



# Cedar Valley Visions

## Conservation News

### Season Recap

This past season has been a busy one for the crew here at Cedar County Conservation. Over the summer and early fall we were able to put on some amazing summer camps, finish installation on brand new playground equipment, construct a new trail at Bennett Park. We also made some cosmetic improvements at Massillon, Cedar Valley, Rochester, and Bennett Park just to name a few of the projects we tackled.

New landscaping at Bennett Park, brought native plants in to help improve the area around the front entrance sign and shower house. Additionally we added new ADA accessible sight and amenities at Bennett Park to improve accessibility for campers. Several areas got a facelift including older merry-go-rounds getting repainted and play equipment installed at Red Oak Park.

We had great turnout in our campgrounds this last season and we had the opportunity to provide some amazing recreation opportunities for campers to enjoy. Our campgrounds are still open even though the water is turned off, it's a great opportunity to enjoy some winter camping for the adventurous.

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### A New Face in Town!

I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Jacob Wilbourne and I am the new Park Technician here in Cedar County. I worked seasonally here in Cedar County this past summer and the previous fall, before that I had seasonal experience working at Wildcat Den State Park. I currently have an associates degree in conservation science and I am working towards a Bachelor's of Natural Resources from Oregon State University, which I will complete in June of 2024.

I have a strong passion for the outdoors and enjoy spending as much time as I can outside. I enjoy hiking, fishing, and camping and take every opportunity I can to engage in these past times.

I look forward to helping take care of the wonderful areas around Cedar County and promoting our great outdoors so that everyone can enjoy them!



Jacob Wilbourne Enjoying Nature



Beavers! Natures Engineers

### North American Beaver

*Castor canadensis*

These aquatic mammals are members of the rodent family and best known for their dam building. The North American beaver is the second largest rodent in the world! Due to historic demand for fur the beaver nearly went extinct in the late 1800s but has now made a drastic come back and is a species of least concern.

## Kirkwood Outreach

This fall Andy Petersen was asked to teach a college level mammalian wildlife class at Kirkwood Community college. Being an alumni of Kirkwood, Petersen took this same class in 1995 and was excited to take on this new challenge. The campus has changed a lot since his time there. The Parks and Natural

Recourses program has a new building for the program.

The Horticulture building has several classrooms, computer lab, metals and wood shop with classroom, greenhouse and aquaculture areas. Kirkwood is ranked sixth in the nation for the number of students graduating in the natural resource field.

Mammalian wildlife was scheduled as a night class that met once a week for twelve weeks and had nine students. This class mainly dealt with mammals that are commonly found in Iowa. Students learned about habitat requirements, diets, dental formula and reproductive traits. Mammals were identified by physical appearance, skull, footprints, and scat. Students were tested throughout the semester and with a midterm and final test. Special projects worked on were building bat houses, speeches to the class on various mammals, and a comprehensive paper on white-tailed deer.

Petersen enjoyed his first teaching experience and learned a lot about the process and how college has changed since he last attended. If anyone is interested in joining the conservation field and has any questions, please feel free to reach out to Andy Petersen or any of our staff.



Raccoon (*Prycon lotor*) skull

## Shagbark Hickory Syrup

Shagbark hickory is an easy to identify tree species whose bark makes an excellent syrup reminiscent of a light maple syrup. The recipe is easy and the syrup can be used in a variety of ways.

You will need:

- Pint Mason Jars
- About 1 pound of hickory bark
- White Sugar
- Water

Harvest your hickory bark ensuring to get bark that is free of moss and debris. Be sure to spread your harvest between several trees and only take bark that is mostly loose from the tree. The best bark has a bit of red on the inside and comes from bark closer to the tree.

Preheat your oven to 350° F. Wash your bark, scrubbing it clean in water only. Discard any pieces with lichen growing on it.

Lay your bark flat on a cookie sheet and put it in the oven to roast for 20 to 30 minutes, or until it smells slightly smokey and spicy.

After roasting place your bark into a pot and cover with enough water to cover

your bark. Bring your water and bark to a boil and let simmer for 30 minutes. After boiling strain out your bark, keeping the water.

