

The Heron

*Newsletter of Clinton County Conservation
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First Annual Conservation Foundation Banquet

by Mark Roberts, Education Coordinator

The Clinton County Conservation Foundation has been in existence since 1997. It is a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to support the programs and facilities of the Clinton County Conservation Board. The group is comprised of Conservation Board Members, Conservation Staff and community leaders.

Over the years the Foundation has assisted in many of our projects and events. They are instrumental in funding the Hunter Safety Camp, my personal favorite event, each year. They also have established a Bus Scholarship Program to help schools pay for bussing costs to our wonderful nature centers for field trips. Since starting the scholarship in 2009, they have brought over 5,000 students to our Clinton County parks, reimbursing local county school districts well over \$13,000! They helped purchase the Blue Heron Eco Cruise Boat back in 2002 and continue to raise money to fund fuel and maintenance for the boat. They help out in many small and indispensable ways that don't receive much attention. They also have produced a spin-off, the volunteer group "*Friends of Rock Creek*" that is open to anyone who wants to help out (see *Events* section).

Their biggest claim to fame to date, of course, is the Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center. The group has raised roughly two million dollars to build the center at Rock

Creek through donations, grants and fundraisers. As many visitors know, the building is beautiful and functional, but several planned internal displays remain unfinished.

With that in mind, the group has decided to hold its first annual Fall Banquet in the Community Room at Rock Creek on Saturday, November 1st. Following the lead of groups like Pheasants Forever and Whitetails Unlimited, the Foundation is planning an evening that will feature auctions and raffles along with a top notch dinner. Prizes to tempt you will include great outdoor experiences, gear to enjoy the outdoors, weekend getaways and wildlife art. The ticket price is planned at just \$20 per person and the event promises to be a great evening of fun and will benefit a terrific local cause.

If you can't make the event, we also have an outside raffle with a prize of a two-day, two-person cruise aboard the "Twilight" paddle wheeler for \$20 per chance. The winner will receive a gift certificate worth over \$800 to take the LeClaire to Dubuque cruise and includes all meals, one night lodging, shore tours, admission to National Mississippi River Museum, Dubuque shuttle, entertainment & activities onboard.

Proceeds for this year's banquet will go towards finishing the central display in the Nature Gallery, "Turtle Island". The display, which will feature a live turtle pond with a crawl under acrylic tube, a beaver lodge and creatures of the floodplain forest. The display has been sitting partially done for several months and we want to make sure it is completed over the winter.

Our Foundation Board Members, Friends of Rock Creek, CCCB Board Members and our conservation staff are going to be working hard to bring a top of the line banquet experience for you. Please consider attending, purchasing "Twilight" raffle tickets, sponsoring through your business or making a donation of a prize that can be auctioned off.

Tickets can be purchased at the Camp Store. Call Walt Wickham at 563-847-7202 to discuss how you can help.



**Nature Gallery ~
Mississippi River
Eco Tourism Center**



Water, Water Everywhere, but not a Drop to Drink?

by Chuck Jacobsen, *Interpretative Naturalist*

I'm an Iowan living in the Lower Wapsipinicon watershed and am closely bound to water as a fisherman, paddler and an organism whose main ingredient is water. I understand that humans can survive only three days without it. Still I have seen our water treated like an unwanted commodity by those who control most of the land. It is being rushed off every tillable acre through tiling and drainage ditches as well as off rooftops, parking lots and roadways for reasons that boil down to pure profit. It's not that much of this generates revenue. Rather, it is that doing the right thing and controlling the effects of our development and use of the land, initially, costs dollars.

