

Cedar Valley Visions

Conservation News

Park Improvements

Photos by Jacob Wilbourne Article by Chip Brown and Jacob Wilbourne

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With water being turned off in October, this marked the end of the busy portion of our season. This slowdown allows us time to schedule and complete important projects that may otherwise impact visitor experience at our parks. One of the biggest for Cedar Valley Park users will be the expansion of the parking area at Shelter One. This expansion will allow more people to visit the area without the need to park in the grass or down the hill. In addition to allowing more space for visitors, this also increases accessibility for park users. The end goal is to always increase our park guests experience and enjoyment!



Our second major improvement is at Massillon Park Shelter One. Earlier this spring we updated the furnace for the shelter from a fuel oil furnace to an electric heater as well as giving the shelter a fresh coat of paint. Part of this update included putting in electric outlets along the north wall. Now we have added an enclosed closet to the shelter along with a countertop with new lighting and other cosmetic improvements. These updates should make it easier for family gatherings and improve the overall user experience in a bit nicer shelter.



We've had a lot of positive feedback from park users regarding improvements across all of our parks and appreciate all the positive feedback! Thank you for enjoying our parks.



Creature Feature~ Dark-eyed Junco

Article by Jacob Wilbourne Park Technician



Photo Credit: Erica Place | INHF

Dark-eyed juncos are striking and energetic little birds that can often be seen around Iowa bird feeders as winter sets in. We may not think of ourselves as living in a prime winter destination, but to these little snowbirds, we have it all! During the warmer months, these birds can be found living in the forests of Canada and in the Rocky and Appalachian Mountain states; however, when colder weather sets in up north, these birds migrate south to areas including Iowa.

These birds are ground feeders and prefer areas with a bit of cover and are often seen at and around bird feeders. They prefer seeds for much of their diet and can be seen hopping around on the ground searching for seeds. They are one of the most abundant birds in North America and can be found all the way from northern Canada to northern Mexico, depending on the time of year.

Continuing Education

Article by Jacob Wilbourne Park Technician



Continuing education is important in all of our daily lives. Being able to update our knowledge and skills used in our day-to-day lives, hobbies, and careers allows us to be better able to reach our goals and improve. Here at the office, the big ones we participate in are Winterfest and IAN workshops.

Winterfest allows conservation professionals the opportunity to ask questions of our peers in order to gain from each other's professional experience with the goal of improving the areas we manage. Probably more importantly, Winterfest offers many seminars put on by a variety of professionals covering a vast amount of topics. Participants are able to attend seminar sessions and learn some of the latest techniques and developments in conservation and across the state. Winterfest isn't only for current conservation professionals, though, as every year Iowa colleges and students in conservation-related fields are invited to attend on Collegiate Day. Collegiate Day attendees are able to have their resumes reviewed and develop professional connections in order to help begin their careers in conservation.

IAN workshops are held three times a year by the Iowa Association of Naturalists for conservation education professionals and volunteers to develop outdoor education programming and skills. IAN workshops provide diverse seminars ranging from programming concepts and skills to professional certifications and everything in between. While most attendees at IAN workshops work for one of Iowa's 99 county conservation boards, there are many who work for other adjacent organizations such as museums, zoos, and more! The diverse attendee makeup allows for a lot of networking opportunities and collaboration amongst environmental educators.

The staff here at Cedar County Conservation have attended these workshops over the years in order to improve their skills and knowledge to provide a better experience for park and campground guests alike. Continuing education is an important aspect of our jobs so that we may be able to deliver a great experience outdoors for all of you!

Beginner Winter Bird Watching

Article by Jacob Wilbourne Park Technician

Winter is an excellent time for beginner birders to improve their bird identification skills. During this time of year, many birds have migrated south for the winter, leaving mostly year-round residents. Though many birds leave Iowa, a few migrate in, such as the dark-eyed junco, a common sight at bird feeders. Luckily enough, migration tends to leave a smaller pool of bird species for beginners to identify.

Keeping a well-stocked bird feeder within the view of a window or shelter outdoors is a great way to attract different birds to you. Great tools for this type of birdwatching include a notebook, a field guide, and a pair of binoculars. Your bird feeder can attract several different species of nuthatches, sparrows, woodpeckers, and more! In addition to helping you learn a bit more about what birds are around you, your bird feeder provides valuable food for them as well.

