

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Summer 2011

MCCB Naturalist

Soon James, the Mills County Conservation Board's Naturalist, will be leaving Mills County and returning to NE Iowa. While the MCCB is sad to see James' departure drawing near, the MCCB is working to replace him with another qualified individual who will fit well with the MCCB team, schools and communities of Mills County.

Regarding Spring's Loess Hills Article

The release of our Spring newsletter brought forth an anonymous letter in the mail voicing concern about our loess soil article. Since there was no contact information associated with the letter, we were not able to contact the individual.

With that opportunity lost, we want our readers to know that if anyone wishes to contact us regarding a statement or article, or if they have questions, we welcome it via mail, email or by phone (all listed on the cover). However, we need your contact information so that we have the opportunity to follow up with you and talk in person. We may be mistaken about something, but we need that opportunity for civil discourse to allow us all to learn and grow. Thank you.

MCCB LAKE GEORGE SPECIAL REQUEST

The Mills County Conservation Board is looking for the public's help in collecting data about Lake George. We are looking to acquire old photographs, stories and general information about the Lake George area from the years 1925 up to 2000. Stories, photographs, newspaper clippings, hand drawn maps outlining locations of different features of the property, are all welcome and they will be scanned or copied and the originals returned to their rightful owners.

For those unaware, Lake George is located at the intersection of 380th St and James Ave. The street address is 59490 380th St and it is located between Hastings and Emerson just off of H34. If you are unfamiliar with the street address, it is directly south of the Indian Creek Historical Museum.

We appreciate all the help we can get with this project. Thank you.

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

The Ruby Throated Hummingbird is the smallest bird we see in our state, but it is not a permanent resident. It is a migratory bird, moving over the Gulf of Mexico to reach Central and South America in the fall and make the

long exhausting return trip in the spring. These small creatures maintain their prolonged flight over the Gulf of Mexico by tapping into their fat reserves, which are severely drained by the time they arrive. When they arrive stateside they start feeding on nectar and small insects and many begin to work their way farther north when preferred flowers begin to bloom. They arrive in southern Iowa in late April to early May, with males being the first to arrive followed shortly by females.



These first hummingbirds will be looking for feeding areas, and many may stick around if you are diligent about supplying a food source for them. In addition to feeding on flower nectar, tree sap and small insects, they are also fond of a man-made nectar-like solution of sugar and water. The solution is very easy to make. Simply start boiling water and add table sugar at a ratio of one part table sugar to four parts water. Of course you will need to allow the mixture to cool before filling your feeders, and refrigerate any extra solution. **Never** add honey, artificial sweeteners or **red food coloring** to the solution; they can cause internal problems in hummingbirds.

Many hummingbird feeders have a dome or solution container that is red in color. This is because they use their sight to find brightly colored flowers to feed on and this red bulb acts like a beacon to attract them. Be sure to replace the fluid every three to four days and scrub the feeders with a soft brush and rinse well before filling back up with the solution. If you've ever wondered how Hummingbirds feed, they don't drink the solution by using their beak as a straw. They actually lap up the sugary nectar much like dogs use their tongues to lap up water. If you ever wondered why they put perches on hummingbird feeders, just watch the birds. On occasion, they will use those perches to rest while they drink.

Hummingbird nests are very tough to find. They are really small (under two inches in diameter) and can be found in small branches of a tree at heights from 1 to 50 feet high. The nests are often built with care, with plenty of cover available from the trees leaves. The outer nest consists of soft plant materials, spider webs or caterpillar nests and lichens and mosses. The interior of the bowl, where the eggs are laid, is lined with soft down from plants like thistle and milkweed. The nest is attached to the limb using sticky tree resins, like pine resin.

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The female will lay two eggs in the nest over three days & incubate over the course of 16-18 days. The young hummingbirds will fledge at around 22 days and venture forth seeking their own food. In Iowa, these birds usually only raise one brood per year due to our climate. With that in mind, please do not disturb or destroy the nests, eggs or young hummingbirds.

These tiny birds, which weigh nearly the same as a penny, beat their wings 60 to 200 times per second and are able to fly forward, backward, shift sideways and are even able to hover in midair. This is great for them when they are feeding on those higher flowers. They are also very important pollinators of many plant species.

To get more hummingbirds to your yard, start by planting hummingbird friendly flowers around your feeders. Species such as coral-bells, wild columbine, penstemons, bergamot, lilies, aloe, lilacs, trumpet vine, morning glory, fire pink, and cardinal flower are a few varieties of flowering plants which attract hummingbirds. Please keep in mind that it is always best to use native species, as non-native species have the potential to become invasive. If you would like a more complete list, please contact the Mills County Conservation Board office and we would be glad to provide you with a more complete listing.

MCCB Wish List

We are in need of the following items to complete our collection of pelts representing common mammals found within the state of Iowa. Animal pelts are used in several of our various Environmental Education programs.

Mills County Conservation is currently seeking:

- (1) Badger skull
- (1) Woodchuck skull & hide
- (1) Mink skull
- (1) Coyote pelt
- (1) Opossum (adult) pelt

Equipment Needed:

- (1) 4 to 6 foot wide cultipacker (useable)



Please contact us at **(712) 527-9685** if you are willing to donate any of these items to the Mills County Conservation Board. Your assistance, donations and support of Environmental Education programs and conservation practices in Mills County are greatly appreciated. **Thank you!**

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

JULY

7/29/11

Evening Canoe Float 8 PM at Mile Hill Lake

Join us for a relaxing evening canoe float on Mile Hill Lake. Come listen and watch for the animals starting to make their evening movements in and around the lake. Space is extremely limited for this event. Call to register and for more details. Pre-registration is required.

AUGUST

8/13/11

Composting! 10 AM at Pony Creek Park

Learn many reasons and uses for compost, from garden fertilizers to fishing bait. We will touch on the do's and don'ts of composting, simple methods of composting, and how it works. Please call the Naturalist at (712) 527-9685 to register for this event or if you have any questions. This program is dependent upon cooperative weather. Pre-registration is required.



SEPTEMBER

This is approximately the time that MCCB's current Naturalist, James, will be leaving (pending other circumstances). Therefore watch the newspapers for upcoming programs to be announced by the new MCCB Naturalist

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.