

Cedar Valley Visions

Conservation News

Bennett Cabin Work and More!

Article by Chip Brown and Photos by Jacob Wilbourne

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The Bennett Park cabin is coming along nicely. The outer shell came together well and was completed by mid-July, thanks to K and L Construction. After the shell was up, we were able to begin some of the interior work, such as putting in a utility room and putting in nailer boards for the ceiling and wall boards and trim work around the windows. Electricity and water have been run to the cabin interior at this point as well.

Next steps include putting in insulation, putting up the inside walls and ceiling, and other interior finish work. We look forward

to seeing this cabin completed and are really proud of how far we have come on this project.

Labor Day has come and gone, and with that, the last of the "Camping Holidays." Over the last holiday weekend the new camping area at Massillon was completely full, which is awesome! Bennett Park was full up as well, and Cedar Valley nearly so—all great things we love to see.

This year we did a little something different and included holiday weekend programs for park campers and guests, with Jake and Sarah alternating parks and providing a program for users to enjoy. These programs have included hikes, outdoor activities, and nature art and have been a hit so far!

We appreciate all of our campers and park users spending time outdoors in our parks. We thank you for choosing us and our parks to enjoy nature and the outdoors.



Creature Feature~ Eastern Milk Snake

Article by Jacob Wilbourne and Photo by Sophie Poppe



The eastern milk snake is a medium-sized snake ranging in size from 24 to 52 inches in length, native to Iowa. They have a slender and colorful body, with coloration patterns ranging from greys and browns to reddish patterns, but always with black-bordered blotches.

These snakes are active from April through September and can be found in rocky areas, woodlands, and even in old barns, though they often prefer hiding under some sort of cover. Their diet consists of amphibians, insects, mice, and even other reptiles, including snakes! These snakes have a mostly docile temperament and are harmless to humans.

They get the name "milk snake" because it was believed that they would come into barns at night and steal cows' milk; however, this isn't true.

What's the Buzz?

Article by Sarah Subbert

Summer was a buzz with many different activities. Camps, library programs, day care programs, and even chasing bees! We were fortunate enough to get an extern this year through the Iowa Governor's STEM Teacher Externship Program. Our extern's name was Adam Brown from Calamus-Wheatland Community School. Adam received training and observed what kind of bumble bees were at some of our parks.

We were hoping to find the Federally Endangered rusty-patched bumblebee, which has been found at River Valley Wetland before. However, the critter evaded Adam. That does not mean it was not out there. It simply means it was not observed during the 45-minute observation sessions conducted by Adam. Adam did observe several different species of bumble bees, which is great news! There were 34 brown belted, 18 common eastern, five black and gold, and three two-spotted bumble bees. Great job, Adam! Thanks for all your hard work!

Fish Kill Update

Article by Jacob Wilbourne

The last weeks of July saw a fish kill at Bennett Park. While not super common, these types of fish kills do happen from time to time.

Most often these fish kills happen due to a sudden decrease in dissolved oxygen in the water, which in turn suffocates the fish. There are three main factors that acted together to create the conditions that led to our fish kill: warm water, decaying plant matter, and cooling temperatures. Warm water holds less oxygen than cooler water due to the warmer water having more energy available for the gas to escape. When plant matter dies, it starts rapidly breaking down, which consumes already low oxygen. Finally, the cooler temperatures chill the surface water, causing it to sink to the bottom in a process called turnover. This mixes the entire water column with low-oxygen bottom water, placing further stress on the fish.

Our aerator has been working hard this summer trying to keep up and put oxygen into the water, but it just wasn't enough. Future options we are exploring include algae prevention and stocking the pond.



We love seeing and sharing your nature photos! These photos were submitted by S. Anderson to share with others of some of the nature they have been enjoying throughout the season.

If you have nature photos or photos in our parks, we would love to share them with others.

To submit your photos, send them to:

Jwilbourne@cedarcountry.iowa.gov

Please include what photo credit you would like to include with your photos.



