Conservation News

A Publication of the Muscatine County Conservation Board

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Creature Feature - Osprey by Michelle Berns



Found on every continent except Antarctica, these beautiful birds have a wingspan of five to six feet and weigh between 2.5-4.5 pounds. Females are the larger of the sexes and have a gorgeous necklace of darker plumage across their chest. Males have a pure white chest. Both have dark brown feathers on their back and wings with a white head. Adults have vibrant yellow eyes. Young have orange eyes and have white tipped edges on their dark wings. In flight these birds look like an "M", with a dark wrist patch under their wings.

Ospreys migrate to central and South America each fall. The male returns from his overwintering grounds around April and tidies up the nest, which can weigh up to a hundred pounds and be 3-6 feet across. The female will help finalize the nest renovations and then lay two to four eggs over the course of several days. Both parents take turns incubating the eggs for 36-42 days. After 55 days the young will fledge. They follow the adults to the overwintering grounds but remain there for another whole year before coming back to their hatch area. It is the male that exhibits the highest nest fidelity, meaning that where he hatches, he will come back to. Choosing a mate and starting the lifecycle over again happens around four to five years of age.

Ospreys are sometimes called a fish hawk, sea hawk, or river hawk because of their specialized diet of fish. Ospreys have many adaptations to help them hunt and hold their prey. Great vision and specialized oil droplets in their retina help them to see fish underwater from 130 feet up in the air without the glare of the sun! Similar to how you see with polarized lenses. They dive into the water feet first with nostrils that close to keep the water out. They also have extra oily plumage to keep water from penetrating their feathers.

Like other raptors, they have great talons to help hold their prey. Osprey have another adaptation for grasping slippery fish, an outer toe that rotates for two in front and two in back (Zygodactyl) as well as spicules (raised bumps for an improved grip). They carry fish headfirst to help with aerodynamics.



Until recently, Osprey had not nested in Iowa since before European settlement. The Iowa DNR began a reintroduction program in 1997 at Lake McBride in Johnson County. The program continued through 2016 at 11 other places throughout Iowa.

There were 301 juvenile Osprey brought in from Minnesota and Wisconsin at 42 days old and placed in hack towers. The young Osprey were fed through PVC tubes so they would not become imprinted on humans. Fledging happened around 55 days and they eventually learned to catch their own fish. In the meantime, fish were still placed in the hack towers as the doors were open and they were free to come and go.

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The first nesting's of wild Osprey in Iowa took place in Spirit Lake and Iowa City in 2003. Since then, Osprey have been very successful from this reintroduction. Nests are monitored every year by the Iowa DNR with the help of volunteers. During the 2025 nesting season, 70 nests were monitored; 54 were active nests. Thirty of the nests fledged 58 Osprey!

Since acquiring Deep Lakes Park in 2012, staff have seen many Ospreys flying and fishing especially around Lake Chester. In an effort to help these incredible birds of prey, we installed two nesting platforms in the park. It is our hope that we will attract a couple returning males to take advantage of the platforms (see photo left). One is situated near the trail overlooking Lake Ivy and the other is North of the Cabins, near the bike trail between Lakes Chester and Patricia.

This project could not have come together without partnerships! We are incredibly thankful for our **talented maintenance crew** who built the 5-foot diameter nesting platforms.

We also want to thank **Eastern Iowa Light and Power (REC)** for donating both of the 30-foot power poles the platforms were placed on.

Another huge THANKS goes out to **Muscatine Power and Water** for allowing their very talented and efficient crew to spend two mornings installing the poles with the nesting platforms already attached.

It is our hope that multiple generations of Osprey can use the towers and that visitors to Deep Lakes Park will enjoy watching these magnificent raptors.

MOTUS Installation at Discovery Park - by Michelle Berns



Our partnership with Muscatine Power and Water and Eastern Iowa REC also allowed us to install a power pole in Discovery Park that will be connected by an antenna to an international research network called MOTUS. This program uses radio telemetry to track birds, bats, and large insects, including Monarch Butterflies!



When a tagged creature flies by a motus station (which are located from Canada to South America) it pings the antennae and information is uploaded to the cloud.

Scientists are using the data that is gathered to answer some great questions about migration, life cycles, animal physiology, and urban effects just to name a few. To date there have been 1,246 projects, over 504 species, and 66,815 individuals tagged. Thirty-four (34) countries are included with this research and there are 2,472 MOTUS stations.

