

# The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

Winter 2016

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

[www.scottcountyjowa.com/conservation/wapsi.php](http://www.scottcountyjowa.com/conservation/wapsi.php)

The Wapsi River Center is owned, managed and operated by the Scott County Conservation Board

## WAPSI HAPPENINGS

By: Director, Dave Murcia

### AmeriCorps NCCC Success

After six weeks of service, the Maple 5 Team has completed their service project here at the Center. The project included a variety of accomplishments: invasive species removal, trail restoration and enhancement, native plantings, prescribed prairie burns, painting of buildings, education programming, and real world experience. On behalf of the SCCB and Wapsi River staff, we thank the North Central AmeriCorps NCCC Region and Maple 5 Team for an outstanding effort in supporting our community and natural



resources. For more info, visit [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

“TRAIL WORK AT THE WAPSI!!!”

### Goodbye Leroy

As time passes, so do careers including our faithful and dedicated Caretaker of the past 8 years. On behalf of the SCCB and our Wapsi family, we wished Leroy Haeffner well this past November, on his next path as husband, grandfather, and steward. Leroy is a dedicated steward and many aspects of our Mission were supported by everyday efforts Leroy made. From recycling to habitat restoration, Leroy will be missed. *“There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot” A. Leopold.* Our friend Leroy is one who cannot!!!!



### Center Improvements

The Center has completed a variety of improvements this year for both **community and wildlife**. As this old boy scout site ages, we are looking into the future to improve all services to our community and includes the **completed well house** thanks to our own West Lake Park staff and committed local contractors. The **trail system** improved with 1 mile of clearing, 19 water bar erosion structures installed, and the **Woodland Trail** is re-opened after storm damage. Also completed is

the **native pollinator friendly plantings** found at the Eagle View Eco Center and within the prairie. About 200 milkweed plugs and 4 fruit trees were planted in support of our important pollinators including our very own bee hive! The prairie saw four units burned and about an acre of invasive species removed.

## Fall Events 2015

The **Ecology Day** theme was *"It's All About the Bugs"* and a total of 76 participants enjoyed making monarch truffles, hiking for insects, building their own bug hotels, and visiting unique insects thanks to Iowa State University's **Insect Zoo**.



The **Halloween "Zombie" Archery** shoot was a "hit" with 21 archers while the **Halloween Hike** was "spooktacular" for 24 brave hikers!

**Cocoa Picasso** has been popular with many full events. This newer program brings nature and art together by exploring the Wapsi Center grounds, while our **Natural Wreath** program shares the same love of nature in a different art form.

Lastly, our animal programs continue to connect people with nature including our **Birds of Prey** program.



Photo by James Varcho

*Thanks to all who supported our annual events including the Friends of the Wapsi Center!*

## New Specimen/Sponsor an Animal

We are delighted to introduce a new educational specimen- an **albino corn snake**! Thank you to fellow naturalist **Clay Steele** for the donation. Please stop in to learn more about this beautiful snake. If you are interested in sponsoring an animal, please contact us at 563-328-3286 for details or visit our website.

## Welcome Sean

Hello, my name is Sean Santiago and I am the new Caretaker at the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center. I graduated from Saint Ambrose University in 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. I played football for Saint Ambrose during the 2012 and 2013 seasons. I



was a defensive tackle and defensive end for the Bees during both seasons. I was a first team all-conference defensive player during the 2012 and 2013 season as well as team captain for the 2013 season. I enjoy hiking, shooting, and working out. I am excited to be working for Scott County Conservation and look forward to furthering my knowledge and understanding of our natural resources.

## Fall Field Trip Attendance

Approximately 2739 students, teachers, and parents participated in 13 field trips this fall. An **emphasis on supporting the Iowa Core and Next Generation Science Standards** will enhance future programming for school groups.

If you are an educator and would like to schedule a winter or spring field trip, we recommend that you call well in advance if possible. **To set up a field trip**, you may download a **Field Trip Planner** from our website: [http://www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi\\_education.php](http://www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/wapsi_education.php) and contact us at (563) 328-3286.

If you have visited the live animals, you may also see continued **improved habitat enclosures**, ensuring optimal animal care for our educational specimens. Thank you to our well trained and experienced naturalists.





# Winter Events

## FEBRUARY

**6<sup>th</sup> ~ 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Science Expo ~ 11:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M. ~ Bettendorf Middle School** ~ Join Wapsi River Center Director Dave Murcia, in supporting this year's Bettendorf Community School District's science expo with live bird of prey sessions! Come learn about these beautiful predators up close including owls and falcons.

