



Conservation Matters



Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Spring 2012

Spring Has Sprung

The Snow geese are honking overhead, the male Red-wing blackbirds are singing near every splash of water, and the Painted turtles are beginning to stir. It is time to get your nest boxes cleaned out and ready for the new season of baby critters. Please remember that if you find a baby animal, leave it alone. Often times when you think an animal has been orphaned it has just been placed there by its mother. White-tail deer and cottontail rabbits both leave their young for hours at a time, only returning to nurse. This behavior reduces the smell around a young animal and helps it hide from predators more efficiently. Baby birds that you find are often fledglings that are learning to fly and are still being cared for by their parent. If you think the baby bird is in danger you can place it up in a tree or bush. If you find a bird that is very small and does not have feathers it can be placed back into its nest if you can reach it. Occasionally, you find an animal that truly is orphaned. In this event, you need to contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or vet clinic. It is illegal to keep wildlife without the proper permits from the Department of Natural Resources.

Meet Your *WILD* Mills County Neighbors!



Belted Kingfisher's are a unique little bird found throughout Iowa. They can easily be seen perched on fences, tree limbs, and power lines over most open, clear bodies of water. They resemble a cartoon character with their disproportionately large head and a small body. They have a bluish head and back with a white throat and collar. Both sexes have a blue chest band but only the females have a rufous colored band below the blue.

As their name implies these birds are fish eaters. You might notice them diving off perches or hovering for a short period before diving into the water after a fish. They have also been known to feed on aquatic invertebrates, small reptiles and amphibians, and occasionally berries. Kingfishers use steep banks to excavate a burrow for nesting. The nesting cavity can be 3-6 feet into the side of a bank where 4-8 white eggs are laid. The eggs are incubated for 24 days and the young typically fledge 30 days later. Once they are capable of flight, the parents begin teaching them to forage by catching fish and dropping them back into the water for the young to retrieve.

As the water begins to freeze they migrate South to open bodies of water for feeding. If the winter is mild and water stays open they have been known to stay in Iowa year round. Population declines in this species are the result of habitat loss due to drainage or channelization and by the decrease in water quality due to sedimentation and chemical pollutants.

Monarch Waystations

Monarch butterflies are a beautiful butterfly that nearly everyone is familiar with. Something most people are not as familiar with is their dependency on milkweeds for reproduction. Milkweeds act as a host plant for larval monarchs. With the continuous development of land across the U.S. there is very little habitat left that supports the Milkweed plant. To offset the loss of milkweeds and other nectar producing plants you can create a Waystation at your home, school or business. Monarch Waystations are places that provide resources necessary to produce successive generations and sustain their great migration. This can be as simple as adding milkweeds and other nectar sources to your existing gardens or maintaining natural habitats with milkweeds. No



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effort is too small to have a positive impact. If you are restoring a large area back to native vegetation it is important to plant only species that are native to your specific area. If you are planting in a garden it is not as crucial. In our Northeast region of the United States there are four species of milkweed that can be planted, common milkweed, swamp milkweed, butterfly milkweed, and poke milkweed. To find out more information about this program visit the website www.MonarchWatch.org or call MCCB. **Come by the MCCB office to pick up a small bag of FREE milkweed seeds.** Supplies are limited, so feel free to call ahead 527-9685. We are open 8am- 4pm Monday thru Friday.

6 feet and change vibrant colors throughout the year. Most non-native grasses turn a dull brown or tan hue during the winter, but these native grasses take on a rusty red or golden color. Native wildflowers speak for themselves with yellows, oranges, reds, and blues dotting the landscape throughout the growing seasons.

So, now you ask yourself, "Where do I begin"? You can check with local nurseries to see what natives they offer and there are numerous websites such as www.stockseed.com that specialize in selling native seed. If you would like more information about prairie restoration or just adding some natives to your garden feel free to give us a call at the MCCB office or check out this great website www.plantiowanatives.com. Below is a list of some common native plants in Mills County.

Calling All Birders!!!!!!

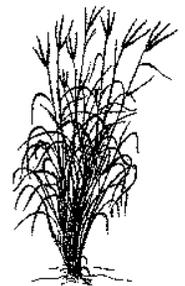
We are compiling a bird checklist for Mills County Parks. If you have sighted and correctly identified an uncommon or rare bird in one of our parks please let us know, so we can add it to our list. We appreciate your help and look forward to hearing about all the birds you have seen.