Photo Credit: S. Anderson

Kids Corner

Cedar Valley Visions

Suet in a Mug: Outdoor Bird Feeder

Please have an adult help you with the following project

This project is a reprint from the Winter 24/25 Edition of Cedar Valley Visions

Materials:

- Crisco, Lard, or other hard fats
- An old coffee mug
- Bird seed
- Something to hang your mug with
- A short stick for a perch

Optional:

- Peanut Butter
- Dried Fruit
- Chopped nuts
- Oats
- Cornmeal



Photo Credit:
Jacob Wilbourne

Instructions:

1. Scoop the lard or other hard fat into your mug leaving plenty of room to add bird seed later, this will form the base of your suet. Be sure that your mug is microwave safe, and then microwave on high in 15-30 second intervals, stirring after each interval to melt your fat. Alternatively you may use a stove to melt and pour your fat into the mug.
2. Once your fat is melted stir in your bird seed and other additions. I used chopped raisins and peanut butter for mine!
3. Let your mug sit on the counter for 15-20 minutes until the suet has settled and begins to harden slightly. Once it has hardened slightly you may insert a stick to be used as a perch on the opposite end from the handle. This allows the birds a place to land and eat.
4. Place your mug with suet into the freezer to harden overnight. Once hardened you may hang your mug outside using twine or another device. I used an old carabiner! Be sure to hang your suet in an accessible and safe location for yourself and birds.
5. Enjoy watching the birds visit your new bird feeder!

Fall Nature Scavenger Hunt

- A spider web with dew
- A pumpkin
- Three different colored leaves
- Geese Flying in a V shape
- White Pelicans
- A snowflake
- Frost



Nature

Word Scramble

ALNUTW

SKRIB

DSUGOR

RRDCOHA

SINRUGTL

STACLKOSRN

WRCAESCRO

UCMHNKIP

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

ACORN DECIDUOUS FALL FROST HARVEST
HIBERNATE MIGRATION SQUIRRELS

Answers: Walnut, Brisk, Gourds, Orchard, Rustling, Cornstalks, Scarecrow, Chipmunk

Friday, September 18th, Snakes

Cedar Valley Park Shelter One (673 255th Street, West Branch, IA), 6:30 pm.

Join guest speaker, Mary Bliar, Iowa County Naturalist, for a riveting program on snakes! She will be bringing live specimens.

Saturday, September 19th, Stanwood Funfest

Stanwood City Park, 12:00 pm. – 4:00 pm.

Come see Miss Sarah amongst all the fun! Tons of booths, fun games, and food options!

Tuesday, September 22nd, Toads and Tadpoles

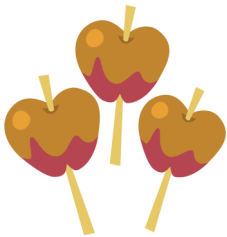
Mechanicsville Library, 3:30 pm.

It's going to be TOADLY awesome! Come learn about frogs, toads, and tadpoles with live examples that we get to touch and feel.

Wednesday, September 23rd, Caramel Apples

Durant Library, 3:30 pm.

We will be having home made soft caramel with apples.



Friday, September 25th, Glow Paddle

Bennett Park, 7:30 pm.

Come canoeing with style! Meet on the east side, down by the water. We will light up the canoes with pool lights and have several floating, glow objects as well. Please bring bug spray, water, and snacks. If you have your own life jacket, please bring it. We will have various sizes of life jackets to borrow as well. Children must be 10 and older to participate. Feel free to bring your own canoe or kayak as well.

Saturday, September 26th, Glow Paddle

Lake Chester (3300 Cedar Street, Muscatine, Iowa), 7:30 pm. – 9:30 pm.