Measure the amount of water and return to the pot, adding equal amounts of sugar to your water, you are looking for a 1:1 sugar and

water ratio. Bring this mixture to a low boil until your mixture is reduced by 25 to 30%. Make sure to stir often to avoid scorching. Once reduced, allow your syrup to cool.

Once cooled you can transfer your syrup to jars. Process the jars as in canning if you desire to store unrefrigerated but stored refrigerated this syrup can last several months.

Use as a topping for pancakes, cornbread or anywhere you would use maple syrup.



# Kids Corner

## Cedar Valley Visions

### Pinecone Bird Feeder Activity

#### You will need

- A pinecone
  - Peanut butter
  - String
  - Birdseed
  - Paper plate
  - Scissors
  - Popsicle stick
1. Wrap the string around the top of the pinecone, tight enough so that it can resist weathering.
  2. Pat a fair amount of peanut butter over the pinecone and in-between the crevices.
  3. Pour birdseed onto plate or tray.
  4. Roll it in some birdseed until it is well covered. Now you have a natural hanging bird feeder!
  5. Hang it from a tree or wherever you like and watch the birds enjoy your thoughtful gift.

### Winter Nature Scavenger Hunt

Get outside and try and complete the whole list!



- A deer or squirrel foot print
- An acorn
- An oak leaf on the branch
- A robin
- Rabbit tracks
- A pinecone



## Word Scramble

ANSNPIPG ERTL U    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

OTYOEC    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

DAANCRLI    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

EIC    \_ \_ \_

LAPME    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

WSNO    \_ \_ \_ \_

ORMHSMOU    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

ESNAAHPT    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

## Nature Word Search

R	A	C	C	O	O	N	I	O	L
F	C	H	L	A	R	I	E	E	G
T	O	F	H	K	E	Q	W	A	M
S	R	K	R	I	A	N	L	G	O
S	N	O	W	C	C	S	A	L	B
U	Y	L	I	W	T	K	O	E	A
P	L	X	N	V	M	E	O	L	S
C	D	F	T	G	H	I	J	R	S
W	D	N	E	S	T	C	V	F	Y
E	R	T	R	U	M	I	N	K	L

Answers: Snapping Turtle, Coyote, Cardinal, Ice, Maple, Snow, Mushroom, Pheasant

RACCOON    OAK    WINTER    EAGLE    NEST  
BASS    ACORN    SNOW    HICKORY    MINK

Please email Miss Sarah at [naturalist@cedarcountry.iowa.gov](mailto:naturalist@cedarcountry.iowa.gov) or call the office at 563-886-6930 to register for programs.

## December Events

### December 8: Mechanicsville Library 10:15 am Early Readers Todays topic: Hibernation

Join us at the Mechanicsville Library to learn about hibernation and why animals go into this deep sleep. Many animal species hibernate during this time to conserve energy and survive during the hardest time of the year. Learn about species that hibernate ranging from bears to bees!

**December 13: Bennett Library 1:00 pm** : Check Facebook for the topic for this program closer to the event date.

**December 13: Bennett Fire Department booth for Bennett Holiday Fest** starting at 5:00 pm.

Join us as we celebrate all things winter! Stop by and see Miss Sarah and say "Hi!"