One of the primary tools in helping our birds survive cold weather is their high metabolism, in part fueled by feeders like the one you may put out! The high metabolism coupled with the natural insulation helps our feathered friends year-round. You can feel comfortable in knowing that what you may do to help become a better birder also helps Iowa birds survive cold winters!

Kids Corner

Cedar Valley Visions

Suet in a Mug: Outdoor Bird Feeder

Please have an adult help you with the following project

You will need:

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:

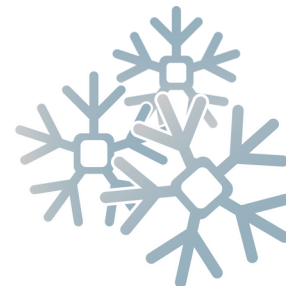
Peanut Butter
Dried Fruit
Chopped nuts
Oats
Cornmeal

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 over night. 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!



Photo Credit: Jacob Wilbourne



Winter Nature Scavenger Hunt

Go out and try to complete the whole list!

- A pine tree
- A cardinal
- Animal tracks
- Frost
- Shed deer antlers
- A blue jay

Word Scramble

OCBAPT _____

SEDH _____

OSTFR _____

LEMPA UPYRS _____

RCTKSA _____

INLEDGSD _____

ANOWSNM _____

ATGEMIR _____

Nature Word Search

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

GOOSE TROUT FINCH WOODPECKER HOTCOCOA
CHICKADEE BLIZZARD DRIFT

January Events

Monday, January 6th, Sound Waves

Durant Library, 3:00 pm.

Come join Sarah to learn the basics about sound waves with some cool experiments!

Thursday, January 9th, Squirrels!

Durant Library, 10:00 am.

Learn all about squirrels during story time for young children.



Saturday, January 11th, Ice Fishing and Snowshoeing

West Rochester Sand Pits (208 W Rochester Avenue, Atalissa, Iowa), 11:00 am.

Ever want to try ice fishing or snowshoeing? Now is your chance to do it for FREE during this family friendly event! REGISTRATION REQUIRED by THURSDAY, January 9 at 8:00 pm. This event is VERY weather sensitive!

Registered participants will be notified the day before if the program will proceed or not.

Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcounty.iowa.gov to register. Please state how many people will be attending and the general age or grade level for kids so we can know approximate size of equipment.

Saturday, January 18th, Winter Wonderland

Tipton City Park, 11:00 am.

Come join Miss Sarah for some fun at Tipton City Park! Fingers crossed for lots of snow! We will have some cross-country skis, snowshoes, two snowboards, and even some ice skates for all to enjoy! Registration required by Thursday, January 16th at 8:00 pm. Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcounty.iowa.gov to register. Please state how many people will be attending and the general age or grade level for kids so we can know approximate size of equipment.

Friday, January 24th, Prairie in a Cup

Durant Library, 5:00 pm.

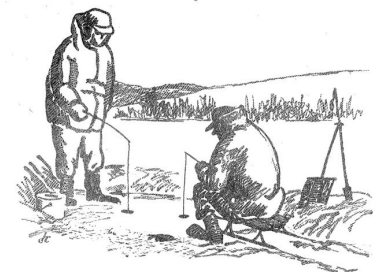
Join Miss Sarah to plant some prairie seeds during this free, family friendly event! We will be planting butterfly milkweed, great blue lobelia, wild bergamot, and even some cardinal flower seeds for you to take home and transplant in May.

Saturday, January 25th, Icy Dreams

Bennett Park (1378 Yankee Avenue, Bennett, Iowa), 11:00 am.

Join Miss Sarah for some fun on the ice! We will be ice fishing and ice skating. REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Thursday, January 23 at 8:00 pm.

Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcounty.iowa.gov to register.



February Events

Saturday, February 1st, Ice, Ice, Baby!

Bennett Park (1378 Yankee Avenue, Bennett, Iowa), 11:00 am.

Join Miss Sarah for some fun on the ice! We will be ice fishing and ice skating. REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Thursday, January 30th at 8:00 pm. Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcounty.iowa.gov to register.



Thursday, February 6th, Owls

Durant Library, 10:00 am.