Time to light up the night! If you would like to reserve a canoe or kayak, please call Muscatine County Conservation at 563-264-5922. If you would like to reserve a paddle board, please email Sarah Subbert at naturalist@cedarcounty.iowa.gov

Sunday, September 27th, Hunter Safety Education

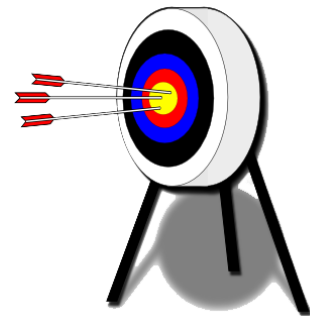
Cedar County Conservation Office (713 E South Street, Tipton, Iowa), 8:00 am. – 4:00 pm.

Pre-registration required. Please sign up at <https://license.gooutdoorsiowa.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx?id=3983&searchText=&type=0&startDate=9%2F27%2F2026&endDate=05%2F13%2F2027&zipcode=&distancefrom=> Kids must be 11 or older. They will get their completion certificate on their 12th birthday. Adults are welcome too!! Participants are required to stay the entire duration. Lunch provided. If you have special dietary needs, please bring your own lunch. Please bring your own water bottle and snacks.

Monday, September 28th, After Supper Archery

Bennett Park Shelter Two, 6:30 pm.

This program is for adults and children over the age of 10. If you have long hair, please tie your hair back. Please bring your own water, snacks, and bug spray. We will provide all the equipment.



Tuesday, September 29th, Roving Retirees

Stanwood Library, 2:30 pm.

Roving Retirees are at it again! Come join the fun!

Wednesday, September 30th, Finspan

Tipton Library, 4:00 pm.

Join the craziness and play the educational game Finspan and learn true facts about fish from around the world.

Monday, October 5th, Spectacular Spiders

Durant Library, 3:30 pm.

Learn about spider's special features and get to play some fun games.

Thursday, October 8th, Beautiful Bats

Durant Library, 10:00 am.

This young learner program is designed to explore Iowa's bats with hands on games.

Saturday, October 10th, Vampire Valley Halloween Hike

Cedar Valley Park Main Campground (trail by the quarry wall near the dumpster), 7:30 pm.

Enter if you dare! This is a free, family-friendly event. The non-scary hike will start at 7:30 pm. We will make a giant line and walk the trail. We've been lucky in the past and if people are quiet, we have heard and even seen a barred owl! Scary hikes to follow. We will have trail leaders leaving about every eight minutes for the scary hikes with groups of 10 people or less. BE PREPARED TO WAIT. We will provide headlamps for people to share during the hike. Feel free to bring your own flashlight/headlamp. Light refreshments will be provided. Address is 660 255th Street, West Branch, Iowa.

Monday, October 12th, Bats

Tipton Library, 3:30 pm.

After school bat special! Creepy or cool? You decide.

Tuesday, October 13th, Roving Retirees

Stanwood Library, 2:30 pm.

Join the fun and laughter for a surprise program.

Monday, October 19th, Iowa Bats

Durant Library, 5:30 pm.

Iowa is home to several species of bats and we will discuss some of their features, habits, and habitats.

Thursday, October 22th, Spiders

Tipton Library, 3:30 pm.

They are not creepy, but they are crawly. Learn about spider's cool features.

Friday, October 23rd, Mini Pumpkin Muffins

Mechanicsville Library, 11:00 am.

Come eat some tasty mini muffins with Sarah as we bake some pumpkin muffins together. Learn how your pumpkin can be a decoration and then a tasty treat.

**Monday, October 26th, Turkey Vultures**

Tipton Library, 3:30 pm.

Learn about one of nature's best clean up crew members!

Wednesday, October 28th, Turkey Vultures

Bennett Library, 1:30 pm.

Roadkill cafe! Learn about our feathered friends.



Monday, November 2nd, Crazy Cranberries

Durant Library, 3:30 pm.

Taste some crazy cranberry concoctions for free!

Tuesday, November 10th, Roving Retirees Cranberry Surprise

Stanwood Library, 2:30 pm.

Cranberry season is upon us! We must feast! Try the surprise recipe, you'll like it.

Friday, November 13th, Cranberries

Mechanicsville Library, 11:00 am.