### December 15: Mechanicsville Library 10:15 am Early Readers Todays topic: White tailed Deer

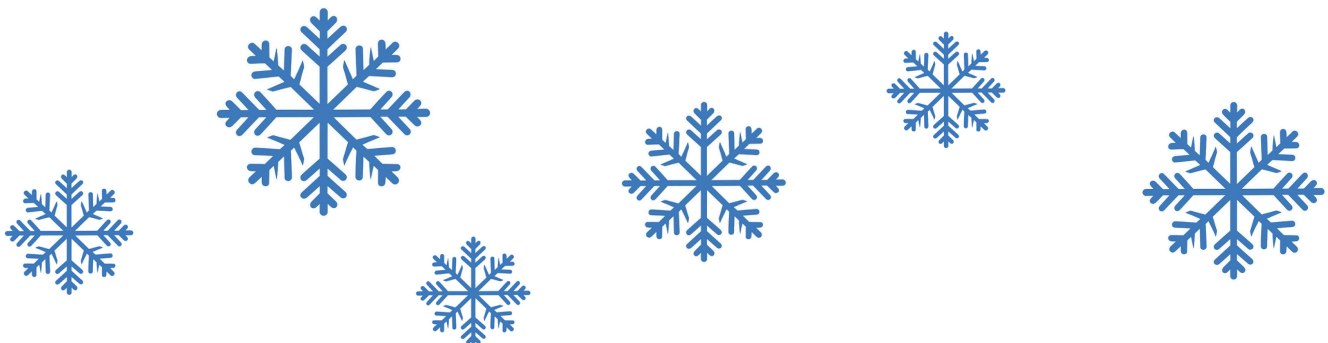
Join us and learn all about one of Iowa's most iconic wildlife species. White tailed deer are one of the most commonly seen wildlife species here in Iowa and have some amazing and unique characteristics! Did you know that antlers can grow as much as an inch per day! Learn all about deer and what make them special today!



**December 15: Durant Library 5:30** Todays topic: Wood Ornaments  
Get hands on with the perfect arts and craft activity this season! At this program we will be making some ornaments from recycled wood to brighten up our homes. This is a make and take program for all to enjoy!

**December 20: West Branch Library 2:00 pm** : Check Facebook for the topic for this program closer to the event date.

Programs may be canceled due to weather. Please follow us on Facebook for program cancellations and updates.



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## January Events

**January 11: Mechanicsville Library 3:45 pm** Today's topic: Hibernation

Join us at the Mechanicsville Library to learn about hibernation and why animals go into this deep sleep. Many animal species hibernate during this time to conserve energy and survive during the hardest time of the year. Learn about species that hibernate ranging from bears to bees!

**January 12: Mechanicsville Library 10:15 Early Readers** Today's topic: Animals in winter

Come join Miss Sarah to learn about what animals are doing during the winter. Find out what goes on above and below the snow when the rest of the world is cold. We will learn all about animals winter activities and where they may be hiding. We will also read the book *Over and Under* by Nao Konashi.

**January 12: Durant Library 5:30 pm** Paper Mâché Bowls and Mini Pinatas

Come join us for some arts and crafts at Durant Library while we make and share paper mâché crafts. For this program we will be making paper mâché crafts that you can take home. All skill levels welcome!

**January 15: Durant Library 3:30 pm** No Bake Deserts

Join us for a sweet treat while we make some awesome no bake recipes! Be ready to enjoy some time baking and trying some new treats!

**January 17: West Branch Library 2:00 pm** : Check Facebook for the topic for this program closer to the event date.



**January 20: Bennett Park at shelter one** snowshoeing

10:30 am Pre-register to guarantee a pair of snowshoes

Join us to try this great winter activity! Get outside with

us for a new way to explore nature and find new

meaning in "staying on top of things"! No experience necessary and all skill levels welcome!

**January 26: Mechanicsville Library 10:15 am** Early Readers Today's topic: Snow and Indoor Snowball Fight

Join us at Mechanicsville Library to learn all about snow and why it's special. I bet you knew that all snowflakes are unique but did you know why? Find out this and more while having fun playing with some 'indoor' snow!

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## February Events

**February 3:** West Rochester Sand Pit snowshoeing 10:30 am. Pre-register to guarantee a pair of snowshoes

Join us to try this great winter activity! Get outside with us for a new way to explore nature and find new meaning in ‘staying on top of things’! No experience necessary and all skill levels welcome!



**February 8:** Mechanicsville Library 3:45 pm Today's topic: Owls

Join us at the Mechanicsville Library to learn all about ‘whoop’ is out at night! You’ll learn all about owls, how they hear so well, and what makes them so silent at night! After this you may just be nocturnal too!

**February 9:** Mechanicsville Library 10:15 am Early Readers Today's topic: Owls

How are owls so silent when they fly?

