

# The W.R.E.N.

Wapsi River Environmental News

SPRING 2021

Scott County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Newsletter

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

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

## Wapsi Happenings

By: Director, Dave Murcia

### 2020 Outstanding EE Program

The Wapsi River Environmental Education Center was awarded the **2020 Outstanding Environmental Education Program** by our *Iowa Association of Naturalists* (IAN- <https://www.iowanaturalists.org/>) and the *Iowa Conservation Education Council* (ICEC- <https://iowaee.org/>). I am grateful for, and thank Mike, Becky, Paige, Faith, and Brandi.

“This joint committee with the *Iowa Conservation Education Council* serves to recognize and award outstanding

achievement in conservation and environmental education. The Awards Programs serves many functions. It recognizes those efforts to promote conservation and environmental education, rewards those involved, and publicizes and expands awareness of the excellent programs happening across the state. “ - IAN



**ICEC**  
IOWA CONSERVATION  
EDUCATION COALITION



*interest me. The relation of people to each other, and the relation of people to land.” - Aldo Leopold.*

In these times, our natural areas, parks, and wild places, have become a retreat, to reconnect, ground ourselves, and keep well. Scott County Conservation Board parks, including the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center, are such places.

Our SCCB Mission: *To improve the quality of life and promote and preserve the health, welfare, and enjoyment for the citizens of Scott County and the general public by acquiring, developing, operating, and preserving the historical, educational, environmental, recreational and natural resources of the county.*

The goals of the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center provides multiple uses, with an emphasis on resource protection and environmental education. Specific goals include: protection of existing natural resources, a comprehensive environmental education program, providing limited outdoor recreation, providing public access to the Wapsipinicon River, managing the area to provide diverse wildlife habitat, and development of a Wapsipinicon River Greenbelt. During the challenging past year, our Wapsi River Center Naturalists and programs have focused on offering, supporting, and maintaining healthy lifestyles while incorporating nature.

Over the course of this season’s stormy path, the



To all our fellow Iowa Naturalists, environmental educators, guides, park rangers, and interpreters, you all are deserved. “There are two things that

staff including Naturalist/Director, two Naturalists, Assistant Seasonal Naturalist, and Iowa 4H AmeriCorps Environmental Educator Member, weathered the dark, and produced results by bringing place-based, essential community experiences, shining the brighter path onto our sacred earth. Despite the winds of fear, Wapsi River staff presented 63 educational videos, approximately 297 programs, on 86 days, for 5383 brave adventurers who chose health and lifestyle through nature. All levels of public and school were represented including college and homeschools!

Presentations reflecting more sustainable and healthy lifestyles included: **Leave No Trace Awareness**, **Natural Health and Home** (focuses on home-made products from non-toxic, natural ingredients and upcycling), **Wild Edibles**, **Fishing 101**, **Basic Archery**, **Grounded in Nature** (connecting to nature through mindfulness, forest bathing, hiking, and yoga), **Kayaking Experiences** including *World Rivers Day*, Nest Box and **Pollinator workshops**, Candle Making, Grapevine Baskets, and *International Mud Day*.

Despite the season's "pandemic" and derecho, bright highlights included: new partnership with *The Center of Outdoor Ethics* and *Leave No Trace*, as a **Community Partner**, *rails-to-trails Conservancy* partnership, *Get Outside* program partnership with the Scott County Library system, partnership with the **Quad Cities Women's Outdoor Club**, partnership with new **Hagen Homeschoolers**, conducting the Partners of Scott County Watersheds Fall Water Quality Snapshot survey, partnering with Nahant Marsh to bring professional development to Eastern Iowa IAN, two prescribed prairie fires, full educational animal collection and husbandry of reptiles, amphibians, and birds of prey. All this, during a multimillion dollar renovation of a new education facility with only one Resident Caretaker to maintain all 225 acres and facilities!

