

Summer 2023

Conservation Connection

Johnson County Conservation Newsletter

Owlet gets a new nest and family!

Frances Owen-Naturalist

Tuesday, April 25th, around 6:00pm, a tiny owl, no more than a week old, was lifted into a new nest to meet their adoptive family.

The little owlet was found on the ground in the Mason City area. When no nest could be located, the owlet was transferred to the Black Hawk Wildlife Rehabilitation Group in Waterloo, Iowa. That rehab group began reaching out to partners and that was when Jodeane Cancilla from R.A.R.E. (Raptor Advocacy Rehabilitation and Education) became involved. They were looking for a new nest for the tiny barred owl. Jodeane explained to me that when a young owlet is found outside of a nest, the best thing to do is get them back into their nest. If that isn't possible, the next best thing is to place them in a surrogate nest. This gives them their best chance at a successful life in the wild.

Fortunately, our very own Alicia Claus-Bartels, Field Worker for Johnson County Conservation, had recently discovered a Barred Owl nest at one of our Johnson County Conservation properties. Mick McGrew of General Tree Service graciously came to the nest with a bucket truck to give the orphaned owlet a lift. Mick has helped R.A.R.E. with many such projects over the years and has helped many owls, osprey, eagles, and hawks. The nest already contained two owlets that were likely around five days older than the new owlet.

Even so, they appear to have integrated well and thankfully, their parents have chosen a prey rich habitat to call home. All owlets should be on their way out of the nest by early June.

While we don't want to advertise where the nest is for fear that they could be bothered by excess foot traffic, if you find them, please tread quietly. Sudden movements or loud noises can be stressful for mom, dad, and babies.

***Below:** Alicia holds the owlet shortly before it is lifted into its new nest.*



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A Note from the Director

Larry Gullett - Executive Director

Johnson County has many fine recreation and conservation areas offering a variety of opportunities. In addition to the county conservation areas, we also have Lake MacBride State Park, Coralville Lake and the Iowa River flowing through the county. Even with all these opportunities the majority of people in Johnson County still want more recreation and conservation areas and trails. In 2021, several non-profits and community improvement groups in Iowa City completed a study called "Better Together 2030, A Shared Future for Johnson County. The outcome of the planning process was identification of five important focus areas for the future. "Champions of the Natural Environment" ranked first of the five focus areas.



Top: The Mehaffey Bridge Trail segment is part of the greater Iowa River Trail which provides which is a 16-mile paved, multi-use trail connecting Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty.

Bottom: Clear Creek Area and Trail. This was the first property purchased by JCC utilizing funding from the Conservation Bond.



In 2008, the people of Johnson County voted for the first in the state "Conservation Bond" to provide \$20 million over 20 years to expand the conservation and recreation program in the county. This year, the Conservation Board budgeted all the remaining funds in the Conservation Bond program. Over the last 15 years the Board has provided many projects using