I understand that the problem of chemical and soil runoff is caused in many ways but it is clear that a major contribution to this is stemming from our abuse of croplands. This not only effects our water quality but also has created a hydrological system of sudden and devastating flooding followed by severely low water levels which have harmful effects on animal, plant and human populations. It brings what should be ground water to the surface and prevents what should be absorbed by the earth to recharge aquifers. This creates the potential for greater evaporation and higher humidity which in turn can imbalance weather patterns creating stronger and more frequent storms producing still greater flooding and, again, the damage it brings to homes, wildlife and our lands. Ironically enough, while we are hampering the land's ability to hold water and release it slowly, we are also depleting the earth's ability to recharge underground aquifers which in many places are failing due to the amount of water taken from them for irrigation and other uses, including drinking water. These are my own observations but I'm sure the science is out there to support each point I'm making.

Recently 400,000 residents in Toledo, Ohio, were without access to safe drinking water for three days. They're simply the latest population to face a toxic algae problem. It's bad enough that algae blooms can knock out an entire city's drinking water, but they are also responsible for creating the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico, which this year measures over 5,000 square miles. There is a substantial cost for continuing as we are and taking little action at any level is not working. Let's protect our water now!

The U.S. EPA has known for a decade that it is necessary to set limits for phosphorus and nitrogen pollution. But they have backed down time and again. Today a handful of states have created limits, but even then, only protecting a few types of water within their borders. Most states continue to wait for the EPA to set a common baseline nationwide. This is encouraging those responsible for unethical land and water management to continue to profit.

The EPA must first set the limits promised a decade ago. If



we go on expecting the land owners or states to do this we will fail. They are too close to the problem and the difficulties and costs of correcting them. Many good farmers have taken steps on their own land's but all too much of the countryside is now owned by "Big Ag" and controlled by businessmen with little or no connection to the land beyond what it can put into their pockets. It took our national government and the formation of the EPA to get air pollution under control in the later part of the 20th century and I believe that is what it will take to address our water quality issues in this century. If we don't, we may all suffer far worse than others across the country, including those in the delta region and Ohio.

The EPA cannot control this pollution simply by establishing limits. Our nation needs the immediate attention of the US. Department of Agriculture to adopt and promote farming practices to significantly reduce the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus and other agricultural pollutants that enter our water. Establishment and maintenance of appropriate sized grass waterways, terracing of steep slopes bearing row crops, riparian zones to boarder all ditches, streams, ponds, rivers and lakes will help do the job. Each watershed containing agricultural, commercial and other development should be fitted with catch basins that would prevent runoff from reaching waterways allowing for filtration of contaminants through absorption by plants and the recharging of underground aquifers. Tiling needs to be abolished or mitigated allowing for some sort of wetlands created below them to catch and retain surface water for filtration and absorption.

If the USDA implements such actions they will help farmers by keeping expensive fertilizers and irreplaceable soils on the growing fields.

All this will take time and money. We have taken just a few baby steps in the right direction but one thing is for certain, we can no longer sit back and pretend what is happening to our water resources is just a figment of environmentalist's imagination. It is time to demand action.

Hide And Go Seek Box Turtles

by Jill Schmidt and Jessica Steines, Interpretive Naturalists

On August 20th, several Clinton County Conservation staff and members from the public ventured out onto the Thomson Sand Prairie to explore this unique habitat where imperiled ornate box turtles and other rare wildlife (sandhill cranes, western hognose snakes, etc) call home. We were led by Jeramie Strickland, Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Jeramie was willing and excited to share his experiences tracking (since 2008) the ornate box turtle. He shared his research and explained to us the technique of tracking this well-camouflaged reptile, by using radio telemetry equipment, to find the turtles.

Only female ornate box turtles are assigned transmitters, which is attached to the carapace (top shell) of the turtle. Females are the indicator of how the species is doing, since they are the ones that grow the population. They are wanting to track the habitat use, home range size, brumation (hibernation) characteristics, nesting and daily activity periods. Each transmitter is assigned a number and frequency that is picked up by the antennae when that number is set into the receiver. When the signal is detected there is a turtle within 300 meters of the receiver. Once a signal is found, we used the antennae to zero in on the turtle. That's the easy part! Once you are close to the transmitter, finding the actual turtle is quite difficult without a trained eye. The female's coloration is excellent camouflage for the grassy habitat of the sand prairie. The yellow and brown markings on the head, shell and legs help this turtle blend in. Also, on hot days, these turtles will use their strong legs and long claws to burrow under ground to escape the hot sun.

