

# The Heron

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## Take A Hike In Clinton County

*by Chuck Jacobsen, Interpretative Naturalist*

Recreational areas in Clinton County offer many outdoor distractions from daily life and one of the most important is their trails. Here is a quick overview of areas that welcome hiking. Users should be aware that not all trails are officially maintained and that hunting seasons may be in progress.

Eden Valley Refuge north of Lost Nation off Hwy136 and south of Baldwin off Hwy 64 enchants and leaves a lasting impression. Its 201 acres (ac.) of steep terrain and bluff are nestled along the banks of Bear Creek. Bear Creek Trail is challenging as it leaves the creek and leads into rougher terrain. The Red Gate Trail is less steep with a gradual climb through a gap in the bluff where the trail splits with an ascending branch leading visitors to the Observation Tower and the descending leading to the back valley. Walnut Trail crosses the back valley floodplain and follows the noisy riffles of Bear Creek. The Hardwood and Black Ridge Trails both climb aggressively into the wooded hills to bluff-top overlooks. The Swinging Bridge carries visitors over the creek to the Whispering Pines Trail. The steps beyond the bridge are a climb and the trail is a moderate hike.

Just south of Eden Valley Refuge off Y32 is the McAndrews Wildlife Area. Its 198 ac. are divided into 118 ac. of CRP and 80 ac. of hardwood timber. There is a small stream and an upland pond. This area has no dedicated hiking trail, is open for equestrian use and offers a good hiking experience along mowed fire breaks over rolling terrain.

Not far to the southeast of McAndrews and north of Lost Nation is the 260 ac. Lost Nation Public Hunting Area. A parking area is available from 130th Ave. Here again the terrain is moderately rolling and the trail is a mowed fire break offering grand vistas of restored prairie and wetland.

Brookfield Recreation Area consisting of 21 ac. of brushy woodland and prairie remnants is located off 210th

Ave. just southwest of the intersection of Hwy 136 and US 61. It was formerly a Milwaukee Road railroad right-of-way. Its 3.2 mile round trip trail tops the old rail bed.

The Marie Ketelsen Learning Area is a privately-owned public access area. The 40 ac. park and wildlife area features a 26-ac. restored prairie, 2 mi. of trails, picnic shelter, pit restrooms, 1 ac. pond and 12 ac. oak woodland. Access is from E55/150th Street just 3 mi. east of Lost Nation.

Endangered Ornate Box Turtles call Mockridge Wildlife Refuge home. North of Calamus off Y44 on 215th St., pre-historic winds formed dunes of sand there and previous landowners planted scotch and white pine for wildlife cover and Christmas trees. Most of these pines grew to maturity creating a unique micro-habitat. Its 75 ac. and 3 mi. of easy trails offer plenty of leg stretching fun.

The Syracuse Wildlife Area is a 695 ac. public hunting area managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Its forests line the Wapsi River and range from lowland softwoods to upland hardwood. There is also a large sand prairie to explore just north of the parking area off Old Hwy 30 east of Wheatland. The area is open for hiking though the trails are along access roads and not necessarily maintained as such.

Sherman Park's 258 ac. offer a wide variety of hiking trails. The hiker will enjoy access to flood plain and upland for-



ests, sand prairies and wetlands walking the rolling terrain of the county's first park. Primitive campsites line the Wapsipinicon while modern sites are located on a terrace above the floodplain. A trail head parking lot is available along the lane at the intersection of 160th Ave. and 274th St.

The Wapsi River Environmental Education Center borders the Wapsipinicon River and is diverse in ecosystems and wildlife.

Conservation, Park or Wildlife Area	Acres	Restrooms	Drinking Water	Lake/Pond	Trail Miles	Stream	Hunting	Brochure
Ben Martinsen Wildlife Area	446			5 Acres	1.67	X	X	X
Brookfield Recreation Area	21				1.6			X
Camp Miss-Elk-Ton	39	X	X		1	X		X
Eden Valley Refuge	201	X	X		4.4	X		X
Lost Nation Public Hunting Area	260			10 Acres	1.8		X	X
Malone Park	30	X	X	9 Acres	1			X
Manikowski Prairie	185				1.2		X	X
McAndrews Wildlife Area	198				2		X	X
Mockridge Preserve	75				1.5			X
Ringneck Marsh Wildlife Area	260			60 Acres	2.9		X	X
Rock Creek Marina & Campground	100	X	X		1.4	X		X
Sherman Park	232	X	X		3.1	X	X	X
Wapsi River Env. Education Center	225	X	X	7 Acres	4.5	X		X
Barber Creek Wildlife Area	942			25 Acres	1.7	X	X	X
Goose Lake Wildlife Area	1212			250 Acres	1.5		X	X
Syracuse Wildlife Area	709			2 Acres	5.4	X	X	X
Wapsi Wildlife Area	86			7 Acres	.5	X	X	
Upper Miss. Nat'l Wildlife Refuge	8192				X	X	X	X
Marie Ketelsen Learning Center	40	X		1 Acre	2			X
Soaring Eagle Nature Center	40				2.5			X

Its 225 acres is crisscrossed with trails that range from steep to moderately rolling woodlands and open areas with views of the Wapsi and ponds. The Center is located two mi. northwest of Dixon, IA, at the north end of 52nd Ave.

Barber Creek Wildlife Area consists of 937 ac. of upland habitat and forested floodplain located 4 mi. southwest of DeWitt. Barber Creek flows through the area to join the Wapsi. The area is composed of 466 ac. of timber, meadows, and cropland, plus 114 ac. of oxbow lakes, floodplain chutes and small ponds.

The Wapsi River Wildlife Area is 99 ac. of trackless floodplain, 45 ac. of grassland, 12 ac. of lake and 42 ac. of woodland. A parking area exists at the end of 270th Ave., just south of 270th St. A hiker can reach a large sandy beach on the Wapsi by passing beneath US 61, skirting the lake and passing through the timber south of the lake.

The Ben Martinsen Wildlife Area includes 420.5 ac. of Wapsi floodplain timber, oxbow ponds and river frontage. Currently, parking is available off US 67. No set trails exist offering a truly rugged experience in the Wapsi bottoms.

Soaring Eagles Nature Center is located at 3923 North 3rd St. in Clinton. It maintains 3 mi. of trails winding through wooded ravines and across restored prairie. They link the

trail user to Eagle Point City Park with expansive overlooks of the Mississippi River.