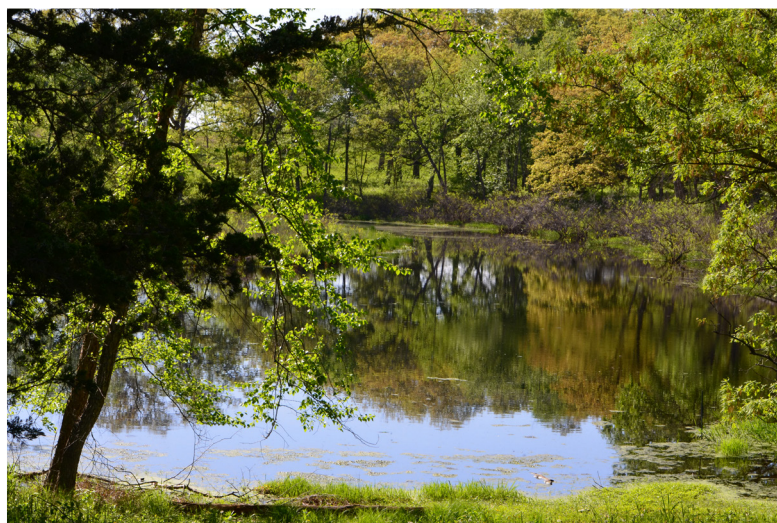
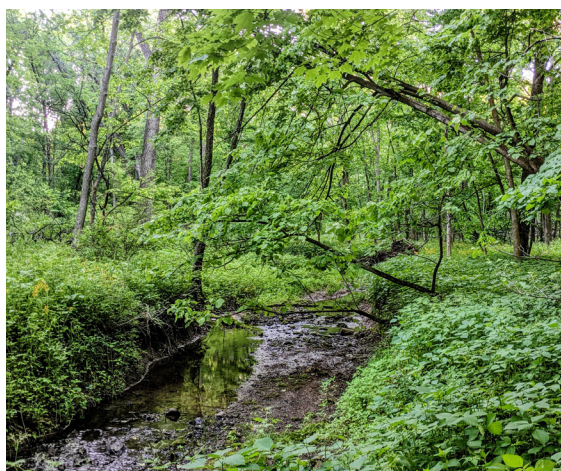
the bond funds. This includes 3 different trail systems within the county, 8 new conservation areas throughout and two special water quality projects - the 270-acre wetland development project at Cedar River Crossing and the lake restoration project at Kent Park.

Funding for new opportunities will now be limited since the original Conservation Bond funds are extinguished. We are still at least \$1.7 million short of funding to complete the Clear Creek Trail connection to Kent Park. This trail system connection will be a huge benefit to the people of Johnson County if we can find the funds to complete it. Anyone in Iowa City, Coralville, North Liberty and Tiffin will be able to ride the trail system from town to Kent Park.

In addition, people visiting Kent Park can get on the trail and ride to these communities. It will be a transformative project that connects population centers to community attractions, just the type of project the State of Iowa's Trails Plan identifies as priority. The trail will also serve as a vital connecting link to the community of Oxford and eventually the Amana Colonies.

Conversion of these recent acquisitions from private land to public use areas requires funding. At this point in time the Conservation Board has identified about \$42 million in projects that need completed to adapt these areas for public use. Adding trails, developing parking areas, restroom facilities and other park features will make these areas accessible for public use.

Clockwise from top left: Pechman Creek Delta (380 acres); Melinda Reif Reilly Fen and Prairie (100 acres); Cangleska Wakan (132 acres); Ciha Fen (80 acres)



THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO TIRELESSLY WORK TO MAKE OUR LIVES AND JOBS RUN SMOOTHLY...

JCC'S UNSUNG HERO OF THE SEASON!



DORY KJOSA

Office Manager

DORY WEARS MANY HATS AT JCC, FROM MAKING SURE THE BILLS ARE PAID TO BRINGING TOGETHER ANY LAST MINUTE NEEDS FOR BOARD MEETINGS AND EVENTS. DORY IS THE FRIENDLY FACE GREETING YOU AT THE DOOR OF JCC'S MAIN OFFICE AT KENT PARK. SHE HELPS ROUTE INCOMING CALLS FROM THE PUBLIC TO MAKE SURE EACH CALLER REACHES SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP. SHE ALSO ORDERS MUCH NEEDED SUPPLIES AND TAKES ON THE MASSIVE TASK THAT IS PAYROLL. HER SKILL AND POSITIVITY KEEPS US ALL ON TRACK. WE COULD NOT DO WHAT WE DO WITHOUT YOU! THANK YOU, DORY!

JCC Staff Updates!