*"The time has come for science to busy itself with the earth itself."* Aldo Leopold. *Keep well, stay wild.* - Dave Murcia

### Freedom in the Commons....

"The path to an ecological civilization is paved by reclaiming the commons - our common home, the Earth, and the commons of the Earth family, of which we are a part. Through reclaiming the commons, we can imagine possibility for our common future, and we can sow the seeds of abundance through "commoning." - Vandana Shiva, *the Defender*

As I have stated in previous *WRENs*, our natural world and the innate, intrinsic values of nature, are not only free, grounding, and healthy, but "common" to our

Earth family. Our natural world by its true nature, offers us the essential commons of air, water, and food. In these times, we must not only uphold our constitutional rights, but honor these ecological limits and our common responsibilities to both. Our education programs offer insight, connection, and experiences, to not only support balance, but better sustain our "commons".

"She is a patient mother, but she can not hold onto us much longer if we continue to thrash in her arms. Stop struggling mankind, rest for a moment and realize you are nurtured by your nature." - **Zach Bush, MD**

In the latest **NRPA Park Pulse** survey, six in every seven U.S. adults support local parks and recreation agencies and their initiatives. The top three initiatives include: wildlife conservation, **environmental education**, and natural resource management. Our parks, natural areas, and environmental education programs not only provide for the freedom of healthy lifestyles, but for the reclamation of OUR ecological commons.

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free." Foreword, *A Sand County Almanac*.

### Winter Programs

Wapsi staff challenged program explorers this season with a variety of opportunities to gain skills in the freedom of nature. Programs included: snow shoeing, wild edible foraging, maple syruping, and nature grounding, while also using nature in art during *Cocoa Picasso*.



Photo: Snowshoeing at the Wapsi River Center



PHOTO by Wapsi- new education addition

### Renovations and Evolutions...

As these times change, so do our facilities and improvements in support of both our natural world and education. Here is a sneak-peak at the new education addition facing our native forest of Iowa. Stay tuned for more to come as the seasons welcome the brightness of a new year.

### School and Public Programs

The Wapsi Center takes an interdisciplinary approach to environmental education and maintains **100% satisfaction ratings** through comments cards and evaluations. The Center also meets at least one **Iowa Core** requirement for all Iowa school programs surveyed, while current efforts are now focused on **NGSS/STEM** standards. The Center's staff can help plan your field trip to meet educator needs. If you are an educator who wants to schedule a field trip, give us a call at (563) 328-3286.



PHOTOS by Troop 203

### Eagle Scout Project Supports Education

Thank you to Troop 203 **Eagle Scout candidate, Charley Anderson** of Long Grove, Iowa, for his interest and dedication to our education program. Charley and Troop 203, spent the winter building twelve program benches in support of our environmental education

programs. These benches are a well needed addition to programs and will be used throughout the year with the many program participants that attend each year. Thank you Charley and Troop 203!



PHOTOS by Troop 203



**Leave No Trace™**

**Proud Partner 2021 | LNT.org**

### Leave No Trace Programming

The staff at the Wapsi River Center has just completed the 16 hour **Leave No Trace (LNT) Trainer Course** and plan to offer future programs related to the LNT program (<https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/>). The LNT program is offered by the **Center for Outdoor Ethics**, and is a most effective, least resource intensive solution to protecting lands.

*“The Seven Principles of Leave No Trace provide an easily understood framework of minimum impact practices for anyone visiting the outdoors. Although Leave No Trace has its roots in backcountry settings, the Principles have been adapted so that they can be applied anywhere — from remote wilderness areas, to local parks and even in your own backyard. They also apply to almost every recreational activity. Each Principle covers a specific topic and provides detailed information for minimizing impacts.” - Center for Outdoor Ethics*

Please look to future events and programs in support of LNT ethics and principles. Whether you are an educator, nature lover, outdoor explorer, or want to make a difference, these LNT programs will offer innovative education, skills, and research to gain knowledge in caring for our natural world.



**1000 HOURS OUTSIDE™**

# SPRING EVENTS



share her experiences with streambank restoration projects. She will discuss the basic steps involved in beginning a restoration project and provide examples of projects that Impact 7G has completed. Register

at [www.partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org](http://www.partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org).