**6<sup>th</sup> ~ Winter Fun Day ~ 10:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join us for a fun-filled day of winter activities. This is an event the whole family can enjoy, so plan to come out and discover winter at its best. A limited number of skis and snowshoes are available, so please call to reserve equipment; (563) 328-3286. BYOM ~ Bring your own mug.



**10:00 A.M. ~ Cross-country Ski Clinic** ~ Come learn the basics of cross-country skiing and tour the Wapsi Center trails; if conditions allow. Participants will learn about proper skiing techniques, safety and equipment. Participants may bring their own equipment.

**12:30 P.M. ~ Snowshoe Nature Hike** ~ Join Michael Granger on this excursion into the Wapsi River Center's woodlands. We will be traveling the way of the Native Americans and early pioneers, looking for signs of life in the still, winter woods.

**2:00 P.M. ~ Winter Bird Feeding** ~ Come learn how to identify winter birds; plus how to attract and feed our feathered friends. Fun for all ages!

**3:00 P.M. ~ BUG Hotels** ~ Join a Wapsi naturalist to learn how to attract insects to your yard by making a bug hotel. Please



call to reserve your kit today (563) 328-3286!

**4:30 P.M. ~ 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Chili Cook-off** ~ The Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc. will be hosting this annual competition. Please bring your best chili creation to share, and possibly win the coveted chili cup!!!

## JANUARY

**8<sup>th</sup> ~ 10<sup>th</sup> ~ Annual Quad City Bald Eagle Days ~ Quad Cities Expo Center** ~ The Quad Cities Conservation Alliance, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Army Corps of Engineers are sponsoring this huge event. This event features live birds of prey, and exotic animals from Niabi Zoo and the Pella Wildlife Company, a 20 foot climbing tower over 100 display booths, and of course, viewing of our national bird, the American bald eagle. The event is held at the QCCA Expo Center at 2621 4th Avenue, Rock Island, from 4:00-8:00 P.M. on Friday, 10:00 A.M.-8:00 P.M. on Saturday, and 10:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M. on Sunday. Come see us at the Wapsi River Center display. Please call (309) 788-5912 for more details.



**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Snowshoe Hike ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Naturalist/Director Dave Murcia to learn about snowshoeing and experience the fun of being outdoors. Please wear warm waterproof boots and call to register to reserve your snowshoes. This is a weather dependent program and will be cancelled if conditions do not allow. Please call (563) 328-3286.



**21<sup>st</sup> ~ Wapsi River Center Friends Meeting ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Conservation Board, Headquarters - West Lake Park (Gate #3)** ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563) 328-3286.

**30<sup>th</sup> ~ Cocoa Picasso ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Wapsi River Naturalist Emily Santiago for a lesson on the owls of Iowa. Participants will learn how to identify owls and then paint an owl on canvas! There is a \$5.00 fee per canvas. Please call to (563)328-3286 to reserve your spot today.

**13<sup>th</sup> ~ Hunter's Education Field Course ~ 8:00 A.M. - 11:30 A.M. ~ Scott County Park (Old Nature Center)** ~ Scott County Park Rangers will be teaching a Hunter Education Online Field Day at the Old Nature Center. The course is intended for those who are 11-17 years old and will include firearms safety, firearms handling, Iowa hunting laws, and a final exam. Students must successfully complete an Iowa approved online Hunter Education Course prior to registering and attending the field day. For more information on hunter education in Iowa, to register for the class, or to complete the online portion please visit [www.iowadnr.gov/huntered](http://www.iowadnr.gov/huntered). Please email [James.Graham@ScottCountyIowa.com](mailto:James.Graham@ScottCountyIowa.com) with any questions specific to this class, or call (563) 328-3282 for more info.

**13<sup>th</sup> ~ Great Backyard Bird Count ~ 10:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center**  
Please join assistant naturalist, Becky Horton, and learn about a global Citizen Science Project called the Great Backyard Bird Count. This annual event is hosted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society and occurs from February 12<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup>, 2016. During this program, you will learn how to get involved with this research project, the findings from last year's event, and how you can conduct your own backyard bird count at home on February 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Bird watchers of all ages can participate in this project to create a real-time snapshot of where birds are. Please call in advance to register at (563)328-3286.