Camp Miss-Elk-Ton sits on a hill off 445th Ave. just north of E44 with the Elk River babbling below. The area is 39 ac. of mature oak-hickory forest with about 1 mi. of trails, none of which are flat.

Manikowski Prairie is a 180 ac. limestone prairie. The parking lot is located off 370th Ave. north of Hwy 136. The prairie remnant contains over forty species of native plants. There are no set trails and hunting is allowed.

Goose Lake Wildlife Area covers 1,212 ac. with parking west of the town of Goose Lake along Hwy 136 and off 350th Ave. It consist of 520 ac. of wetlands and 692 ac. of upland habitat. A hiker will enjoy the 3 mi. round-trip trail along its levee system.

Mountain biking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are permitted on our trails provided users respect the rights of others. Bikers and skiers must remain on designated trails. Walking in ski tracks should be avoided as this makes their use less enjoyable. These areas are closed between the hours of 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM. Hunting and fishing areas are excepted for these purposes only. Enjoy!

# History & Mystery of the “ Monkey Brain” Tree

by Dan Magneson, Fishery Biologist, USFWS

All photographs courtesy of Jim Rine

When I was a kid growing up in Iowa, my family often traveled from our small town to the farm of a relative for Thanksgiving dinner. It always seemed fitting to me – the bounty that would soon be on our plates had originally come from a farm. There was the traditional American fare such as turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, sage dressing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie, but also ethnic Swedish foods like potatis korv, bond-ost, knäckebröd and ostkaka.

At that time of year, the world outdoors was a drab and generally drizzly mixture of black, brown, tan and gray. Because of the oftentimes-wet gravel roads, even the otherwise colorful and shiny vehicles were covered with a dull and dirty film.

There were a lot of osage-orange hedgerows in the countryside back then, and like the red-headed woodpeckers, they were denizens of rural areas, seldom encountered in town. The fallen fruits of the osage-orange trees, big as softballs, littered the ground beneath. They almost had a fluorescent chartreuse glow when viewed against that dreary background, really catching my eye, and so I always associated the osage-orange with the Thanksgiving holiday. The only thing that stood out even more was the sight of a rooster pheasant, whose brilliant coloration and iridescent metallic sheen seemed, given the setting, almost impossible.

Later, as an adolescent with strong passion for hunting, those osage-orange hedgerows began to mean something much more. I would hardly sleep the night before opening day of the pheasant and bobwhite quail season, and then the next morning feel that fiery fervor and ardent anticipation of what was probably going to be experienced that day.

I can remember standing in the dim light at the end of one of those osage-orange hedgerows, which were typically bordered with the blond of foxtail grass, the rusty cinnamon-red of smartweed, and those tall, cane-like stands of rough-hewn, grayish-beige giant ragweed. This scene was set within another, one of picked, weedy cornfields everywhere. I would gaze through my frozen puffs of breath at an enchanted world encrusted in frost, waiting for the hand on my watch to signal the start of shooting hours.

My gun was a little single-shot 20 gauge, and it tells you something about my age that the shells for it, although plastic, were red; they hadn't yet been color-coded yellow.



The mornings started out excruciatingly-cold, but you would quickly warm up, especially when headed uphill.

Later in the season, the frozen ground yielded to mud as the day warmed. If you were walking through soybean stubble – or worse yet a fall-plowed field – the sticky Iowa mud would cling to the bottoms of your boots. You would walk slower and taller as the mud accumulated, then it would build to the point the sheer weight of several pounds would cause the caked mud to finally pull loose, and you would be shorter again, walking on feet that suddenly seemed light as air until the cycle slowly repeated itself. It always seemed you had been paralleling the hedgerow in nearly a straight line, but when you paused to look back at your trail, punctuated with those big clods of mud, your footprints meandered as though you had been nipping the jug.

It was a frustrating endeavor to hunt those hedgerows alone; the birds simply flew out the other side away from you, and through the thick cover, it afforded you – at best – a quick chance at an always-poor opportunity to shoot – and very often, simply no chance for a shot at all.

This was remedied by hunting in pairs, one partner on each side. Usually there is the matter of settling who will take which side – since the gunning opportunities lying ahead are rarely created equally. But that decision was easily settled by my left-handed shooting style, which stood alone amongst all my assorted hunting companions over the years, all of whom were right-handed. I would take the right-hand side, which naturally and safely allowed me to keep my gun pointed out away from the hedgerow, and likewise for my right-handed hunting partner on the left side of the hedgerow.

The very first pheasant I saw taken on the wing occurred alongside a hedgerow on my first-ever pheasant hunt. From a jumble of thick, matted weeds, a rooster pheasant launched skyward in a coppery blast, wings whirring and cackling loudly, and my uncle shouldered that silvery old 16 gauge double and at the shot it crumpled and tumbled earthward.

The very first time I saw a bird dog point likewise happened adjacent to an old hedgerow.

A friend had a young Brittany spaniel, much more puppy than adult, and she was imbued with a shy and soft personality to boot; she spent a lot of her time in close proximity to her owner's feet. But she would come confidently alive in the field and one damp and chilly afternoon she suddenly slammed on the brakes, standing still as a statue.

Neither her owner nor I had ever witnessed a bird dog's point; he asked me "Is that a point?" and I responded "It must be" as she continued to stand frozen in place. We were both spellbound; it looked just exactly like what you see in one of those beautiful and classic paintings. We stepped forward, and just a few feet in front of her nose a rooster pheasant erupted from the tall, dense grass.

I don't know how many miles I must have hunted alongside those hedgerows during my youth, but what transpired during the years spent walking those miles generated some of my fondest and longest-lingering outdoor memories. Besides the hunt itself, I can recall the sound of a downy woodpecker working away within a hedgerow, grain dryers in the distance, pigs squealing from a feedlot, the lonely sound of a cow bawling from a pasture at dusk.

As I've aged, my appreciation for history and how those venerable osage-orange hedgerows came into being has sharpened and deepened.

My grandfather was born in 1890 and used to entertain me with stories of prairie chickens, civet cats and jackrabbits, creatures that were already in decline by the time my grandfather came of age. Although the prairie no longer abounded in Iowa, Grandpa gave the impression there were still some generous tracts clinging to the landscape. I was then myopically-focused on animals and hunting, but now I regret not having asked him more about what was left of the prairie itself and the plants that had grown upon it.

Aldo Leopold, the great conservationist, was born in Iowa just a few years before my grandfather and likewise grew up there. A teacher introduced me to his book, "A Sand County Almanac", and between having heard my grandfather's words and having read Leopold's writings (augmented by Leopold's expansive descriptions of the original prairie) I probably looked at the countryside during my hunts differently than many of my peers.