## APRIL

**1<sup>st</sup> ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village Opens** ~ The Dan Nagle Walnut Grove Pioneer Village opens for the 2021 Season. Visitors may tour the site from 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. through October 31<sup>st</sup>. Call (563)328-3283 for more information.

**1<sup>st</sup> ~ Buffalo Bill Cody Homestead** opens for the 2021 season. Visitors may tour the site from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. through October 31<sup>st</sup>. Call (563) 225-2981 for more information.



**10<sup>th</sup> ~ Paint By Nature ~ 10:00 A.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Enjoy the springtime in a creative way at this family- friendly program! Join Naturalist Paige to learn about springtime phenomena. Then create a fun painting with guided step-by-step instructions. This program costs \$5/canvas (payable by cash or check at the program). **Space is limited and registration is required by calling (563)328-3286.**

**10<sup>th</sup> ~ Paint By Nature (Adult) ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Enjoy the springtime in a creative way at this adult-oriented painting program! Join Naturalist Paige to learn about early spring wildflowers then paint a floral wall hanging with guided step-by-step instructions. This program costs \$5/sign (payable by cash or check at the program). **Space is limited and registration is required by calling (563)328-3286.**

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park & Virtually** ~ 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> ~ 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.**

**20<sup>th</sup> ~ Partners of Scott County Watersheds Forum ~ Noon to 1:00 P.M. ~ Via Zoom** ~ Streambanks can erode and cause flooding and water quality issues. Whether this is from natural or man-made causes, there are ways to stabilize the banks and prevent further degradation. Judy Joyce with Impact 7G will

**22<sup>nd</sup> ~ Earth Day 2021 ~ Find a way to celebrate Earth Day this year!**

**22<sup>nd</sup> ~ Earth Day Virtual Trivia Night ~ 7:00 to 8:30 P.M.** ~ Join the Quad Cities Earth Coalition for multiple rounds of fun and informative questions about human population, pollution, animals, mating habits and more during this virtual trivia event brought to you by the Quad Cities Earth Coalition and the Center for Biological Diversity. Gather a team of 2-6 adult players (\$25 per team) and win fun prizes! You will register as a team so have your team member names and emails ready. Instructions will be sent after registration is complete. Registration opens April 1. For more information, go to <https://www.qcearth.org/events.html>.

**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Volunteer Stewardship Workday ~ 9:00 A.M. to Noon ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come celebrate Earth Day at the Wapsi River Center. Join the *Friends of the Wapsi Center* and Staff for a celebration of Earth Day for our annual Spring Volunteer Workday. The workday will focus on sprucing up the grounds and facilities for upcoming events. All skill levels are welcome, so bring the whole family and invite a friend! Afterwards, enjoy light refreshments by the *Friends of the Wapsi Center*. **Please call to register at (563)328-3286.**



**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Spring Wild Edible Workshop ~ 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Naturalist Becky Baugh 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 take a hike outdoors to identify some of the spring wild edibles available during this time. **Registration is limited and required by calling (563)328-3286.**

**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Leave No Trace Awareness Workshop ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center (Red Tail Lodge)** ~ Join Director Dave Murcia for an introduction to the 7 Principles of Outdoor Ethics. The workshop will cover Leave No Trace principles that protect the



outdoors while minimizing our impacts to the land, soil, vegetation, water, wildlife, cultural resources and other visitors. Upon completion, this entry level workshop offers a Certificate of Completion. Dress appropriately and bring water. **Registration is limited and required by calling (563)328-3286.**

## MAY

**1<sup>st</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 10 above that need a chance to unwind. **Space is limited and registration is required by calling (563)328-3286.**

