

# The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

SUMMER 2020

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

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



[www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation](https://www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation)

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

## Wapsi Happenings

By: Director, Dave Murcia

### Spring Events 2020

The spring has brought a new season of awareness, an opportunity to ground ourselves in nature, and calls for a reconnection of our lives. Nature does not close, and with it, our public programs included: **Channel Cat Raptor Talks, Kayak Experiences, Pollinator and Bat House Workshops**, and a variety of educational videos. We have resumed public programming with guidelines observed, please visit: [www.scottcountyiowa.gov/conservation/calendar](http://www.scottcountyiowa.gov/conservation/calendar) and [www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation/](https://www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation/) for info.

We have presented public programs in June only, since the state restricted gatherings back in March. All school experiences including Pre-K, elementary, middle, and high school were cancelled. As nature adapts, so did our education staff, and we have produced educational videos as a relevant and continued service for our community. Please visit our website at : [www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation/](https://www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation/) for educational posts including videos.



Exploring the pollinator garden

### Annual Friends Meeting

Our annual meeting recognized outstanding volunteer efforts in support of our education program. Through their skills, knowledge, and abilities, members bring valuable time to the Center and the wide variety of programs they support. A total of **532.75 hours** were volunteered by all, including **424 hours** by the *Friends of the Wapsi Center* for a gracious value of **\$13,547.83** of support! The following *members* specifically recognized were: Joy Sheeley (Secretary) as **Volunteer of the Year**, Norm Nichols (President) most **hours hosting** Eco Center, Carol Rogers (V. President) **most meetings attended**, and Lucia Dryanski for **outstanding program and event support**. On behalf of the Wapsi River Center Director and staff, the Scott County Conservation Board, and Scott County, we are grateful and appreciate your continued support! **Go Team Wapsi!**

### Wapsi Recognized

Naturalists Becky Baugh, Paige Owings, AmeriCorps Iowa 4H Member Faith Henrichs, and Director Dave Murcia were recognized by the *Iowa Association of Naturalists* (IAN) for continued professional development (PD). The IAN PD Program requires 20 hours of annual development including: **Knowledge of natural and cultural history and recreation, Program development & educational skills, Communication Skills, Administrative Skills, and Other certification/training.**

The Center has also been awarded a **Monarch Watch** (<https://monarchwatch.org/>) milkweed grant in support of Monarch and pollinator health and

habitat. As a **Monarch Waystation**, our site supports native habitats in an effort to raise awareness, educate, and provide for an increased population of Monarchs.

## Improvements at the Center

The Wapsi River Center continues planning and renovations of the old Owl's Nest Dorm. The multi-phase project is taking shape with exterior and interior changes and improvements. The maintenance free metal roof and siding, **Energy Star** rated windows, along with natural limestone walls, are just a few upgrades you can see already.

Through our partnership with the **Monarch Research Project/MRP** (<https://monarchresearch.org/>), the Center has added an additional **BioTent™** as a **Monarch Zone** site, in support of Monarch butterfly health



**BioTent™** on prairie



and populations. Through our education program including citizen science events, we focus on restoring and maintaining native pollinator habitats benefiting Monarchs. Please visit the MRP for information on supporting the endemic Monarch butterfly, and visit our **Annual Monarch Festival** in September!

## Life Rank Candidate Service

The Wapsi River Center has been chosen once again by a Life Rank candidate of Troop 203, out of Long Grove, IA for a service project. Henry Rieck is completing 6th grade at Ed

White in Eldridge and has been involved in Scouts since 1st grade. He's currently working toward his Life Rank with Troop 203 out of Long Grove, IA (Scoutmaster: Sam Miller). To attain this rank, he must log six hours of service and at least three must be conservation

related. He felt that building a Kestrel box would be a good way to provide them with a place to nest and increase their numbers. In his free time, Henry enjoys biking, baseball, video games, and scouts. On behalf of the Wapsi River Center staff and the Scott County Conservation Board, we thank Henry and the support of Troop 203.