The morning was filled with adventurous turtle tracking. The first turtle we attempted to find was located under a shrubby looking tree, surrounded by thorny blackberries. We were all wishing we had worn gloves and jeans! After searching around the tree for 15 minutes, Jeramie saw where the soil was disturbed and pulled her out of the ground. She was in the ground enough to cover her body and transmitter, about 8 inches. In the winter the turtles can burrow down up to 5 feet which is why sandy, easy to dig soil, is ideal habitat.

The second turtle we tried to locate was not entirely successful. Jeramie found the tag, but not the turtle. The tags are epoxied on and do not fall off the turtles easily. They must be pried off. Maybe a coyote tried to have a turtle meal. It is a good thing nature gave this land turtle the ability to close up with their hinged plastron (bottom shell).

The next turtle tracked was discovered by Jeramie again! He found it where the ground was disturbed, but this time only the transmitter wire was sticking out.

The last turtle located was a little trickier, as it looked like it was in an abandoned coyote den. Jeramie was sure the turtle was in the burrow, but was not confident it was



Right: Jeramie looking for a turtle located under this tree. Left: An ornate box turtle found with its transmitter.

alone! He was going to leave it but the curiosity of a naturalist cannot be cured without actual evidence. The only way we'd know for sure is to reach in and find out! Determined, I (Jessica) decided to see what was lurking in that hole. Everyone helped push the prickly pear cactus out of the way. Reluctantly, I stuck in my arm, to touch the back of the hole, I felt something move. I screeched and pulled my arm out quickly. After I gathered up my nerves again, I stuck my fist in and gingerly explored the burrow where I felt the movement, hoping it was not a snake or furry creature with sharp teeth! Luckily the only living thing in the hole was the box turtle!

As we were looking for turtles around the prairie there was a weather station, transmitter towers and a marker to locate where the USFWS released young turtles this last June. Last year, eggs were taken from ornate box turtle nests, incubated to hatch, to then be raised at Lincoln Park Zoo over the winter. Since the 10-month-old captive-reared hatchlings did not hibernate during the winter, their size was equal to a seven-year-old wild turtle upon release. Their large size is an important factor in avoiding predation, which is a common cause of hatchling mortality. Some of the turtles hatched were also released in the 4,000 acres of sand prairie habitat at Lost Mound Sand Prairie near Savanna, where the population of box turtles declined due to military activities that occurred at the old army depot. The project's goal is to re-establish a breeding colony of 100 box turtles by 2020.

This turtle is threatened in both Iowa and Illinois. Their populations are in trouble because of their habitat has decreased and is broken up by roads, railroads, fields, development and woodland encroachment. Roadways are very dangerous for these slow moving animals. Farm fields are dangerous because the equipment can cause harm to the turtles and their nests. Weakening genetics, illegal pet trade and people collecting them for pets have also contributed to the decline. Hopefully, with increased public awareness, scientific studies and zoo breeding programs this turtle will continue to survive in our area for generations to come! Want to make a difference? See "Box Turtle Round-up" in the events section.



Jessica reaching into the unknown for a turtle! P.3

Events Calendar - Free Family Fun in the Outdoors!

September Events

4th ~ Sunset Eco Cruises ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Every Thursday evening through October, we will be offering naturalist-guided eco cruises aboard the Blue Heron pontoon boat on the Mississippi River. Call 563-259-1876 for free reservations.

