

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Fall 2013



Fall Facts

Fall is a time of change for all aspects of Nature. Wildlife, plants, and people begin preparing for the winter months that are approaching. This time of the year is notorious for the beautiful colors that show up around every corner. The magnificent yellow, orange, and brown colors that many leaves turn is actually present in the leaf year round, however it is concealed by a pigment called chlorophyll. Chlorophyll gives leaves a green color during the spring and summer because it is the most abundant pigment during that time. As Autumn days become shorter and shorter, trees respond by making less chlorophyll which allows the other colors to show through. Yellow, orange, and brown begin changing in response to day length.

Red, purple, and crimson leaves come from a slightly different source of pigments and actually occur in relation to temperature. When a number of warm, sunny autumn days and cool but not freezing nights come one after the other, it's going to be a good year for reds.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end and the trees drop all of their beautiful leaves. Any plant tissue unable to live through the winter must be sealed off and shed to ensure the tree's survival. As the day length shortens, trees begin sending a *separation layer* to the base of the leaf stem. When the layer is complete the leaf falls off. There is an exception to every rule. Some species of oak trees do not detach their leaves and they stay on throughout the winter. All of the beautiful leaves that fall to the ground play a very important role by providing ground cover for numerous critters and eventually decomposing to provide nutrient rich soil for new plant growth.

As you get outdoors this fall look for all the amazing colors that surround us. Here is a quick guide to help you ID some local trees by leaf color.

Oaks: red, brown, or russet

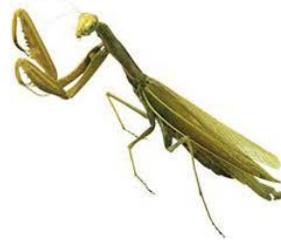
Walnuts: golden yellow

Elms: yellow

Hickories: golden bronze

Maples: red, purple

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!



Iowa is home to two different species of "Praying mantis". Most people distinguish the two from one another by size. One is HUGE and the other is smaller. The Chinese mantis, *Tenodera aridifolia*, can grow to be 5 inches in length! It was introduced to the United States in 1896 from China to help reduce garden pests. The smaller species, European mantis, *Mantis religiosa*, only reach a length of about 3 inches and was also introduced to the United States. It is best distinguished by a round black spot on the inner surface of its big front legs. The name "Praying Mantis" comes from the position they hold their large front legs. They are the ultimate predator. Both species are capable of turning their heads 180 degrees and have the ability to fly. They have great camouflage and hunt very patiently from the tops of tall vegetation. Smaller insects are often their target, however, the Chinese Mantis has been known to capture small frogs and even hummingbirds.

Female mantis grow larger than males. Breeding season occurs towards the end of the summer when adults are full grown. After mating the female often kills and eats the male. An egg case is attached to the underside of leaves and remain there until the following spring. Nymph mantis emerge and begin preying on anything smaller than themselves or their own siblings. The lifespan of a mantis is around 12 months.

People around the country still use them as garden pest management specialist. You can actually buy mantis eggs to place in a garden! For about five dollars you can purchase an egg case that should hatch 100-200 baby mantis. Although these critters are not native to Mills County they have established themselves very well as our neighbors. This is a great time of the year to spot them, so keep your eyes open when you are out exploring.

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Board Members

Wayne Phipps served as a board member from 2008-2013 and played a very active role in the MCCB. His service to the board is greatly appreciated.

George Marshall has graciously taken over the vacant spot on our board. He is a lifelong resident of Mills County and grew up on a farm near Silver City. George currently resides north of Malvern with his wife Linda. He is retired from the Union Pacific Railroad after 41 years of service as a manger in labor relations. Over the years George has been active throughout Mills County serving as a 4H leader and EMT for the Silver City ambulance service. He currently is on the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Union Pacific Railroad Museum. His hobbies include hunting, fishing, and riding his four wheeler. We welcome George to our board and look forward to working with him.

June Parks Bluebird Trail

June Parks has been an avid bird watcher for over 40 years. Her love of bluebirds is something she shares with everyone she meets. She has been a member of BLUEBIRDS ACROSS NEBRASKA (BAN) for over 20 years and has been active in trying to keep a bluebird organization in Iowa. June has helped establish a blue bird trail along the paved walking trail at Foothills Park which she has diligently maintained for at least 15 years. The Mills County Conservation Board approved the dedication of the June Parks Bluebird Trail for all of her hard



work and being an outstanding ambassador for bluebirds. The trail is located along the lower paved walking trail at Foothills Park.

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 22nd @ 3:00 pm- " Fall Float"

Come enjoy the first day of Fall with some family fun. Canoes will be provided by the Mills County Conservation board at Mile Hill Lake for a chance to come and paddle around. PRE-REGISTRATION is required 712-527-9685.

September 25th @ 9:00 am - "Birding at Foothills Park" Join the naturalist at Foothills Park to walk along the paved walking trail to identify and learn about some local and migrating birds. Binoculars and bird identification books will be provided or you can bring your own. Call the Mills County Conservation Board at 712.527.9685 if you would like more information about this program.

October 12th @ 11:00 am - "Fall Colors Hike"

A hike at West Oak Forest to enjoy the colors of the season while learning about the Loess Hills and the reason for fall colors. This hike can be somewhat challenging so wear sturdy shoes and bring something to drink.

October 16th @ 9:00 am- " Birding at West Oak Forest"

Join the Naturalist at West Oak Forest to look for some fall migrants utilizing the Loess Hills. Hike can be somewhat challenging so wear sturdy shoes. Binoculars and bird identification books will be provided or you can bring your own.

November 2nd @ 11:00 am- "Surviving the Seasons"

We will meet at Pony Creek Park to learn the physical and behavioral adaptations local animals have to help them survive in Iowa. There will be fun activities to help us learn how things survive. Pre-registration is required! Space will be limited.

To pre-register for these events or for more information, please call Dessa at (712) 527-9685 or send us an email at millsccbia@hotmail.com

GO GREEN! If you would like to receive your Conservation Matter's newsletter straight to your email inbox please send your request to millsccbia@hotmail.com

It is also available on the MCCB website:
<http://mccb.millscoia.us>

This will also put you on the email list to receive event reminders

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LITTLE CRITTERS FUN PAGE **NATURE RIDDLES:**

1. I touch your face,
I'm in your words,
I'm lack of space,
and beloved by birds.

2. I have four legs and a tail.
I have no teeth.
I can swim and dive underwater.
I carry my house around with me.

I am a _____

3. *I have wings but I'm not a bird
I am small and colorful.
I live in gardens and fields and forests.
I used to be a caterpillar.*

I am a _____

4. Why do Birds fly south?

5. The wind blows on the west side of a
pine tree which way would the leaves
blow.

6. What did the worm say to the other when he
was late coming home?

7. What did on firefly say to the other?

8. What did the beaver say to the tree?

Answers:

- | |
|---|
| 1. Air
2. Turtle
3. Butterfly
4. Because it's too
far to walk
5. A Pine tree
doesn't have
leaves, it has
needles
6. Where in the
EARTH have you
been?
7. Got to glow
now
8. It's been nice
gnawing you |
|---|