This young learner program will get to try some cranberry snacks and see how they are grown and harvested.

**Monday, November 16th, Terrific Turkeys**

Durant Library, 5:30 pm.

Gobble, Gobble! Come learn about the various types of turkeys.

**Thursday, November 19th, Turkeys**

Durant Library, 10:00 am.

This young learner program will be getting to touch and feel real turkey parts. What is a turkey beard? Where does a turkey wear a beard on their body?

Friday, November 20th, Talking Turkeys

Tipton Library, 3:30 pm.

Talk turkey to me! Learn how to cluck, strut, gobble, and wobble like a turkey!

Friday, November 23rd, Pumpkins

Tipton Library, 3:30 pm.

Let's talk about pumpkins and some of their history.

Wednesday, November 25th, Pumpkins

Bennett Library, 1:30 pm.

Your Halloween decoration can become food! Find out how.



Wednesday, December 2nd, Winter Evergreen**Identification**

Durant Library, 3:30 pm.

What is that green tree over there? Let's talk about it!

Friday, December 4th, Wood Ornaments and Snowball Fight

Mechanicsville Library, 11:00 am.

We will be decorating slices of tree branches for ornaments and then we'll have a snowball fight using cotton balls.

Monday, December 7th, Holiday Ornament Swap

Tipton Library, 5:30 pm.

This is for adults as we swap ornaments and repurpose things for gifts.

Tuesday, December 8th, Winter Evergreen Identification

Stanwood Library, 2:30 pm.

What is the difference between a spruce and a fir tree? Find out...

Wednesday, December 9th, Miss Sarah Surprise

Bennett Library, 1:30 pm.

Join the fun!

Friday, December 11th, Cedar County Christmas Festival Booth

Cedar County Fair Grounds, evening (To Be Determined Later).

Join Miss Sarah and many others at the various booths to celebrate the holidays.

Saturday, December 12th, Cedar County Christmas Festival Booth

Cedar County Fair Grounds, (To Be Determined Later).

Join Miss Sarah and many others at the various booths to celebrate the holidays.

Monday, December 14th, Winter Evergreen Identification

Tipton Library, 3:30 pm.

What do you mean not all cones are PINE cones?

Wednesday, December 16th, Gift Making Event

Durant Library, 5:30 pm.

Make some ornaments and some other easy gifts to give for the winter season .

Thursday, December 17th, Wooden Ornaments

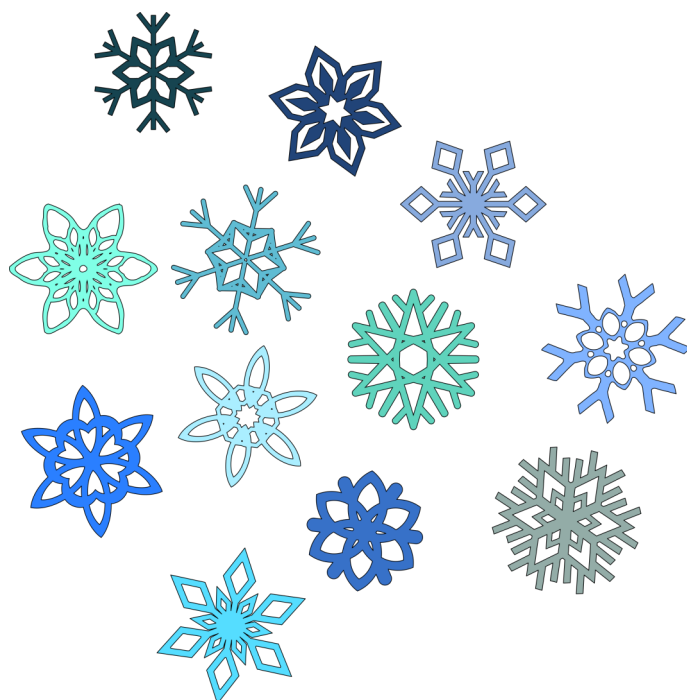
Durant Library, 10:00 am.

