

Cedar Valley Visions

Conservation News

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West Rochester Sandpit Improvements

Photos by Jacob Wilbourne Article By Chip Brown-Park Technician



West Rochester Sandpit has received a face lift and upgrades this season. Right off the Cedar River, this park is an excellent day-use location and boasts some good fishing as well as spectacular wildlife viewing opportunities. Our goal for this project was to improve public access and enjoyability of this great area!

We've expanded the driveway and parking area, allowing

for more people to park and use the area.

Additionally, we've expanded the walk-in access and improved water access by adding rock to the slope of the new canoe access. Fallen branches and brush were removed, allowing us to open the area up a bit and install two stand-up grills and picnic tables. In addition we have leveled the trail along the south side of the park in order to improve usability and access to the back portion. We applied grass seed for ground cover to improve aesthetics and to aid in keeping weedy vegetation, such as poison ivy, down.



These upgrades have greatly improved the overall quality of the area, making it an attractive option for family fun and fishing. Many people are out walking the sandbar and accessing the river using the improved access on the south side trail. Fishing reports for the area include bass, crappie and catfish. Already the park is getting more use with people putting in kayaks and canoes using the new canoe access. We hope to see plenty of use for the coming summer!

Creature Feature ~ Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Photos and Article By Mark Roberts-Seasonal Park Technician



Red foxes are beautiful and interesting creatures in our Iowa landscape. Foxes are members of the dog family, they are actually omnivorous and will quickly change their diets based on what food is available. Foxes will eat small game, eggs, fish, frogs, insects, grass, berries, fruits and even worms. For town-dwelling foxes, their diet may even include garbage and pet food.

The foxes in these pictures are locally famous as they were featured on the Cedar County Conservation Facebook Page last spring. The adults are back at the den this spring and we hope to get more pup pictures this year! Follow us on Facebook for cool pictures, park updates and educational events!



Ephemeral Woodland Wildflowers

Photos and Article By Jacob Wilbourne—Park Technician

With the arrival of warmer temperatures come the first blooms of spring. Our woodlands come alive with a growing assortment of wildflowers ranging from showy species such as trout lily and blood root to the unassuming flowers of spring beauty and Virginia waterleaf. Shades of white, yellow, and pink emerge to breath new life into our spring woodlands. This is my favorite time of year to be in our woods. The astounding display of color and remarkable ability of these plants to thrive and grow while snow is still melting takes my breath away. Lasting only a brief period of time these flowers are ephemeral in nature.

These early bloomers have specialized adaptations that allow them to survive temperatures into freezing and take advantage of conditions when many other plants are dormant. Some species such as hepatica have hairy stems that allow them to trap air near their stems as insulation against the cold and as a shield against frost. Bloodroot use a large leaf to accomplish a similar goal by wrapping around and ‘hugging’ the growing bud and flower.



Pictured above from left to right are: Dutchman's breeches, bloodroot, and hepatica.

One of the most remarkable examples of these adaptations though is that of skunk cabbage. This species is one of the earliest bloomers, emerging even through snow! Skunk cabbage accomplishes this by generating heat during blooming, at times upwards of 50 °F. This heat generation allows the plant to emerge up through the frost and melt the snow around it. The leaf around the flower cluster traps warm air around the emerging flowers and allows that air to circulate inside, building warmth to provide insulation against the cold. It doesn't stop there though! The unpleasant scent produced by the flowers of skunk cabbage attracts one of the few pollinators out and about during this time, flies! Skunk cabbage wonderfully illustrates the marvels of the natural world. Who would have thought one plant could do so well in the cold.

Now is a great time to get out and take a look around, you'll be surprised at what you find. Cedar Valley Park has some amazing blooms of flowers in early spring. Keep your eyes out while walking the trails.



Skunk cabbage

Little Imagination Path at Bennett Park

Photos and Article By Mark Roberts—Seasonal Park Technician

We have a brand new trail at Bennett Park! The Little Imagination Path combines a short, easy trail and lots of fun things to spur the imagination of young ones. The path is on the east side of Bennett Park, just passed the open shelter.

As I was mowing Bennett Park on several occasions last summer, I kept looking at the woods north of the shelter on



the east side of the park. The woodland is mainly black locust trees and honeysuckle, a product of its past use as a pasture. What struck me is how open the floor of the forest was. There was literally no ground cover at all. No flowers, no stickers, and no poison ivy!

I envisioned seeing little kids running through the forest, under the honeysuckle and thought all they need is a little trail opening and they could have a ball. It also came to my mind adventures in Woodson's Woods near my childhood home. It was just a single town-lot that had overgrown into a woodlot, nothing special. We had no playground equipment, just the woods and our imaginations!



Every summer we would build a new "fort". We would play tag and hide-and-go-seek. We would try to scare each other with stories of ghosts or wandering hobos. How could we use this neat little, neglected area of Bennett Park to re-create that atmosphere of imagination and adventure.

