, and fruit trees. Studies have also shown that they may diminish the population of much needed insects like butterflies and bees.

We know not all weeds are good, and some can be invasive and detrimental. But before you grab the weed killer and head into your yard, think about what that plant means. Not only how it can benefit you, but how it is benefitting the natural world.



# Animal Ambassadors

By: Sunshine Laursen

An animal ambassador is an animal who was once wild but can no longer survive on their own due to a dependency created by injury, illness or human intervention.

The animal ambassadors that live at our nature center all have interesting personalities that we adore so much, but we must also keep in mind that their renewed purpose is to educate the public about the do's, don'ts, and fascinating perspective of wildlife.



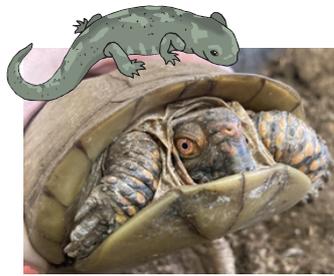
## Get to know them...



Lucy (Red-Eared Slider)



Ornate Box Turtle



Three-Toed Box Turtle

Our day-to-day care of these animals includes misting all their enclosures, feeding (veggies, fruits, worms, insects), giving them baths, and tidying up their space.



Eastern Box Turtle



Tiger Salamander

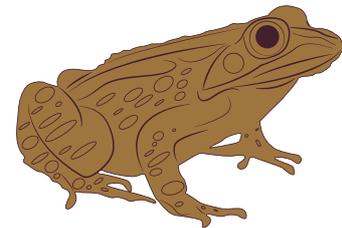


American Toad



Madagascar Hissing  
Cockroach

In March 2023, we held our second Animal Ambassador Program as a way to help provide support for the ambassadors while also including the community! We were able to do this through **SPONSORSHIP!**



To be an animal ambassador sponsor means to financially support our ambassadors. We wanted our goal to be clear that we do not want financial borders to keep the public from being a part of such a unique opportunity. That is why there is no set payment plan to be a sponsor and all donations are welcomed! All donations will not go towards one specific ambassador but include all of our creatures' vet care expenses and animal life enrichment. This year's specific goal in mind is to build a new toad and salamander enclosure!

If you are interested in becoming an Animal Ambassador Sponsor visit us at our Pioneer Ridge Nature Center to register and provide payment by check or cash only. Don't forget to meet the animals!!



## Destination Iowa Grant

Have you heard the good news?!

Destination Iowa awarded Wapello County Conservation \$500,000 for improvements and enhancements to the Pioneer Ridge Campground. This is 40% of the total project cost of \$1,260,975.

These improvements include expanding from nine sites to twenty-four, an additional shower house, dump station, and a playground!

Thank you to everyone who made this possible!

We are so excited to see this dream become a reality and can't wait for more people to experience the beauty of Wapello County.

**Thank you to Chris Bower and the Wapello County Heritage Foundation** for your help during the grant process. Your passion and dedication to Wapello County Conservation made this possible.

**Thank you to the Wapello County Board of Supervisors** for agreeing to fund the rest of the project. This campground will be a great addition to all of the exciting things in the works for Wapello County.

**Thank you to the public** for your support! Because of the support of our current campers, trail users, program attendees, and everyone in between, we have been able to demonstrate the good this will bring to our community.

## Upcoming Events

A more detailed list of events can be found at [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com) on the Wapello county page.

**June 7th:** Summer Camp- Crickets (4/5 year olds)  
Insectigations & Tree Frogs (6/7 year olds)  
Animals

**June 8th:** Summer Camp - Crickets -  
Insectigations and Tree Frogs-Animals

**June 9th:** Summer Camp - Crickets -  
Insectigations and Tree Frogs - Animals

**June 12th-15th:** Summer Camp - Otter (8-10 year olds) Elements

**June 16th:** Building Better Birders - Backyard birds

**June 21st-23rd:** Summer Camps - Odanata (11-13 years old) - Wildlife

**July 12th:** Summer Camps - Crickets - Pond study

**July 13th:** Summer Camps - Crickets - Pond study

**July 14th:** Summer Camps - Crickets - Pond Study

**July 12-14th:** Summer Camps - Tree Frogs -  
Mudrocks

**July 19th-21st:** Summer Camps - Otter-  
Stewardship

**July 26th-28th:** Summer Camps - Odanata - Young vs Wild

## American Gothic House Center News

**June 6th:** Youth Summer camp STARS **10am-11:30am**

Learn about constellations, stories behind them, and then create our own!

**June 13th:** Youth Summer camp ANIMALS **10am-11:30am**

Learn about animal adaptations and create your own unique animal!