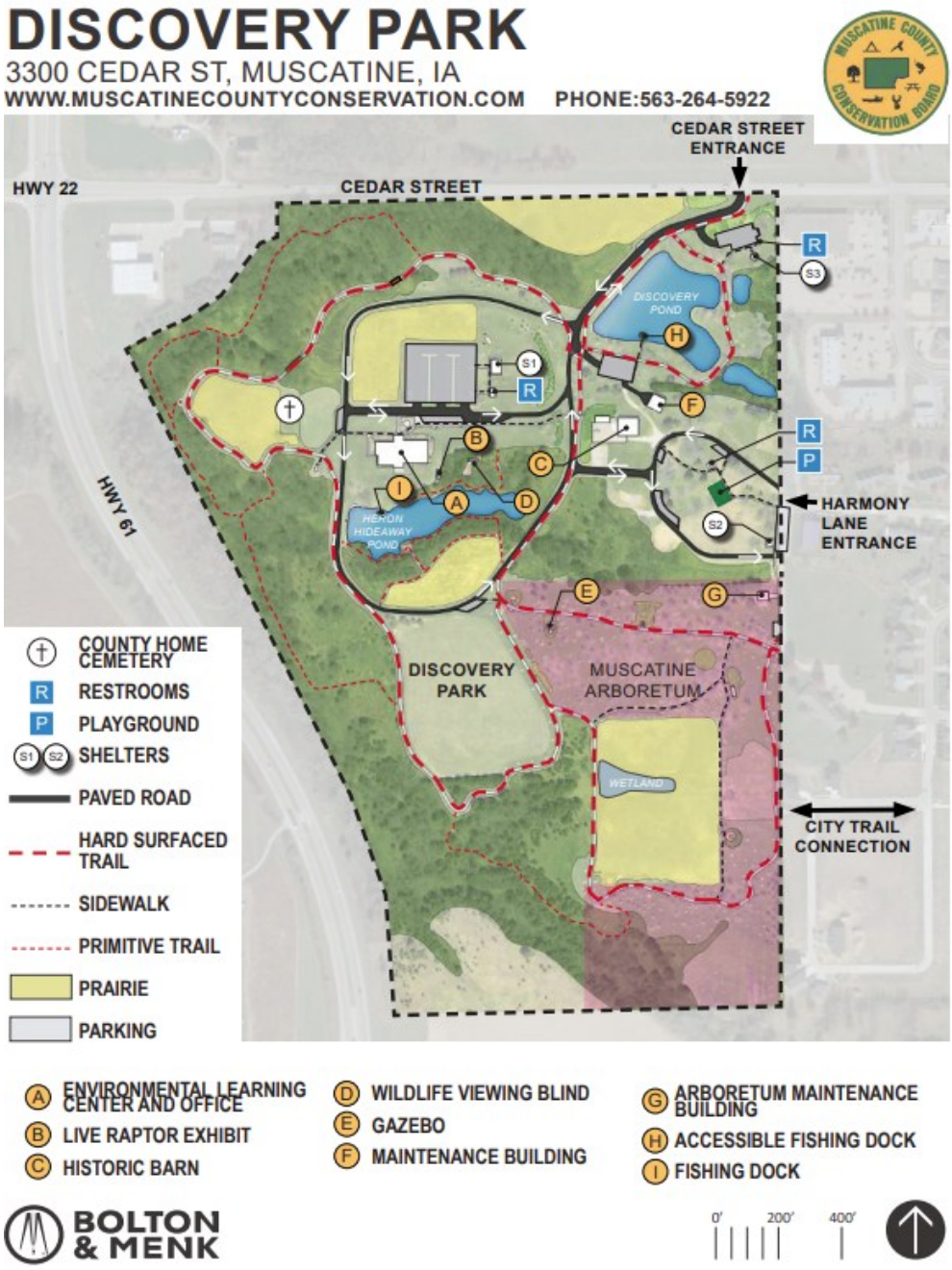
We are excited to be able to use this data in our environmental education programs. MOTUS.org is where you can find more information about this program.

Park Spotlight: Discovery Park

Discovery Park is a 100-acre county park located just inside the Muscatine city limits on Cedar Street, near Highway 61. This multi-use park is a great place to visit during every season.

Discovery Park is open daily, year-round from 6:00 am – 10:30 pm. Here is a list of the top 10 things to do at Discovery Park!