An ancient farmer, seemingly old as Moses to my then-young eyes, told me a story from his youth: he had been hunting at night, and what his hounds had brought to bay was wholly unexpected, even in that era, for illuminated in the lantern light was a lynx.

For the bobwhite quail, however, the good times were unequivocally at hand.

Prior to European settlement, the bobwhite was probably largely absent from that open, green ocean of prairie; they existed mainly along the brushy interface between wooded stream courses and adjacent upland prairie, utilizing shrubby wild plum thickets and the like.



rie, utilizing shrubby wild plum thickets and the like.

The early settlers had few materials at hand to construct much in the way of fences, and they had still-fewer dollars in their pockets, even had the opportunities to purchase such supplies not been so scarce.

So they planted their fences utilizing the osage-orange tree. If planted in a continuous straight row, a single bushel of seed was enough to yield a hedgerow six miles long. Severely pruning the young trees would spur development of a vigorously-bushy growth form, ultimately creating a dense, diffuse network of intertwined and thorny branches overhead. The goal was to create a living fence that was simultaneously "horse-high, bull-strong and hog-tight." That is to say, high enough a horse wouldn't be tempted to jump over it, branches thick enough to deter a bull from forcing his way through and the vertical trunks spaced so closely that hogs couldn't squirm their way through it.

These osage-orange hedgerows crisscrossed the changing landscape, creating a checkerboard of small fields sprouting up with a variety of weed-laden grain crops and interspersed hayfields and pastures. The smaller fields meant that all this diversity existed in relatively-close proximity to one another, and the bobwhite quail flourished in this newly-created environment where the osage-orange hedgerows provided shelter and safe travel lanes to close-at-hand feeding and nesting areas.

The osage-orange had historically been a particularly-useful tree, both before and after the era of those homesteading pioneers. The wood was at once strong, dense, durable – and limber. A finer wood for constructing a bow could hardly be had; in the early 1800's, a good osage-orange bow commanded a steep price: a horse and a blanket. Said bow was capable of flinging an arrow with such force that it would be very nearly buried in a buffalo.

These same properties lent themselves well to the construction of axles and wheels for chuck wagons and covered wagons, and also for the yokes with which the draft animals provided locomotion.

The size, shape and spacing of the osage-orange's thorns are widely regarded as being the inspiration for its successor: barbed wire, also known in its early years by the nicknames "devil's hatband" or "devil's rope." Osage-orange was cut to provide the posts along which the barbed wire was strung; the wood is so resistant to decay that the posts might outlast the strands of wire.

The wood burns hot enough for use in a blacksmith's forge; one learned not to load too much into a metal wood stove at bedtime, lest one wake up soaked in sweat and discover the stove glowing in the dark.

Because the wood was so durable and shrinks and swells little compared to the wood of most trees, the osage-orange provides excellent horizontal crossarms and insulator pins for use on utility poles. A number of farmers simply



installed insulators onto already-existing osage-orange fence posts and thus their “crank-and-holler” tele-phones of yore were more economically connected to the surrounding world.

The Indians had taught the whites how to concoct tinctures from the osage-orange, and when synthetic dyes from Germany were subsequently cut off during World War I, this knowledge was

adapted into dyeing the doughboy’s uniforms a khaki color.

Other than some reputed effectiveness in warding off insect pests, the only thing about the osage-orange that seemed of little use were those outlandishly-large and curious fruits, commonly called hedge apples, horse apples or monkey brains; why does the osage-orange go to the trouble of producing those oversized fruits that so often end up plopping to the ground directly below and then just rotting there?

A tree is stationary and so produces fruit to entice animals, which move around, to eat it and thus disperse the seeds well away from the parent tree. The fruit is digested and the seeds are excreted elsewhere. The mulberry tree, a relative of the osage-orange, produces a succulent purple fruit that birds relish; anyone who has ever owned a white car or hung laundry on an outdoor clothesline knows this. What then was the osage-orange thinking when it designed its fruits?

It would appear that the osage-orange had not feathers in mind, but fur – and big fur at that.

North America was once populated with both a great variety and great numbers of large mammals, both carnivorous and herbivorous; to get an idea of what it must have been like then, you would have to look to the plains of Africa.

Then, from around 10,000 to 13,000 years ago, during the last throes of the Ice Age, there were spasms of large mammal extinctions. Gone were big herbivores such as the mastodons, woolly mammoths, giant ground sloths, giant beavers, horses and camels. Along with them went the big carnivores, which included the likes of saber-toothed and

scimitar cats, dire wolves and the giant short-faced bears.

Today, our relatively-meager assortment of comparatively-puny creatures such as mountain lions,



grizzly and black bears, gray wolves, moose, elk, caribou, mountain goats, bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope represent a mere shadow of the mighty assemblage of North American mammals that preceded them.

It seems plausible that one or more of those great herbivores formerly feasted on the fruits of the osage-orange. In the grand scheme of time, the door just clicked closed on the critters that had scattered its seeds; as a relatively long-lived organism, the osage-orange hasn’t yet come to the realization that its original seed dispersers are now gone.

With nothing left to carry its fruits – and thus its seeds – uphill, over the ages the intertwined combination of gravity and flowing water apparently shrank the distribution of the osage-orange downhill and downriver to accumulate at lower elevations; the osage-orange was found solely along the Red River drainage of Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas when the white man happened along.

Because of the prized properties of its wood, the osage-orange was heavily-harvested within this limited range and it was undoubtedly beneficial to the species that its seeds were widely-shipped for use as living fences; one reason the osage-orange transplanted so well into colder northerly climes may have to do with the strong possibility these areas were in fact part of its original range.

By the time I reached adulthood, there were some sadder and darker developments: I started finding greater numbers of those old hedgerows bulldozed.

More than once, I remember standing there in the gathering dusk looking at the upside-down trees, their cable-like roots, orange as carrots, drooping in the shape of gentle arches. Juncos still fluttered among the dying branches, but the covey of quail that had sheltered under these shrubby trees was probably doomed.

I grew up in small Iowa towns, but a lot of my classmates and relatives lived on farms. Everything appears bigger when you are a little kid and during my grade school days in the 1960’s, it just seemed like a multitude of those cheese-yellow buses plied the rural routes, each one absolutely crammed with loads of farm kids.

