



# THE PRAIRIE STAR



## Nature Playscape Breaks Ground in April!

A nature playscape will be constructed outdoors on the west side of the Environmental Learning Center this spring. Ground breaking and construction will begin in mid-April. This will be a great place to enjoy the outdoors and provide kids a fun place to play! Watch for construction updates on our Facebook page.

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## Woolly Mammoths Up Close

Did you know that Woolly mammoths bones were found in Mahaska County in 2010? Many of these bones are now on display at the Environmental Learning Center. Stop by to see them and learn about an amazing part of our history! *(Right) The life-sized Woolly mammoth replica skeleton on display at the ELC.*



# MCCB UPDATES

## SCSEP Provides Volunteer for ELC



Mahaska County Conservation is excited to welcome Mary Mraz as a new volunteer at the Environmental Learning Center through the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

Mary Mraz has over 20 years of herbal experience and certifications as a Chartered Herbalist and Family Herbalist. Mary moved to Iowa a few years ago and enjoys exploring the area. She has a passion for nature, especially lush landscapes, lakes, and the ocean. Mary looks forward to building connections in the community.

While at the ELC, Mary will be helping each week with a range of tasks, such as administrative support, custodial duties, and horticultural work at the ELC. She will be a great help for Mahaska County Conservation. If you see Mary while you visit, tell her hello!

## “Home Away from Home” Video Now Seen Across the US

Mahaska County Conservation was awarded a \$10,000 Iowa Tourism Grant in 2024 to create a video to promote the wonderful outdoor opportunities in Mahaska County. In June of 2024 this video was filmed with help of the crew of Astartox Productions, LLC. Many volunteers and supporters helped make this endeavor possible!

This grant has also provided funding to promote three 15-second video segments in Iowa and across the United States. They have been viewed in all 50 states! Home Away from Home can be seen through Google ads in states surrounding Iowa and on Facebook in Iowa and across the country. Perhaps you have seen one of these!



**Watch Home Away from Home!**  
[youtu.be/Y9DW0aSeCil](https://youtu.be/Y9DW0aSeCil)



### Thank you to these contributors and volunteers:

- Clow Valve
  - Musco Lighting
  - Lora Friest, Iowa Tourism
  - Max Leonida
  - Paola Cippolina
  - Joseph Ascoti
  - Brooke Richardson
  - Kadi Casey
  - Jacob Glandon
  - Jordan Lester
  - Zachary Williams
  - Rosso & Wine
  - Oskaloosa City Hall
  - William Penn University
  - And the many volunteers that were in the video!
- Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
  - Mahaska Veterinary Clinic
  - Wyndell Campbell State Farm
  - Christopher Chipman
  - Reed Peterson
  - Brittany Sword
  - Terri Rogers
  - Dave & Patricia Dixon
  - Steve & Linda Fox
  - Diane Crookham-Johnson
  - Abigail Batu-Tiago - *Miss Iowa*
  - Mahaska Chamber and Development Group
  - Oskaloosa Fire Department
  - Virginia Walker of McNeill Stone Mansion





# NATURE NOTES

## Bird Identification

by Laura DeCook, Naturalist

With over 800 bird species in the U.S. and Canada, it's easy for a beginner birdwatcher to feel overwhelmed when trying to identify birds. Field guides often arrange their pages to show birds that look very similar. Many identification tips focus on identifying specific plumage details, or field marks. While these are helpful, they're most useful after you've already narrowed your choices down to a few similar species. So let's break it down into an easier way for you!

Try to identify bird species from just a quick look. There are four keys to visual bird identification: Size & Shape, Color Pattern, Behavior, and Habitat. Become familiar with the bird's general shape, color, and behavior, as well as by keep track of which types of birds are most likely to be found in your area. While you'll still need to examine field marks like wingbars or eyerings to confirm your ID, these four strategies will help you quickly identify the right bird group, so you'll know exactly which field marks to focus on. Good luck and have fun!