Learn all about owls during story time for young children.



Saturday, February 8th, Snow Much Fun

Tipton City Park, 11:00 am.

Come join Miss Sarah for some fun at Tipton City Park! Fingers crossed for lots of snow! We will have some cross-country skis, snowshoes, two snowboards, and even some ice skates! REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Thursday, February 6th at 8:00 pm. Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcounty.iowa.gov to register. Please state how many people will be attending and the general age or grade level for kids so we can know approximate size of equipment.

Saturday, February 15th Seed Balls

Cedar County Conservation Office, 10:00 am.

Come make seedballs to help beautify your favorite areas with native plants!

Friday, February 21st, Indoor Snowball Fight

Durant Library, 3:30 pm.

Join Miss Sarah for a fun snowball fight INSIDE the library! Don't worry, the books will be safe and you'll even stay warm! You'll get to see the "ice cave" as well, enter if you DARE!

Saturday, February 22nd, Massillon Snow Adventure

Massillon Park (206 Hoover Highway, Lowden, Iowa), 11:00 am.

Snowboarding, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing with Miss Sarah. REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Thursday, February 20th at 8:00 pm. Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcounty.iowa.gov to register. Please state how many people will be attending and the general age or grade level for kids so we can know approximate size of equipment.



March and April Events

Saturday, March 8th, Snowshoe Adventure

Bennett Park (1378 Yankee Avenue, Bennett, Iowa), 11:00 am.

Join Miss Sarah for SNOW much fun! We will be cross-country skiing, snowboarding, and snowshoeing. REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Thursday, March 6th at 8:00 pm. Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcountry.iowa.gov to register. Please state how many people will be attending and the general age or grade level for kids so we can know approximate size of equipment.

Saturday, March 15th, A Walk in the Woods

Townsend Wildlife Area (920 Hoover Hwy, Lowden, IA), 11:00 am.

Join us for a winter walk in the woods! We will explore the trails at Townsend Wildlife Area and enjoy nature. Parking is on the east side of Hoover Highway. Be sure to dress for the weather and come have fun!

Saturday, April 5th, Easter Egg Hunt

Red Oak Park (1056 Red Oak Park Road, Tipton, Iowa), 10:00 am.

Join Miss Sarah for a HOPPING good time with over 2000 Easter eggs! All ages welcome, yes that includes teenagers! Small prizes will be given to the top three kids with the most eggs! There will be plenty of room for people to spread out and there will be a separate area for smaller children. REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Friday, April 4th at 7:00 pm. Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcountry.iowa.gov to register. Specific event details will be emailed following registration.

Saturday, April 12th, Easter Egg Hunt

Cedar Valley Park Shelter Three (Main campground, 660 255th St., West Branch, Iowa), 10:00 am.

Join Miss Sarah for a HOPPING good time with over 2000 Easter eggs! All ages welcome, yes that includes teenagers! Small prizes will be given to the top three kids with the most eggs! There will be plenty of room for people to spread out and there will be a separate area for smaller children. REGISTRATION REQUIRED by Friday, April 11th at 7:00 pm. Please call 563-886-6930 or email Sarah at naturalist@cedarcountry.iowa.gov to register. Specific event details will be emailed following registration.

Saturday, April 26th, Spring Wildflower Walk

Cedar Valley Park Shelter One (Main campground, 660 255th St., West Branch, Iowa), 11:00 am.

Join us as we explore the trails at Cedar Valley Park and look for spring wildflowers! We'll see many different types of flowers as well as get a chance to learn a bit about them! Be sure to dress for the weather and come have fun!

Wish List

Every once in a while we get asked about donations. Here is a small list of items we can make use of for education and programing. We appreciate you considering us for your donations.

- Arizona Tea or Arnold Palmer Tea one gallon plastic bottles with lids.
- Ice Skates, all sizes and styles
- Badminton nets or volleyball nets
- Badminton birdies



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

We Want to See Your Photos!

Have you taken photos out in our parks? Would you like to share them for everyone to see? If so we would love to feature them in our Newsletter! Please send photos to Jwilbourne@cedarcountry.iowa.gov with the subject "Newsletter Photo". Feel free to tell us a bit about your photo, be sure to include which park you're at, who the subjects and original photographer are and any other relevant details.

Your Photo Could Be Here!