**Henry and the new Kestrel Box**

# THANK YOU!

**Friends of the Wapsi Center  
PSCW**

**Lisa Davis**

**Linda Puls**

**Hedy Hustede**

**Victoria Graves**

**Norm & Cathy Nichols**

**Susan McPeters**

**Patty & Stacy Thomas**

**Monarch Watch**

**Life Rank  
Candidate**

**Henry Rieck  
Troop 203**

**Mitch Tollerud,  
Scott Co. IT**

**Monarch Research Project**

**Amber Whittington, Andalusia  
Elementary School**

**Churches of Mercer County, IL  
Food Pantry**



# SUMMER EVENTS

## JULY

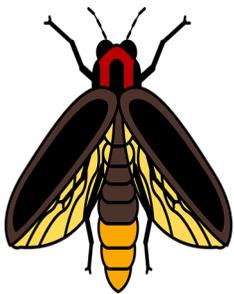
**1<sup>st</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park, (Pride Lake)** ~ Join the Wapsi River Center staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions. Weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register. Seats are limited (563)328-3286.



**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Holiday ~ All county offices will be closed in observance of the holiday.**

**8<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park** ~ The Scott County Conservation Board meets monthly at the West Lake Park Headquarters office (Gate 3) 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. Please call if interested in attending (563)328-3280.

**10<sup>th</sup> ~ Firefly Magic ~ 8:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center (Menke Observatory)** ~ Come join AmeriCorps Iowa 4-H member, Faith Henrichs on a night of exploration into the magical world of fireflies.



Learn about some of Iowa's most unique bioluminescent insects that can be found right in your very own backyard! Participants will then make their own insect observation container then go on a firefly catching adventure to see what fireflies live here! Participants are encouraged to bring their own lawn chairs or blanket to sit on, bug spray and an upcycled glass jar with a lid. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563)328-3286 to register for this event.

**11<sup>th</sup> ~ Health and Home ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come join Wapsi River Center staff and AmeriCorps Iowa 4-H Environmental Educator, and learn to become more sustainable by creating your own health and home products made with natural

ingredients. Creating your own home and health care products is cost effective, customizable, and a more sustainable solution to buying products with harsh chemicals...plus it is fun! We will focus on creating some Spring Cleaning-type items (hand sanitizer, dusting spray, multi-purpose cleaner, and soap bars). Please provide your own containers to take the products home. You will need: 2 spray bottles \* (glass is best, 8-16 ounces), a reusable squeeze bottle for the hand sanitizer (ex: travel shampoo bottle or empty pocket hand sanitizer), and a small container to transport the soap home. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563)328-3286 to register for this program.



(\*If you want to repurpose a glass jar into a spray bottle, visit this website for instructions: <https://crunchybetty.com/how-to-turn-a-glass-jar-into-an-eco-friendly-spray-bottle/>).

**11<sup>th</sup> ~ Summer Wild Edible Workshop - 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Naturalist Becky to learn about the many wild edibles in your own neck of the woods.



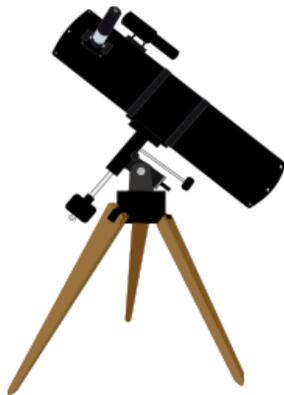
We will focus on foraging basics, foraging safety, identifying plants, and preparing wild edibles. We will then take a hike outdoors to identify some of the summer wild edibles available during this time. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register for this program.

**15<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Lost Grove Lake, ramp at 250<sup>th</sup> Street & 230<sup>th</sup> Avenue** ~ Join the Wapsi River Center staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Lost Grove Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions. Weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register. Seats are limited (563)328-3286.

**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center & Virtually** ~ Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563)328-3286.

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Menke Observatory (Wapsi River Center) ~**

Beginning at sunset, St. Ambrose University will offer to the public a night of stargazing. This event is free of charge. For more information, contact Robert Mitchell at [MitchellRobertC@sau.edu](mailto:MitchellRobertC@sau.edu) or (563)333-6141. This event may be held virtually through WebEx at AmbroseAstro Facebook page. On the day of the event, the same number may be called for a recorded message that will either confirm the event or report a cancellation.



**25<sup>th</sup> ~ Terrarium Workshop ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~**

Join naturalist Michael J. Granger for a lesson on terrariums. Learn how to create a miniature garden under glass. Participants are asked to bring a large glass or plastic container with lid. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563)328-3286 to register for this event.



**29<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park, (Pride Lake) ~** Join the Wapsi River Center staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions. Weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register. Seats are limited (563)328-3286.

