

Winter 2016-2017



Conservation Matters

Upcoming Event Highlights

Tiny Nature
Adventures:
First Wednesday
of each month

Bird Watching:
Third Wednesday
of each month

Animal Tracks:
December 17th

Nature Painting:
January 21st

Seed ball
Workshop
February 25th

*More program
details and
contact
information
located in
newsletter.*

Mills County Conservation Board

Grants and Donations

The Mills County Community Foundation has generously awarded MCCB a grant of \$4000. This money has been used to purchase three picnic tables and two benches for the education deck at Pony Creek Nature Center.

Several individuals have donated money towards mounting new animals for the Nature Center, every amount is great appreciated and helps add new, educational displays for the public to enjoy. If you are interested in donating towards an animal we are currently raising money for an adult turkey vulture to be mounted. It will be a quite the site, soaring above the Nature Center gallery!

Mills County Neighbor

Striped skunks are probably not everyone's favorite neighbor, but they are quite common in Mills County. They are actually found across the entire United States, into southern Canada and the northern Mexico. That is one adaptable animal! If you set out looking for one of these adorable little fellows the woodlands, riparian areas, cultivated areas, or even your very own backyard is a good place to find one. Skunks are very docile animals and tend to stay to themselves. They have a bad reputation because of their smelly defense system. The strong musk that they spray typically comes with a few warnings such as tail raising, ground stomping, and even a hand stand. When those signs are ignored, it sprays! Many people believe that a tomatoe juice bath will remove the smell if you or your dog are unfortunate enough to get sprayed. Save your time and energy and gather up the items in this recipe, 1 quart hydrogen peroxide, 1 teaspoon dish washing liquid and ¼ cup of baking soda. Skunks are also known for carrying rabies, distemper and other diseases that can be passed to our pets. One of the best ways to avoid a run in with this Mills County neighbor is to never leave your pets food outside after dark.

Skunks serve an important role in the ecosystem as both a predator and prey. Insects and ground nesting bird eggs are some of their favorite foods, but they are very opportunistic and will consume small animals when available. On the other end of the food chain, great horned owls are efficient skunk predators and occasionally a coyote, fox or bobcat might get desperate enough to catch one and eat it. Once winter weather sinks into our area the skunks will spend a majority of their time in burrows sleeping, but will emerge on nice days to forage. In late February and March skunks become quite active during their breeding season and this is the most likely time of the year for your dog to be sprayed! About two months later, 4-6 baby skunks will be born. Young have been known to stay with their mothers for up to a year, so its not too uncommon to see a skunk family foraging together.



Classroom Connection



Fall is always a great time to get local students outside for field trips and with the great addition of Pony Creek Nature Center to Mills county we had the opportunity for some great field trips. The East Mills 5th grade spent a day at Pony Creek Park learning about habitats, adaptations, fishing and canoeing. East Mills 6th graders were also lucky enough to visit the park the following day to kick off some of the topics they will cover in Science this school year. They had a great time learning about the impact we all have on the earth, doing a pond study, fishing and canoeing. Next up, the Glenwood 5th grade science camp. This was a fun filled week with the students partaking in numerous outdoor activities, all of the students had the opportunity to fish and several students caught their first fish ever!

Through a partnership with Maple Edge Farms and Farm to School the East Mills 5th graders spent an afternoon learning about "our prairie roots", the soil and how it effects us all. During this time they planted seeds to work on reconstructing a plot that will serve as a pollinator resource and restoring healthy soils. As a follow up to this lesson the students visited the prairie plot that is on the East Mills Elementary campus. In the classroom we provided monarch butterflies for Preschool, Kindergarten, and 4th graders at East Mills to raise and release. Students had a front row seat to learn about life cycles, pollinators, migration and the beauty of these butterflies.

Conservation Tip

Invasive plants are a problem across the nation, and Mills County is no exception. If you live in the Loess Hills it is hard to find an area that is not impacted with some of these aggressively growing plants. Autumn olive, Eurasian bush honeysuckle and Tree of Heaven are three of the most invasive. All of these species have common traits, they are highly adaptable and grow quickly. Once established they outcompete native plants and nearly eliminate tree regeneration. With over 1800 acres of public land to manage within our county, Zach Kohlhoff and Jesse Ayers work diligently to remove these species.