### **BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE**

Size & Shape: Tiny bird with large head, plump body, narrow tail, and short bill

Color Pattern: Shiny black cap and throat against white cheeks. Buffy sides; wings and back soft gray

Behavior: Busy, acrobatic, and often feeds with flocks of several species

Habitat: Forests, woodlots, backyards, and shrubby areas

## Eveland Access CABINS

1681 – 290th St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577



Apple and Birch Cabins are available for rent year-round. To view pictures of the cabins and to find rental information, visit the MCCB website:

[www.mahaskaconservation.com](http://www.mahaskaconservation.com)

or call MCCB at (641)673-9327.

# PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES

## April

### 22 Elephant Documentary

1:00-2:30 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

This documentary follows African elephant Shani and her spirited son Jomo as their herd make an epic journey hundreds of miles across the vast Kalahari Desert. They travel from the Okavango delta to the Zambezi river, just as countless generations of their ancestors have done before. Feel free to bring snacks. Some refreshments will be provided. **Save your seat by signing up at [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or by calling (641)673-9327.**



### 24 Night Crawler Hunt

8:00-9:00 pm

#### White Oak Conservation Area

Have you ever gone on a night hunt to find and collect nightcrawlers? Join us for an exciting adventure at White Oak Conservation Area! You can take your crawlers home to use as fishing bait or donate them to the hungry critters at the Environmental Learning Center. It's sure to be a fun experience for all ages! Be sure to wear shoes that can get wet and dirty, and don't forget your flashlight. White Oak Conservation Area is located just south of Rose Hill at 2647 Ventura Ave., Fremont, IA 52561.

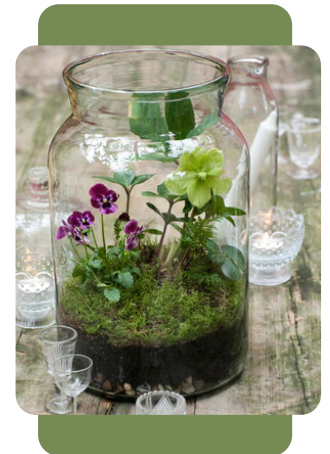
## May

### 8 Terrarium class

6:00-7:00 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

Join us at the Environment Learning Center for a fun and creative experience! Learn about different types of terrariums and build your own closed-style terrarium to take home. This is the perfect class for all levels of plant enthusiasts! All materials will be provided by Mahaska County Conservation. **The cost is \$5 per person. Limited to 15 participants. Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat. Contact [hicks@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:hicks@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.**



### 20 Wings of Life Documentary

1:00-2:30 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

This documentary gives you a close-up look at butterflies, hummingbirds, bees, bats, and flowers highlights their important role in nature. A third of the world's food supply depends on these amazing—and increasingly endangered—creatures. Feel free to bring snacks. Some refreshments will be provided. **Save your seat by signing up at [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or by calling (641)673-9327.**



# PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES

## June

### 7 Free Fishing Clinic

10:00 am-12:00pm

#### Russell Wildlife Area, Pond 1

Come join us at the beautiful Russell Wildlife Area for a fun-filled morning of fishing! This family-friendly event is completely free and open to the public. Iowa residents can enjoy fishing without a license, and this clinic is part of the Iowa DNR Free Fishing Weekend. We'll provide worms for bait and fishing poles to borrow. **Stay tuned for more details on our Facebook page.**



### 10 Monkey Kingdom Documentary

1:00-2:30 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

This documentary is about an adventure of a young monkey and her son, who live among the ancient jungle ruins. But when they are forced to leave their home, she must guide her family to safety through unfamiliar lands and strange new creatures. Feel free to bring snacks. Some refreshments will be provided. **Save your seat by signing up at [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or by calling (641)673-9327.**