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**AUGUST**

**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Lost Grove Lake, ramp at 250<sup>th</sup> Street & 230<sup>th</sup> Avenue ~** Join the Wapsi River Center staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Lost Grove Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions, weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register. Seats are limited (563)328-3286.



**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park ~** The Scott County Conservation Board meets monthly at the West Lake Park Headquarters office (Gate 3) 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. Please call if interested in attending (563)328-3280.

**15<sup>th</sup> ~ Health and Home ~ 10:30 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~ Health and Home 10:30 A.M. ~** Come join Wapsi River Center staff and AmeriCorps Iowa 4-H Environmental Educator, and learn to become more sustainable by creating your own health and home products made with natural ingredients. Creating your own home and health care products is cost effective, customizable, and a more sustainable solution to buying products with harsh chemicals...plus it is fun! This program will be summer-themed. We will create roll-on insect repellent, a citronella candle, dandelion lotion bars, and citrus-infused cleaning vinegar. This program costs \$15/person. The fee covers ingredients for all products. Please provide the following to transport products home: a glass jar with a lid (any size) , a recycled soup can (any size), and a small reusable container to bring the lotion home. Optional: bring your favorite fresh citrus or herbs. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register for this event.



**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center & Virtually ~** Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563)328-3286.

**22<sup>nd</sup> ~ Archery Basics ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** - Learn how to use a bow and arrow in this informative and fun hands-on class. You will learn safety and proper archery techniques according to National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) guidelines. Children must be in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and above and accompanied by an adult to participate. Adults are welcome to participate as well! This program is free and weather permitting. Park in Parking Lot A and meet at the observatory. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563) 328-3286 to register for this event.



**22<sup>nd</sup> ~ 360 Trail Project: Summer Edition ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Iowa 4-H AmeriCorps member for a *free* day of hiking and orienteering! Participants will learn how to read and use a map and compass, then take to the trails and capture 360° photos to show off what the Wapsi River Center trails have to offer in the summer! This event is family friendly. Please bring a reusable water bottle and dress for the weather. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563)328-3286 to register for this event.



**26<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park, (Pride Lake)** ~ Join the Wapsi River Center staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions. Weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register. Seats are limited (563)328-3286.

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**29<sup>th</sup> ~ Fishing 101 ~ 10:00 A.M. to Noon ~ Pride Lake (Scott County Park)** ~ Join Naturalist Mike Granger for a lesson on fishing basics. Learn how to tie on a hook and bobber, put a worm on a hook and cast. We will provide the fishing poles and bait! Registration is limited and required. Participants over 16 years of age must have a valid Iowa fishing license. Please call (563)328-3286 to register for this event.



**29<sup>th</sup> ~ Menke Open House ~ Dusk ~ Menke Observatory (Wapsi River Center)** ~ Beginning at sunset, **St. Ambrose University** will offer to the public a night of stargazing. This event is free of charge. For more information, contact Robert Mitchell at



[MitchellRobertC@sau.edu](mailto:MitchellRobertC@sau.edu) or (563)333-6141. This event may be held virtually through WebEx at AmbroseAstro Facebook page. On the day of the event, the same number may be called for a recorded message that will either confirm the event or report a cancellation.

## SEPTEMBER

**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Holiday ~ All county offices are closed in observance of the holiday.**

**6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> ~ Pioneer Village Labor Day Weekend Festival ~ 11:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. (Daily) ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village** ~ Come celebrate the Labor Day weekend at Pioneer Village. Event features blacksmithing, spinning, weaving, music, kid's games & crafts, food & ice cream for sale, and Wild West shoot-outs. Family fun for all ages! (\$2.00 adults, \$1.00 children, under 5 free). For more information please call (563)328-3283.



**9<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park, (Pride Lake)** ~ Join the Wapsi River Center staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations.

Reminder- this program is determined by weather and site conditions. Weight capacity loads for kayaks are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem. Dress appropriately, bring water, and call to register. Seats are limited (563)328-3286.

**9<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park ~** The Scott County Conservation Board meets monthly at the West Lake Park Headquarters office (Gate 3) 14910 110th Ave, Davenport, Iowa 52804. Please call if interested in attending (563)328-3280.