**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Hunter's Education Field Course ~ 5:00 - 8:30 P.M. ~ Scott County Park (Old Nature Center)** ~ Scott County Park Rangers will be teaching a Hunter Education Online Field Day at the Old Nature Center. The course is intended for those who are 11-17 years old and will include firearms safety, firearms handling, Iowa hunting laws, and a final exam. Students must successfully complete an Iowa approved online Hunter Education Course prior to registering and attending the field day. For more information on hunter education in Iowa, to register for the class, or to complete the online portion please visit [www.iowadnr.gov/huntered](http://www.iowadnr.gov/huntered). Please email [James.Graham@ScottCountyIowa.com](mailto:James.Graham@ScottCountyIowa.com) with any questions specific to this class, or call (563) 328-3282 for more info.

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**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Cocoa Picasso ~ Animal Signs ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come join Wapsi River Center Naturalist, Emily Santiago for a lesson on animal signs in winter. Learn how to read tracks and find out who lives in your neck of the woods. Participants will paint their own outdoor wintery scene. There is a \$5.00 charge per canvas. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.



**27<sup>th</sup> ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come join a Wapsi River Center Naturalist to discuss the history of syruping, tree identification, and then make maple candy! Fun for the whole family. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.



## MARCH

**5<sup>th</sup> ~ Maple Syruping ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Once again, come join us for a lesson on syruping. Fun for the whole family. Please call to pre-register (563) 328-3286.

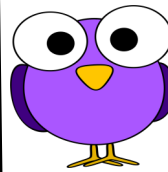
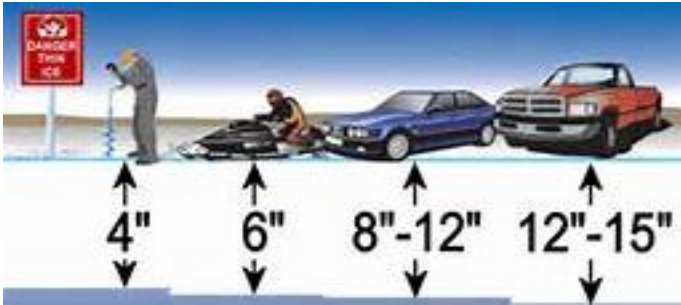
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**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Cocoa Picasso ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Goodbye Winter, Hello Spring!** ~ Come help us say farewell to winter and welcome spring at the last Cocoa Picasso of the season. Learn about the changing of the seasons through traditional Native American storytelling from a special guest, Mr. Larry Lockwood! Then, warm up with some hot cocoa and learn how to paint a themed picture on canvas in a guided step by step experience. Cost is \$5/painting. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register.



# REMEMBER ICE SAFETY FIRST!

FOLLOW THESE  
RECOMMENDED **IOWA DNR**  
ICE SAFETY GUIDELINES  
(for New Clear Ice ONLY!)



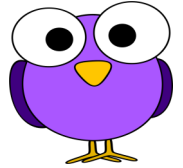
# THANKYOU!!!

**Melinda Tuley**  
(Master Conservationist)

**Mindy Williams**  
(Master Conservationist)  
**CAT SCALE COMPANY**  
(Linda & Kevin Cole)

**Morgan Roth**  
(WIU Mentee)

**Cally Bridge**  
(SCC Intern)



**Teske's Fish & Aquarium**  
**The Friends of the Wapsi Center Inc.**

# SAVE THE DATE:

On Friday, April 29th, there will be an **IOWATER Introductory Workshop, from 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. at the Wapsi River Center.** Do you want to *protect and improve* Iowa's water quality?

IOWATER is Iowa's citizen volunteer water monitoring program that trains citizens to conduct basic water chemical, physical and biological measurements. We provide you the equipment and tools you need to start understanding and protecting Iowa's valuable water resources. Intro Workshops are 8 hours in length and consist of some classroom time and outdoor, hands on learning. Upon completion of

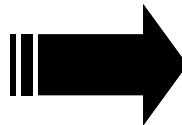
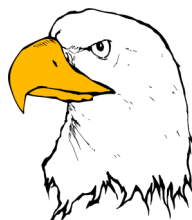
the workshop, you will be a certified **IOWATER Citizen Monitor**. You'll receive all the materials you need to monitor Iowa's streams, lakes, and ponds at the workshop. Space is limited, get certified now -- sign up for this IOWATER workshop by contacting Mary Skopec (IOWATER Coordinator) at [Mary.Skopec@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Mary.Skopec@dnr.iowa.gov) or (515) 725-3434 or the Wapsi Center at (563) 328-3286.



## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED !!!!