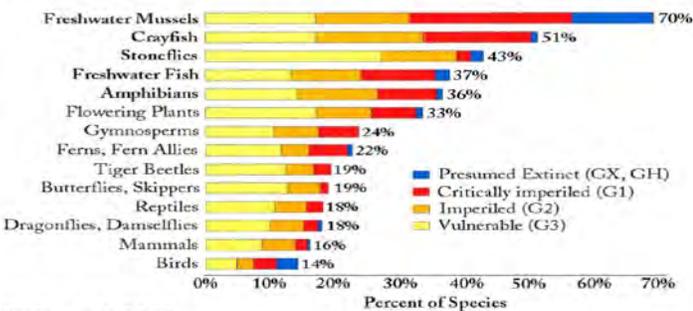
4th ~ Moonlight & Music Cruise ~ 8 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Come enjoy an evening of home spun music beneath the waxing moon aboard the Blue Heron. The cruise is free of charge, make reservation early by calling 563-259-1876.

6th ~ Grandparents Day Free Canoes & Kayaks ~ 8 AM-Noon ~ Rock Creek ~ Get your grandkids and spend some quality time on the water. Stop in the camp store to check out a canoe or kayak to use in the backwaters.

6th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ Come tour the varied exhibits of this gem of a nature center. Native American, early settlement and natural artifacts fill the center and the live animal exhibits are always a hit with the youth.

8th ~ Mussel Beach Cruise ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ The Blue Heron will take participants out to learn about and wade for the 15 species of freshwater mussels that live there. Call 563-259-1876 for reservations.

Endangered Species in North America



11th ~ Sunset Eco Cruises ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek

13th ~ Youth Outdoor Skills Day ~ 9 AM - 3:30 PM ~ Clinton Izaak Walton League ~ Looking for a way to open your child's eyes to a life of adventure in the great outdoors and gain experience with a variety of outdoor skills? We have just the thing! Clinton County kids, ages 11-17, will learn about safety and skills at various stations staffed by various conservation organizations such as *Whitetails Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Harvester Bass Club, Wild Turkey Federation, Clinton Ike's, Clinton County Sportsman's Club, Iowa DNR and Clinton County Conservation*. All stations will involve hands-on activities designed to give kids practical experience while keeping safety at the forefront. Parents and younger siblings are encouraged to attend. All children must be accompanied by an

adult. Each participant will be charged a non-refundable \$10 fee receive a T-shirt. Call 563-242-6939 to sign-up.

13th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

15th ~ A Nature Story ~ 10 AM ~ Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center, Rock Creek ~ Preschoolers and their parents can enjoy a free nature-related story followed by a themed craft or nature activity.

18th ~ Sunset Eco Cruises ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Call 563-259-1876 for free reservations.

20th ~ Free Canoes & Kayaks ~ 8 AM - Noon ~ Rock Creek ~ Get your family together and spend some quality time on the water. Stop in the camp store and check out a canoe or kayaks to use in the backwaters.

20th ~ Choose to Care ~ 9 AM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Lend a hand at your local privately run nature center, lovingly known as the Nature Barn. Its buildings and grounds are maintained through the efforts of volunteers and serve as a unique venue for area schools and groups out for some relaxation, recreation or nature study. Call 563-357-0759 and let us know you're joining us.

20th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

20th ~ Riverside Jam ~ 2 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Come enjoy an afternoon of home spun music at the Eco-tourism Center. Area musicians and vocalists are invited to bring their instruments to blend as others gather to listen, sing along and sometimes dance. It is truly enjoyable for all.



23rd ~ Friends of Rock Creek Meeting ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek, Eco Tourism Center ~ No dues ever! New members and guests are welcome!

25th ~ Sunset Eco Cruises ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek

27th ~ Fun Fish Day ~ 9 AM - Noon ~ Killdeer Recreation Area ~ Do you wish you could spend more time fishing with your child? Well here's your chance! The day will be filled with a variety of fish themed activities including fish rubbings, casting challenges, and hook tying - all while trying to catch the "big one" on Killdeer Lake. There will be competitions and prizes to be won! CCCB has a limited supply of fishing equipment that can be reserved free of charge for the day by calling 563-847-7202 otherwise you can bring your own! This is a free event and bait for fishing will be supplied! All children must be accompanied by an adult.