1. Visit the Environmental Learning Center. FREE and open to the public! It includes two 1,200 gallon fish aquariums, over 100 mounted animals, a kid's exploration area, hands-on displays and more!
2. View live animals including raptors, fish, snakes, turtles, and more!
3. Attend a Naturalist led program or hike. Events are listed on Facebook and the website.
4. Hold a snake!
5. View fall colors at the Muscatine Arboretum. This living museum has trees and shrubs of every color, shape, and size.
6. Take a hike or bicycle on 2+ miles of hard-surfaced trails that wind past prairie, woodlands, and ponds.
7. Bait a hook, sink a line, and try your luck at catching a fish or two at Discovery Pond & Heron Hideaway.
8. Enjoy some creative play on the nature themed playground.
9. Enjoy a picnic in the park.
10. Step back in time and enjoy a historic tour of the Old Barn.



Environmental Learning Center Hours
Monday - Friday: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Saturday & Sunday: noon - 4:00 pm
Closed most holidays.

Visit our websites for more information
MuscatineCountyConservation.com
MyCountyParks.com/County/Muscatine

Muscatine County Conservation Foundation



The Muscatine County Conservation Foundation has been supporting conservation projects in Muscatine County for the past 38 years!

Their most recent project was to plant 26 trees in the new Deep Lakes Park Campground. These trees will continue to grow over the years and provide much needed shade for campers.

Please consider a tax-deductible gift to the Muscatine County Conservation Foundation today to assist with this and other great projects!

A Gift For the Conservation Foundation

I would like to become a Friend,
please accept my donation.

☐ Sponsor	$10—$49
☐ Partner	$50—$99
☐ Patron	$100—$249
☐ Guardian	$250—$499
☐ Steward	$500—$999
☐ Benefactor	$1000 +

☐ I would like to donate my time.

Name _____

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Phone _____

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Thank you for your support!

Please make checks payable to:
Muscatine County Conservation Foundation
PO Box 109
Muscatine, IA 52761



Thank you for being a Friend!

Thank you to all our "Friends" whose donation to the Muscatine County Conservation Foundation support the development and enhancement of environmental education and conservation projects in Muscatine County.

The names of all donors go into our donor book and those who donate $250 or more receive a plaque on our donor wall located in the Environmental Learning Center. Please include the form above with your donation and become a "Friend" today.

Helen Atkinson
Norma I. Lewis
Joni Axel
Mike & Phyliss Avesing
Chris & Carol Zorich
Jean Scott
Crawford Company-Muscatine
James Wester



A Turtle Success Story!

Back in June, Nate Barnett, a Wildlife Biologist from Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge spotted a Mama Blandings turtle digging a nest on the edge of a gravel road. Not the best place in terms of safety. He knew he needed to do something to help this nest of rare and threatened turtles survive.

Huge THANKS goes out to the Muscatine County Highway Department for avoiding major work in the section of road during the incubation period.

In order to give the turtles the best chance of survival, the two turtles who hatched and the remaining viable eggs were relocated to the Blank Park Zoo for their Head-Start program. Turtles experience the highest mortality in their first year of life. In a year, they will be released back to the same general area where they were found.

Blanding's turtles live in wetlands, spending most of their time in the water. They are omnivores, eating all sorts of things including small fish, insects, and aquatic plants. They can live to be 80 or 90 years old in the wild.

Muscatine County has an adult Blanding's turtle named Mr. B who can be visited at the Environmental Learning Center.





Newsletter Contact Information

To help save on Newsletter expenses, we would like to update our mail and e-mail information. If you have moved or changed your email address, please update your information. Thank you!

Muscatine County Conservation Board
P.O. Box 109
Muscatine, IA 52761
563-264-5922

Conservation@muscatinecountyiowa.gov



Sharing a love for snakes!

Gwendolyn Jack is a 3-year old who visited the Environmental Learning Center with her Grandma.

She asked so sweetly to pet a snake so Office Manager, Lori Dietrich, let her hold one of our nicest animal ambassadors, Kajika, a 5-foot long fox snake who educates thousands of kids each year!

Our Animal Sponsors are the best!

Thank you to Ann E. for sponsoring Louie, the Speckled Kingsnake, and Joni A. for continuing to sponsor Sheldon, the Spiney Softshell Turtle.