**4<sup>th</sup> ~ Water Sampling Snapshot ~ 8:00 A.M. to Noon ~ Davenport Public Works (1200 E 46th St. Davenport, IA 52806)** ~ Register now for the Spring Snapshot Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Event! This is your opportunity to become a citizen scientist for the day and gather important data about the health of Scott County's watersheds. The valuable data gathered by volunteers will assist PSCW in raising funds for water quality improvement projects in the county. No experience is necessary, and anyone over 16 is welcome to participate. Volunteers will return at noon for a FREE pizza lunch and FREE t-shirts! To register please sign up at <http://xstreamcleanup.org/event/spring-snapshot-volunteer-water-quality-monitoring-542021>. **For any questions or for more details please email [info@partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org](mailto:info@partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org).**

**8<sup>th</sup> ~ Spring Wildflower Hike ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join Naturalist Michael Granger for a lesson on spring woodland wildflowers at the Wapsi River Center. May apple, bloodroot, and hepatica are just some of the wildflowers to discover. Please wear sturdy waterproof shoes for this woodland adventure. **Space is limited and registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286.**



**8<sup>th</sup> ~ Frog and Toad Chorus ~ 6:00**

**P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Come learn about the frogs and toads of Iowa and experience the sounds of the season, in search of the frogs and toads which inhabit the Wapsi River Center. Please bring a flashlight and waterproof footwear. **Space is limited and registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286.**



**8<sup>th</sup> ~ Menke Star Party (Virtually)** ~ This year's Menke Star Parties will be held virtually (NOT held at the Menke Observatory, Wapsi River Center). This event will be held virtually at AmbroseAstro Facebook page (a zoom link will be provided). 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. **For more information, contact Robert Mitchell at [MitchellRobertC@sau.edu](mailto:MitchellRobertC@sau.edu) or (563)333-6141.**



**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Scott County Conservation Board Meeting ~ 3:00 P.M. ~ West Lake Park & Virtually** ~ 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.**

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Partners of Scott County Watersheds Forum ~ Noon to 1:00 P.M. ~ Via Zoom** ~ Landowners who are interested in permanently protecting their land from future development may have many questions about how to make this possible. For example, what will happen to my land after I'm gone? Who will care for this land? How can my heirs afford to inherit this land? Can I turn my land into a public nature area? Carole Teater with the Iowa Natural Heritage Fund will discuss the Iowa Landowner Options Program designed to help landowners take the next steps in protecting their land. **Register at [www.partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org](http://www.partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org).**

**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> ~ Earth Day Fair ~ 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. ~ Freight House Farmer's Market** ~ There will be live music, interactive activities, and table displays. Learn about what local environmental and community organizations have been doing to celebrate and

support the Earth. This is a family friendly free event. COVID safety protocols must be followed.

**30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> ~ Pioneer Village Heritage Days ~ 11:00 A. M. to 5:00 P.M. ~ Dan Nagle Walnut Grove**



**Pioneer Village** ~ Enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of yesteryear! The past will come to life at the Village as interpreters and actors recreate pioneer life. There will be pioneer craft demonstrations. Admission is \$2 for Adults and \$1 for children. **Please call (563)328-3283 for more information.**

**31<sup>st</sup> ~ Holiday ~ County offices will be closed in observance of the holiday.**

## JUNE

**1<sup>st</sup> ~ Channel Cat Talk ~ “Raptors along the River” ~ 9:00 A.M. ~ Join Director Dave Murcia to learn about birds of prey in our area. The program will include habitats, ecology, and human impacts to these awesome predators. Be sure to bring your kids and see a live raptor from the Wapsi River Center up close! Meet at Riverbend Commons, 2951 E River Dr. in Moline and board the Channel Cat. The talk will run on Tuesday and Thursday from 9:00 AM to 10:45 AM. Call River Action to register at (563)322-2969.**



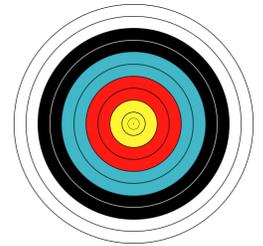
**2<sup>nd</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park (Pride Lake) ~ Join the Wapsi River staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/ PFD, though it must comply with IADNR 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 according to the weather conditions and bring water. Registration is limited and required by calling (563)328-3286.**

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**5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> ~ Free Fishing Weekend ~** Iowa residents can try fishing without buying a license on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, as part of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources’ (DNR) free fishing weekend. All other regulations remain in place.