### 12 Bowfishing Basics

7:00-8:00 pm

#### Russell Wildlife Area, Pond 1

Bowfishing is a fun activity that blends fishing and archery skills. Join us at Pond 1 in Russell Wildlife Area for a beginner's lesson on how to safely use a bowfishing bow. Everyone of all ages is welcome to join, and all equipment will be provided! The Russell Wildlife Area is located at 2254 - 200th St., New Sharon, IA. **Sign up by June 11th by contacting [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327.**

### 26 Evening Canoe Adventure

6:00-7:30 pm

#### Russell Wildlife Area, Pond 1

As the summer day cools into evening, join us for a canoeing adventure on Pond 1 at Russell Wildlife Area. Mahaska County Conservation staff will teach you canoeing skills and safety. You'll have time to paddle around the pond and enjoy some fun water games. All equipment will be provided. **Equipment is limited, so please sign up by June 25th by contacting [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327.**



# PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES

## July

### Lunch in a Park

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

July 7 Quercus Wilderness Area

July 14 Maskunky Marsh

July 21 Nicholson Park

July 28 Environmental Learning Center



Join the naturalist for lunch at one of Mahaska County's beautiful parks! Bring your lunch, along with a blanket or lawn chair to sit on. Enjoy learning about the park of the day and connect with other participants. Each person who attends will have their name entered into a drawing for a prize at the final Lunch in the Park on July 28th. The more Lunch in the Parks you attend, the higher your chances of winning! No registration is required—just come on by!

### 14 African Cats Documentary

1:00-2:30 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

This documentary is about several lions and cheetahs trying to survive on the African savannah. The film follows Mara, a lovable lion cub striving to inherit her mother's strength, spirit, and wisdom; Sita, a courageous cheetah raising five playful newborns on her own; and Fang, a proud lion leader who must protect his family from a rival lion and his sons. Feel free to bring snacks. Some refreshments will be provided. **Save your seat by signing up at [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or by calling (641)673-9327.**

## August

### 5 Polar Bear Documentary

1:00-2:30 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

This documentary tells a story of a new polar bear mother whose memories of her own youth prepare her to navigate motherhood in the increasingly challenging world that polar bears face today. Feel free to bring snacks. Some refreshments will be provided. **Save your seat by signing up at [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or by calling (641)673-9327.**





# PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

## April

### 2 Knee-High Naturalists “Fishy Fun”

9:00-10:00 am

#### Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for kids ages 5 and younger. This month, the kids will learn about fish that live in ponds and lakes. We will have a story time, fish craft, and feed fish in the aquarium.

**Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.**

**A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**



### 16 Homeschool Science Lab “Spring Season Nature Hike”

10:00-11:00 am

#### Quercus Wilderness Area

This is a free program for all ages of homeschool and online students. Join us this month to explore nature on the trails at Quercus Wilderness Area, located at 3139 Kent Ave., Oskaloosa. We will take a hike on the trails, so dress for the weather and get ready to look signs of spring!

**Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**

## May

### 7 Knee-High Naturalists “Owls”

9:00-10:00 am

#### Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for kids ages 5 and younger. This month, the kids will learn about owls and go on a hike where owls live. Kids will learn how to call for owls and make owl puppets.

**Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**



### 7 Homeschool Science Lab “Fishing at Russell Wildlife Area”

1:00-2:00 pm

#### Russell Wildlife Area, Pond 1

This is a free program for all ages of homeschool and online students. Join us this month to explore nature outside the Environmental Learning Center. We meet at Russell Wildlife Area pond 1 to go fishing. Fishing poles and bait will be provided, but feel free to bring your own.

**Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**

# PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

June

## 4 Knee-High Naturalists “Exploring Ice”

9:00-10:00 am

### Environmental Learning Center

Kids will stay cool while engaging in fun, hands-on activities and experiments with ice! They'll explore how ice forms and melts through exciting, interactive experiments. It's an immersive, learning-packed experience that lets them discover science in a playful way! **Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**



## 17 Discovery Camp “Backyard Bugs”

10:00 am-12:00 pm

### Environmental Learning Center

**Ages 5 & Younger / \$10.00 per child**

Children will explore the fascinating world of insects, learning about their characteristics and behavior, followed by a craft and fun hike to search for real-life insects. Participants should bring a snack and an adult to stay with them. **Space is limited to 15 kids, so pre-registration is required. To sign up, contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641) 673-9327. Registration deadline is June 13.**

## 18 Discovery Camp “Animal Planet”

10:00 am-12:00 pm

### Environmental Learning Center

**Ages 5 & Younger / \$10.00 per child**

Children will embark on an exciting exploration of where animals live and what they eat! The morning will be filled with hands-on crafts, fun activities, and up-close encounters with live animals. Participants should bring a snack and an adult to stay with them for the duration of the program. **Space is limited to 15 kids, so pre-registration is required. To sign up, contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641) 673-9327. Registration deadline is June 13.**

## 19 Challenge Camp “Brave Wilderness”

9:00 am-12:00 pm

### Russell Wildlife Area

**Ages 10-17 / \$10.00 per child**

This camp is perfect for kids eager to explore the great outdoors! They'll enjoy exciting activities like fishing, wilderness survival lessons, building a campfire, and even embarking on a treasure hunt using a compass. It's an adventure-packed experience that will spark a love for nature! **Space is limited to 15 kids, so pre-registration is required. To sign up, contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641) 673-9327. Registration deadline is June 13.**





# PROGRAMS FOR KIDS

## June cont.

### 24 Jr. Naturalist Camp “Pond Life”

9:00 am-12:00 pm

Russell Wildlife Area

Ages 6-9 / \$10.00 per child

Children will dive into the fascinating world of freshwater plants, animals, and insects! Along with hands-on exploration, they'll enjoy a fun fishing experience and a tasty fish fry. Participants should bring a snack and water bottle to stay refreshed during the day. **Space is limited to 15 kids, so pre-registration is required. To sign up, contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641) 673-9327. Registration deadline is June 20.**



### 25 Jr. Naturalist Camp “Ice Age Adventures”

9:00 am-12:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Ages 6-9 / \$10.00 per child

Kids will travel back in time to explore the Ice Age and the world of Woolly Mammoths! They'll learn to throw atlatls, a prehistoric hunting tool, create cool crafts, and even investigate real mammoth bones. It's an exciting, hands-on adventure into the past! Participants should bring a snack and water bottle to stay refreshed during the day. **Space is limited to 15 kids, so pre-registration is required. To sign up, contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641) 673-9327. Registration deadline is June 20.**

### 26 Challenge Camp “Outdoor Adventures”

9:00 am-12:00 pm

Russell Wildlife Area

Ages 10-17 / \$10.00 per child

This camp is ideal for kids excited to explore the great outdoors! They'll dive into the skills of fishing, bowfishing, and canoeing while enjoying fun, hands-on adventures. Participants should bring a snack, water bottle, clothes that can get wet, and a towel. **Space is limited to 15 kids, so pre-registration is required. To sign up, contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641) 673-9327. Registration deadline is June 20.**

## July

### 9 Knee-High Naturalists “Nature Hike”

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

This is a free program for kids ages 5 and younger. Kids will go on a fun hike through the woods behind the Environmental Learning Center at Caldwell Park. **Pre-registration is needed to participate. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up. A minimum of 5 kids are needed to hold the program.**



# PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

## April

### 4 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

#### Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that has the color yellow on it to take part in a door prize.** We meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.