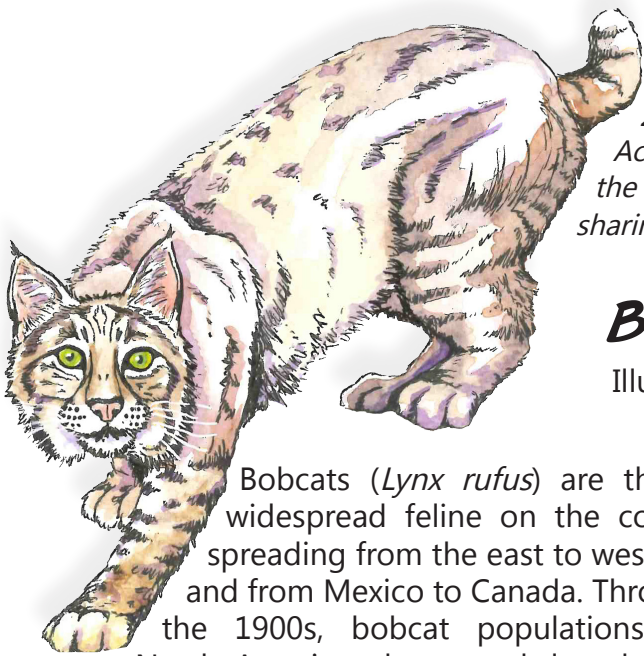
Ally Skidmore: New JCC Office Assistant

I'm originally from Muscatine, Iowa and moved to Johnson County in 2022. All my life I have truly loved the outdoors. I started deer and turkey hunting with my grandfather when I was about 13 years old and have continued ever since. Camping has also been a big part of my life with my family along the Cedar River just east of Conesville, IA. The outdoors has always been a huge part of my life and personality.

When I started college, I wanted to go for Graphic Design but realized my time would be better spent in the outdoor/recreation field, especially given the things in my childhood that connected me with nature. I now have a bachelor's degree in Recreation, Park & Tourism Administration with a minor in Environmental Studies from Western Illinois University. Throughout college, I interned with the Muscatine County Conservation Board. Since that experience, my goal has been to build a career with the local conservation organization,

and it is my pleasure to work in the office here at Johnson County Conservation. I'm excited to immerse myself in the environmental culture and share my passion of the outdoors in any way I can.





2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, considered by many to be the most significant law to benefit the conservation movement. To celebrate the anniversary, we are sharing wildlife success stories with ties to this landmark legislation.

Bobcats Back from the Brink

Illustration & Article by Kristen Morrow - Naturalist

Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are the most widespread feline on the continent, spreading from the east to west coasts, and from Mexico to Canada. Throughout the 1900s, bobcat populations across North America plummeted, largely due to habitat loss and unregulated hunting. In fact, in many U.S. states, it was legal to shoot or trap bobcats any time of year, with no limit on cats killed. Unsurprisingly, bobcats started to disappear.

In Iowa, bobcats were nearly extirpated from the state, with few cats remaining in isolated pockets of southern Iowa. In 1977, they were listed as "endangered" in the state. Once they finally had legal protection, the cats started to rebound on their own, many migrating into the state from more wild unplowed habitats in Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska. By the late 1990's, occasional sightings of the cat became more common in southern Iowa. By 2001, their population grew enough to warrant less stringent protections, and they were relabeled as a "threatened" species, then down-graded again to a "protected" species in 2003. In 2007, their population was stable enough to open limited harvest seasons in parts of the state. Today, biologists estimate the bobcat population to be between 5,000-8,000 individuals, with an annual average increase of 8.5%. Their range within the state has spread from its core in the south-central counties to today covering the lower half of the state east to west, with further spread expected to continue into northeast Iowa.

Bobcats are smaller than many people realize. Averaging just 20 pounds and three feet long,

they dwarf mountain lions which they are often confused with. They have fluffy gray-brown backs, white-gray bellies spotted in black, and a short "bobbed" tail, just ten inches long.

These small cats dine primarily on rabbits, voles, squirrels, and mice, and those animals make up 95% of their diet. Rarely, they'll catch gamebirds such as pheasant, quail, or turkey, and very occasionally, they may succeed in hunting a sick or old deer.