**5<sup>th</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. **Space is limited and registration is required by calling (563) 328-3286.**



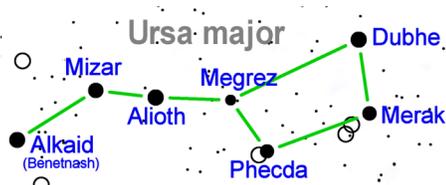
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**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Bats 101 ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Head out to the Wapsi River Center to learn about our local bats! Activities include a small lesson, building bat houses and a bat hike. An open campfire for roasting will be available from 6:00 to 7:00 P.M. (roasting sticks are available; Bring your own food). Hike and campfire are weather dependent. \$10 per bat house kit. (BYOH – Bring Your Own Hammer). **Space is limited and registration is required by calling (563)328-3286.**



**12<sup>th</sup> ~ Menke Star Party (Virtually)** ~ This year's Menke Star Parties will be held virtually (not held at the Menke Observatory, Wapsi River Center). This event will be held virtually at AmbroseAstro Facebook page (a zoom link will be provided). 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.



For more information, contact Robert Mitchell at [MitchellRobertC@sau.edu](mailto:MitchellRobertC@sau.edu) or (563)333-6141

**15<sup>th</sup> ~ 12:00 P.M. ~ Partners of Scott Country Watersheds Forum** ~ Join Naturalist/Director/CIG, Dave Murcia for a program on stewardship while recreating on water. Whether paddling, fishing, or simply exploring waterways, the Seven Principles of Outdoor Ethics is an easily understood framework of minimum impact practices for anyone visiting the outdoors. **Register at [www.partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org](http://www.partnersofscottcountywatersheds.org).**

**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park (Pride Lake)** ~ Join the Wapsi River 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 according to the weather conditions and bring water. **Registration is limited and required by calling (563)328-3286.**

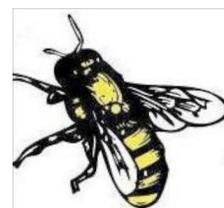


**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park (Pride Lake)** ~ Join the Wapsi River staff for an adventure with kayaks. Program includes all equipment use, covers safety, techniques, and taking a tour of Pride Lake. You may bring your own vessel/PFD, though it must comply with 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 according to the weather conditions

and bring water. **Registration is limited and required by calling (563)328-3286.**

**17<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of the Wapsi Center Annual Meeting ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Join us to learn more about the *Friends of the Wapsi Center* group. Learn about current events and volunteer opportunities at the Wapsi River Center. A main dish, drinks and dinnerware will be provided. Afterwards tour the new nature center renovations. **Registration is required by calling (563)328-3286.**

**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Pollinator Workshop ~ 10:00 A.M. – Noon ~ Wapsi River Center** ~ Learn about the cause and effect of the decline in honey bee populations through The Great Sunflower Project. You will also learn about native bee species and what you can do to support their populations. Then, participate in a pollinator count and make insect hotels that you can take home and install in your own garden using recyclable items. Please bring empty 1 or 2 liter bottles or empty soup or pasta cans for the insect hotels. **Registration is limited and required by calling (563)328-3286.**



**30<sup>th</sup> ~ Birds of Prey ~ 1:00 P.M. ~ McGehee Center in Silvis, IL** ~ Join Dave Murcia, Director/Naturalist of the Wapsi River Environmental Education Center, for a presentation on **Birds of Prey** in support of the Silvis Public Library's Summer Reading Program. The program will include biology, ecology, habitats, with live raptors! **Please contact the library at (309) 755-3393 for more info.**



**30<sup>th</sup> ~ Kayak Experience ~ 6:00 P.M. ~ Scott County Park (Pride Lake)** ~ Join the Wapsi River 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 according to the weather