I didn’t spend as much time visiting out on those farms as I would have liked, but enough that I recall being amazed at how warm the cows kept the barn despite the frigid cold outside. I sure had a lot of fun on those childhood visits, which always seemed more like an adventure, and still hold nostalgic views of a happy, healthy kid astride a pony, a tire swing under a big shade tree in the yard, fishing in a small pond with a cane pole and cork, hunting rabbits and squirrels with a little single-shot .22 rifle, and of hip boots, icy water and muskrats.

I hope someday to happen across a newly-planted hedgerow filled with seedling osage-orange trees, and to look over toward the road and see a school bus packed full of kids headed toward their farms, toward home.

# Events Calendar - Free Family Fun in the Outdoors!

## April

**1<sup>st</sup> ~ Woodcock & Whippoorwill Watch ~ 7:30 PM ~ Sherman Park** ~ Some of the most memorable and anxiously awaited sights and sounds of spring are those demonstrated by these seldom heard and seen birds. You can sit by a warm fire after a short presentation and watch their sky dance while listening for their calls. Or get up on your feet and attempt a close encounter of the weirdest kind. The terrain can be rough, the reward is entertaining.

**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Music in the Loft ~ 7 PM ~ Soaring Eagle** ~ Local talents will provide entertaining instrumental and vocal offerings of a wide variety of music. Participants with musical talents are invited to bring their instruments along for this "coffee house-style" jam session. Refreshments are available and the entire family is welcome. This is a free event, donations to support the center are welcomed.

**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Nighttime Prairie Burn ~ 7:30 PM ~ Whittier Elementary, Clinton ~ (April 10<sup>th</sup> is rain/wind date)** ~ Clinton County Conservation's Prescribed Burn Team will light up the night sky during this educational program. Fire is a natural part of a prairie's life cycle. Along with a spectacular show, the staff will explain the how, why and when of prairie burns. Whittier Elementary School is located at 100 North 13<sup>th</sup> Street in Clinton, Iowa.



**9<sup>th</sup> ~ Movie Night ~ 6:00 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ Come see this entertaining (probably rated PG13ish) yet startling documentary (79 minutes) that starts with plastic bags but turns into an investigation into plastic and its effects on the world, including us! A naturalist will have some neat up-cycled crafts to make and take home for children attending with parents. Please 563-847-7202 to call or go to [www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com) to register.

**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Choose to Care ~ 9 AM-Noon ~ Soaring Eagle** ~ Care-givers help with a variety of projects both indoors and out. There is something to meet everyone's talents and abilities. Come and join in the fun and community spirit. Give us a call at 563-357-0759 so we know to expect you and can set you on your way to something fulfilling.

**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Riverside Jam ~ 2 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ This "coffee house-style" jam session offers local talents and center guests an opportunity to gather together for a variety of music in a casual setting. Step up and lead or just playing along. Sit and listen or get up and dance. There is enjoyment for all and all are welcome. Come and go at will but the music may linger until 4 PM. Refreshments are available and the entire family is welcome.



**22<sup>nd</sup> ~ Friends of Rock Creek ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ The Friends is a group of citizens dedicated to improving the park and its facilities for visitors with the promotion of the site through volunteering and planning events. New members and guests welcome!

**25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> ~ Spring Fever Weekend ~ Rock Creek** ~ This winter was very generous with snow and cold and we all have a little Spring Fever going on. Join us for Spring Fever weekend. Cabin rentals are discounted online this weekend only at [www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com).



**26<sup>th</sup> ~ Spring Fling ~ 10 AM-2 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ Come help us celebrate spring! This family-orientated program is filled with spring-like activities for all ages! At 10 AM, we will start the event off with an egg hunt. Children 6 and under will enjoy a fun and simple egg hunt by the far playground near the primitive campsites. Children 7 and over will get a short introduction on GPS before heading out to search for their eggs around the campground. From 11 AM-1 PM, artist Susan Holgerson, the creative mind behind our mural, will decorate the faces of people of all ages with different animals. At 11:30 AM, Naturalist Jill Schmidt will be presenting on Monarchs and Milkweed in the community room of the Eco Center. Jill will share the latest on the Monarch butterfly and children will get to take a milkweed plant home with them. At 1 PM, Master Gardeners Stanley and Kay Bates will share their expertise in planter pot gardening. They will provide suggestions on how to choose your plants and ways to garden in limited amount of space. Throughout the day the Easter Bunny will be "hopping" around as well as appearances from our resident reptiles. We will also be serving cakes and refreshments in honor of the Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center's second anniversary in operation. So bring the whole family and enjoy a day celebrating spring!



**26<sup>th</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Opener ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley** ~ The Nature Center will be open from 1-4 PM on Saturdays, now through October. As always, we are looking for volunteers to open the Nature Center on Saturdays. No experience is necessary. Call 563-847-7202.

**29<sup>th</sup> & May 3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Hunter Education Course ~ 7-9:30 PM (Tue.) & 8 AM-4 PM (Sat.) ~ Wapsi Valley Ikes, DeWitt** ~ Visit [www.iowadnr.gov/training](http://www.iowadnr.gov/training) for required sign-up.

## May

**1<sup>st</sup> ~ Music in the Loft ~ 7 PM ~ Soaring Eagle** ~ Local talents will provide entertaining instrumental and vocal offerings of a wide variety of music. This is a free event although donations to support the center are welcomed.

**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**10<sup>th</sup> ~ DIY Dishware for Birds ~ 1 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ Dishware is not just for people anymore! Are you looking for a DIY project to brighten up your yard all while helping our feathered friends? Join Naturalist Jill Schmidt as you turn your old dishes and vases into bird baths and feeders. Participants will bring in their collection of old plates, bowls, tea cups, vases and whatever else they find, all other materials will be provided. Registration is required, visit [www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com) to register by May 3<sup>rd</sup>, call 563-847-7207 with any questions. Cost for the program is \$5/ person, all children must be accompanied by an adult.

**10<sup>th</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> ~ Heroes Weekend ~ Rock Creek** ~ We want to thank our heroes for everything they do so we are offering all police, military, and fire members a thank you discount. When you pay for a campsite Friday, Saturday is ½ price (must present valid I.D.)



**17<sup>th</sup> ~ Choose to Care ~ 9 AM-Noon ~ Soaring Eagle** ~ Care-givers help with a variety of projects both indoors and out. There is something to meet everyone's talents and abilities. Come and join in the fun and community spirit. Give us a call at 563-357-0759 so we know to expect you and can set you on your way to something fulfilling.

