

# *In Nature's Care*

**Conservation News and Programs**



*To develop an awareness and appreciation of our natural world through conservation and education.*



# Naturalist Notes

BY HEATHER HUCKA, CONSERVATION EDUCATION MANAGER

Spring is a time to get back outside and celebrate the changes around you. We have been busy all winter long at the nature center and we are excited about the changes that have been happening.

A new display exploring how the animals that call Iowa home have changed over time. Some never to call it home again while others have made an amazing comeback! We wanted to acknowledge that humans can learn from past mistakes and have a positive impact on the creatures we share the land and water with.

A new animal ambassador joined the team! A Western Hognose Snake will take his turn on display. This unique reptile is not common around North Central Iowa, but will allow us to showcase nature's diversity and adaptations within the animal kingdom.

A new entrance into the office wing not only provides security but creates a more welcoming window to connect with staff.

We would like to thank everyone for their patience this past winter season during the construction and updates. We hope to see you out at the park very soon and would love to hear how you like changes at the nature center.



**Spring ~ A lovely reminder of how beautiful change can be!**

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# Programs

Register at [LimeCreekNatureCenter.com](http://LimeCreekNatureCenter.com) or call 641/423-5309

\*Programs may be cancelled due to weather or low registration\*

## **LIME CREEK ANIMAL ENCOUNTER**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 5 PM**

**LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER**

Come meet the animals that call Lime Creek Nature Center home! Whether they walk, swim, or slither, all the ambassador animals have something unique about them. Here's your chance to get close to our newest addition and ask any questions you may have about these creatures. This program is for all ages! **Please register for this FREE event by Monday, March 10 at 4 PM.**



## **RETURNING TO YOURSELF: NATURE JOURNALING**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 1-2:30 PM**

**LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER**

Feeling stressed or in need of a reset? Join us for a relaxing experience that blends nature, reflection, and creativity. We'll enjoy a stroll through the woods, then return to create word art that is unique to you! No writing experience is needed. Just bring yourself and a journal. Let yourself slow down and reconnect.

**This event is free if you register by April 15.**

## **CONSERVATION COFFEE CLUB ~**

### **REFLECTIONS ON IOWA RIVERS & THEIR FUTURES**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 9:30-11 AM @ LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER**

Enjoy some social time with coffee, tea and treats followed by a conservation focused program. Dr. Jim Pease has paddled over 2,200 miles of Iowa's rivers for the IDNR Water Trails Program over the past 15 years. This presentation is a result of those paddles and reports. We will ponder the future of our rivers and celebrate these ever-changing corridors. **Registration deadline is Friday, April 10.**

Cost is \$3 for nature center members or \$7 for nonmembers.



## **WILDLIFE WONDERS ~ METAMORPHOSIS**

**TUESDAY, MAY 26, 5-6 PM**

**LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER**

Have you ever wondered how a caterpillar turns into a butterfly? Or how frogs come from tadpoles? Get ready to explore nature's transformations and surprising ways animals change! This program is geared towards upper elementary age. Discover how amazing growing up in the wild can be!

**Registration requested by May 22.**



## **EARTH DAY HIKE**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 5-6:30 PM**

**LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER**

Come and enjoy some time outdoors and celebrate our planet with other nature lovers. Explore and discover Lime Creek Conservation Area on this guided walk. See wildflowers and birds as we trek the trails.

**Please register before 4 PM on Earth Day.**

This program is free to attend.



# Programs continued

## Summer Nature Camps

SAVE THE DATES

### Animal Adventurers ~ June 16, 23, July 7, 14

Youth completing 3rd or 4th grade  
9am-12pm (snack provided)

Each day of camp is a new adventure! Come to one or come to them all this summer.

### Nature Neighbors ~ June 18, 25, July 9, 16

Youth completing 1st or 2nd grade  
9am-12pm (snack provided)

Four days of fun or maybe just one. Each day is unique so you can make camp as long as your little one wants.

### Evening Explorers ~ July 24-25 (1 night)

Youth completing 6th or 7th grade  
4pm-10am (dinner and breakfast provided)

### Recreation Renegades ~ June 30 & July 1

Youth completing 5th or 6th grade  
9am-4pm (lunch and snack provided)

### Water Wanderers ~ July 22 & 23

Youth completing 7th or 8th grade  
9am-2pm (lunch and snack provided)

### Caving Adventure ~ July 7-9 (2 nights)

Youth completing 9th - 12th grades  
9am Tuesday-3pm Thursday (all meals/snacks provided)

August 4, 5, 6



### Tiny Tots (9-10:15 am)

Youth ages 4-6 years old

### Crawly Critters (10:45-noon)

Youth ages 7-8 years old

## SUMMER FUN FOR EVERYONE!

This summer we will be trying out some new nature camp schedules. These changes are to better serve our community. If you have any questions please connect with us and we will find the right camp for your family.

Prices and additional information will be published in our next newsletter and online beginning in May.



# Earth Day Needs You!

April 22, 2026

MASON CITY EARTH DAY



"IT'S IN OUR HANDS"

City-wide Earth Day  
Clean-up!  
**Mid-April through Mid-May**  
(dates announced late March)

Roll up your sleeves and help clean up  
Mason City streets, parks, and trails.  
Form a team or on your own.