Native Gardening

Iowa was once covered in extensive prairies and scattered wetlands. Today, Iowa has been nearly completely converted to agriculture fields, roadways, and towns. The need for native restoration and gardening is greater now than it has ever been. Restoring small parcels of land or gardens back to native vegetation adds up quickly and is beneficial to wildlife. When you think of native gardening I hope that it is a vision of diverse colors, textures, and sizes. Native plants are extremely adaptable and can tolerate Iowa's ever changing weather better than any other plants can. Tall grasses such as Big Bluestem, Switchgrass, and Indian grass all reach impressive heights of up to

Native Species of Plants

- Big Bluestem
- Little Bluestem
- Wildrye
- Indian grass
- Switchgrass
- Sideoats Grama
- Black-eyed Susan
- Blazing star
- Butterfly Milkweed
- Compass plant
- Partridge Pea
- Goldenrod
- Wild Bergamot





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UPCOMING EVENTS

March 31st @ 1:00 PM- AMAZING AMPHIBIANS Hop over to **Lake George Park** in eastern Mills County to learn some awesome facts about amphibians. This program will have LIVE frogs and salamanders. **Pre-registration is required.**

April 21st @ 10 AM - 1PM- FESTIVAL OF THE YOUNG CHILD @ Glenwood YMCA

April 22nd ALL DAY- EARTH DAY
Do something to help the Earth today & everyday!

May 5th @ 9:00PM- FULL MOON HIKE
Join the Naturalist at **Ray Thomas Prairie** on the eastern side of Mills County to enjoy the "biggest moon" of the year. Dress appropriately and bring a flash light. **Pre-registration is required.**

May 12th-20th - SPRING SNAKE COUNT
This is a Nationwide count that helps determine the status of snake species across the United States. If you would like more information please visit the website www.snakeconservation.org or call the MCCB office.

May 19th @ 11:00 AM- SLITHERING SNAKES
We will be meeting at **West Oak Forest** in western Mills County to learn about the fascinating world of snakes. What they eat? Where they live? These are just a few of the questions we will answer. Live snakes will be used for this program. Following the program we will head out on a snake search to help with the spring snake count. **Pre-registration is required.** West Oak Forest is a moderately difficult hike so please dress accordingly if you plan on attending the Snake Search.

Iowa's Free Fishing Days: June 1st,2nd,& 3rd

June 3rd @ 1:00 PM - BEGINNER FISHING
Join us at **Mile Hill Lake!** Fishing equipment will be provided or you may bring your own. We will cover the basics of fishing and see what we can catch. **Pre-registration is required.** Adults are required to remain through duration of program.

To pre-register for these events or to ask questions, please call Dessa at (712) 527-9685. Thank you.

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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Mills County Conservation Board



The Mills County Conservation Board is able to accept, in the name of Mills County, any gifts, bequests, contributions and appropriations of money or other personal property for conservation purposes. Your tax-deductible donations, and our grant writing, promote the growth and betterment of our facilities for the enjoyment of the citizens of Mills County and its many visitors.



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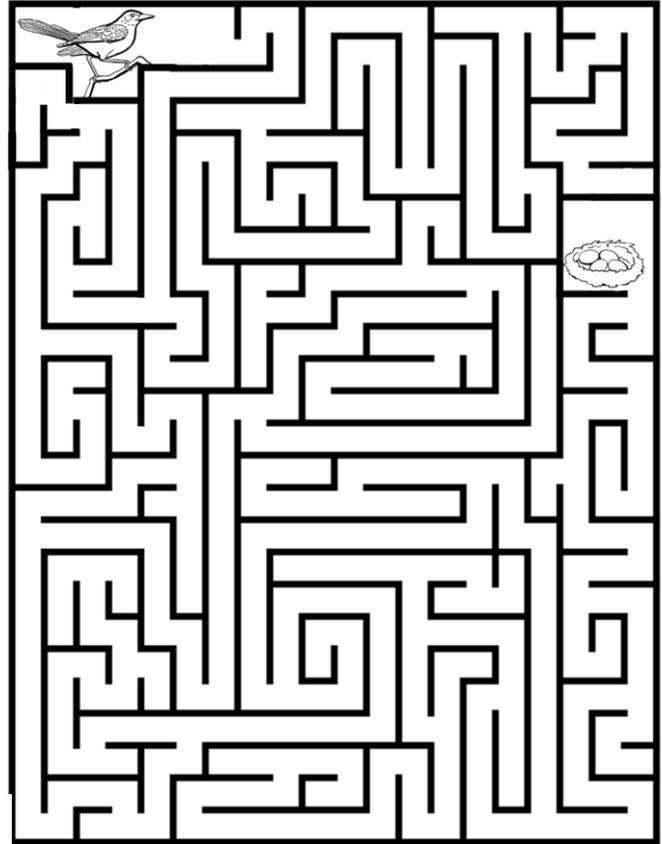
READY,
SET,
RESEARCH.....

**What is the
LARGEST SNAKE
FOUND IN IOWA**



A-MAZE-ING ANIMALS

Fly the bird to her nest.



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