

# Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board  
Summer 2014



## Park Highlight

Continuing from the spring newsletter we will highlight two more of the parks that Mills County Conservation manages. Pony Creek Park and Indian Creek Greenbelt are the focus of this season's newsletter.

Pony Creek Park is a beautiful 53 acre park located west of Glenwood at 56235 Deacon Road. This is the only park that allows camping and is a great retreat for peace and quiet. There are six electrical campsites with gravel parking pads that are approximately 30 feet long. Also, found throughout the park are numerous tent camping locations with fire rings, picnic tables, and a pedestal grill. A nice play set is found in the middle of the electric camping area and a swing set is located towards the front entrance of the park. Two picnic shelters are available on a first come first serve basis or they can be reserved by contacting the MCCB office. Another fun feature of this park is the recently planted fruit trees. It will be a couple more years before they produce a good harvest of fruit but it gives everyone something to look forward to. There are two small ponds located near the front of the park that frogs, turtles, birds, waterfowl and muskrats call home. If you enjoy fishing or canoeing, Pony Creek Lake is located directly across the gravel road from the park. Trails are found throughout the park that can provide a nice workout and beautiful scenery. There is a lookout tower on the southwest corner of the park that provides an excellent view of the Loess Hills. The Davis Oriole Earthlodge, a National Historic Landmark, is also found at Pony Creek Park. Near the back of the park you will find the MCCB office building. Inside the building are some really neat displays and live animals. The office is typically open from 8:00-4:00 Monday thru Friday, however, it is always a good idea to call ahead and make sure someone will be there if you plan to make a special trip out to see the displays.

Indian Creek Greenbelt is located at 60220 410th St, south of Emerson. This small area is being restored to native prairie and has a mowed path around the outside perimeter. Indian Creek is located along the south edge of this parcel. With the proximity to moving water this is a great location for

bird watching. The native prairie seeds were planted in the spring of 2013, this year there will be some grasses and annual forbs present on the site. Native prairie restoration can take 3-4 years to become established so it is worth the time to visit this small park often to see the seasonal changes. There are also some fruit trees that have been recently planted.

## Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

Baltimore Orioles are very popular birds that seem to disappear in the summer months. Look closely though and you will quickly realize they are still very abundant in wooded areas. Male orioles are brightly colored orange with a black head, females are not as showy with a yellow-orange breast and grayish back and head. Orioles retreat to the dense cover of the tree tops where they feed on caterpillars and other insects, but prefer fruit and nectar over anything. They seek out the darkest, ripest fruits and berries. One way to attract orioles to your bird feeder is to provide nectar or fruit feeding stations. Cutting oranges in half and hanging from trees is a great food source. They also enjoy grape jelly. To attract orioles to your yard naturally, year after year, it is important to plant a variety of fruit and nectar producing plants. Raspberries, crab apples, and trumpet vines are all good options.

Orioles are acrobats that can hang from incredible angles as they spend their days in the highest branches of trees. If you ever catch a glimpse of their nest you will understand just how talented they are. They weave a long sock-like hanging nest made from small fibers, like the one pictured here. Construction materials can include grass, strips of grapevine bark, wool, and horsehair, as well as artificial fibers such as cellophane, twine, or fishing line. If you find an oriole nest that is still in a tree make sure to leave it there, some nests are repaired and used year after year. Orioles prefer open woodland areas, forest edge, orchards, and stands of trees along rivers, parks, and backyards.



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## Classroom Connection

Spring is a great time to have students out to the MCCB parks. The weather did not always cooperate but we made due. In total, 240 students participated in field trips at Pony Creek Park and West Oak Forest. We started out with a very wet, chilly visit from the East Mills 3rd graders, who enjoyed a pond study, scavenger hunt, and a fun activity called "Who Polluted the Missouri River". Next the East Mills 2nd graders joined us on an extremely warm 90 degree day in May for some hiking, fishing, and making animal tracks out of plaster. The final field trip was the Glenwood 8th graders, who took an exciting hike up to the top ridges of the Loess Hills at West Oak Forest.

The Mills County Master Gardeners awarded us a generous \$300 grant to purchase native prairie plants to make an educational plot at the Glenwood Middle School. The naturalist and approximately 20 eighth grade students planted a variety of native plants including little bluestem, prairie drop seed, aster, nodding onions, and lead plant. This will be a great resource to aid with educating students located at the middle school. We will be adding milkweed and other forbs throughout the upcoming weeks.

## Welcome to the New Conservation Technician

Help us welcome Jesse Ayers as the new full time Conservation Technician for MCCB. Jesse is from Lidderdale, Iowa and attended high school at Carroll. He attended Des Moines Area Community College where he received his Associates degree and then went on to Iowa State University for his B.S. in Forestry.

Jesse enjoys hunting, camping, hiking, biking and playing softball-basically anything outdoors. So far he says West Oak Forest is his favorite park due to the beautiful view and the great prairie species. Here is what he has to say to our readers- " I spent time working in the Loess Hills last summer when I was working with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and really fell in love with everything it had to offer (beautiful views, unique plants and animals). After I finished my internship with INHF I went on to my first real job after college doing timber and prairie

work for a private contractor near Des Moines. After my time there I continued working in the natural resource field with another position doing timber and prairie work with Driftless Land Stewardship in Wisconsin. I really enjoyed working there but wanted to find a position a little closer to home. That being said, I am excited to be working here for Mills County Conservation and I hope to meet some of the *Conservation Matters* readers out and about."