### 25 O.W.L.S. "YMCA Drum Performance"

11:00 am-12:00 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are invited to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program! Come enjoy a fun, free performance by the YMCA Cardio Drummers, where the group will move and drum to simple rhythms using stability balls and sticks. It's a lively and engaging experience for everyone! **Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.**

## May

### 2 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

#### Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that has an animal on it to take part in a door prize.** We meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

### 23 O.W.L.S. "Volunteer Iowa"

11:00 am-12:00 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are invited to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program! Bring a friend and hear from our guest speaker, Shelly Elrod, as she shares information about Volunteer Iowa. In addition to volunteering with Mahaska County Conservation, you'll discover other local volunteer opportunities and learn how this program can benefit you personally. **Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.**





# PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

## June

### 6 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

#### Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that has an animal on it to take part in a door prize.** We meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

### 27 O.W.L.S. “Dutch Oven Cooking”

11:00 am-12:00 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are invited to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program! Bring a friend and join us right outside the ELC for a fun demonstration on cooking with Dutch ovens. You'll even get to sample some delicious food! Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.



## July

### 11 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

#### Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that has a story behind its purchase to take part in a door prize.** We meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

### 25 O.W.L.S. “Board Game Day”

11:00 am-12:00 pm

#### Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are invited to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program! Bring a friend, a favorite board game if you have one, and a snack to share. We'll enjoy friendly games, great conversation, and tasty treats as we spend time together. **Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat. Contact [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov) or call (641)673-9327 to sign up.**



# B.A.R.K. RANGERS



## Your Dog Can Be A B.A.R.K. Ranger in Mahaska County

by Laura DeCook, Naturalist

Mahaska County Conservation is excited to be onboard with a National Park program called B.A.R.K. Rangers. Just like many national parks, Mahaska County has pet-friendly parks for you and your furry companion to enjoy. As someone who absolutely loves the term "pet-friendly," I always look forward to bringing my dog along on adventures. There are so many parks to enjoy with your dog here in Mahaska County!

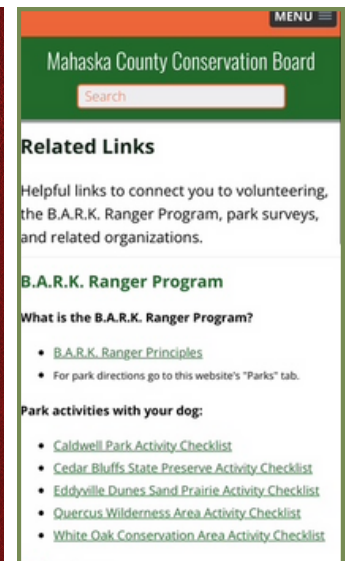
**When you participate, you and your pet commit to following the B.A.R.K. Ranger rules:**

### BARK RANGER RULES

- B**ag your waste
- A**lways wear a leash
- R**espect wildlife
- K**now where you can go



To participate, choose a Mahaska County park and complete a fun and easy activity checklist to earn your **FREE** B.A.R.K. Ranger certificate! Find the checklist on our website at [www.mahaskaconservation.com](http://www.mahaskaconservation.com) under the "Links" tab (see image to the right). After your visit, stop by the ELC during our open hours to get your certificate stamped with your dog's paw print. You can also buy a B.A.R.K. Ranger dog tag for \$10.00. *Cash or check to FMCC.*



Mahaska County Conservation Board

Search

#### Related Links

Helpful links to connect you to volunteering, the B.A.R.K. Ranger Program, park surveys, and related organizations.

#### B.A.R.K. Ranger Program

What is the B.A.R.K. Ranger Program?

- [B.A.R.K. Ranger Principles](#)
- For park directions go to this website's "Parks" tab.

Park activities with your dog:

- [Caldwell Park Activity Checklist](#)
- [Cedar Bluffs State Preserve Activity Checklist](#)
- [Eddyville Dunes Sand Prairie Activity Checklist](#)
- [Quercus Wilderness Area Activity Checklist](#)
- [White Oak Conservation Area Activity Checklist](#)

## May

### 22 B.A.R.K. Ranger Park Hike 6:00-7:00 pm Quercus Wilderness Area

Bring your dog and explore the beautiful Quercus Wilderness Area to earn a B.A.R.K. Ranger Certificate! Quercus offers a shady, scenic environment with towering oak trees, the state record Downy Serviceberry tree, and exciting hiking trails for a fun and memorable adventure. Mahaska County B.A.R.K. Ranger dog tags will also be available for purchase as a special memento. Just a friendly reminder—dogs must remain on a leash in the park.

