

# Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board  
Winter 2014-15



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## Park Highlight

Kenny's Woods, Fisher Wildlife Area and the Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve are the final three parks to wrap up the Park Highlights for 2014.

Kenny's Woods is a twenty acre woodland located off Highway 34, east of Glenwood. There is a parking area .1 mile from the corner of 255th and Jagger Road. As most of the local landscape is dominated by crop fields it is a nice site to see a piece of woodland. This timber provides a good place for a short hike, bird watching, mushroom hunting, and nature viewing in general. Turkey and deer are regularly spotted, as well as a variety of birds.

Fisher Wildlife Area is another small, 20 acre park that runs along the Nishnabotna River on Lambert Ave, east of Malvern. This park is unique because it allows access to the river and is one of the MCCB parks that allows hunting. A portion of this property is still farmed. Around the edge of the crop field is a strip of prairie plants and shrubs. Pheasants, deer and turkey all call Fisher Wildlife home. During the winter months it is a common site to see Eagles perched along the river in the large trees. Sometime in the near future a canoe access is planned to be constructed under the bridge. This is exciting news as it will open up this section of the Nishnabotna for local paddlers.

The Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve is a bit of a hidden gem within the county. This large 906 acre preserve can be found at 59069 Levi Road, along highway 34 south of Glenwood. There are 107 recorded archaeological sites that have been discovered, ranging from 10,000 years in age to early Euro- American settlement era, 150 years ago. Most significant are 27 earth lodge sites that are related to the Glenwood Culture. Only a small fraction of the preserve has been archaeologically surveyed, so many more sites probably exist.

It is managed as a low impact, recreation area. On this property you will find a variety of opportunities. There are over 1.5 miles of paved trails located in the Foothills Park area. This neat area of the preserve offers excellent bird watching and nature viewing. A small creek runs along the trail and mature trees of many kinds attract local wildlife. Bobcats, raccoons, opossums, badgers and coyotes

are some of the larger mammals that reside here. Numerous snake species can be found basking on the trails. Native prairie restoration is underway, with a total of 15 acres already planted and 20 more acres to be planted soon. These areas along with two food plots provide excellent habit for local wildlife species. The population of bobwhite quail is growing and are frequently heard calling during the spring and summer.

Although the weather is not ideal during the winter it is a great time to get outside and explore your county parks. Snow cover and the lack of leaves actually provide ideal backdrops for spotting wildlife. Get outside and enjoy nature!

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## Grant Received

The Mills County Community Foundation awarded the MCCB a generous grant of \$1000 to purchase a new canoe and paddles. The grant was made possible through the Mills County Field of Interest Fund. With this grant the canoe trailer will be full for all of next seasons public canoeing adventures. Keep an eye on upcoming newsletters if you are interested in attending a public canoeing program.

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## Meet Your *WILD* Mills County Neighbors

You might think you are seeing things the first time you spot one of these Mills County neighbors, but after a second glance, you will know for sure that you are looking at a black squirrel. Black squirrels occur in very localized areas and tend to only inhabit human settlements. Council Bluffs is famous for its population of black squirrels and over the years they have expanded their range to include other local towns. Squirrel enthusiasts have trapped and relocated them to their yards in an effort to establish a population of their own and it has worked pretty well.

Black morphs can actually occur in two species of local squirrels, the Eastern gray squirrel and Eastern fox squirrel. Fox squirrels are typically twice the size of a gray squirrel and they prefer more open areas. So, what makes a squirrel black? They have a melanistic pigment that makes their fur black. In today's landscape the black squirrel stands out

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quite well which is a disadvantage when dealing with predators. Historically, these darker squirrels were camouflaged better than the gray ones because woodlands were much denser and darker. The positive side to having such a dark fur is they stay warmer.