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Summer Kick Off- June 20th @ 7:00 pm

Canoes, fishing pole casting games, and campfire! Get the family out to Pony Creek Park on the eve of summer solstice with some outdoor fun. Hotdogs and smores will be provided. Pre-registration is REQUIRED, so please call 712-527-9685.

### Glenwood Farmers Market- June 25th @ 4-7 pm

MCCB canoes will be available for family fun during the Farmers Market. Come to the Glenwood Lake Park!

### Canoeing at Mile Hill Lake- June 26th @ 10:00 am

The MCCB canoes will be available for use at Mile Hill Lake for anyone interested in getting out for a paddle around this beautiful lake. Life jackets will be provided. Pre-registration is REQUIRED, please call 712-527-9685.

### Full Moon Hike- July 11th @ 9:30 pm

Join us at Ray Thomas Wildlife Preserve for a hike around the prairie with the full moon lighting our way. Ray Thomas is located at 35040 Fry Ave, northwest of Hastings, IA.

### Keg Creek Days- August 23rd

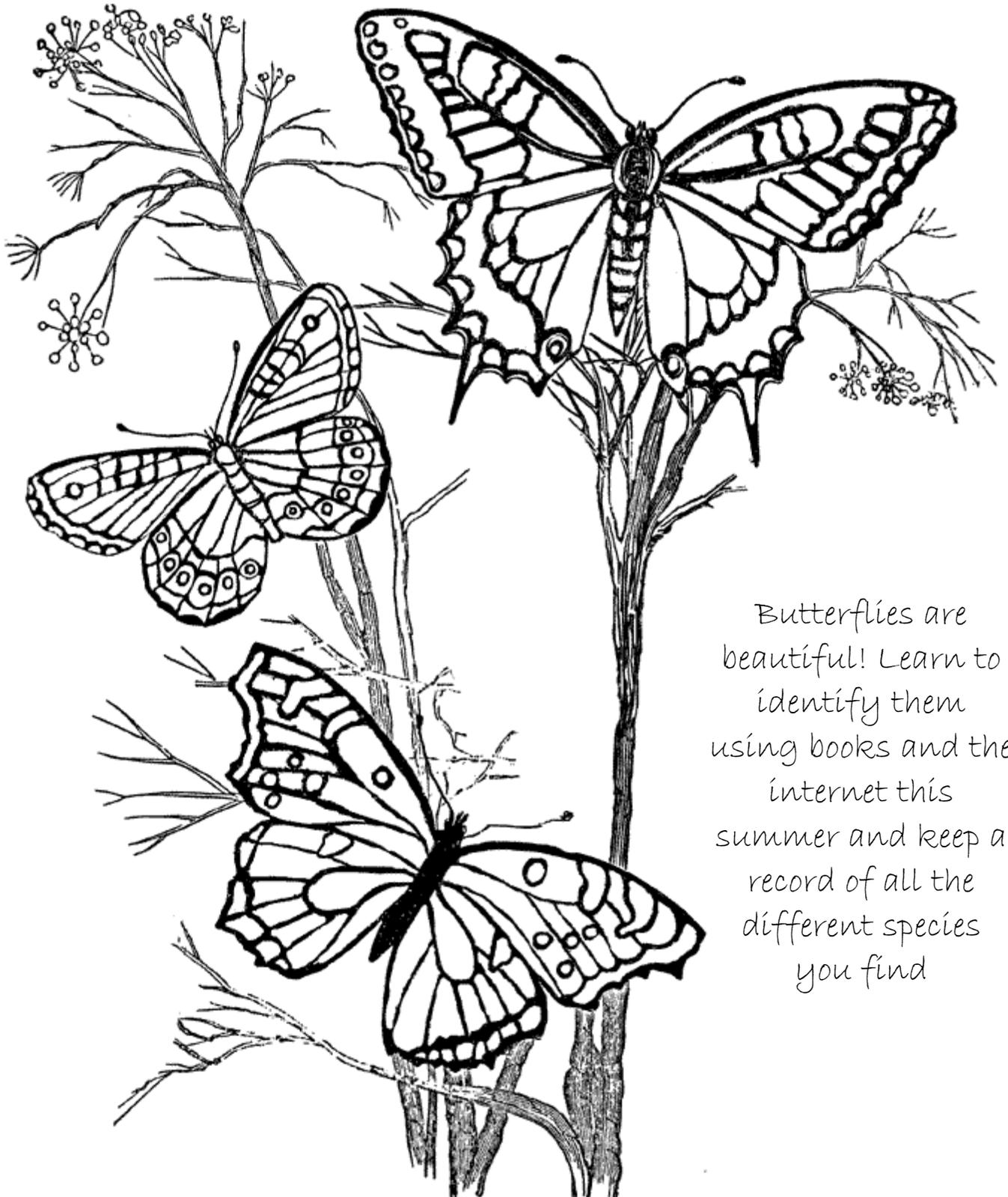
Come see us at the Glenwood Earth lodge site across from Glenwood Lake Park. The big teepee will be up and there will be live animals.

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](mailto:millsccbia@hotmail.com).

*For a map and information about the parks go to the Mills County Conservation website at - [mccb.millscoia.us](http://mccb.millscoia.us)*

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Butterflies are beautiful! Learn to identify them using books and the internet this summer and keep a record of all the different species you find