I proposed to my supervisor, Chip Brown, that we cut a tunnel trail 7-feet wide and 7-feet tall, looping through the area. We would add some cool, natural objects to spur kid's imaginations. The trail would not have any instructions as to how to use the objects we put along it. Children could use them however their imaginations saw fit. Chip suggested to fully mulch the trail, especially since there is no grass ground cover and he had a source of free mulch. The trail would take advantage of the openness of the forest so parents



could sit back and watch the children do their thing or join in the fun themselves!

We may add a few new features over time, so keep an eye out for those. Most of all, get out and enjoy our trails and parks. Take the kids and let 'em run!

Little Imagination Path



Kids Corner

Cedar Valley Visions

Recycled Bug Hotel

A bug hotel is a neat way to observe the insects around us and spring is the perfect time to set one up. These bug hotels are a great place for insects to lay eggs and offer safety from birds. Here is a quick activity for all ages to make a recycled bug hotel!

You will need:

A plastic bottle or can with the ends removed

Stuffing material such as: Pinecones, twigs, tightly rolled newspaper and pine needles.

Optional: String or twine to hang your creation

In your bottle or can place your stuffing materials, starting with the large items like pinecones and packing smaller materials around them. Make sure your materials face outwards to allow insects to come in to the small openings formed by the materials. Once your container is stuffed with material find a place to hang your brand new insect hotel!



Parents: This can be scaled up to a more permanent design using wood for a frame, more stuffing material like log pieces with holes drilled in them, and chicken wire to keep stuff in place.



Spring Nature

Scavenger Hunt

Get outside and try to complete the whole list!

- A new leaf bud
- A dandelion
- A bee visiting a flower
- A robin
- Rabbit tracks
- A pinecone

Word Scramble

U M B L B E E B E

N O R B I

W F R O E L

M L O B O

E R C A N

I C L E P S E

P R D I S E

N P L O L E

Nature Word Search

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

DANDELION FROG SPRING FLOWER EGG

FOX MIGRATION RAIN STORM FAWN

Answers: Bumble bee, Robin, Flower, Bloom, Crane, Eclipse, Spider, Pollen

March Programs

Saturday, March 16 Easter Egg Hunt with over 2000 eggs!

Cedar Valley Park, 10:00 am **PLEASE DO NOT COME BEFORE 9:30 am.** The "Easter bunny" will still be hiding eggs. **Registration required.**

Monday, March 18 Make a Nest Challenge!

Durant Library, 2:00 pm
Can you build a nest as well as birds do? Visit Durant Library to see how you stack up!

Tuesday, March 19 Tomahawks and Atlatls

Cedar Valley Park Shelter Three,
4:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Learn how to throw these ancient hunting tools during this free event. The tomahawk is a slender hatchet and atlatls are 5-foot long, feathered darts thrown with a handle. This is for people ages 10 and up.

Friday, March 22 Easter egg hunt

Durant Library, 5:30 pm please contact the Durant Library at 563-285-4794 for more information

Saturday, March 23 Easter Egg Hunt with over 2000 eggs!

Red Oak Park, 10:00 am **PLEASE DO NOT COME BEFORE 9:30.** The "Easter bunny" will still be hiding eggs. **Registration required.**

Monday, March 25 Toddler program: Toads

Bennett Library,
1:30 pm.
Come visit Bennett Library to learn all about toads and have an awesome animal interaction with Tina!



Tuesday, March 26 Roving Retirees: Simple Macrame

Stanwood Library, 2:30 pm.
Come visit Stanwood Library and learn the art of macrame. Sarah will teach some simple beginner techniques for you to try

Thursday, March 28 Owl Prowl

Cedar Valley Park Shelter One,
7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.
Let's go for an easy walk calling for our local owl species. We will start off with a short PowerPoint presentation on the owls of Iowa.



April Programs

Friday, April 5 Recycling

Mechanicsville Library, 10:15 am.
Come visit Mechanicsville Library to learn the importance of recycling!

Sunday, April 7 Hunter Education

Conservation Office, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.
PREREGISTRATION ONLINE REQUIRED
Hunter Education stresses the importance of individual responsibility and outdoor ethics. Participants must be 11 year old or older.

Thursday, April 11 Archery and Tomahawks

Bennett Park Shelter Two, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm.
Learn how to throw these ancient hunting tools during this free event. The tomahawk is a slender hatchet and archery will be done with our Genesis compound bows. This is for people ages 10 and up.



Friday, April 19 Craft Challenge

Durant Library, 5:30 pm.
Can you craft on the fly? Come test yourself with randomly assigned materials and see what you can make!

Saturday, April 20 Earth Day Celebration

Herbert Hoover Historic Site, 10:00 am to 2:00pm.
Come celebrate Earth Day in West Branch!

Tuesday, April 23 Roving Retirees: Wild Garlic Mustard Pizza

Stanwood Library, 2:30 pm.
Come learn how to make pizza with a delicious foraged ingredient at Stanwood Library.

Wednesday, April 24 Prairie Seed Planters and Pollinators

West Branch Library, 2:00 pm.
Kids will make prairie seed planters and learn the importance of pollinators.