**June 20th:** Youth Summer camp PLANTS **10am-11:30am**

Learn about plants, make leaf poundings, leaf rubbings, and other plant crafts!

**June 27th:** Youth Summer camp RECYCLE **10am-11:30am**

Learn why recycling is important and make crafts using recycled materials!

**July 22nd:** Pioneer Crafts **2pm-4pm**

Celebrate National Pioneer Day by making pioneer crafts and toys!



# Wapello County Summer Camps

Are you looking for activities for your kids this summer?! At Pioneer Ridge Nature Center we are offering summer camps for all ages!

Crickets- 4 & 5 yr old. \*Must be accompanied by an adult.\* \$5 per day

*Insectigations- June 7, 8 & 9. 9 am - 11:30 am* Spend some time investigating the wonderful world of insects.

*Pond Study- July 12, 13, & 14. 9 am - 11:30 am* Have you ever wondered what lives in or around a pond? Do you like to play in the mud and water? Then you have to check this out!

Tree Frogs- 6 & 7 yr old.

*Animal Adaptations- June 7, 8 & 9. 1pm - 4 pm \$10 per day.* This camp will be full of fun facts and delightful discoveries. Animal lovers only!

*Mud Rocks- July 12-14. 1pm - 4 pm \$30 for this three day camp.* Explore the ground beneath your feet and come prepared to get muddy!

Otters- 8-10 yr old.

**\*The last day for both camps will be from 3pm-9pm\***

*The 4 Elements- June 12-15. 9am - 3 pm \$60 for this 4-day camp.* Each day we will explore a new element. Wind, Fire, Earth and Water.

*Stewardship- July 19- 21. 9 am - 3 pm \$45 for this 3-day camp.* Learn how to be a steward of the land through recreation- This will include archery, fishing, camping, hiking and more!

Odanata- 11-13 yr old.

**\*The last day of camp will be from 3pm-9pm\***

*Wild Life- August 3, 4 & 5. 9am-3pm \$15 per day.* Learn all about the plants, animals and people who are a part of Iowa's Wildlife.

*Young vs. Wild- July 26-28. 9 am - 3 pm \$45 for for this 3-day camp.* Do you have what it takes to survive in the wild?

**Registration is required** to attend.

Registration can be done through [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com). (Click on Wapello County, navigate to events and you will find the camp that you want to register for there.)

If you have any issues getting registered, need to pay cash or would like to request a scholarship, **please call 641.682.3091.**

Camps will be **first come first served** and limited to **15 participants.**

We will also be offering an overnight adventure for those that attend Odanata and Otter camps.



# Building Better Birders

Join us at Pioneer Ridge Nature Center on **June 16th** for our final Building Better Birders workshop!

The workshop is free and open to the public. Come for an hour or stay for the whole day!

**The schedule for June 16th is as follows:**

**2pm-3:30pm** - The Ultimate Winter Bird Survey

Summary of the first ever Christmas Bird Count Marathon

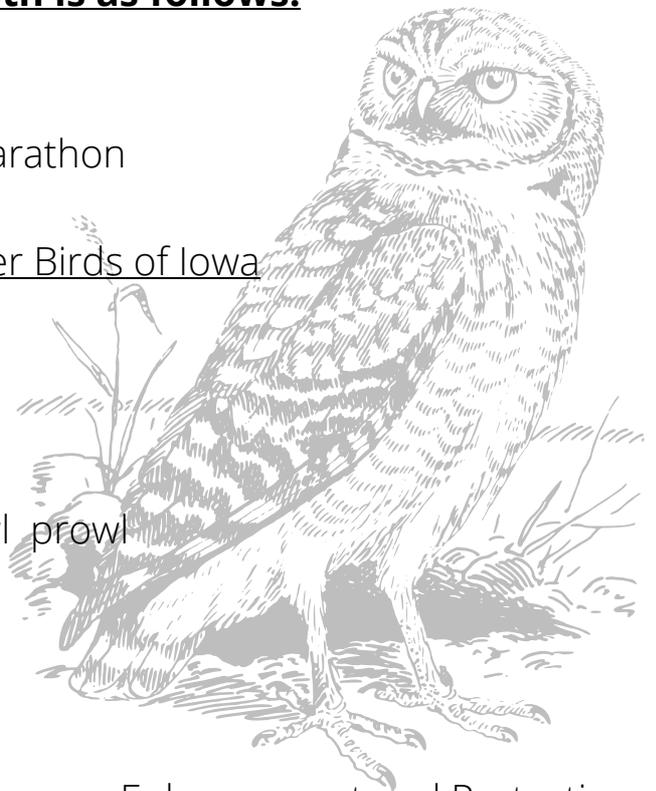
**4pm-5:30pm** - Introduction to the Common Feeder Birds of Iowa

**6PM-8PM** - Evening Bird Hike

**8pm-9pm** - Kid's Bird Program

Learn all about owls before heading out on our owl prowl

**9PM-10PM** - Owl Prowl



Funding for this workshop was provided by the Resource Enhancement and Protection – Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP).