## July

### 17 B.A.R.K. Ranger Park Hike 6:00-7:00 pm White Oak Conservation Area

Bring your dog and explore the scenic White Oak Conservation Area to earn a B.A.R.K. Ranger Certificate! White Oak offers nature trails around a 20-acre lake. Mahaska County B.A.R.K. Ranger dog tags will also be available for purchase as a special memento. Just a friendly reminder—dogs must remain on a leash in the park.



# VOLUNTEER NEWS

## Congratulations to the 2024 Partnership and Commitment to Conservation Award Winners

by Laura DeCook, Naturalist

On February 10, 2025, Mahaska County Conservation hosted a Volunteer & Partnership Appreciation Dinner at the Environmental Learning Center to honor the invaluable contributions of our volunteers and conservation partners. We are deeply grateful for the time, effort, and dedication shown by all of our volunteers! A special congratulations to the recipients of the Partnership Award and Commitment to Conservation Award for their exceptional service and commitment.



### 2024 Commitment to Conservation Award

**Robert Leonard**

211 days/369 hours as  
Cedar Bluffs Park Steward



### 2024 Partnership Award Friends of Mahaska County Conservation

- Raised over \$400,000 through grants and fundraising for nature playscape
- Spent money and donated items to support our programs
- Volunteered many hours at the ELC and events



## New Volunteer Training Dates

If you would like to join our volunteer team, come to our one-hour training on **Monday, April 14, 2025** or **Monday, June 30, 2025** at the Environmental Learning Center. **Please sign up for one of two sessions on either date by calling us at (641)673-9327 or email [decook@mahaskacountyia.gov](mailto:decook@mahaskacountyia.gov).**

Afternoon session 1:00-2:00 pm  
Evening session 6:00-7:00 pm

## What Can Volunteers Do?



- Host and greet visitors at the Environmental Learning Center
- Help feed animals at the Environmental Learning Center
- Help with educational programs
- Help keep our parks clean or help with park projects as a Park Steward
- Help with native garden care at our county parks
- Help with light duties at the Environmental Learning Center

## Mahaska County Conservation Wins Prestigious “You Rock” Geode Award at Iowa Tourism Conference

by Chris Clingan, MCCB Director

Mahaska County Conservation is thrilled to announce its recognition at the 2025 Iowa Tourism Conference, held on March 12-13 at Prairie Meadows in Altoona. The organization was honored with one of only eight prestigious “You Rock” Geode Awards for its outstanding “Home Away from Home” tourism video.

The Iowa Tourism Conference brought together industry professionals, leaders, and advocates to celebrate and strengthen the state’s tourism landscape. The event featured engaging sessions, networking opportunities, and awards that highlighted the innovative marketing strategies shaping Iowa’s reputation as a must-visit destination.



The award-winning “Home Away from Home” video, produced in summer 2024, has made an extraordinary impact, reaching audiences in 49 states in just a few weeks. The video showcases the breathtaking beauty of Mahaska County’s parks, scenic trails, and peaceful outdoor spaces, reinforcing the county as a premier destination for adventure, relaxation, and exploration.

Lora Friest, Iowa Tourism Liaison for Eastern Iowa, praised the project during the award presentation: “This project not only inspired Mahaska County partners to expand their tourism efforts in the coming years, but it also motivated county conservation professionals across the state, positioning Mahaska County Conservation Board as a leader in tourism marketing and video production.”

Max Leonida, producer of the video and founder of Astarox Production, emphasized the personal significance of the project: “This is a homegrown commercial. This is my home now, and this project became a way to showcase the beauty of Mahaska County. It wasn’t just a commercial—it’s a story that highlights local talent and the spirit of this incredible place.”