**2016 Bald Eagle Days — January  
8th, 9th, and 10th., 2106**

Call us to sign up to volunteer at the Wapsi River Center's booth at this year's "BALD EAGLE DAYS" at the Quad Cities' Expo Center. Please report for your shift early to become familiar with our booth and display. Please call (563) 328-3286 to find out what times are still available.



### VOLUNTEER SHIFTS

**Friday January 8th**

4:00—6:00 P.M.

6:00—8:00 P.M.

**Saturday, January 9th**

9:30—11:30 A.M.

11:30 A.M.—1:30 P.M.

3:30—5:30 P.M.

5:30—8:00 P.M.

**Sunday, January 10th**

9:30—11:30 A.M.

11:30 A.M.—1:30 P.M.

1:30—3:30 P.M.

3:30—5:00 P.M.

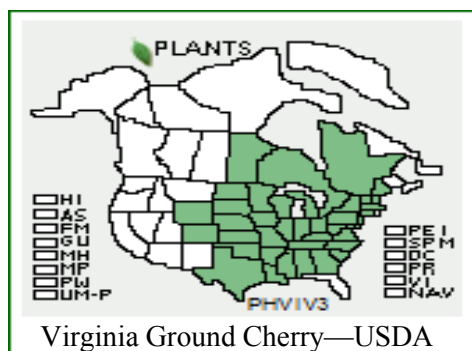


# PLANT PROFILE: VIRGINIA GROUND CHERRY

By Naturalist, Michael J. Granger

Let me introduce to you a plant that most people consider a weed, but has a hidden delicious surprise in the fall or winter, the Virginia Ground Cherry. The ground cherry belongs to a group of flowering plants of the family *Solanaceae*, more commonly known as the “nightshade family”. This plant group includes several plants which have economic significance, such as the tomato from *Lycopersicon*, plus the potato and eggplant, both of which are in the genus *Solanum*. Also included in the group is the genus *Capsicum*, which produces bell peppers and chili peppers.

There are several species of ground cherry normally differentiated by range maps. Many varieties are common in the southwest and one is prevalent throughout Texas. The species we have locally is known as Virginia



Ground Cherry, *Physalis virginiana*. They also have some other common names such as “husk tomato”, “winter tomato”, “hog plum”, or “cape Gooseberry”. I have found the plant growing in my garden and also in waste places. It is generally very common throughout its range but is considered an endangered species in New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The ground cherry is closely related to the tomatillo, *Physalis philadelphica*, which is a plant cultivated in Mexico and originally a native of Central America.

The ground cherry is a perennial plant which grows 1 to 2 foot tall. Stems are branched, angled and covered with stiff hairs. Leaves are spear shaped and up to 3 inches in length. Leaves can have an irregular toothed edge or be smooth. The leaves may be hairy or smooth.

The flowers of ground cherry typically hang downward like bells. They arise singly from the leaf axils and are about 1 inch long. The flower will be yellow in color, and each petal will have a dark green to purple–brown center. These spots sometimes merge into a ring. The calyx (below the petals) has 5 pointed lobes and is very hairy. One plant has a few to about a dozen flowers on branching stems.

Blooming occurs throughout the months of June–September and may be pollinated by bees, butterflies and other insects. After pollination, the flower’s yellow petals fall away and the fruit begins to form. The ground cherry fruit is enveloped in a husk formed from the calyx. The husk will soon begin to dry out as the fruit ripens. Many people liken the papery shell to a “Chinese lantern”. The cherry itself ripens from a dark green to a yellow or even orange coloration. Eventually the fruit with its papery shell will fall off, hence the name “Ground Cherry”.



Virginia Ground Cherry

The ground cherry fruit is much sought after. They are about the size of small marbles and have a sweet yet tangy taste. One reference describes their taste as a combination of tangy pineapple and sweet cherry. Once you have tried one you will be wanting more. Surely our local Native American Indians harvested ground cherries in the fall. A friend told me that the Amish frequently make jams, jellies and spreads from the ground cherry, and sell their product as well.

Ground cherries may be harvested and allowed to ripen in their husks, in a cool dark place. Be sure to remember that the ground cherries should only be eaten when the berry turns a golden yellow. Another word of caution when you are foraging for wild edibles is to be sure you are able to positively identify the wild edible that you are harvesting. For example, Ground cherries will have a husk around the berry, while Carolina Horse nettle, *Solanum carolinense* L., also have yellow berries with no husk and are considered very poisonous.

Ground Cherry is a plant which grows in a variety of places. They do well in poor soils and are easy to grow as a potted plant. I have learned that it is a delicious treat in the fall and into winter. I hope to save some seeds and plant some in pots next year. Happy foraging!