They thrive in mixed habitat zones, places where young forests and prairie or grassy field edges meet, which is also great habitat for their typical prey. Wooded stream and river corridors have been important migration paths for them as they expand their territory, and cities without safe habitat corridors have impeded their ability to expand through or past those areas. The north central parts of the state where natural spaces are more sparse and agricultural lands are most dominant, have seen little bobcat recovery so far.

Bobcats are reclusive and stealthy. With their activity highest in the hours between dusk and dawn, they can be even harder to spot. If you have had the chance to see one in the wild, count yourself lucky to witness such a special animal, and thank the Endangered Species Act for providing the legal protections that allowed this magnificent animal the chance to recover.

Bobcat populations have been growing in Johnson County in recent years. They (or their signs) have been spotted in Kent Park, Cedar River Crossing, Cangleska Wakan, and Two Horse Farm.

Snake Spotlight:

Dekay's Brown Snake

Liz McVey-AmeriCorps Naturalist

The Dekay's brown snake (*Storeria dekayi*) is an intriguing snake to encounter here in Iowa. It's shy and gentle personality make it the ideal snake to interact with for most people. DeKay's brown snakes are non-venomous and can be identified by their small size measuring between 9-13 inches and their brown colorations with dark eyes. They have pairs of black spots running the length of their backs, heavily keeled scales, and a creamy white belly.

Dekay's brown snakes live mostly in the southern and eastern regions of Iowa and prefer to hide under logs and leaves in wooded areas near water. The best time to see these snakes out from their hiding is on warm spring and fall days where they will bask in the sunlight on sidewalk trails. If you are able to see one on your next hike, most Dekay's brown snakes allow you to gently pick them up for brief periods without biting or musking you.

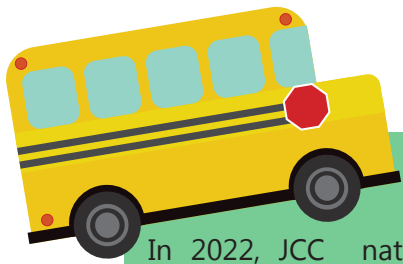
The diet of these small snakes mainly consists of macroinvertebrates including snails, slugs, and worms. Though, they will not shy away from eating tadpoles and small frogs when they are available. Dekay's brown snakes themselves are a major food source of other larger snakes and birds. Their defense mechanisms against predators are musking and flattening their bodies to appear larger.

Unlike most reptiles, Dekay's brown snakes are a viviparous species giving live birth rather than laying eggs. They tend to give birth in the late summer to 3-20 young. Once the young are born, maternal care stops. However, young sometimes stay near their mothers for some time after birth. They reach maturity at about two years and their life span is up to seven years.

This summer, a JCC Naturalist will lead a "Flippin' for Herps" program where participants will learn how to look for different herptiles and survey them. More details in the event section!



Above: A Dekay's Brown Snake slithers across the author's hand.