No matter the color of our local squirrels they are amazing little critters. Most people either love them or hate them. Squirrels are intelligent problem solvers that can cause considerable damage to people's houses, vehicles, and other property. If they aren't causing you grief they are pretty rewarding to have around for constant amusement. Squirrels are easily attracted to bird feeders and of course squirrel feeders. What are these mischievous mammals eating out in the real world? A squirrel menu is quite diverse. Acorns and walnuts are on the top of the list as favorites but they actually eat meat and other forms of protein as well. Baby birds and bird eggs are always a welcome treat for them. Squirrels play an important role in the food chain by providing lunch for a variety of predatory birds, snakes, and mammals. As they are most famous for, squirrels spend a significant amount of time storing nuts for the harsh winter months. Many of the nuts are never recovered and are able to grow into new trees.

## Bird Blind

Grab your binoculars and come out to visit the new bird viewing blind at Pony Creek Park. The blind was built using a generous grant from the Iowa Ornithologists' Union. It is located near the front of Pony Creek Park, just west of the swing set. It is best to approach the blind from the back side so that birds attracted to the feeders are not disturbed. The blind is situated to provide a view of the pond, feeders, and natural food sources which attract numerous species of birds. In the spring native berry producing shrubs will be added to the site. Already available around the blind is evergreen cover, oak, hickory and walnut trees. Chickadees, white breasted nuthatches, wood peckers, blue jays, cardinals, gold finches and many more birds are frequent visitors to the feeders. Fox and gray squirrels are also busy in the blind area.

## Education Donation

The Mills County Conservation Commission made a generous donation to the MCCB to enhance education opportunities across the county. The Conservation Commission presented a check for \$675 to the Conservation Board from the Albert Washburn education fund. Albert was a longtime commissioner that served over 50 years with the Commission. This money will be put to use immediately to purchase tools that will be used during forestry and soil training sessions provided to local students. The local Envirothon teams will greatly benefit by having access to tools and equipment they are expected to know how to use during the competitions. In the past, students had a very small window of opportunity to learn about the equipment and every year this is one part of the competition they have struggled with. Purchasing these tools to have on hand should give the teams the advantage they need to do really well.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### December 13th @ 9:00 am- "Breakfast with the Birds"

Come out to Pony Creek Park to enjoy some light breakfast while you watch the birds. We will meet inside the office building, so it will be warm. The naturalist will cover some basic bird identification tips and provide information on bird feeding. Material will be provided for kids to make pine cone bird feeders to take home. We will also play bird bingo. The morning will wrap up with a visit to the new bird blind, weather permitting. Dress accordingly if you plan to visit bird blind. Pre-registration is required to help with breakfast and beverage planning.

Call 712-527-9685 or email us at  
[millscbia@hotmail.com](mailto:millscbia@hotmail.com)



Suet is a high energy source of food for birds that is readily welcomed by our feathered friends. It is a mixture of fat, seeds, berries, and nuts. Here is a great recipe to make your very own suet and attract birds to your yard.

## Basic Fruit Suet Recipe

### Ingredients:

- 1 to 1 1/2 pounds beef fat
- 3/4 cup millet (red and white mixed, if possible)
- 1/3 cup cracked corn
- 3/4 cup safflower seeds
- 3/4 cup chopped cherries, raisins, or crab apples
- 1 to 2 tablespoons of honey (optional)
- mesh bags, or small plastic containers (margarine, sour cream, yogurt, etc.)
- waxed paper
- glass jar

### Directions:

1. Chop the fat into small pieces (or run it through a meat grinder). Melt the fat in a saucepan over low heat until it turns to liquid. Once the fat is melted, strain and remove any floating particles, including any remaining traces of meat.
2. Let the liquid fat cool slightly and stir in the other ingredients. Don't worry about exact measurements. Just add in whatever you think is needed to make it look good.
3. Line small plastic containers with waxed paper and pour in the mix.
4. Refrigerate containers filled with suet until they start to harden, and then store them in the freezer until ready for use. For ball-shaped suet, remove the suet from their containers while still slightly warm and shape it into balls with your hands. Place the balls in plastic bags and store them in the freezer.

Yields about 4 cups of suet