**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Second Annual Monarch Festival ~ 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Join the Wapsi River Center staff as we celebrate Monarch Butterflies during this day long festival. During the day, we will have family friendly activities such as butterfly crafts, a photo booth, and education stations. There will be a monarch presentation at 10:30 A.M., a prairie hike and butterfly catching at 12:00 P.M., and Monarch tagging and testing at 1:45 P.M.

Refreshments will be available during the day. This event is FREE and fun for the entire family, but registration is required. Please call (563)328-3286 to register your family today!



**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Menke Open House ~ Menke Observatory (Wapsi River Center) ~** Beginning at sunset, St. Ambrose University will offer to the public a night of stargazing. This event is free of charge. For more information, contact Robert Mitchell at [MitchellRobertC@sau.edu](mailto:MitchellRobertC@sau.edu) or (563)333-6141. This event may be held virtually through WebEx at AmbroseAstro Facebook page. On the day of the event, the same number may be called for a recorded message that will either confirm the event or report a cancellation.

**17<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Meeting ~ 6:30 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center & Virtually ~** Come learn about the current happenings at the Wapsi River Center. Please call if you are interested in attending (563)328-3286.

**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Cattail Duck Decoy Workshop ~ 10:00 to Noon ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Come learn some

cattail biology and then create a decorative Native American duck decoy out of cattails. Please call to pre-register for this adult - oriented workshop. There is a workshop fee of \$5 per decoy, and space is limited to 10. Please sign up for this adult workshop by calling (563)328-3286.



**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Grounded in Nature ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center ~** Get ready to unwind during the Electronics-free Grounded in Nature program. Connecting with nature and disconnecting with electronics can enhance your well-being and relax your mind and body. This program will focus on helping you connect with yourself and with nature through mindfulness, forest bathing/ hiking, and yoga. We will be active during this program so please dress comfortably and bring your own yoga mat or blanket and water bottle. This program is open to ages 15 above that need a chance to unwind. Registration is limited and required. Please call (563)328-3286 to register for this event.

**26<sup>th</sup> ~ World Rivers Day Float ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Syracuse Wildlife Area Boat Access to Sherman Park ~** Join the Wapsi River team and explore the Wapsipinicon River by kayak, to celebrate and honor our sacred waters. Participants must be 16 years of age and accompanied by an adult. We will meet/launch at Syracuse Landing, and please consider bringing the following items: sunscreen, insect repellent, comfortable clothes, sturdy shoes, water bottle, waterproof container with snacks/lunch. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with IADNR regulations. Kayaks, paddles, and PFDs are limited so call to register a seat at (563)328-3286. **Reminder: this program is determined by weather and site conditions. Weight capacity loads are 250-300 lbs./solo and 425-475 lbs./tandem, participants are responsible for transportation between launch and take-out sites.**

**SAVE THE DATE:  
WAPSI RIVER CENTER'S  
FALL ECOLOGY DAY  
Saturday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020**

# SECOND ANNUAL MONARCH FESTIVAL

Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020 ~ Wapsi River Center ~ 10:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Join us for an exciting event in celebration of the Monarch Butterfly. This free family oriented event has a variety of activities happening throughout the day including butterfly crafts, a photo booth, and educational stations. Please call (563)328-3286 to reserve your family today!

**(REFRESHMENTS WILL BE AVAILABLE DURING THE DAY)**

**10:30 A.M. – 11:30 A.M. ~ MONARCH BUTTERFLY PRESENTATION** ~ Learn about the natural history and the life cycle of the Monarch Butterfly and how you can get involved with programs to help out the Monarch Butterfly!



**12:00 P.M. – 1:30 P.M. ~ PRAIRIE HIKE & BUTTERFLY CATCHING** ~ Join a naturalist for a hike to the prairie to identify butterflies, look at milkweed and catch monarchs.

**1:45 P.M. – 3:00 P.M. ~ MONARCH TAGGING & TESTING** ~ Learn how to participate in Monarch Watch and Project Monarch Health by tagging and testing monarchs that we collect on the prairie.

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**“BECOME A WAPSI RIVER CENTER FRIENDS MEMBER TODAY!”**

[www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/Wapsi-friends](http://www.scottcountyiowa.com/conservation/Wapsi-friends)

 [www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTheWapsiCenter](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTheWapsiCenter)



The Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc. organized in 1993, is a citizens' support group dedicated to encouraging the public use and enjoyment of the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center and to the preservation of the Center's natural resources for present and future generations. Please contact the Wapsi River Center for more information (563) 328-3286.