# ANIMAL PROFILE: THE DEER MOUSE

By Naturalist, Emily Santiago



The Deer Mouse

As winter gets closer and food becomes scarce, you might find that some unwelcomed visitors have found their way into your home. I'm not talking about Aunt Edna bearing her infamous holiday

fruitcake. I'm talking about the white footed mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*) and deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*). These furry little creatures are found throughout most of North America and are the two most common species of the 15 native mouse species in the United States. All *Peromyscus* species are known collectively as "deer mice" and have white feet, white undersides (with few exceptions), and brownish bodies. Their two-toned tails are quite long, and are sometimes as long as the whole body. Even experts have a hard time correctly identifying all of the species.

White footed mice and deer mice have much larger eyes and ears than a house mouse, and are considered "cute" by many people, that is, until they themselves find an infestation in their homes. The deer mouse prefers grasslands, field edges and fencerows, but it can adapt to thrive in nearly every habitat within its range. This has helped it to acquire the title of most widely distributed and abundant mammal in North America. The white footed mouse prefers brushy or wooded areas, but is sometimes found out in the open. White footed mice spend a lot of time in trees. Other *Peromyscus* species have more specialized habitat preferences. They are nocturnal most of the time.

White footed and deer mice are omnivorous, feeding on seeds, nuts, acorns, fruits, insects, fungi, and green vegetation. Their home range can be up to 4 acres or more. They store caches of food near their nest in autumn when food is abundant. Family groups nest together through the winter, with several individuals "snuggling" together to survive the cold. Nests are made of stems, twigs, leaves, grass roots and other fibrous materials. They'll line it with fur, feathers, or shredded cloth. They usually make their nests underground among tree roots,

under shrubs, or sometimes in a hollow log. Nesting often occurs on our prairie within our bluebird houses, which provides a refuge from predators from on the ground

and ones from above. Mated pairs usually stay together during breeding season, which is spring through fall with a summer lull. If both survive winter, they might take new mates in spring.

Both species are great at locating and digging up buried seed in the western portions of their ranges. This sometimes leads to failure of reforestation efforts where direct seeding methods were used. It is because of this that is often necessary to hand plant seedlings of Douglas Fir and other timber species despite the additional cost.

While many people consider rodents as pests, they are a very important part of the food chain. Countless numbers of predators rely on these creatures throughout the year, including snakes, fox, coyote, weasels and mink. Nocturnal and diurnal birds of prey often survive harsh times solely on mice. If an abundance of these rodents occurs there will likewise be an abundance of predator species the following year. These mice also consume large quantities of weed seeds and insects making them indirectly beneficial to farmers, but are also very fond of stored grain and mature crops, making them not so desirable.

Excluding these mice from your home requires the same measures used for any other mouse. In dwellings used only occasionally, remove drawers and reinsert upside down and remove padded cushions and store them on edge. Do NOT use poison, as this method does not kill the mice immediately and they can wander outdoors. Birds of prey will eat a weakened mouse and the poison can in turn severely injure or even kill the bird. Snap traps are often the best way to deter mice from your dwelling. Deer mice can carry disease so thoroughly disinfect any surface previously used by mice.

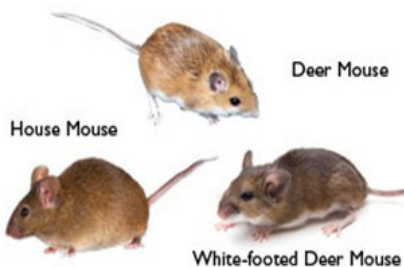
In conclusion, while these furry animals often go unnoticed in their natural environment, and could be considered a nuisance for humans, they are an important part of our local ecosystems, and help to keep nature in balance.