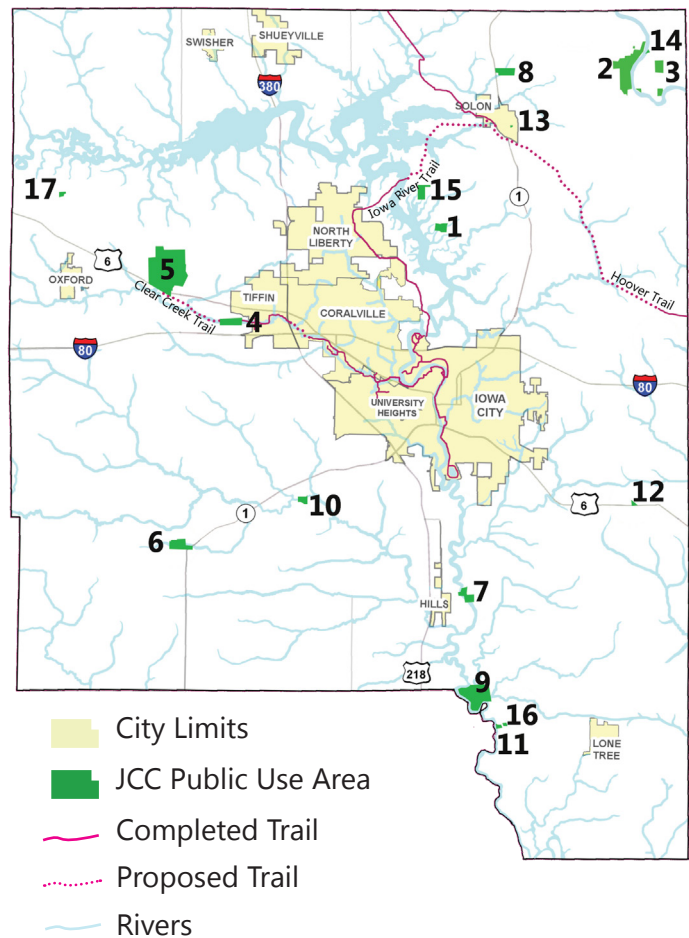
Field Trip Bus Scholarship

In 2022, JCC naturalists provided 75 field trips for area schools, serving nearly 3,000 kids. Field trips feature hands-on discovery-based environmental education, helping kids to understand and connect with the natural world. JCC provides *free* field trip experiences, but increasingly, schools need extra assistance to cover the bussing costs to make their field trips possible. The Friends of Johnson County Conservation provides assistance through the Field Trip Bus Scholarship, but we need your help to keep these scholarships flowing! If you are able to donate, please email kmorrow@johnsoncountyiowa.gov or mail a donation to: Friends of Johnson County Conservation, F.W. Kent Park, 2048 Hwy 6 NW, Oxford, IA 52322. Write "Bus Scholarship" in the memo or included note.



JCC Public Use Areas

1. Cangleska Wakan	132 acres
2. Cedar River Crossing	560 acres
3. Ciha Fen Preserve	81 acres
4. Clear Creek Conservation Area	87 acres
5. F.W. Kent Park	1,062 acres
6. Frytown Conservation Area	94 acres
7. Hills Access	40 acres
8. Malinda Reif Reilly Fen & Prairie	100 acres
9. Pechman Creek Delta	380 acres
10. Phebe Timber	27 acre
11. River Junction Access	12 acres
12. Scott Church Park	5 acres
13. Solon Prairie	3 acres
14. Sutliff Bridge & Access	1/2 acre
15. Two Horse Farm	83 acres
16. Walker Park	3 acres
17. Williams Prairie Preserve	21 acres



Paved Trail Segments Managed by JCC

Clear Creek Trail	1.3 miles
Hoover Trail	6 miles
Iowa River Trail	3.5 miles

More information about JCC public use areas can be found through our website:

www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation

Program/Event Guide

How to Sign Up:

Programs are free unless a fee is listed. Sign up for all programs is online at the link below, unless stated otherwise. To sign up, **click or scan** the QR code to the right or go to: <https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events>. For questions or sign-up help, call **319-645-1011**.



*Do you require any specific accessibility measures in order to comfortably participate in these programs? Reach out to us at 319-645-1011 for special accommodations.

June

Raptor Program

Saturday, June 10, 10:30-11:15 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Come meet and learn about two different birds of prey with Raptology. This program will take place inside of the Conservation Education Center. Space is limited and registration is required.

Firefly Night Hike

Thursday, June 15, 8:45-10:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

This family event will start with free exploration to catch and observe fireflies (tools provided). The program will finish with an optional 1.5 mile-long night hike through a dark forest trail to admire pure firefly magic.

Froggin' Fun

Tuesday, June 20, 6:00-7:30 p.m.
Cangleska Wakan

Like to catch frogs, tadpoles, or toads? Join a JCC naturalist for a frog hunt where participants will learn about different frogs that live here in Iowa!

Archery in the Park

Tuesday, June 20, 6:00-8:00 p.m.
Youth Group Camp, F. W. Kent Park

Come learn archery with JCC Naturalists. This is a family friendly event but our current bow

size restricts archery practice to those eight and older.