**17<sup>th</sup> ~ Spring Refuge Float ~ 12 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ We'll paddle the gentle backwaters of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife & Fish Refuge. Meet at the paddle craft racks near the Mississippi River Eco-tourism Center and sign in for an easy afternoon of family fun on the water. There is no fee for this beginner level event but you must pre-register by calling 563-847-7202 before May 16<sup>th</sup>.

**17<sup>th</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**17<sup>th</sup> ~ Riverside Jam ~ 2 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ Local musicians and vocalists gather to share and enjoy music of many types from Folk to Rock and Roll. Bring your instrument and or voice and join in the fun. Or just come sit and listen or jump up and dance. The whole family is welcome.

**23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> ~ Memorial Day Weekend ~ Rock Creek** ~ Join us for a fun-filled holiday weekend. Reservable campsites and cabins are available online at [www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com).



**23<sup>rd</sup> ~ Camp Dinner ~ 4-7 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ Let us make dinner for you. Dinner will be served in the camp store along the beautiful backwaters of the Mississippi. We will serving our famous fish boil dinner complete with all the fixings. Call 563-259-1876 with any questions.

**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Free Canoe and Kayak Rentals ~ 8 AM-Noon ~ Rock Creek** ~ Our canoes and kayaks will be available for you to check out and enjoy some time on the water.

**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Early Bird Eco Cruise ~ 9 AM ~ Rock Creek** ~ Since it is Memorial Day Weekend we are offering several free eco cruise opportunities for people. We will offer one hour cruises every half hour starting at 9 AM. We will not open the next cruise until the previous one is filled. Call 563-259-1876 to sign-up.



**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**25<sup>th</sup> ~ Hayrack Rides ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**27<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of Rock Creek ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ The Friends is a group of citizens dedicated to improving the park and its facilities for visitors with the promotion of the site through volunteering and planning events. New members and guests welcome!

**30<sup>th</sup> ~ Bird Island Cruises ~ 3 PM & 4:30 PM ~ 25th Ave. Boat Ramp, Clinton** ~ If the weather cooperates, we will be giving pontoon cruises to Bird Island, north of Lock & Dam #13 today only. Pelicans, gulls and shorebirds use the island for nesting and loafing this time of year. We will take reservation for the 4:30 cruise only after the 3 PM is filled. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve seats. *In addition to discovering the rich ecosystem of today's Mississippi, make time to explore the river's history by visiting The Sawmill Museum next door. Find out how the river turned Clinton into a lumber capital of the world and how the lumber industry affected the river. All participants in the "Eco Cruise" will receive a special \$2 admission rate to the museum good for May 30<sup>th</sup>.*



**30<sup>th</sup> ~ Camp Dinner ~ 4-7 PM ~ Rock Creek** ~ Let us make dinner for you. Dinner will be served in the camp store along the beautiful backwaters of the Mississippi. Call 563-259-1876 to find out this week's dinner special.

**31<sup>st</sup> ~ Garage Sale Weekend ~ 8 AM-Noon ~ Rock Creek** ~ It's time to clean out the closets. All registered campers are invited to have a garage sale at their campsite. Please stop or call the camp store at 563-259-1876 for rules and to register your sale. At the conclusion of your sale, please consider donating one item to the camp store to be used during Garage Sale Bingo.

**31<sup>st</sup> ~ Early Bird Eco Cruise ~ 9 AM ~ Rock Creek ~** Most Saturday mornings through Labor Day, we will be offering naturalist-guided eco cruises aboard the Blue Heron pontoon boat on the Mississippi River. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve a free spot.

**31<sup>st</sup> ~ Live Animal Encounter ~ 12:30 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** We will start off with feeding the fishing in the 8,000 gallon aquarium then move on to meeting and feeding our snakes, turtles and other critters that call the center home.

**31<sup>st</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**31<sup>st</sup> ~ Garage Sale Bingo ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Please join us for our 1<sup>st</sup> ever garage sale bingo. Admission is free and you can win somebody else's treasure. Call the camp store at 563-259-1876 for details.

**31<sup>st</sup> ~ Saturday Night At the Movies ~ Dusk ~ Eden Valley ~** The campground at Eden Valley will show family movies on the big screen for campers/park visitors.



## June

**5<sup>th</sup> ~ Music in the Loft ~ 7 PM ~ Soaring Eagle ~** Local talents will provide entertaining instrumental and vocal offerings of a wide variety of music. This is a free event although donations to support the center are always welcomed.

**5<sup>th</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Most Thursday evenings through October, we will be offering naturalist-guided eco cruises aboard the Blue Heron pontoon boat on the Mississippi River. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve a free spot.

**6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> Free Fishing Weekend ~** Iowa residents may fish and possess fish without a DNR fishing license.

**6<sup>th</sup> ~ Camp Dinner ~ 4-7 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Let us make dinner for you. Dinner will be served in the camp store along the beautiful backwaters of the Mississippi. Call 563-259-1876 to find out this week's dinner special.

**6<sup>th</sup> ~ Leaf Printing ~ 7:30 PM ~ Eden Valley ~** Bring out your creative minds and connect nature with art in the main campground! We will take a closer look at leaves as we design our own leaf print. Please bring an article to print on, t-shirt, pillow case, bandana, etc.

**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Fishing Has No Boundaries Event ~ 7 AM-3 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Clinton County Conservation will be hosting the first ever FHNB Eastern Iowa Chapter event. We will be providing an opportunity for persons with disabilities to experience fishing on the mighty Mississippi. For more information visit [www.fhnbinc.org](http://www.fhnbinc.org) or contact Jill Schmidt at 563-847-7202.

[www.fhnbinc.org](http://www.fhnbinc.org)



**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Free Canoe and Kayak Rentals ~ 8 AM - Noon ~ Rock Creek ~** Our canoes and kayaks will be available for you to check out and enjoy some time on the water.

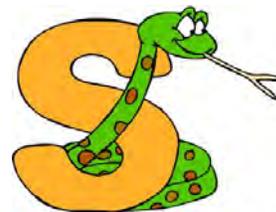
**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Hayrack Rides ~ 7 PM ~ Eden Valley ~** Ride to the back valley. Adults must accompany children.

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

**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**13<sup>th</sup> ~ For Goodness Snakes! ~ 7:30 PM ~ Eden Valley ~** Meet some of the snakes that call Iowa home, underneath the Eco Tourism Center. You can come as close as you like or watch from afar.