To register and claim a location, go  
to [MasonCity.net](http://MasonCity.net), call **421-3372**, or  
e-mail [volunteer@masoncity.net](mailto:volunteer@masoncity.net)



Visit the Clear Lake Earth Day website to  
find out and sign up for all their events and  
activities to celebrate our earth!

Trash Bash / Outdoor Fest /  
Green Expo / 10K-5K Run /  
Photo Contest / AND MORE!

[EarthDayClearLake.org](http://EarthDayClearLake.org)

Empower Yourself!  
Make a Difference!  
Celebrate!



# Flora and Fauna

## Mourning Cloak

*Nymphalis antiopa*

One of the earliest signals of spring is the emergence of the mourning cloak. This species of butterfly is one of only a few who overwinter in their adult form! They find shelter under tree bark or in small crevices. On the first warm days in late March or April, mourning cloaks make their appearance, even if there is still snow on the ground! Their dark hairy wings allow them to soak up the warmth from the sun. This gives them a head start on spring, often emerging before most other insects.

When the butterfly's wings are closed, the speckled gray color helps them to blend in with bark, keeping them safe from predators. Aside from camouflage, mourning cloaks can also make an audible click sound to startle predators.



Did you know?

Unlike most butterflies, mourning cloaks don't rely heavily on flower nectar. They feed mostly on tree sap, rotting fruit, and animal droppings to get their needed nutrients. The caterpillars feed on the leaves of various trees including willows and elms. While most butterflies live up to two weeks, mourning cloaks can live 10-12 months, making them one of the longest lived butterflies! As spring unfolds, you might just spot a beautiful mourning cloak soaking up the sun along the trails at Lime Creek.



# Roadside Review

BY RYAN WILCKE - ROADSIDE VEGETATION MANAGER

## POISON HEMLOCK

My vote for the most dangerous noxious weed would have to go to Poison Hemlock, *Conium maculatum*. All parts of this plant are toxic to both humans and animals if ingested. As little as 100 grams can be fatal to a human in only 30 minutes! Cattle will need to consume up to 0.25% of their weight for it to be fatal. Native to Europe and North Africa, this plant was brought over and introduced to North America as an ornamental. Disturbed soils are where poison hemlock thrives, and it can quickly form a dense monoculture.

With its white umbrella shaped flowers blooming in late June to early July, it can be mistaken for wild carrot commonly known as Queen Ann's Lace. However, if you take a closer look at poison hemlock there are a few characteristics that quickly give it away. It has a hollow, hairless stem with purple blotches, and glossy, dark green leaves. Reaching up to 12 feet tall this is quite the impressive plant. Queen Ann's Lace has green hairy stems, dull green rough leaves, and reaches only four feet at it's highest.

Poison hemlock is a biennial, meaning it takes two years to complete its life cycle. The first year it forms a rosette focusing its energy into root production, and does not flower. Year two it sends up a bolt to flower and each plant can produce up to 30,000 seeds! With this much seed production, it is difficult to get ahead of this plant once established.

Management techniques can be hand pulling the entire tap root before the plant goes to seed. Pulling in the fall is best for first year rosettes while pulling in the spring is best for second year plants. Repeated mowing during the growing season can be effective, but you need to make sure the plant never gets to flower and produce seed. Herbicide application also can be effective if done before flowering and seed production. However, chemicals can be costly. For more information on this plant check out the Iowa weed commissioner's website,

[IowaWeedCommissioners.org](http://IowaWeedCommissioners.org)

If you are concerned about Poison Hemlock on your property or have questions, please contact me at the Lime Creek Nature Center, I'd be more than happy to chat.





# Conservation Comment

BY JOSH BRANDT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program has been instrumental in conserving and improving our natural and cultural resources for more than 30 years. Created in 1989, REAP provides funding to protect natural areas, improve water quality, enhance outdoor recreation, and preserve historical and cultural sites.

The program is funded through Iowa's Environment First Fund, which receives revenue from state gaming receipts and the sale of natural resource license plates. State law authorizes up to \$20 million annually for REAP, but the actual amount appropriated each year is determined by the legislature.

REAP funding is used for many things, including parks & trails, wildlife habitat, soil & water conservation, conservation education, and historic preservation. In addition to annual disbursements, cities, counties, and nonprofit organizations in Iowa are eligible to receive grants to carry out these projects. REAP has helped fund thousands of projects statewide, and the impact close to home is undeniable. Since inception, nearly five million dollars has been allocated to fund projects in Cerro Gordo County. In the last four years alone, Cerro Gordo County Conservation has used REAP funds to expand public lands, construct new river accesses, improve fish habitat, repair park infrastructure, and purchase native prairie seed.

Community involvement is key to the success of the REAP program. How can you help? You can purchase a REAP license plate or participate in a local REAP assembly where you will help guide how funds are used at the local level. Held every two years, the next round of statewide assemblies are scheduled for Summer 2026. Stay tuned for more details!