Nature Buds: Wetlands!

Wednesday, June 21st, 10:00-11:30 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Nature Buds is a program for kids ages 2-5. It involves hands on STEM and arts stations around a nature topic. This month, we'll learn all about wetlands!

Summer Solstice Sunset Hike

Tuesday, June 21, 8:00-9:30 p.m.
Cedar River Crossing

Come celebrate the first day of summer (and the longest day of the year!) as we travel to the astronomical clock to watch the sun set over the wetlands of Cedar River Crossing. Dogs are welcome but must remain on a 6 foot leash and waste packed out.

Junior Explorers: Wetlands!

Thursday, June 22, 10:00-11:30 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Junior Explorers is a program for kids ages K-2nd. It involves hands on STEM and arts stations around a nature topic. This month, we'll learn all about wetlands!

Chlorophyll Printing

Friday, June 23, 9:00-11:00 a.m.
Cangleska Wakan
Fee: \$5/print

Learn how to transfer photographs onto

real leaves using the sun. This totally natural process produces beautiful ephemeral artwork and can be a really fun way to display some of your favorite photos. Program includes a brief presentation, then time will be spent gathering and setting up your very own framed chlorophyll prints to take home.

July

Queer Hikers of Iowa Adventure Hike & Fish/Nature Journal

Saturday, July 1, 8:00-10:00 a.m.
Location TBD

Take an early morning hike with a JCC Naturalist. Depending on water levels we may try to add in a bit of fishing for those interested.

Raptor Meet-n-Greet

Saturday, July 8, 10:30-11:15 AM
Whip-poor-will Shelter Area, F.W. Kent Park

Come meet and learn about two different birds of prey with Raptology. This program will take place outside in the Whip-poor-will Shelter area, just north and across the road from the Conservation Education Center entry. This outdoor program is an informal "meet-n-greet" style and no registration is required. No dogs permitted in the area during the time of the program.

Prairie Night Hike

Wednesday, July 19, 8:00-9:30 p.m.
Valley View, F.W. Kent Park

After sunset is often the best time to explore the prairie during the scorching summer heat. On this hike, we'll enjoy the sunset, cicada song, and prairie flowers at their peak. This hike will be 1.5 miles long on a grass trail. Leashed dogs welcome.

Flippin' for Herps!

Thursday, July 20, 6:00-7:30 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Join a JCC naturalist to learn different Iowan herptiles, how to find them, and go on a guided

hike looking for herps!

Raptor Meet-n-Greet

Saturday, July 22, 10:30-11:15 AM
Whip-poor-will Shelter Area, F.W. Kent Park
See July 8 event for details.

Moth Night

Saturday, July 22, 8:30-11:30 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Celebrate the incredible diversity of moths with us through self-guided educational activities and an illuminated night hike through the woods! We will also be sampling for moths all night in celebration of national moth week. Everyone is encouraged to learn, observe, and document as many moths as they can.

Foraged Pottery

Tuesday, August 1 & 8, 1:00-3:00 p.m.
Cangleska Wakan

Learn where and how to harvest/process clay locally during the first class. Then create with the foraged clay during the second class. Finished pottery will be pit fired by the instructor and should be ready for pick-up approximately two weeks after the final class.



Rose Mallow Hike

Saturday, August 5, 9:00-11:00 a.m.
Cedar River Crossing

Embrace your wild side for a swamp hike through the south half of Cedar River Crossing. This 3-mile hike is a quest through wetlands and prairie to reach a pond with thousands of rose mallow at peak bloom. Hikers may walk through thigh-high water in some places and tall natural vegetation along the route.

Raptor Meet-n-Greet

Saturday, August 5, 10:30-11:15 a.m.

Whip-poor-will Shelter Area, F.W. Kent Park

See July 8 event for details.

August

Introduction to Fly Tying

Saturday, August 5, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Merge art and crafts skills with ecology and a wetland exploration by tying flies while you sip on coffee or tea. Optional fly tying book reading assignment prior to the event for those interested.