27th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

27th ~ Public Open House, Jens-Wendt Observatory ~ Dusk ~ Sherman Park ~ View skies through a 20-inch telescope, if the skies are clear.

29th ~ Box Turtle Round-up ~ 9 AM ~ Thomson Sand Prairie ~ As a follow up to our terrific Turtle Tracking event from August, we are going to get a group of people together to walk the prairie, on a grid, looking for new, turtle to put tracking devices on to help the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service increase this species. Call 563-847-7202 to sign-up. Meet at Schafer's Fish Market, north of Fulton, IL. Wear long pants and sturdy shoes.

October Events

1st ~ Make Your Own Barn Quilt ~ 7-9 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Barn quilts are fun to see when you are driving down the road and they really dress up a place. Now you can make one for you or as a gift. In order to make the design, the paint has to dry between sessions.



The proceeding sessions will be from 7-8 PM every Wednesday for the next 6 weeks (if needed). You may make a 2'X2' (\$15) or a 4'X4' (\$30 valued at \$175). Register is required and space is limited, please call 563-847-7202 by Wednesday, September 24th.

2nd ~ Fall Color Blue Heron Cruise ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Call 563-259-1876 for free reservations.

2nd ~ Music in the Loft ~ 7 PM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Come enjoy an evening of home spun music in the loft of the center's 1938 barn.

4th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

4th ~ Free Canoes & Kayaks ~ 8 AM - Noon ~ Rock Creek ~ Get your family together and spend some quality time on the water. Stop in the camp store and check out a canoe or kayak's to use in the backwaters.



4th ~ Clinton County Chapter of Pheasants Forever Banquet ~ 5 PM ~ Millennium Ballroom ~ Pheasants Forever's Clinton County Chapter is holding its annual fundraiser at the Millennium Ballroom in Goose Lake. The group provides local wildlife habitat. Call Brad Taylor at 563-357-0465 for tickets.

6th ~ A Nature Story ~ 10 AM ~ Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center, Rock Creek ~ Preschoolers and their parents can enjoy a free nature-related story followed by a themed craft or nature activity.

9th ~ Fall Color Blue Heron Cruise ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Call 563-259-1876 for free reservations.

10th-12th ~ Halloween at Rock Creek Weekend ~ Decorate your campsites for Halloween. We will be awarding prizes to the best decorated site. Judging will be on Saturday evening during the hayrides.



On Saturday, October 11th ~ Rock Creek

- **! Pumpkin Carving ~ 10:30 AM ~ Rock Creek ~** Come carve your pumpkin at the Eco Center! We will supply all the carving tools and a place to make a mess! We will have a limited supply of pumpkins on a first come, first served basis donated by *The Pride of Wapsi*, otherwise bring your own!
- **! DIY Household Halloween Crafts ~ 12:30 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** There are many spooktacular crafts to be done with household items! Make a Halloween wreath for your front door or a haunted Halloween luminary for the trick-or-treaters! All materials will be provided for this free event! All children must be accompanied by an adult.
- **! Face Painting ~ 2 PM ~** Complete your costume by getting your face painted, for free!
- **! Pressing Apples ~ 2 PM ~** Come to make some homemade apple juice then enjoy a sample. Donation of a bag of apples is appreciated, but not required!
- **! Animals of the Witches Brew ~ 3 PM ~** See the ingredients (live snakes, turtles and amphibians) to this witch's magical brew.
- **! Trick or Treat at Rock Creek! ~ 5 PM ~** We invite our campground children to get dressed in their Halloween attire to trick or treat through the campground. We ask that our campers please pass out candy to our little ghouls and goblins.
- **! Night Cruises ~ 6:30 PM ~** We will be taking short pontoon boat rides to see the Halloween displays, via water, aboard our own lit-up vessel.
- **! Lighted Hayrack Ride ~ 7 PM ~** Join us aboard a wagon for a lighted ride around the park to view the decorated campsites. Children must be accompanied by an adult.
- **! Site Judging ~ 8 PM ~** We will be awarding prizes to the campsite that has the most Halloween spirit.