WHOOO is that I hear calling? How can they hear so well? Come with the questions and more as we learn all about owls!

**February 10:** West Rochester Sand Pits Ice fishing and snowshoeing 10:00 am until noon

Come have a great time with us out on the ice and snow. Learn how to ice fish and snowshoe to beat the winter blah! Beginners and Experienced fishers welcome!



**February 21:** West Branch Library 2:00 pm

Check Facebook for the topic for this program closer to the event date.



**February 23:** Durant Library 5:30 pm Today's topic: Pine needle and rose tea

Join Miss Sarah and to learn about an awesome use for pine needles and enjoy a cup of tea!

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## March Events



**March 2:** Cedar Valley Park at shelter two snowshoeing 10:30 am. Pre-register to guarantee a pair of snowshoes

Join us to try this great winter activity! Snowshoeing is a great winter activity to get out and beat some winter blues. Get outside with us for a new way to explore nature and find new meaning in 'staying on top of things"! No experience necessary and all skill levels welcome!

**March 8:** Mechanicsville Library 10:15 am Early Readers Today's topic: Rainbows and Rain

Join us at Mechanicsville Library for this colorful program! Where do the colors come from? What's at the end of the rainbow? Come with these questions and more to learn all about how rain makes rainbows!

**March 9:** Massillon Park at shelter one 10:30 am snowshoeing. Pre-register to guarantee a pair of snowshoes

Join us to try this great winter activity! Snowshoeing is a great winter activity to get out and beat some winter blues. Get outside with us for a new way to explore nature and find new meaning in 'staying on top of things"! No experience necessary and all skill levels welcome!

**March 14:** Mechanicsville Library 3:45 pm Today's topic: Rainbows and Rain

Join us at Mechanicsville Library for this colorful program! Where do the colors come from? What's at the end of the rainbow? Come with these questions and more to learn all about how rain makes rainbows!



**March 16:** FREE Easter egg hunt at Cedar Valley Park at 10:00 am PLEASE DO NOT COME BEFORE 9:30 am The "Easter bunny" will still be hiding eggs. Registration required.

**March 20:** West Branch Library 2:00 pm: Check Facebook for the topic for this program closer to the event date.

**March 22:** Mechanicsville Library 10:15 am Early Readers Today's topic: Nests

Come and join us to learn all about nests and nest building. Why and how do birds build nests? What do they use for nest building and why? Come find out with Miss Sarah!



**March 23:** FREE Easter egg hunt at Red Oak Park at 10:00 am PLEASE DO NOT COME BEFORE 9:30 am The "Easter bunny" will still be hiding eggs. Registration required.

**March 28:** Mechanicsville Library 1:30 pm Memorial building: Check Facebook for the topic for this program closer to the event date.

Programs may be canceled due to weather. Please follow us on Facebook for program cancellations and updates.

## Feeding birds in the winter

Winter food for birds is very important because they require more energy to stay warm and survive the harsh, Iowa winters. A bird's normal winter food can easily be covered with snow and ice, thus limiting the number of wildlife that will survive the winter.

There are several winter foods that are recommended for feeding, one being suet. Birds that munch on insects love to forage on beef suet. You can use suet to attract chickadees, nuthatches, tufted titmice, blue jays, woodpeckers, and even juncos and white-throated sparrows when it gets cold enough. Peanut butter is another energy packed food for the wintertime, plus it's delicious! So, if you make yourself a sandwich, share the wealth with the wildlife. All you need to do is slather some peanut butter on a rough-barked tree and watch the chickadees, blue jays, and nuthatches gobble up your shared kindness.



Speaking of sandwiches though, you can share your bread crusts or your burnt toast with the birdies. Bread crusts, stale, unsalted popcorn, dried fruit, boiled potatoes, and cooked spaghetti noodles can be munched on by a few species. However, these things are meant to be a treat, not their main diet.

Something that is part of a bird's diet that we often forget is grit. Birds require grit to grind up their food. Winter grit in the form of sand (not kitty litter) is often a welcomed site!

Check out your local bird club and library for more information on feeding birds.

### Cedar County Conservation Staff

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