**YES I WOULD LIKE TO BE A FRIENDS MEMBER:**

Enclosed is my contribution to the Friends of the Wapsi Center.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 newsletter  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ \$20.00 contributing member  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ \$30.00 supporting member  
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE SEND MEMBERSHIP FORM TO:**

~~~Friends of the Wapsi “Treasurer”~~~

31555 52nd AVENUE, DIXON, IOWA 52745

Contributions to the Friends are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

# ANIMAL PROFILE: COMMON EASTERN FIREFLY

By AmeriCorps 4-H Naturalist, Faith Henrichs

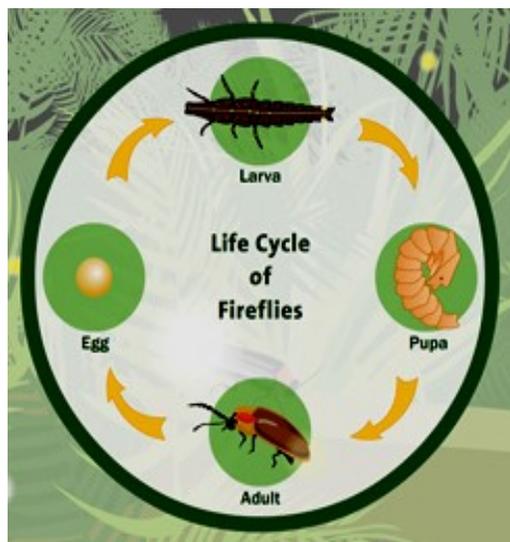
As a child, I spent many early summer evenings running around the yard with my trusty bug net catching little, flashing insects to place them in a jar for a magical night light. I am sure many of you have had a similar experience as I did as a child. These small insects are most commonly known as fireflies, although some may refer to them as lightning bugs or glow worms.



Common Eastern Firefly; Google images

Whatever you choose to call them, fireflies are not actually flies but are in fact a soft-bodied beetle. The most abundant firefly in Iowa is the common eastern firefly, *Photinus pyralis*. The common eastern fireflies have a 4-stage lifecycle: egg, larva, pupa and adult. Females lay their eggs in moist places such as leaf litter, under mulch or in tall grasses. Moisture is critical for fireflies, whether it's a permanent source or more temporary. While in the larvae stage, they are voracious predators of soft-bodied invertebrates like snails and slugs so they are great to have around the garden!

After overwintering, the firefly larva completes its final stage of metamorphosis into the adult. The adult common eastern firefly is one half to three-quarters of an inch long. They have a reddish thorax outlined in yellow with two orange spots meeting the abdomen. The adult common eastern



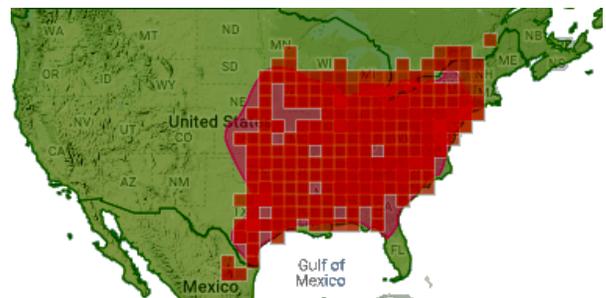
Firefly Life Cycle; Google Images

firefly also has two sets of wings. Only the males are able to fly while the females typically have a smaller set of wings making them unable to fly. The last segment of the abdomen is the section that lights up using a process called

bioluminescence! They do this by using special light-emitting organs. This chemical process is very efficient and gives off about 100% of the energy produced as light without producing any heat! This special adaptation was developed over time to warn predators that they are toxic and distasteful, but are now used as courtship for mating.

Starting around the 1960's scientist discovered that fireflies have an enzyme called luciferase, which is what gives off the glowing light from the fireflies' abdomen. They found that this enzyme could detect bacteria in supposedly sterile environments by lighting up living things present and then found luciferase could be used for a wide variety of medical research such as cancer and heart disease. In order for scientist to get their hands on mass luciferase was by catching a bunch of fireflies. The Sigma Firefly Scientist Club put out ads all across the Midwest asking kids to catch lightning bugs in exchange for cash, adventure park tickets, bicycles and other prizes. The average payout was 50 cents for every 100 fireflies. Tufts University estimates that nearly 100 million fireflies were taken from the environment during Sigma Firefighters Scientists Club tenure.

Now, scientific studies of local firefly populations are indicating that their numbers are declining. The firefly species face many challenges such as habitat loss, light pollution, pesticide exposure, invasive species and climate change. You can help these magical insects thrive in your own yard by using outdoor motion sensor lights, avoid pesticide usage, leave leaf litter for larva and plant native grasses and shrubs of various heights. If you are interested in learning more about other firefly species that live here in Iowa and more on what you can do to help them, come join us for our Firefly Magic program on July 10<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 PM. Space is limited so you must call to register.