Programs and Special Events



Discover Fly Fishing in Muscatine County
Saturday, September 26th and Saturday, October 24th - 8:00 am - 12:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center - Classroom



Muscatine County Conservation is partnering with First Watch Fly Company to offer Fly Casting and Fly-tying classes designed for beginners and anyone looking to spend intentional time outdoors. This is a hands-on, 4 –hour morning session where you will learn the fundamentals of fly fishing in a relaxed, supportive environment. Pre-registration is required. Contact our office.

Halloween Drive-Thru Saturday, October 17th 6:30 pm-8:00 pm
Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area - Main Campground



Enjoy a Halloween Drive-Thru the campground. Campers will have their sites decorated with a spooky (not scary) Halloween theme. This event is very accessible, since guests will remain in their cars for the tour. There is a suggested donation of $10/per vehicle with proceeds going to the Muscatine County Conservation Foundation. The first 300 children, ages 2-12, will receive a treat bag. Volunteers & treat bag donations are needed. Contact our office.



Winter Wreath Making Saturday, December 5th 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center - Classroom



Want to spruce up that front door or fireplace? Kick off winter with your own homemade wreath using hand-foraged greenery from Discovery Park. Bring a pair of gardening gloves, any embellishments you would like, and your creativity. We'll provide the rest. Pre-registration is required by November 27.

Winter Break Camp Monday, December 21st 10:00 am-2:00 pm
Drop off at Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area- Lodge 3rd –6th grades $10.00 per child

Join the Naturalists for some fun in the snow! Bundle up and come to Saulsbury. We will set up a camp, cook a meal, and hike in the woods! Lunch will be provided. Pre-registration required. Form and payment required to register.





Bald Eagle Watch Saturday, January 16th 9:00am - 1:00 pm
Pearl City Station - Muscatine Riverside Park

Join our naturalists at the Pearl City Station for eagle viewing outside on the deck overlooking the Mississippi River. Exhibitor booths and activities for kids will be located inside the Pearl City Station. Coffee and cocoa will be served while supplies last.

Winter Sowing: Native Wildflower Seed Workshop Saturday, January 30th, 2027 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center - Classroom



Ever started a garden in the middle of winter? Come join us and learn how to start a pollinator garden right in your own yard.
Seeds and soil will be provided, but please bring gallon milk or water jugs for planting if you are able.

Prescribed Fire Workshop for Landowners Thursday, February 18 8:00 am-4:30 pm
Environmental Learning Center at Discovery Park

Landowners interested in using prescribed fire as a management tool for prairies and woodlands should attend this class. Participants can expect to be learning mostly in an indoor setting, with some outdoor hands-on sessions. This workshop is provided by the Great Rivers Conservation Alliance of SE Iowa. Attendance makes a person eligible to borrow a fire cache with tools specific to wildland firefighting. Pre-registration required and space is limited. www.Tri-Rivers.org



Full Moon Prowl Saturday, February 20th 6:30 pm - ???
Saulsbury Bridge Recreation - Lodge

Let's go wander through Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area and listen for the owls We will follow the trail guided by the light of the Snow Moon! Be sure to dress for the weather and we'll meet at the Lodge parking lot.

"WHO" do you think we will hear?

Fall & Winter Nature Camp Schedule



9:00 am - 10:00 am - Polliwog Playtime - Ages 18 mo. - 2.5 yrs
10:00 am - 11:00 am - Polliwog Playtime - Ages 2.5 yrs - 4 yrs
11:00 am - 12:00 pm - Knee-High Naturalists - 4-6 yr s old
$5.00/session
Maximum class size is 12/session

Discovery Park - Environmental Learning Center

Join us for activities designed to help toddlers learn about their natural world and explore nature. Children must be accompanied by an adult. You can register for as few or as many of the nature camp sessions as you would like.
Pre-registration is required and space is limited.
Register at the Environmental Learning Center by filling out a registration form and providing payment.



Saturday - September 12	Flutter, Fly & Forage
Saturday - October 3	Growing Gourds
Saturday - November 7	Mix & Measure
Saturday - December 5	Galaxy Gazers
Saturday - January 9	Blizzard Buddies
Saturday - February 6	Chasing Rainbows
Saturday - March 6	Recycling Rangers
Saturday - April 3	Feather Friends

Park News:

- Deep Lakes Beach is CLOSED for the season.
- Campgrounds will close on November 2, 2026.
- Water will be shut off in outdoor restrooms as soon as the temps start dipping below 32 degrees at night. (Estimating the week of Nov. 2)
- Vault toilets and porta pots will remain open.
- Cabins Rentals are available year-round.
- The Saulsbury Lodge is available year-round.