DEER MOUSE



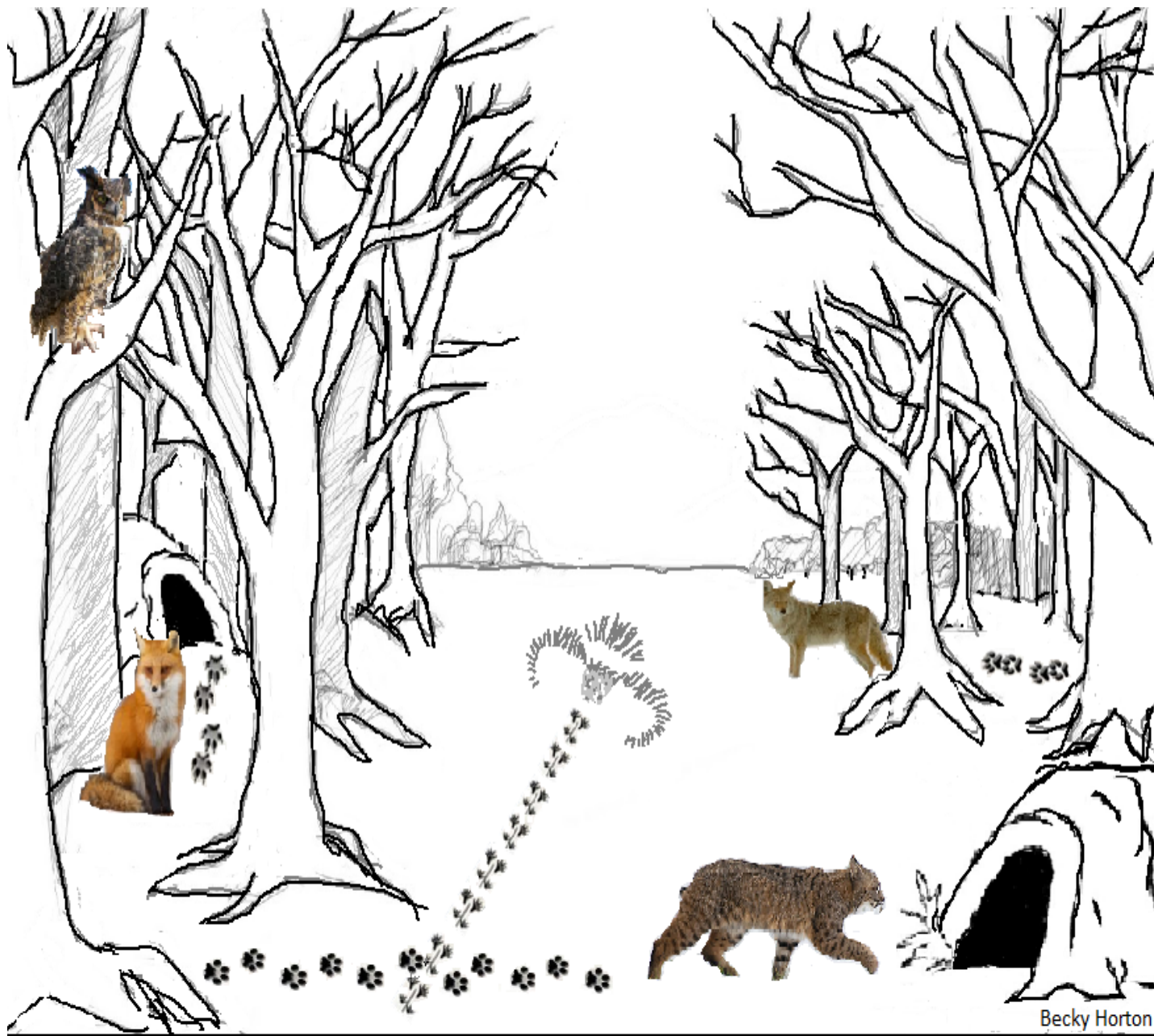
WHITE FOOTED MOUSE



Wild Mammals of Missouri © 1959

# KIDS KORNER

Mystery of the Missing Mouse! Follow the animal tracks in the snow to solve the mystery of the missing mouse. What happened to the mouse?



Becky Horton



Bobcat



Great Horned Owl



Coyote



Red Fox



Deer Mouse



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**Tel: (563) 328-3286**  
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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

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*For All Seasons*

“The W.R.E.N.” is published quarterly by the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center and the Scott County Conservation Board.”

**Mailing List:** To receive a copy of the WREN free of charge, please send a postcard to the address above.

### **Scott County Conservation Board**

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John “Skip” O’Donnell      Beth McAleer  
Carol Fennelly

Director:

Roger Kean

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Wapsi River Environmental Education Center

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Scott County Conservation Board

(563) 328-3280

### **Wapsi River Environmental Education Center Staff**

Scott County:

Dave Murcia, Director/Naturalist  
Mike Granger, Naturalist  
Emily Warren, Naturalist  
Becky Horton, Seasonal Assistant Naturalist  
Kyle Moeller, Seasonal Assistant Naturalist  
Sean Santiago, Resident Caretaker

The Scott County Conservation Board in the provision of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes they have been subject to discrimination, they may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Scott County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240.