Can You Name This Critter?

This animal is common across Iowa, has a hairless tail, and is the only marsupial north of Mexico. Can you guess the animal based on this information and the photos below? If you think you have the right answer email Jwilbourne@cedarcountry.iowa.gov and we'll let you know if you got it right!



Wild Recipe: Hickory Nuts

Historically, winter was a time of food scarcity when people traditionally relied on food stored during the fall to survive. One of these pantry staples was tree nuts, a rich source of nutrition in times when calorie-dense foods were harder to come by. Nowadays we don't need to rely on these methods to get through the winter, but some, like hickory nuts, still provide a tasty treat!

Before we talk about how to use them, we first need to understand that there are several different species of hickory trees here in Iowa, but the one we are focusing on is the shagbark hickory due to its abundance and rather pleasant taste of the nut. Shagbark hickory trees are distinguished by their shaggy bark and tall straight trunk. They are common at Red Oak Park, Cedar Valley Park, and Massillon Park.



Photo Credit:
Alan Bergo | Forager Chef

Hickory nuts begin to fall late summer through fall and will still have the outer husk attached. Discard any nuts that are discolored or have holes. Nuts harvested later in the fall may not be as flavorful but are still edible and delicious. Cracking the nut and extracting the meat requires a bit of finesse I admit I have yet to master. Several methods of cracking these nuts are out there, ranging from a nutcracker and pick to lightly tapping with a hammer; choose the one that works best for you.

Once you have extracted the nut meat, feel free to use it as a garnish for dessert, toasted on salads, and even in cookies in place of walnuts or pecans. The possibilities are nearly endless!

Cedar County Conservation Board Members

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Duane Moeller

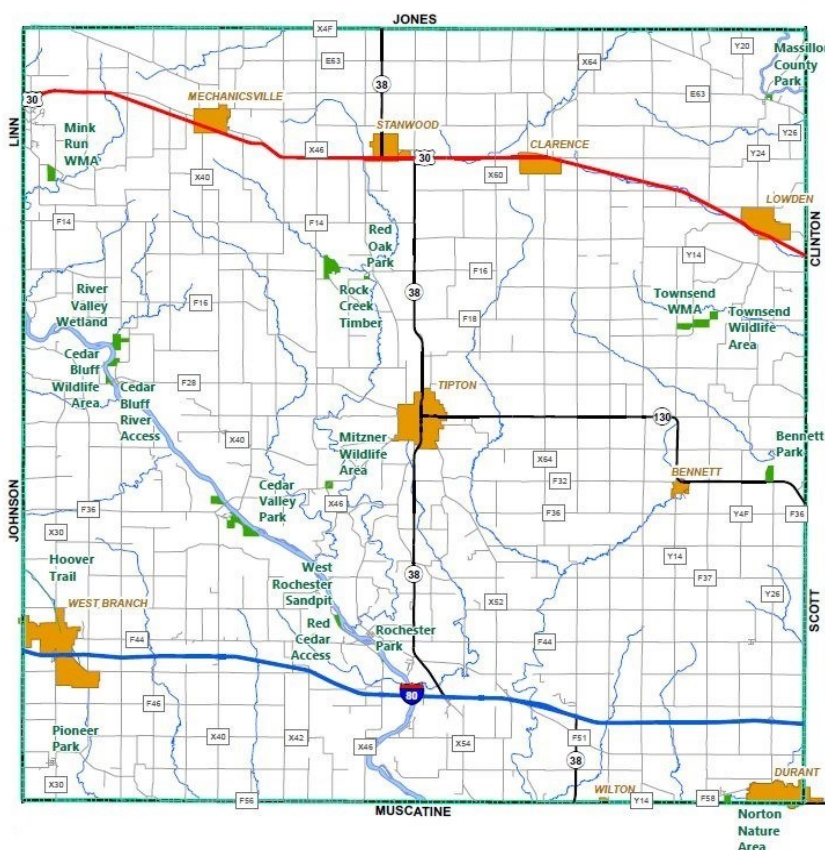
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To be added to our newsletter email list please send an email to Newsletter Editor jwilbourne@cedarcounty.iowa.gov with the subject "newsletter".

Cedar County Conservation Parks and Wildlife Areas



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parks.