This workshop will be conducted by Kelly McKay (BioEco Research and Monitoring Center), with assistance from Mark Roberts (Clinton County Conservation), Brian Ritter & James Wiebler (Nahant Marsh Ed. Center).

**<https://buildingbetterbirders.com>**



# Species Spotlight

## Bluebirds

The harbinger of happiness. Bluebirds throughout history have been associated with happiness, peace, hope, and just an overall sense of wellbeing. They are often referred to in pop culture whether that be in movies or songs and have held many jobs throughout history. Bluebirds come in a variety of color patterns, but the Eastern Bluebird is what you will find in Iowa. Today, at Wapello County Conservation we have over 30 Bluebird boxes that are monitored by staff. You may wonder why people throughout history have taken so much stock in these small blue birds, so let's take a closer look!



The Eastern Bluebird calls Iowa home year-round but does migrate in other parts of the country. The males can be identified by their rust orange chest that wraps around the neck and fades into a white abdomen. Their head and wings are a beautiful sky blue. The females appear similar to the males, but their coloring is much more subdued. The juvenile birds have spotted gray wings with the males being blue and the female grayer. You can often see them on backyard feeders, but they prefer a semi-open habitat. Bluebirds are secondary cavity nesters, meaning that it creates its nests in cavities, but cannot make their own.



Bluebirds have held a place throughout history. In modern culture, they make appearances in songs like “Zip-A-Dee-Doodah” and “Over the Rainbow”. People like Henry David Thoreau and Robert Frost have drawn inspiration from these beautiful birds. Before their appearance in modern culture, they mesmerized the first settlers. So much so, that they would send back their feathers to royalty. Early American farmers would hang boxes for bluebirds around the farm to help keep down the insect population. Native Americans hollowed gourds for houses for the Bluebirds and then hung them over their drying meat because the Bluebirds would eat the nuisance bugs.



# Species Spotlight

## Bluebirds continued



One would think that with a bird this beloved there is no chance of its future being in danger, but that was not the case for the Bluebird. Starting in the early 1900's the bluebird population was declining rapidly due to a number of factors. The biggest factor being the introduction of the House Sparrow and European Starling because both of these bird species are also secondary cavity nesters. These species are extremely aggressive and competitive. By the 1970's many scientists believed the extinction of the Bluebird was inevitable. But thanks to Citizen Science, people just like you, they were able to bring the Bluebird back from the brink of extinction.

Citizen Scientists prioritized the production of bluebird boxes. They set the boxes up along trails where they could monitor the numbers and health of Bluebirds. People were then trained to monitor the boxes and collect data. This created the lifeline that the Bluebirds needed. Today, the population has stabilized, but we still monitor Bluebirds through boxes set up along trails. We hope to never see these beautiful birds on the brink of extinction again, but it's amazing to see what people banding together can do for conservation.



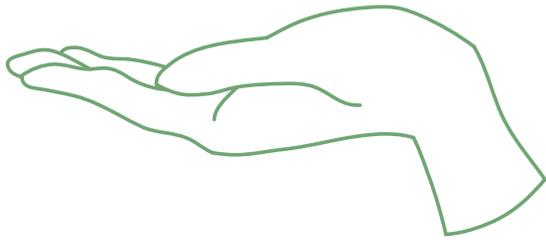
**“And perhaps in the spring  
He would come back and sing.”**

**Robert Frost- The Last Word of a Bluebird**



## Wapello County Conservation Board

The future in our hands..



### Pioneer Ridge Nature Center

Open Monday through Friday

8:00 am to 4:30 pm

Summer Saturdays 10AM-4PM

The Nature Center will be closed for the following days in Summer:

July 4th, 2023

Labor Day- September 4th, 2023



Call us: 641.682.3091



Like us: Pioneer Ridge Nature Area-  
Wapello County Conservation Board



Follow us: [wapellocountyconservation](https://www.instagram.com/wapellocountyconservation)



Look us up:  
[www.wapellocounty.org/conservation/](http://www.wapellocounty.org/conservation/)



Come see us:  
1339 Hwy 63  
Bloomfield, Iowa 52537

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