New Legislation For Hunters

Trail Cameras - Trail cameras are prohibited on game management areas (this includes State and County owned areas) unless specifically authorized by permit or when used directly by the department of its designated agents. This law goes into effect February 1, 2027.

Tree Stands - Tree stands must be removed from public lands at the end of each hunting season. There is going to be a big push this year to get all tree stands down. New legislation states that "a person shall not place a tree stand for hunting deer on public land unless the stand is affixed with and exhibits a metal plate that plainly shows the department-issued identification number of the owner of the stand." Warnings will most likely be given this year, although when stands are removed by law enforcement, hunters seldom get them back. Starting February 1, 2027 fines will be issued.



Deep Lakes Park Cabins

Fall and winter are a great time to plan an overnight at Deep Lakes Park. Guests will enjoy the off-season rates from November through March.

Cabins 1 & 3: have one bedroom and sleep a total of 4 people between a queen bed and fold out sofa-sleeper. Winter rates are $109/night.

Cabins 2 & 4: have two bedrooms and sleep a total of 8 people between a queen bed in one room, a queen and twin bunks in the second room, and a sofa-sleeper. Off-season rates are $124/night.

A minimum of two nights must be booked.

Saulsbury Lodge is open for rentals year round!

The Saulsbury Lodge is a great setting for a family reunion, small wedding reception, graduation or birthday party.

This enclosed building has both heat and air. There is a small kitchen area, modern restrooms, and access to the Saulsbury Bridge. It has the capacity to seat around 75 people with tables and chairs.

Prices vary depending on the day of the week and type of event. Availability can be viewed on our reservation website.

For information or to make a reservation:

MyCountyParks.com/County/Muscatine

Information is also available at:

Muscatinecountyconservation.com
563-264-5922
Facebook: MuscatineCountyConservationBoard



Dave & Kathy Bert - Fishing poles, reels, stands & fishing line.

Curt & Janna Weiss - Bench at the Deep Lakes Park Campground.

Muscatine Disc Golf Club - Construction of a the *new * Deep Lakes Disc Golf Course.

Eastern Iowa Light & Power (REC) - Donation of power poles for Osprey & MOTUS projects.

Muscatine Power & Water - Installation of poles for Osprey & MOTUS projects (pictured right).

HUGE thanks goes out to the MPW crew who set the poles for the Osprey nesting platforms and MOTUS. Pictured below: Luke Hart, Michelle Berns, Spencer Kress, Nathan Panther, Chad Behnke, Nic Rosenbloom, Hunter Meyer, Mark Archer, Katie Hammond, and Trevor Ebeling.



Memorials & Tributes

A boat/fishing dock was donated at Deep Lakes Park
In Memory of Nick Hannig

Monetary donations were made
In Memory of Nick Hannig

A bench was donated at Deep Lakes Park
In Memory of Nick Hannig

Fishing poles, reels and fish mounts were donated
In Memory of Jim Bermel

A carved mushroom and framed duck puzzle
In Memory of Rodger Broderson

A Sugar Maple tree was adopted in Discovery Park
In Memory of Connie Root







Holiday Closings



The Conservation Board and Environmental Learning Center will be closed for the following holidays.

Veteran's Day - Wednesday, November 11, 2026

Thanksgiving - Thursday, November 26, 2026

Day after Thanksgiving - Friday, November 27, 2026

Christmas Eve - Friday, December 24, 2026

Christmas Day - Saturday, December 25, 2026

New Year's Day - Friday, January 1, 2027

MUSCATINE COUNTY
CONSERVATION BOARD
3300 CEDAR STREET
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MUSCATINE, IA 52761

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MUSCATINE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

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Jeff Snyder	Vice-chairperson
Karen Hartman	Member
Sherry Seright	Member
Julie Jindrich	Member

The Muscatine County Conservation Board meets the third Monday of each month at 6:00 p.m. Meetings are held at the Environmental Learning Center, 3300 Cedar Street in Muscatine. The public is welcome to attend.

If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, gender, or handicap, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Muscatine County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240

STAFF

Katie Hammond	Director
Michelle Berns	Naturalist II
Luke Hart	Naturalist
Kent Kaufman	Operations Supervisor
Ryne Brimeyer	Park Officer
Kristin Neeld	Maint. Tech./Park Officer
Trevor Ebeling	Maint. Tech./Park Officer
Lori Dietrich	Office Manager
Dave Schuler	Learning Center Assistant

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