**13<sup>th</sup> ~ Camp Dinner ~ 4-7 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Let us make dinner for you. Dinner will be served in the camp store along the beautiful backwaters of the Mississippi. Call 563-259-1876 to find out this week's dinner special.

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Campground Flea Market ~ 8 AM- 3 PM ~ Eden Valley ~** Shop & sell throughout the campground. The staff will be selling brats & burgers. Call Chip at 563-357-4134 for information.

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Early Bird Eco Cruise ~ 9 AM ~ Rock Creek**

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ For Goodness Snakes ~ 1 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Join us near the playground to meet some of the snakes that call Iowa home. You can come as close as you like or watch from afar.

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Hayrack Rides ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> ~ Creature Camp, Summer Camp for K-2<sup>nd</sup> graders ~ 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Sign up for these wildly popular summer camps for kids ages 6-8 at [www.mycountyparks.com/county/Clinton/Events.aspx](http://www.mycountyparks.com/county/Clinton/Events.aspx). Cost is a flat rate of \$30 whether your child attends all three days or not, this is new this year. Hurry, space is limited and the deadline to register is June 1<sup>st</sup>! You may sign up for only one K-2 camp.

**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Night Hike ~ 8:30 PM ~ Eden Valley ~** A naturalist-led 1.5 mile hike to and along the Hardwood Trail. This is a vigorous hike and be sure to let the naturalist know should you decide to find your own way back to the Nature Center on your own. We will investigate the sights and sounds we encounter along our way.

**20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> ~ Park User Appreciation Weekend ~ Rock Creek ~** We want to thank the visitors to our park and will have some fun things planned this weekend.

**20<sup>th</sup> ~ 1/2 price Canoes ~ 4-7 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** We want to thank you for your patronage and will offer half price canoes this evening. Check canoes out in the camp store and relax on the water.

**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Camp Dinner ~ 4-7 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Let us make dinner for you. Dinner will be served in the camp store along the beautiful backwaters of the Mississippi. Call 563-259-1876 to find out this week's dinner special.

**21<sup>st</sup> ~ Food Specials and Drawing for Prizes ~ Rock Creek ~** We will have prize drawings & food specials throughout the day. Stop in the camp store, sign up to win.

**21<sup>st</sup> ~ Early Bird Eco Cruise ~ 9 AM ~ Rock Creek**

**21<sup>st</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**21<sup>st</sup> ~ Fireside Jam ~ 2 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** This outdoor music event offers local talents and park guests an opportunity to gather together for a variety of music in a casual setting. Step up and lead or just play/sing along. Sit and listen or get up and dance. There is enjoyment for all and all are welcome. Come and go at will but the music may linger until 4 PM. Refreshments are available and the entire family is welcome.



**23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> ~ "Ghosts of the Prairie" EdiWild Teachers Workshop ~** Register online at [www.nahantmarsh.org/ediwild](http://www.nahantmarsh.org/ediwild) or call Nahant at 563-323-5196.

**24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> ~ Creature Camp, Summer Camp for K-2<sup>nd</sup> graders ~ 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** See earlier description. You may sign up for only one K-2 camp.

**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of Rock Creek ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** The Friends is a group of citizens dedicated to improving the park and its facilities for visitors with the promotion of the site through volunteering and planning events. New members and guests welcome!

**26<sup>th</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**27<sup>th</sup> ~ Camp Dinner ~ 4-7 pm ~ Rock Creek ~** Let us make dinner for you. Dinner will be served in the camp store along the beautiful backwaters of the Mississippi. Call the camp store at 563-259-1876 to find out this week's dinner special.

**27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> ~ Hunter Safety Camp ~ 7 PM (Fri.)-4 PM (Sun.) ~ Wapsi Center ~** In addition to all of the hunter education standards, we will be teaching advanced shooting techniques, bowhunter safety, trapping, waterfowl, turkey & raccoon hunting, dog training, caring for game in the field, first aid, wildlife ID, calling and a whole lot more! The course is open to kids, ages 11-16. They don't need to have received the Hunter Education Certificates already. Cost per student is \$20 for dorm stay, meals, ammo and targets thanks to donations from Pheasants Forever, Missis-

siippi Valley Sportsmen and Clinton Area Whitetails Unlimited, Clinton County Conservation & the Grand Mound Sportsmen's Club. Overnight chaperones will be provided by participants' parents. Space is limited to 50 kids, so sign up early by calling 563-847-7202.

**28<sup>th</sup> ~ Free Canoe and Kayak Rentals ~ 8 AM-Noon ~ Rock Creek ~** Our canoes and kayaks will be available for you to check out. Enjoy some time on the water.

**28<sup>th</sup> ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

**28<sup>th</sup> ~ Saturday Night At the Movies ~ Dusk ~ Eden Valley ~** The campground at Eden Valley will show family movies on the big screen for campers and park visitors.

## July Sneak-Peek

**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> ~ Fourth of July Weekend ~** Reservable campsites & cabins are online at [www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com).

**5<sup>th</sup> ~ Early Bird Eco Cruise ~ 9 AM ~ Rock Creek**

**8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> ~ Child vs. Wild, Summer Camp for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade ~ 9:30 AM - 3 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Campers will enjoy this three-day summer camp filled with a variety of fun outdoor activities including canoeing and fishing. Cost is a flat rate of \$30 whether your child attends all three days or not, this is new this year. You may sign up for only one 3-5 camp. Sign up by June 1<sup>st</sup> for these wildly popular summer camps for kids ages 9-12 at [www.mycountyparks.com/county/Clinton/Events.aspx](http://www.mycountyparks.com/county/Clinton/Events.aspx).



**12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> ~ Wet and Wild Weekend ~ Rock Creek**

**15<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> ~ Child vs. Wild, Summer Camp for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade ~ 9:30 AM - 3 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** See earlier description. You may sign up for only one 3-5 camp.

**22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> ~ Kanoe Kids, Summer Camp for Middle Schoolers ~ Rock Creek ~** This is a 3-day and 1-night camp for kids ages 12-

14. On Tuesday we will have a fun day learning how to "rough it" at Rock Creek from 9:30 AM - 3 PM. On

Wednesday (9:30 AM at Rock Creek) we will

leave for a canoe adventure and stay the night on a sandbar on the Wapsipinicon River! We will then paddle to Rock Creek on Thursday morning (back by 2:30 PM. Only \$30 and your child must attend all three days. Sign up at [www.mycountyparks.com/county/Clinton/Events.aspx](http://www.mycountyparks.com/county/Clinton/Events.aspx). Hurry, space is limited and the sign-up deadline is June 1<sup>st</sup>.