## More Than a License Plate



**Wilkinson Pond Renovation**



**Lime Creek River Access**



**Linn Grove Bridge**



**SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN IOWA.**



**BUY A NATURAL RESOURCE PLATE.**



# Lime Creek Catch-up



## Updates and Additions at Lime Creek

### Discovery Pond

In the spring of 2024 we completed the Discovery Pond renovation at Lime Creek Conservation Area. The total project cost was \$41,160. This allowed for us to double the size of the pond and increase it's depth by 3-4 feet. With this increase in volume we were able to stock it with largemouth bass and bluegill in the summer and catfish in the fall. To have such a prime fishery so close to city limits, we decided to update the original viewing platform to an ADA accessible fishing dock with a small parking area along with a floating dock on the opposite end of the pond to be used for environmental education experiences. We were able to secure \$38,925 in grants to cover the majority of the cost! We were overwhelmed by the support our community showed this project.



To allow the new fish population time to thrive and establish, Discovery Pond is catch and release only. We invite you to visit and discover for yourselves this amazing habitat enhancement.



# Volunteers and Donors

**Weekend Volunteer Hosts:** Jim Degen, Mike & Nancy Roddy, Ron & Lea Norlinger, Bruce Trimble, Sam Hunt, Dave & Patty Hansen, Bruce & Suzanne McKee.

A special shout out to the Norlingers for providing nature center space for the early morning birders during the 2025 Christmas Bird Count!

Thank you

What an amazing community to be a part of! Thank you all for your generous end of the year donations to support the conservation education program.

Steve & Theresa Betz, Alice Phillips, Bruce & Suzanne McKee, Marilyn Strike, Randy & Ginger Krueger, Tim & Kris Latham, Brad Huso, Paul & Barb MacGregor, Brian & Chereen Stroup, Mark & Deb Lassise, Clear Lake Bank & Trust, Larry & Barb Eide, Gloria Kirschbaum, Craig & Janet Miller, Todd & Barbara Godfrey, Kathryn Stephens, Mark & Shannon Dodd, JoAnn Geving, Fred Heinz & Cheri Ross, Cindy Kramer, and Julie Ebeling.

Blair & Rory Vanhorn, thank you for giving a fresh supply of crayons to the education program!

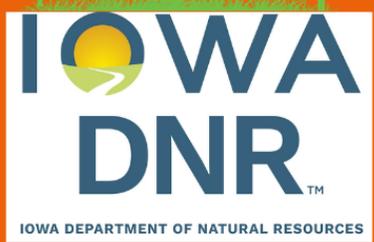


Every act of generosity becomes a seed in the soil, to give fruit to generations.

We are excited to announce an amazing gift that will be a game changer for the Lime Creek Nature Center! Prior to his passing, in 2024, Robert S. Mountain named the Lime Creek Nature Center Foundation as a beneficiary in his will.

Thanks to his generosity, we have a dedicated funding source that will help support the mission of the Lime Creek Nature Center for many years to come.

We are Grateful, Thank you



# ONE MILLION TREES EVENT IS BACK!

## Thursday, May 28, 4-6 PM

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), through a partnership with Alliant Energy, is offering a mixture of hardwoods, low-growing ornamental and evergreen tree species for \$25 each. Working with Cerro Gordo County Conservation, residential Alliant Energy customers can purchase up to two trees per planting address. The event will take place Thursday, May 28, 4:00-6:00 p.m., at the Lime Creek Nature Center (3501 Lime Creek Rd, Mason City).

Online ordering will be available early March. Find updates on the [DNR Residential Tree Programs webpage.](#)



# ONE MILLION — TREES —

## FREE Wood Chips Available

The Cerro Gordo County Conservation Roadside Management staff will be giving away a portion of its stockpile of wood chips at the Lime Creek Conservation Area starting April 13-17. Mulch will be loaded into small trailers or trucks with the assistance of a tractor at 7:45 AM and 3:30 PM each day. Smaller amounts may be loaded by hand. If you are wanting a large quantity, we can arrange a dump truck load(s) to be delivered directly to your location within county lines.

Interested individuals please contact us at **(641)423-5309** to reserve a day and time for pick up. Watch our Facebook page for updates as the date may vary and is weather dependent.

## **Building Hours & Information**

Mon. - Fri.: 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM

Sat. - Sun.: 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Address: Lime Creek Nature Center

3501 Lime Creek Road

Mason City, Iowa 50401

Phone: (641)423-5309

Website: LimeCreekNatureCenter.com

Social Media: Facebook & Instagram



## **CERRO GORDO COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS:**

Shannon Anderson - Vice-Chair

Dudley Humphrey - Member

Jim Roseland - Member

Stephen Gales - Secretary/Treasurer

Jacquelyn Arthur - Chair

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Heather Hucka - Conservation Education Manager

Kari Jeffrey - Naturalist

Ryan Wilcke - Roadside Vegetation Manager

Lakota Kirst - Roadside Vegetation Specialist

Ryan Theel - Roadside Vegetation Specialist

Todd Hansen - Operations Supervisor

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Kolton Byrne - Natural Resource Specialist

Mary Ermer - Office Manager