11th ~ 32nd Annual Old-time Bluegrass Gathering ~ Noon - 9 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ October 10th, we will have a big jam around the campfire all afternoon and evening and then more on Saturday the 11th. Once you attend, you will never want to miss it again! Call Mary McAndrews 563-343-7002 for more information.



11th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1 PM ~ Eden Valley

14th ~ Yankee Run Wildlife Area Dedication ~ 6 PM ~ Wheatland ~ After two years of effort, we are finally ready to open up this great new area to the public. We will have a short dedication ceremony to honor the groups who donated to the acquisition.

16th ~ Fall Color Blue Heron Cruise ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Call 563-259-1876 for free reservations.

18th ~ Choose to Care ~ 9 AM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Give us a call at 563-357-0759 so we know to expect you.

18th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ This will be the last weekend of the season we will be open.

18th ~ Riverside Jam ~ 2 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Come enjoy an afternoon of home spun music at the Mississippi River Eco-tourism Center. Area musicians and vocalists are invited to bring their instruments and talents to blend as others gather to listen, sing along and sometimes dance. It is truly enjoyable for all.

23rd ~ Season Finale: Fall Color Blue Heron Cruise ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Call 563-259-1876 for reservations..

25th ~ Fall Fest ~ 4 PM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Bring the whole family out for an evening of autumn fun. We'll be painting faces, carving jack-o-lanterns, roasting hot dogs and marshmallows to the tunes of John Denver and others, leading spooktacular night hikes and pulling a hay rack through Eagle Point Park spotting whatever lurks in the darkness. And it's all free of charge, though the donation jar will be there for those who wish to donate.



28th ~ Friends of Rock Creek Meeting ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek, Eco Tourism Center ~ No dues ever! New members and guests are welcome!

November

1st ~ Bald Eagle Eco Cruise ~ 10 AM ~ Rock Creek ~ This will be the public's last opportunity this year to take an Eco Cruise on the Blue Heron Pontoon Boat. The American bald eagles are starting to congregate along the Mississippi for the winter, and we hope to see several of the birds, during the cruise. Before freeze-up, the bald eagles are spread out along the river and the best way to see them is via boat. Call 563-259-1876 to register.

1st ~ First Annual Conservation Foundation Banquet ~ 5:30 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Come enjoy a night at the beautiful Eco Center to raise money to benefit it! There will be plenty of action with silent bids, auction and raffles. You may purchase tickets at the Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center or by calling Rock Creek at 563-259-1876.



6th ~ Music in the Loft ~ 7 PM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Come enjoy an evening of home spun music in the loft of the center's 1938 barn.

15th ~ Choose to Care ~ 9 AM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Call 563-357-0759 and let us know you're joining us.

15th ~ Riverside Jam ~ 2 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Come enjoy an afternoon of home spun music at the Mississippi River Eco-tourism Center.

15th ~ Third Annual Veterans and Active Duty Military Pheasant Hunt ~

8 AM - 4 PM ~ Beckridge Hunting Preserve, 613th Ave., Sabula ~ Our goal is to give back to our military men, women and veterans and thank them for all they have done by providing a fun day of camaraderie and pheasant hunting. Open to all veterans, active duty, retired and reserve military men and women. Disabled are encouraged to attend. This day is meant to bring together those who have served and are currently serving, to honor them as a community. People who hunted at the March event are not eligible to hunt again. To volunteer or donate call Beckridge at 563-687-2985.



A track chair, set up for hunting, is available.

To register, <http://qcaveteranshunt.webs.com>.