**25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> ~ Christmas in July Weekend ~ Rock Creek** P.9

# Where Is That Smell?

by Jessica Steines, Interpretive Naturalist

I am on the hunt for skunk cabbage! Some of you may be asking, what is skunk cabbage? Others may be thinking with a name as appealing as that, why go looking for it? Well, skunk cabbage is a rare plant in Iowa and is one of the first spring flowers found only in special wet locations like hanging bogs.

**Cousins** Skunk cabbage is related to other unique forest spring wildflowers like the jack-in-the-pulpit and green dragon. You may even have some of their relatives in your house. If your plant has a spathe (hood) and spadix (a knob that is covered in tiny flowers) it is the domestic, usually tropical, version of their wild cousins.



**Jack-in-the-pulpit**

**Stinky** It is aptly named skunk cabbage due to the skunky smell it emits when a part of the plant is damaged. Like many first bloomers, it replicates the look and smell of rotting flesh to attract the first insects of spring...flies, bees, beetles and spiders. The spathe is mottled mauve and speckled light green.

**Cabbage Anyone?** Though the leaves that spring up after the flower blooms may remind you of cabbage leaves with its smooth edges and thick, pale ribs, it is not edible. In fact, it is toxic. It contains calcium oxalate crystals, which cause a burning sensation of the mouth and tongue. However, many concoctions of various parts of the plants have been used by native Americans and pioneers to treat toothaches, bruises, internal bleeding, asthma, headaches, ringworm, skin sores and muscle spasms.

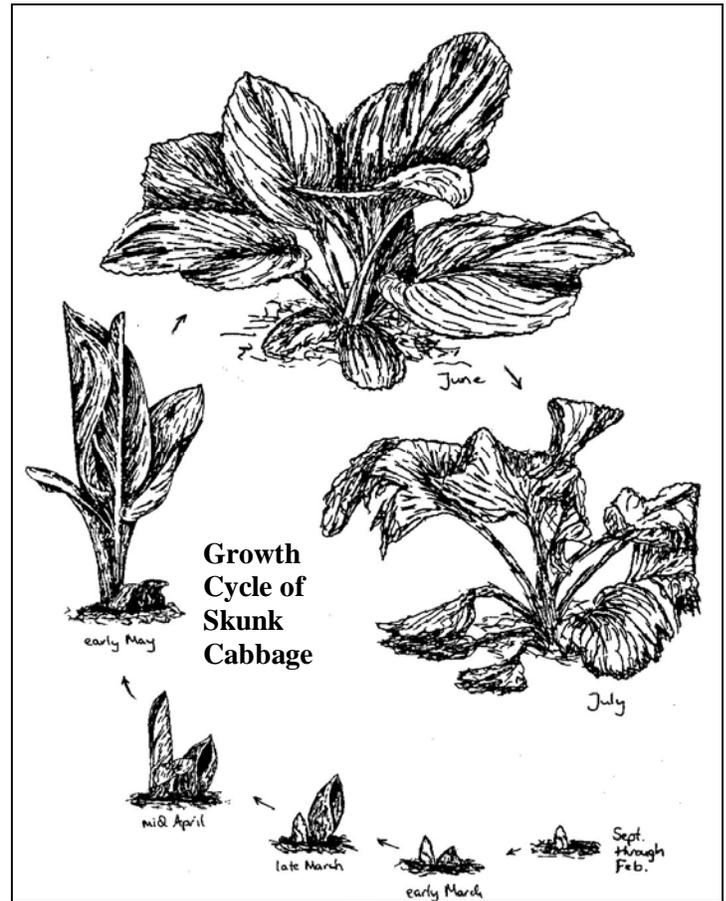
The leaves are large and heart-shaped, achieving a length and width of 2 feet! Around September, the leaves quickly decay leaving a nub above ground.

**A "Warm Blooded" Plant** This plant often comes when snow is still on the ground due to it being able to generate heat! It can maintain an internal temperature of 59° to 95° F above ambient air temperatures of 5° to 59° F! For about two weeks it consumes oxygen at a comparable rate of a warm-blooded animal of the same size. I am envisioning a chipmunk as the flower in full bloom is 6 inches tall by 3 inches wide.

**Contractile Roots** As the plant gets older the roots grow and then contract, actually pulling the plant deeper into the mucky soil, making digging the plant up virtually impossible.



**Wildlife Connections** The heat emitted in the late winter attracts the flies to pollenate it. The flies then attract birds, like the phoebe, to feed. Common yel-



lowthroats have been known to make a nest in the hollow of the large leaves in late spring. Then once the inflorescence wilts and the fruit matures and dries, it leaves a pile of pebble-like seeds on the soil surface for animals like the bobwhite quail and wood ducks to eat.

**Hanging Bogs** These are saturated terraces on the lower slopes of the wooded hillsides. These terraces are large deposits of porous lime which were deposited by mineral-rich groundwater that flows across an impermeable layer of buried bedrock and seeps out of the side of the hill!



**Common Yellowthroat**

I have been searching for these elusive plants at Swiss Valley Nature Preserve near Dubuque but there is another promising place I am going to search and it is called Hanging Bog Preserve by Palo, Iowa, about 6 miles northwest of Cedar Rapids.

**WANTED:** I have never seen this plant and am kind of obsessing over it. I have been looking for this plant since March, but the naturalist in Dubuque County said she has seen it bloom in January! Although its flowers can appear into April, it just depends on the temperatures of the year, so I am predicting a later bloom, I do not want to miss it! So if anyone sees one or wants to get in on the action, please email me at [jsteines@clintoncounty-ia.gov](mailto:jsteines@clintoncounty-ia.gov).

# Marvelous Mud

by Jill Schmidt, Interpretive Naturalist

Like most years, Spring seems to take forever to get here. Maybe this year more than ever. We all anticipate the first signs of spring, a Robin sighting or the sound of a Spring Peeper. We often seem to forget the negative parts of spring, if you can at think of any. We are not the only ones who have had their share of snow this winter, and with snow comes the spring thaw, and with the thaw comes our almost inevitable spring flood. It's after the water recedes that we are left with the marvelous mud. The "spring mud effect" is something Naturalists look forward to. There's nothing like getting school kids knee high in mud. Although a nuisance to many, we enjoy mud as well as many wildlife species.

