

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Fall 2008

Bugging Out This Fall?

In the Fall of the year, we usually see a few more 'bugs', and generally not ones that light up or are delightful to catch and put in a jar for a 'nightlight'. No, we are talking about 'bugs' that can cause major concern for people. Here are three that you may be seeing a bit more of at this time of year.

Bald Faced Hornets have broad heads and have a black and yellow/white colored body with smoky colored wings. Though they are called 'hornets', they are actually wasps. These are the builders of the gray papier-mâché football-like nests with a single entry / exit point. In the spring, a young queen from the previous year's hatch will chew on wood to create a pulp which is then used to build the nest. The nest has many combs inside the papery outer wall. The first hornets produced are all females, who focus on feeding the new larvae. In the summer males are produced, mate and die. In the fall, the nest becomes highly visible due to the lack of leaves on trees, and the increased number of residents in the nest. They also become more aggressive due to the stress from the increased population. Most of the residents of the nest will be dead after the first or second frost in the fall, wait until then to remove a nest. At this time, the young fertilized females (who will work on next years nests) are safely underground or in a tree for the winter.

Yellow Jacket bodies are black and yellow / white. The head is wide and short and typically wider than the thorax and as wide as the abdomen. The Yellow Jacket and Bald Faced Hornets have similar life cycles.

*Some references state that if you are able to find the entrance hole of the nest during the day, wait until night to place a clear cover (bowl, etc) tightly over the nest entrance. In the morning, the adults will attempt to leave the nest, and become confused when they are not able to leave. Supposedly, the Yellow Jackets will not dig another exit hole since they can see outside and they will die of starvation.

Evergreen Bagworms are here, and they can take a heavy toll on your trees. This larval stage of a moth will feed on more than just Evergreens, though. It has been found on deciduous trees such as maples, sycamores, elms, locusts, willows and apple trees. It has a penchant for arborvitae and red cedar, but will not pass up a pine, spruce or other juniper trees.

If you take a moment and look at your trees, you may be surprised to find these little bags hanging from the branches. They dangle there like unlit Christmas lights on a Christmas tree, but they do not warm your heart with good tidings. Eggs hatch from April to early June and the larvae emerge from the carcass of the female and exit the case by a silk thread through the bottom opening of case. When they are out of the case, often times the wind will blow them onto other plants nearby, where they start to feed and build their own cases out of silk, their feces and host plant materials. The silk is strong enough to kill off a branch over several years time. In August the larvae will pupate, and within a month males develop into moths and emerge from the case

to seek out females for mating. The females develop into large maggot like larvae that remain in their case. The female has no eyes, legs, wings or antennae. Females secrete a pheromone, which helps the males find them. After mating with the female, the male will die. Since she can not eat, the female will die shortly after mating as well, with hundreds of eggs in her body, waiting to erupt and escape.

Light infestations of Evergreen Bagworms can be cheaply controlled by pulling the bags off of the trees and either crushing the bags (with their residents) or burning them. However, for heavy infestations this method is too labor intensive and a chemical application is necessary. If you use a chemical application, be sure to read the directions for application, as you should with all chemicals. The following are recommended chemicals for killing Bagworms: Acephate, cyfluthrin, carbaryl, Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt), spinosad, malathion, permethrin.



Bald Faced Hornet



Yellow Jacket



Evergreen Bagworm

All Public Land Users

In the upcoming months we have multiple hunting seasons. We all need to be highly aware of our surroundings. Since many public areas are open to multiple forms of recreation, those of us on public properties need to realize that there are other users and we need to act accordingly & respectfully. Some areas are closed to

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hunting, which allows non-hunting recreationists a place to go where they can feel safe while they are pursuing their own recreational interests.

For Hunters:

- 1) Treat every gun as if it is always loaded.
- 2) Unload your gun when not in use.
- 3) Transport your firearm properly.
- 4) Make sure the barrel is not obstructed.
- 5) Use the correct ammunition.
- 6) Aim only at what you intend to shoot.
- 7) Identify your target before shooting.
- 8) Keep safety on until you are ready to shoot.
- 9) Unload guns when climbing trees, fences or ditches.
- 10) Do not shoot bullets over flat surfaces or water.
- 11) Do not pull a gun to you by the muzzle.
- 12) Keep guns and ammo separate and out of reach of children.
- 13) Do NOT mix firearms and alcohol.
- 14) Clean your firearm regularly.
- 15) BE ALERT.

For Other Recreationists:

- 1) Use areas closed to hunting.
- 2) Make your presence known.
 - a. Wear brightly colored clothes.
 - b. Talk, whistle or sing while walking.
- 3) Avoid interactions with hunters.
- 4) BE ALERT.

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

This issue's *WILD* neighbor can get quite tall, broad, and can live for several hundred years here in Iowa. It is abundant in the state and can serve as shelter and provide food for wildlife. Maybe those are the reasons why the trees bearing the genus name *Quercus* were destined to become Iowa's State Tree? The genus *Quercus* refers to roughly sixty species of oak trees, 13 of which are native to Iowa. However, only one native oak species can be found in all counties in Iowa – the bur oak, *Quercus macrocarpa*. The Latin word *macrocarpa* roughly translates to 'large seed'. The bur oak bears acorns, which are large seeds. The acorn caps can help identify a bur oak, as the hair-like fringe on the cap of the acorn nearly covers it completely. Like most oak trees, the bur oak has a thick corky bark, which helps protect the tree from fires. The bark is grayish brown and deeply furrowed or ridged. The bur oak has a great way to distinguish it from other oaks, as it is the only oak with thick cork-like bark on its twigs. On a mature bur oak, the leaves are alternate, simple and spatula shaped. They can be between 3-6 inches long and 2-5 inches broad, with a narrow and deeply lobed base (near stem) and a broad tip with shallow lobes or teeth. The leaf is deeply lobed in the center, nearly to the mid-vein of the leaf. The leaves are dark green on the dorsal surface (top) while the ventral (bottom) surface is lighter green or gray.



Bur oak leaves and acorn

Lewis and Clark met with Sioux chiefs under an enormous bur oak tree in what is now Sioux City, Iowa. This tree is now referred to as the Council Oak. At that time the duo estimated the tree to be nearly 150 years old. It is still alive.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register for these events or if you have questions or would like to schedule a program for your group.

October 11, 2008 10 AM Pony Creek Park
Iowa's Loess Hills!

During this program we will discuss theories on how the Loess Hills were formed. We will learn about some of the plants, animals and insects that call the Loess Hills their home and why. We will also learn about the efforts taking place to protect our Loess Hills as well. Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register.

October 14, 2008 7:30 PM Pony Creek Park
Owl Prowl II

We will be presenting a program on Owls of Iowa and listening to some familiar owl calls before we head out on the trails to commune with any owls in the area. Please dress accordingly and bring your own flashlight. Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register.

November 8, 2008 10 AM Pony Creek Park
Winter Bird Feeding!

We will observe some of Mills County's feathered residents as they gather around the many feeders that we have in place. We will review foods & feeders that the birds use at this time of year, how to make some simple birdfeeders and review some common birdfeeder pests. Please bring your binoculars or camera if you would like, as we may go for a walk to view birds in the park. Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register.

Volunteer Opportunities

Contact the Mills County Naturalist by phone at (712) 527-9685, or email at millsccbia@hotmail.com if you have any questions regarding volunteering.