Thursday, April 25 Bird Walk

Cedar Valley Shelter Three, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm.
We will be calling and walking to see what birds are using the area along the Cedar River. We will provide a limited number of binoculars.

Friday, April 26 Gravel Planters

Durant Library, 5:30 pm.
Come visit Naturalist Ms. Sarah to learn how to make and take gravel planters, perfect for your desk or windowsill!

Saturday, April 27 Spring Woodland Wildflower Walk

Cedar Valley Park Shelter One, 10:00 am.
Come enjoy a leisurely walk at Cedar Valley Park while we enjoy the early spring blooms of our woodland wildflowers!

May Programs

Friday, May 10 Tadpoles

Mechanicsville Library, 10:15 am.
Come visit Mechanicsville Library and learn about the wonderful transformation amphibians go through, starting with tadpoles!

Thursday, May 16 Flower Planters

Mechanicsville Library, 3:45 pm.
Come hang out with Naturalist Ms. Sarah and make some great flower planters!

Tuesday, May 28 Roving Retirees: Shagbark Hickory Pies

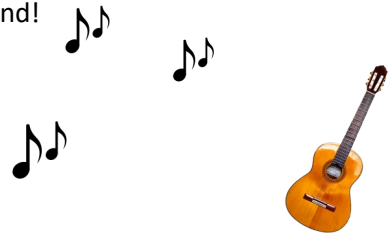
Stanwood Library, 2:30 pm.
Come hang learn how to make some amazing sweet treats with shagbark hickory syrup.

May, 9 Painting Class with Fresh Paint

Cedar Valley Park Shelter One,
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.
Paint along with local artist Christine Boeve a fun, nature-theme picture. Cost is \$35, canvas and paints included. Register 319-321-5499.

May, 17 Live Music in the Park

Cedar Valley Park Shelter Three,
6:00 pm to 9:00 pm.
Join us for some great live music in the campground!



June Programs



June 1st, 11:00 am;
June 2nd, 2:00 pm;
June 9th, 2:00 pm;
June 22nd, 11:00 am;
June 23rd, 2:00 pm.
Naturalist Sarah will be having stand up paddle boarding programs at Lake MacBride, 3971 Cottage Reserve Road

Extension, Solon, Iowa . All experience levels welcome!

Friday, June 7 Lava Lamps

Durant Library, 3:00 pm.
Join Naturalist Sarah in making homemade lava lamps! We will be upcycling old glass jars and making them into lava lamps. If you have a favorite jar, please feel free to bring it with a tight fitting lid.

Friday, June 7 Family Fisheree!

Bennett Park, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm.
Bring your kids out for some Bluegill Bustin' at Bennett pond. All kids under 16 will be eligible to win door prizes including rod and reel combos! This is completely free. Thanks to our sponsors! Zebco, Snapper City Bait and Tackle, and Scheels. This is not a fishing contest or a how-to clinic, just a fishing outing.

Saturday, June 8 Tipton Summer Kick-Off Booth

Tipton City Park, 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm
Come visit Tipton City Park and kick off summer with Naturalist Sarah! Lots of summer fun!

Thursday, June 13 Canoeing

Bennett Park, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm.
Meet at the lake on the east bank to try out our canoes on the pond! We will provide all equipment needed free of charge.

Friday, June 21 Pancakes at the Park

Bennett Park Shelter One, 10:00 am.
Join Cedar County Naturalist Sarah Subbert for a super, sticky breakfast of silver dollar pancakes and shagbark hickory syrup! Come hungry! This is a free program and open to everyone.

Tuesday, June 25 Live Turtles

Tipton Library, 10:30 am.
Visit the Tipton Library and learn about turtles! You'll get an opportunity to meet our awesome education ambassadors and learn what makes them unique!

Friday, June 28 Worms!

Mechanicsville Library, 10:30 am.
Come visit Sarah at the Mechanicsville Library to learn about our wiggly wormy friends that live in the ground.

We plan on offering a variety of camps again this summer please keep an eye on our Facebook page for announcement and registration information.



Wild Recipe: Pine Needle Tea

Pine needle tea is easy to make and the ingredients are often right at hand! This tea is packed with vitamin C and can be sweetened or enhanced however you wish!

Ingredients

- ½ cup (about 3 needle clusters) Eastern White Pine needles
- 3 cups water
- 2 slices lemon, optional
- 1 teaspoon sugar or honey, optional (use more or less to taste)

Instructions

- Remove pine needles from the woody stems. Trim off any brown needles. Rinse needles with cold water. Set needles aside to dry.
- Bring tea water to a boil. Pour into a teapot, saucepan, or a French press, I prefer the teapot myself
- Add needles to the water. Cover pot and let steep for about 15 minutes.
- Strain out the needles by pouring tea over mesh sieve.
- Serve hot and sweeten to taste

You can also make a large batch and let cool and store in a pitcher for some great iced tea!



Cedar County Conservation Board

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To be added to our newsletter email list please send an email to

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Cedar County Conservation Parks and Wildlife Areas