Many animals use the excess mud in the spring for homing material. There are over 300 species of crayfish in North America, eight of which live in Iowa. Also known as crawdads, crayfish are classified as Crustaceans and are closely related to lobster, crab and shrimp. They are often found near and around water, making their homes in the mud. According to *America's Wetland Foundation*, every spring crayfish "chimneys" appear in our yards and shorelines of streams and ponds. For every chimney or sometimes two, there is a crayfish that lives in burrows and tunnels up to three feet underneath the ground surface. These chimneys can indicate different characteristics of soil layers by variance of color and texture of the chimney mud. In order to build their grand entrance to their home, crayfish use their legs and mouth parts to dig up mud underground and make it into little ball called a pellet. The crayfish then brings it



to the surface and begins stacking each pellet, one on top of another, using many individual pellets of mud. The finished product is a beautiful tower of mud.

The American Beaver, North America's largest rodent, utilizes mud in constructing the lodges they call home. Known as "nature's engineers" beavers combine tree limbs

of various sizes, leaves and mud to make a dome-like structure. The walls of a lodge are often several feet thick, and are firmly constructed using mud as an adhesive and insulator. The inside of a beaver lodge is often warmer than the air temperature due to the fact of body heat and excellent insulation. That along with stored fat, thick fur, and cached food allow the beaver to be active year round. It is thought



by many that beavers use their tail to carry mud to their building site, but in all reality, beavers hold the mud against their chest as they move in the water.

Barn swallows are also known for their creatively shaped, mud formed homes. In fact you can encourage these insect-eating birds to nest in your area if you provide some type of building structure and some mud for nest construction.

Both the male and female swallows work on the construction of their nest. They collect mud in their bills and then often mix it with grass stems to make pellets. The nest is started by a strategically placed shelf to sit on, followed by the construction of the side walls by stacking and layering the pellets. Depending on where the nest is built, the shape can be either a semi-circle or half-cup shape if located against a wall of some sort or a complete cup about three inches across at the rim and two inches deep. The



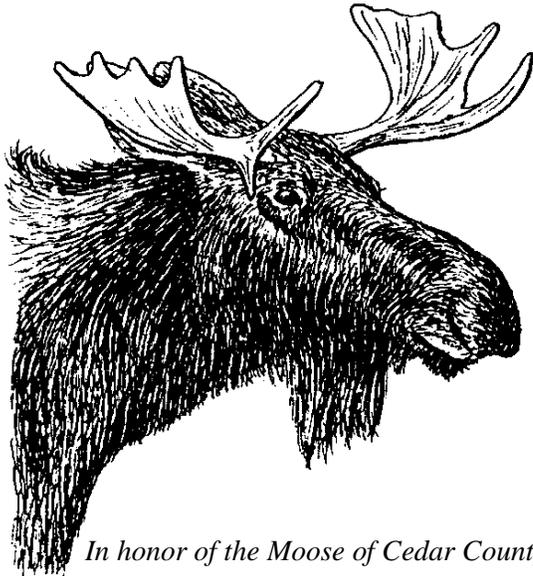
birds then line the cup with grass, and then feathers. In some cases, Barn Swallows may reuse nests from previous years just by cleaning out old feathers and adding new mud to the nest's rim.

So the next time you are frustrated at the mud you are picking up on your shoes as you walk about, just remember the animals that can't live without that mud. We hunger for spring for so long, take a minute to appreciate that marvelous mud that goes along with it.

**Clinton County Conservation**  
**P.O. Box 68**  
**Grand Mound, Iowa 52751**  
**Phone: 563-847-7202**  
**Email: [conservation@clintoncounty-ia.gov](mailto:conservation@clintoncounty-ia.gov)**  
**[www.clintoncounty-ia.gov](http://www.clintoncounty-ia.gov)**  
**[www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com)**

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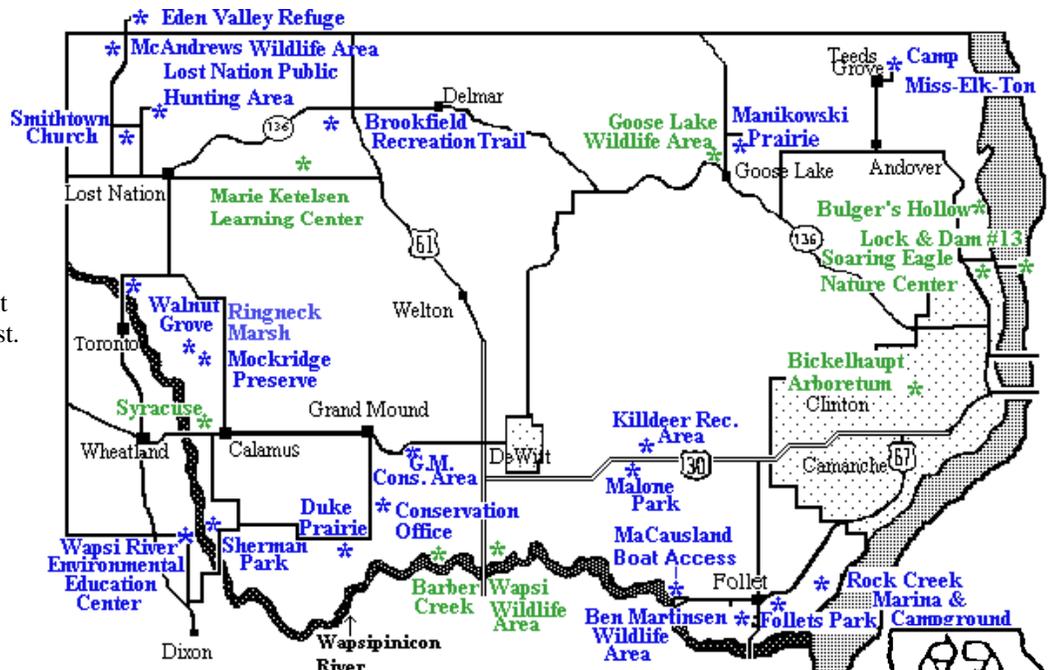
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**MAILING LIST**

Clinton County addresses are free.  
 Others are charged \$5 annually.  
 "The Heron" is on our website or  
 emailed, free of charge.

**BOARD MEETINGS**

The Clinton County Conservation Board meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome. The Board meets the second Tuesday the month, at 6 PM, in the Conservation Office, located 1 mile south of Grand Mound at 2308 255th St. Please note, this date can be changed.



The Clinton County Conservation Board in the provision of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subject to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Clinton C.C.B. or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