Toddler program where we will be using tree branch slices to make adorable ornaments.

Wednesday, December 23rd, It's Tea Time

Durant Library, 5:30 pm.

Ever try pine needle tea? Now is your chance!



Wild Recipe: Mulberry Soda Refresher

Recipe and Photo by Alan Bergo | Forager Chef

Ingredients:

- 32 oz (4 cups) wild grape juice (you'll need about 5 lbs of grapes)
- 1 cup water
- 8 teaspoons powdered apple pectin full strength, such as Ball Classic Fruit Pectin
- 28 oz (4 cups) sugar
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice or from concentrate
- ½ tsp unsalted butter to reduce foam

Equipment:

- Large, heavy bottomed pot (2 gallon capacity, at least 10 inches wide.)
- Candy thermometer
- Strainer
- Cheesecloth
- Potato masher
- Canning jars with lids



Method:

1. Put the grapes in a large pot and mash them.
2. Add the water so the grapes are nearly covered. Bring the pot to a simmer, cook on low heat for 30 minutes.
3. Strain the grape juice while still warm through cheesecloth, squeezing out the excess.
4. Put small metal pie plate or other thin surface over a bowl of ice for a set test.
5. Mix the pectin and sugar. Whisk the grape juice and sugar mixture, add the butter, bring to a rolling boil on high heat until it starts to hover around 220F, skimming off any foam. Do not turn the heat down while cooking. If the jelly threatens to overflow your pot is too small.
6. Right after the jelly passes 220F, spoon a ½ teaspoon of jelly into the chilled metal bowl to test the set, if it holds it's shape around the edge and doesn't run like water anymore it's ready, if not, continue cooking a bit. Drips off of the spoon should hesitate to fall, which is known as sheeting.
7. When the jelly holds it's shape dropped on a chilled plate, turn off the heat and beat in the lemon juice.
8. Pour the jelly into sterilized pint or half pint jars and screw on the lids. Process the jars in a water bath canner for 10 minutes.

Cedar County Conservation Board Members

Dylan Haub
Rick Rouse
Teresa Wendt
Duane Moeller
Pam Hartwig

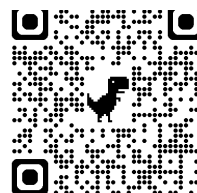
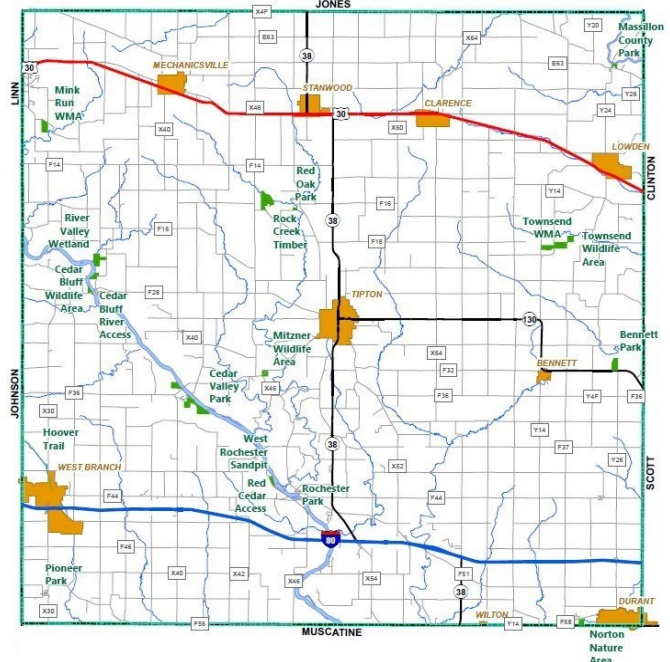
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To be added to our newsletter email list please send an email to Newsletter Editor jwilbourne@cedarcounty.iowa.gov with the subject "newsletter".

Cedar County Conservation Parks and Wildlife Areas



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www.mycountyparks.com
for information on our parks.