

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Summer 2008

New Property Purchased by MCCB!

Fisher Wildlife Area

This 20-acre area is a recent addition to the Mills County Conservation Board's publicly accessible areas and was purchased from the Chris Fisher family with assistance from the local chapter of Pheasants Forever. The area consists of previously established Quail and Riparian buffer strips as well as general green space and river bottom timber. The Fisher Wildlife Area provides habitat for wildlife, access to the West Nishnabotna River for recreationists and is open to public hunting.

This new addition is located 2.5 miles east of Malvern on Lambert Avenue (old H38). It is located on the north side of the road and on the west bank of the West Nishnabotna River.

New Amphitheater & Kiosk at Pony Creek Park!

We have been working on our Amphitheater project for a little while now, picking up equipment here and there when we were able. Last November we obtained all of the necessary equipment to perform programs with the amphitheater. In mid April we began constructing a permanent outdoor projection screen and informational kiosk for use with this equipment.

On May 17th, we held our "Bats of Iowa" program outside and utilized this equipment with the new amphitheater. With the sun still being extremely bright (which is generally the case this time of year) at 7:30pm, we opted to wait until it was dark enough to be able to see the images on the screen. During the program I distributed information about bats that included instructions for building different style bat boxes (bat houses) to promote the well being of bats, information on how to humanely remove bats and spoke about how bats are a benefit to humans. We were even able to see a bat do a fly by as I conducted the program!

The amphitheater is located near the electrical campsites and playground at Pony Creek Park. This will allow us to provide video and computer aided presentations outside for program attendants.

New MCCB Website!

In the past few months, we have been trying to design a new website layout that would be user-friendly, and make things easier to locate. After reviewing the information we had accumulated, we passed it on to Inukshuk Technologies, the people who would inevitably be responsible for building our new website. They took all of our information, with a side of creativity, and designed a website that fit our needs and wants, and still

left us some room to add information in the future. Visit the new website by going to (no www):

<http://mccb.millscoia.us>

Welcome Our New Board Member!

Within the past couple of months there have been numerous changes with the Mills County Conservation Board. We accepted the resignation of board member Don Reed, and welcomed a new member. We would like to formally introduce and welcome Mr. Wayne Phipps to the Mills County Conservation Board. We anticipate that this addition to the board will be a benefit to the citizens and conservation efforts within Mills County. Welcome to the Mills County Conservation Board, Mr. Phipps!

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

This issue's *WILD* neighbor may be one that many of you know and already enjoy. It is a bird who has been poetically described as carrying the sky on its back and the earth on its breast. In fact, there is a group located here in southwest Iowa whose mission is to improve this bird's population through education and conservation projects. This group is the Iowa Bluebird Conservationists, and the bird, as you may have guessed, is the Eastern Bluebird.

The Eastern Bluebird is 6 ½ to 7 inches in length, with the male having a brilliant blue head and rusty colored chest, and the female being primarily a grayish blue, with a white ring around the eye.

Bluebirds are cavity nesters, meaning they nest in holes anywhere from 3 feet to 20 feet off of the ground. They will nest in natural tree cavities, tops of fence posts, old woodpecker holes and in man-made bluebird houses. Bluebird nests are made of grasses, plant stems and pine needles and the bowl may be lined with hair and feathers.

Bluebirds will lay up to 6 pale blue eggs (similar to a robin's) in the nest and incubate them for up to 18-days. When the eggs hatch, the young are featherless and depend upon their parents for heat, food and protection for 21 days. The bluebird can rear 2-3 broods per season. If the nest is raided and the eggs destroyed, they will try again unless it is already too late in the season. Bluebird nests are sometimes raided by other birds, like the wren or starling, because of competition for nesting sites. Other animals like raccoons, opossums and snakes raid bluebird nests looking for a meal. People try to prevent these raids by putting sheets of metal behind the birdhouses to make the surface surrounding the houses slick, so animals can not grip the surface surrounding the house. However, this will not prevent the birds that are there to take over the nest. This is why you need to monitor your bluebird houses.