If you are a local landowner it is never too early nor too late to start your battle against these plants. Removal can be very labor intensive and costly but without it your land will be taken over. There are several mechanical means of control such as pulling, cutting/mowing, and even grazing by goats. A company here in Iowa called, Goats on the Go, actually provides goats to control invasive plants. For some large, well established infestations, effective control might require herbicides. Herbicides can obviously have negative effects on our environment so make sure to do your research and use them responsibly. Several local agencies, Iowa State Extension, NRCS, and of course, Mills County Conservation can help with specific questions about your control projects. Winter is a great time to tackle some of these issues!

Autumn olive



Tree of Heaven



Bush honeysuckle



Upcoming Public Programs

Animal Tracks- December 17th @ 10:00am

Join us at Pony Creek Nature Center to learn how to identify common wildlife tracks, make plaster tracks and go for a short hike to see what tracks we can find around Pony Creek Park. Pre-registration is required, 712-527-9685.

Winter Bird Watching Series- The third Wednesday of the each month! Head out to Pony Creek Nature Center and bring your binoculars. Depending on weather conditions we will be outside at the bird blind or inside the Nature Center watching birds utilize feeders. The winter is a great time to start this fun hobby and learn how to identify some of our common birds.

December 21st @ 9:00 am

January 18th @ 9:00 am

February 15th @ 9:00 am

Nature Painting- January 21st @ 4:00pm

Join Hannah Rief, owner of the Creative Canvas, for a fun wine and paint class at Pony Creek Nature Center. The picture we are painting will be "Winter Woods". Cost for the class is \$30. Pre-registration is required, class is limited to the first 20 people.

Seed ball Workshop- February 25th @ 1:00pm

Let's all start getting ready for the Spring during these last cold winter days. Come out to Pony Creek Nature Center to make balls using clay and native flower and milkweed seeds. These balls are easy to toss around your property to help out pollinators. Pre-registration is required.

Pre-registration contact information:

Phone: 712-527-9685

Email: millscbia@hotmail.com

Pre-registering helps us plan accordingly for programs.

Pony Creek Nature Center
56235 Deacon Road
Pacific Junction, IA 51561

Hours: Monday thru Friday
8:00am- 4:00 pm



Tiny Nature Adventures: The first Wednesday of each month. Nature themed activities for children 3-5 years old. Adult must stay with child and pre-registration is REQUIRED, call 712-527-9685.

First Impressions- December 7th @ 10:00-11:00

We will explore the Nature Center and have hands on learning time with some of the live animals. This program is designed to see how reactions change as children (and adults) learn more about animals! We will be inside for this activity.

Animal Tracks- January 4th @ 10:00-11:00

Animal tracks are a great way to learn about all of the animals around us that we might not see very often. We will do animal track activities in the Nature Center and if weather permits, take a short hike outside looking for tracks.

Bird Beak Buffet- February 1st @ 10:00-11:00

Activities to learn about the special functions of bird beaks and watch birds eat at the Nature Center feeders. We will also make bird feeders to take home.

Contact information

Mills County
Conservation
Pony Creek Park
56235 Deacon Rd
Pacific Junction, IA 51561

PHONE:
(712) 527-9685

E-MAIL:
millscobia@hotmail.com

Website:
mccb.millscoia.us



Mills County Conservation Board:

MCCB Staff:

Jerad Getter, Director
Dessa Montgomery, Naturalist
Zach Kohlhoff, Specialist
Jesse Ayers, Technician

MCCB Board Members:

Jan Faraci, Mineola
George Marshall, Malvern
Lana White, Hastings
Kreg Kinzle, Glenwood
Ted Golka, Glenwood



The Mills County Conservation Board is committed to providing the citizens of Mills County with quality outdoor recreation areas and opportunities for environmental education experiences. Please take advantage of these services and visit the nearly 1,800 acres of public land available!

CONSERVATION MATTERS
MILLS COUNTY CONSERVATION
56235 DEACON RD
PACIFIC JUNCTION, IA 51561