Common FireFly Range Map; iNaturalist

# PLANT PROFILE: COW PARSNIP

By Naturalist Michael Granger

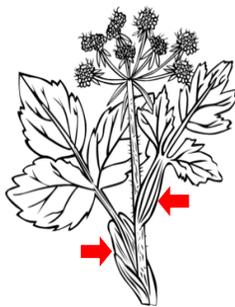
Recently while driving in the country I came across a stunning plant in a road ditch along a gravel road. It had large white flower growing in clusters known in the plant world as umbels. The plant stood about four to five feet tall. What was interesting about it was the large size of the flower heads which were as big as dinner plates. Of course I had to take a closer look!



The plant is cow parsnip, **Cow Parsnip; Michael Granger**

*Heracleum maximum*. The scientific name *Heracleum maximum* refers to the overall large size of this plant. Cow parsnip has large umbel flowers which are characteristic of the parsley or carrot family, *apiaceae* (also known as *umbelliferaea*.) Multiple blossoms cluster radiate from the same point on the plant's main stalk, resembling an umbrella. You may know of some other common garden members of this plant family especially carrots and dill. Many other aromatic plants also belong the to the family which may be found in a spice cabinet, such as anise, chervil, caraway, fennel, and parsley.

Cow parsnip is easy to identify because of the enormous white flower heads. The flower umbels grow up to eight to ten inches across! Cow parsnip grows rapidly and may reach up to seven feet tall. The leaves are also enormous, one to two feet long, and are wrapped with a veil or sheath (see picture).



Many of you may know that some members of the parsley family are toxic, so certain care must be taken to avoid contact with them. Wild parsnip is well known for its phototoxic oils, which may cause severe burns when the plant's oils react with sunlight. Cow parsnip is said to be phototoxic as well. Care must be taken around the plant, not to come into contact with the plant's sap and then being exposed to sunlight.

Cow parsnip is found throughout the United States, Canada, and is particularly common in Alaska. The plant is said to be eaten by wildlife, including grizzly and black bears. It can be a valuable plant for livestock including cows, sheep and goats. The large white umbel flowers provide nectar for many pollinators including bees, flies and butterflies.

Native American Indians had many uses for the plant. Young stems and leafstalks were peeled and usually eaten raw. In terms of taste, texture, and nutrients, the peeled stalks resembled celery, which gave rise to the common name "Indian celery". Special care need to be taken with this plant because of its toxicity. The native people knew that to eat the stems, the outer skin needed to be peeled. Native Americans also made a poultice from the plant which was applied to bruises or sores. The enormous flowers were also used to make a concoction that was said to repel mosquitos or flies. Finally the dried stems could be used for drinking straws, or to make flutes for children.

One final discussion must be addressed. I have talked with some naturalists who regularly make a meal of cow parsnip stems, young leaves, and flowers. Knowing the plants toxicity, I would not recommend consuming the plant by the general public. The other caution is a similar plant known as giant hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, which is considerably more dangerous as a skin irritant, and grows seven to fourteen feet in height. Its umbels are domed and measure up to thirty inches in diameter. It also has reddish purple markings and white hair clusters around the plants leaf nodes. Its leaves are larger and more lacy. Identification of the plant should be left to the experts. Giant hogweed originated from Europe and was brought to the North America in the early twentieth century to plant in arboreta and Victorian style gardens. It is now federally listed as a noxious weed in many states in the U.S. Often it is eradicated in areas where contact with humans is likely.



**GIANT HOGWEED:**  
Google images

So next time if you see a large umbel white flower take a closer look, See if it has veiled leaves and look for its large flower heads, but beware about coming into contact with the plant's oils on a sunny day. . . . it just might be cow parsnip!

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