Family Tree-Tectives

Tuesday, August 6th, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Kent Park

Join us for a tree ID hike and activity in Kent Park. Learn how to identify trees by leaves, bark, shape, and location. Designed for kids and their grown ups!

Volunteer Monarch Tagging

Wednesday, August 16, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

Location TBD

We need volunteers to help us catch wild monarch butterflies for tagging! Tagged butterflies will journey 2,000 miles to their winter home in Mexico. This activity is great for all ages and is a great way to support Monarch butterfly research. Events are dependent on weather conditions and location may be changed depending on monarch activity. Locations include Cedar River Crossing, Two



Horse Farm, or Kent Park. Updates will be shared via email with all registered participants.

Women's Woodworking Confidence Course

Saturdays, August 19, 26, & September 9

Cangleska Wakan

This collaborative class between JCC and Kirkwood Community College will take you from tree to finished furniture! A variety of hardwoods are provided for the class, sourced from the sawmill at Cangleska Wakan. More details on the Kirkwood website. Scan the QR code below to register!



Volunteer Monarch Tagging

Wednesday, August 23, 9:00-10:30 a.m.

Location TBD

See August 16 event for details.

Volunteer Monarch Tagging

Wednesday, August 30, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

Location TBD

See August 16 event for details.

Volunteer Monarch Tagging

Wednesday, September 6, 9:00-10:30 a.m.

Location TBD

See August 16 event for details.

Volunteer Monarch Tagging

Wednesday, September 13, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

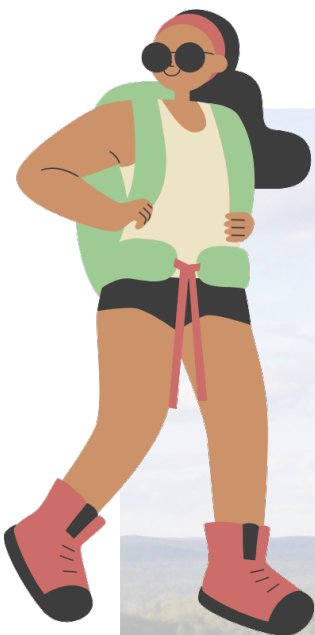
Location TBD

See August 16 event for details.

Volunteer Monarch Tagging

Wednesday, September 20, 9:00-10:30 a.m.

See August 16 event for details.



W. T. F. Backpacking Trip (Women | Trans | Femme)

September 16 - 22, 2023 | Superior Hiking Trail, MN
\$400 fee | Sliding-scale payment option available

Hike 25 miles of the Superior Hiking Trail in northern Minnesota! This naturalist-led trip is designed to be an inclusive learning environment for beginner backpackers that identify as women or gender non-conforming. Participants will learn basic backpacking skills such as campsite set-up, backcountry cooking, and water filtration. Transportation, backpacking gear, and food provided. Additional training and gear-fitting evening programs required. Due to high demand and limited space for these programs, participation is application-based, to help diversify these skills and opportunities. Applications due July 14, selection July 17. For an application, visit JCC's event page: www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events.



More Nature Fun!

Explore the Conservation Education Center in Kent Park!



Summer Visitor Hours:

Saturdays, Memorial Day to Labor Day
10:00 AM - 2:00 PM *new hours!*

Check out an Adventure Backpack!

Wetland-, prairie-, and forest-themed adventure backpacks are available for free check out during CEC visitor hours. Each is filled with guidebooks, exploration tools, and activity guides/prompts.



Hike the Storybook Trail!

This 1/2 mile accessible trail loops around the CEC. A new nature story will be posted every two weeks starting in May.



Johnson County Conservation
2048 HWY 6 NW
Oxford, IA 52332



Scan or click the QR code
to the right to subscribe
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A Tiger Swallowtail is captured sipping nectar from a swamp milkweed plant at Cedar River Crossing.