Remember to use and take care of your County Parks. They belong to You!

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You can prevent wrens & other less desirable birds from establishing nests in your bluebird house. If you intend to build or establish bluebird houses in your area, be sure to avoid birdhouses with perches, as this will attract sparrows and wrens.

From the late 70's on, for nearly 25 years, bluebird sightings dwindled. This was due to competition with other birds for nesting sites. During that time, many people were building Wren houses, which led to a dramatic increase in their numbers, and the increased competition for nesting sites. In fact, in the eastern United States, the bluebird is still not seen as often as it once was. This is why these bluebird groups like the Iowa Bluebird Conservationists are making "bluebird trails" and erecting as many bluebird houses as possible in areas where there is adequate habitat, and insisting people check their bluebird houses and take notes on how many eggs, live young, and fledglings are coming out of each bluebird house each year. This data can be used to estimate how many new bluebird houses need to be constructed and erected in the area before the next years breeding season. If you have bluebird houses, please keep an eye on them and make sure they are truly being used for their intended purpose: the proliferation of the Eastern Bluebird.



Bluebird house, with nest & 5 eggs

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register for these events or if you have questions or would like to schedule a program for your group.

June 7, 2008 10AM at Mile Hill Lake
Beginner Fishing!

During Iowa's 3 free fishing days, Iowa residents may fish for free (no licenses) on June 6, 7, 8th. To take advantage of this opportunity, I would like to invite the children (and adults) of Mills County to Mile Hill Lake on Saturday June 7th for some fishing fun! We will be fishing from shore and learning things like how to identify some popular Iowa game fish and children will receive a fish button! We have some fishing poles and tackle available, but you are more than welcome to bring your own equipment. Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register for this event or if you have any questions. Program is dependent upon cooperative weather.

Mile Hill Lake is located 2 miles west of Glenwood on the eastbound lane of Hwy 34.

June 21, 2008 10 AM at West Oak Forest
Archeological Foray!

We will meet at West Oak Forest for a moderate hike and learn more about the people who lived in these Loess Hills. During this visit we will also be able to observe the Yucca plants and many other wildflowers during their bloom. Please dress appropriately. Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register for this event or if you have any questions. Program is dependent upon cooperative weather.

West Oak Forest is located 2 miles north of Hwy 34 on L31, north of Pacific Junction.

June 28, 2008 7:30 AM at Ray Thomas Preserve
Breakfast with the Birds!

Come and start the day with a "chirp", listening to and viewing our fine-feathered friends. You may wish to bring binoculars and a guide to birds. Please bring your own binoculars if you are able. Please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register for this event or if you have any questions.

Program is dependent upon cooperative weather. Ray Thomas WP is located 4 mi. N. of Hwy 34 on L66 (350th St).

July 12, 2008 7:30 AM at Mile Hill Lake
Breakfast with the Birds!

Program is dependent upon cooperative weather.

Mile Hill Lake is located 2 miles west of Glenwood on the eastbound lane of Hwy 34.

August 17, 2008 1PM Location TBA
Lazy Afternoon Canoe Float!

Join us for a canoe trip down the Nishnabotna River. We will be stopping at various sites along the river. Make sure to bring drinking water to quench your thirst! Space is extremely limited for this event, so please call James at (712) 527-9685 to register or if you have any questions. Starting point will be announced. This program is dependent upon cooperative weather.

Volunteer Opportunities

If you have a group or club that is looking for places to complete volunteer hours, please remember your MCCB parks. They provide a great opportunity to get outside and be active while serving your community.

Contact the Mills County Naturalist by phone at (712) 527-9685, or email at millsccbia@hotmail.com if you have any questions regarding volunteering.

Remember to use and take care of your County Parks. They belong to You!