- ⚔ Veterans hunt for free (no charge)
- ⚔ Half day pheasant hunt (choice: 8-11 AM or 1-4 PM)
- ⚔ Lunch will be provided
- ⚔ Hunting licenses and ammunition will be provided
- ⚔ Firearms can be supplied on a limited basis

22nd - 23rd ~ Holiday Tree Jubilee ~ Rock Creek ~ The Eco Tourism Center will be lit with beautiful holiday trees, wreaths, centerpieces and baskets decorated and donated by area contributors to bid on by YOU to take home after the event. Santa will also be on hand and there will be activities for the children. The center will be open for viewing and bidding Saturday, 10 AM - 4 PM and Sunday, 10 AM - 2 PM. If you are interested in donating an item, please call 563-847-7202.



25th ~ Friends of Rock Creek Meeting ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek, Eco Tourism Center ~ No dues ever!

The Fish That Stands Out

by Jill Schmidt, Interpretive Naturalist

Every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday around noon people (and fish) get a special treat at the Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center. The live fish feeding! It doesn't matter how many times I see this happen, it still is one of the coolest things we share with the public. There is a technique to the madness of feeding. The fish are fed live minnows, three times a week. People often wonder why this is, but there is logic behind our plan. Our goal with the fish aquarium is to show fish species diversity, not necessarily how big the fish can get. If our fish continuously grow, we would have to decrease the amount of fish we have in the tank. Also, the more you feed the fish, the more waste we have to worry about leading to higher nitrate levels and therefore causing harm to the fish and the biological factors in the water. So Monday, Wednesday and Saturdays are the days to catch the fish in action!

If you are lucky enough to watch this happen, there are two fish in the tank that may catch your eye. They are the same kind of fish and they seem to be the largest in the aquarium. They are for sure, without a doubt, the most interesting and fun to watch during this dining experience. Often a very aggressive and dominate fish, our two fish are no different when it comes to their feeding time. It is quite fun to watch!



White Bass



Ocean Striped Bass

These fish are Wiper bass, a hybrid between the White bass and the Ocean Striped bass. Introduced to the Mississippi River in 1984, the Illinois and Iowa Department of Natural



Hybrid Wiper Bass, white bass x ocean striped bass

Resources along with other government agencies oversee the stocking of this fish in our waters. The Exelon Generating Station near Cordova, IL, plays a large role in this project. Exelon utilizes the Mississippi River water in an open cycle, once-through, cooling operation and because of that, they are in cooperation with the Iowa and Illinois DNR as part of the hatchery and fish monitoring project on the river.

According to Jeremiah Haas, Exelon's principal aquatic biologist overseeing the stocking program, the Mississippi River was originally stocked with large numbers of fingerlings, two to three inches in length. It wasn't until the 1990's, that 5,000-10,000 advanced fingerlings (1/4 to 1/2 pound) were being stocked every spring.

So why do we have this fish? The Wiper bass was bred and stocked for several reasons. When you breed two different fish to create a hybrid they have a near zero reproductive rate, which allows them to be stocked for specific reasons. In this case, Wipers are bred and stocked specifically for angling and/or biological control. Once you decide the need is no longer necessary, the fish will naturally remove themselves from the system as they complete their lifecycles. Wipers are fierce predators and consume large amounts of Gizzard shad and other forage species. According to Jeremiah Haas, this and angler interest in the fast growing fish are the two biggest reasons it is stocked.

Currently the Iowa DNR is reviewing the status of this species in the state. At this time, Exelon is the only entity stocking this fish in the Mississippi River. There is speculation that this species may be considered for expanded stocking because of its popularity in other Midwest states including Illinois and Kansas.

I encourage you to take the time to check out our aquarium at the Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center and look for the Wipers. They are nearly always in the upper left corner of the aquarium on the Camp Store side, coincidentally, right where the feeder minnows and shiners are dumped in! If you are lucky enough to catch them on a feeding day I guarantee you will not be disappointed, the Wipers always put on quite the show!