Mahaska County Conservation Executive Director Chris Clingan expressed gratitude for the recognition: “Thank you to the Iowa Tourism Office for honoring the dedication and hard work behind this project. This was a true community effort, and we hope this video inspires many visitors to experience all that Mahaska County has to offer.”

This award marks a significant milestone for Mahaska County Conservation, further establishing it as a leader in tourism promotion. With a commitment to creative storytelling and strategic outreach, the organization continues to highlight the county’s natural beauty and welcoming spirit, inviting visitors from near and far to discover their own “Home Away from Home.”

## Mahaska County Conservation Board & Meeting Dates

Chairperson	Curt Jager, Eddyville
Vice-Chairperson	Linda Fox, Rose Hill
Secretary	Jennifer Peterson, Oskaloosa
Member	Chuck Webb, Oskaloosa
Member	Steve Dixon, Oskaloosa

MCCB's monthly board meetings begin at 6:00 pm on the third Monday of each month. Public is welcome to attend. Meetings are held in the lower level of the Environmental Learning Center, 2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577.

- April 21, 2025
- May 19, 2025
- June 16, 2025
- July 21, 2025
- August 18, 2025

*Dates and times are subject to change. Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 for more information.*

## Mahaska County Conservation Staff

Director	Chris Clingan
Naturalist	Laura DeCook
Park Ranger	Tommy VanRenterghem
Park Ranger	Steve Nugteren
Administrative Assist.	Molly Hicks
Green Iowa AmeriCorps	Lilly Morin
Green Iowa AmeriCorps	Ella Paulson



Discover Nature in Iowa!



**MAHASKA COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER**  
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577  
Ph: (641)673-9327

### OPEN HOURS

<b>Monday - Wednesday</b>	<b>12:30-4:30 pm</b>
<b>Thursday &amp; Friday</b>	<b>12:30-7:00 pm</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>10 am - 2 pm</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>CLOSED</b>

The Prairie Star is the newsletter of the Mahaska County Conservation Board and is emailed to those persons on our mailing list. There is no charge for the newsletter. Please help us by keeping us informed of any change of email address or if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter.

Mahaska County's programs and facilities are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on non-discrimination regarding race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, and handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Mahaska County Conservation Board or the office for Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington D.C. 29240.



# MAHASKA COUNTY CONSERVATION PARKS



MAHASKA COUNTY PARK	ADDRESS
Caldwell Park & Environmental Learning Center	2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Cedar Bluffs State Preserve	1235—280th, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Cedar Creek Access	2748 Ashland Ave., Tracy, IA 50256
Eddyville Dunes Sand Prairie	901 N. Merino Ave., Eddyville, IA 52553
Eveland Access Cabins	1681—290th St., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Ever-Tru Natural Wilderness Area	Lexington Ave., New Sharon, IA 50207
Maintenance Shop	2254—200th St., New Sharon, IA 50207
Maskunky Marsh	2395 Snyder Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Nicholson Park	2791—305th St., Cedar, IA 52543
North Skunk River Wildlife Area	2236—110th St., New Sharon, IA 50207
Peggy's Landing	1198 River Road, Leighton, IA 50143
Peter's Wildlife	Hwy. 63, New Sharon, IA 50207
Quercus Wilderness Area	3139 Kent Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Robertson Access	1010 Hwy 146, New Sharon, IA 50207
Rose Hill Marsh & Access	3108 Ventura Ave., Rose Hill, IA 52586
Russell Wildlife Area & Vos Addition	2254—200th St., New Sharon, IA 52577
Swanson-Lomax Wildlife Area	1972—295th St., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Union Mills Access	1355 Parkin Ave., New Sharon, IA 50207
White Oak Conservation Area	2647 Ventura Ave., Cedar, IA 52543