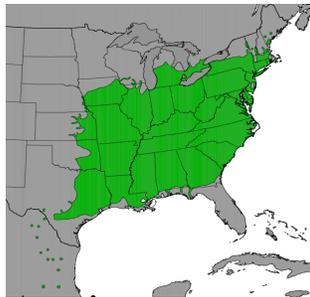


conditions and bring water. **Registration is limited and required by calling (563)328-3286.**

# PLANT PROFILE: SYCAMORE TREE

By Wapsi Naturalist Michael J. Granger

Let me introduce to you another great tree growing here in Eastern Iowa, the American sycamore tree, *Platanus occidentalis*. Sycamore trees may be found in the lower roughly two-thirds of the state of Iowa. The range covers the eastern half of America from Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and portions of eastern Texas, spreading east to the coast. The north range is just south of the Great Lakes, and the southern boundary is Florida. There are some spotty populations south of Texas. The tree is also found in other regions such as Argentina and across the continent of Australia but is considered a non-native. In America the sycamore may be found along wooded rivers and wetlands, possibly due to the seeds' ability to float. In open areas the sycamore tree is often divided near the ground into several secondary trunks, free from branches. Spreading limbs at the top make an irregular, open canopy. The trunks of large trees are often hollow. In woodlands the tree may grow to a height of 90 to 130 feet. A large mature tree may have a trunk diameter at the base of over 5 feet.



American sycamore  
Rangemap: Wikipedia

It is one of the easier trees to identify by its bark. As a tree grows the bark has to adjust by stretching, splitting, and growing new bark. A sycamore tree is well known for the fact that the bark flakes off in large patches on larger trees. The reason is that the bark on a sycamore tree is rigid and not elastic like the bark on other trees. As the tree matures and gets taller the bark begins to split, peel and flake. A mature tree will have large sections of bark which have fallen off, leaving a patchwork of colors: yellow, light green and primarily white. Larger trees really stand out in the fall a due to their white colored smaller limbs and upper branches.



Sycamore bark;  
[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

Sycamore leaves are large and wide (4 to 9 inches wide) with 5 lobes with 5 pointed leaf tips. They at first glance look like large maple leaves. The bottom edge of the leaf has lobes that grow back towards the stem creating a "U" shape. Mature leaves are light yellow green above and pale yellow below. Leaves turn brown in the fall, and fall off revealing buds which will become leaves the next season. Unlike most trees, sycamore buds form inside the leaf stem on mature leaves. The bud is large, sticky and 3 scaled.



Sycamore Leaf; Wapsi  
River Center

A sycamore tree flowers in early May. At the end of the season the tree will have a fruit containing numerous seeds known as "sycamore buttons" or "buttonballs". Fruits are born singly on long 3 to 6 inch stems. Fruits are about 1.5 inches in diameter, light brown and have a fuzzy appearance. Sycamore fruits remain at the top of the tree throughout the winter. Each fruit will have multiple seeds that will dry and break apart for seed dispersal. Seeds may be transported by water or wind.



Sycamore  
Button; Wapsi  
River Center

Historically, the sycamore has been planted in cityscapes as a shade tree. It is susceptible to a fungus which causes anthracnose disease. This often causes leaf discoloration in the spring, leaf loss, cankers, twig loss and witches brooms (multiple twig growth in an affected area). The sycamore now has limited use for landscaping due to this fungus.

The wood is heavy grained and difficult to use and work. Its wood was used extensively for butcher's blocks, boxes and crates. It has also been used to make furniture, siding, and musical instruments.

Once again the American sycamore is a common tree in the Midwest. It can be readily identified at a distance, by looking at its patchy white bark, its large leaves and its seed "buttons" in the fall. I hope you are able to see an American sycamore while you are out and about. Happy Exploring!

# ANIMAL PROFILE: TURKEY VULTURE

By Wapsi Seasonal Assistant Naturalist, Paige Owings



**Turkey Vulture**  
**Matt Davis, Cornell**  
**Lab of Ornithology**

It was Sunday, March 7, 2021, and I saw a large shadow soaring over my house. I immediately got excited and exclaimed aloud when I recognized the shadow as a turkey vulture! Why was I so excited? Well, to me turkey vultures symbolize spring's arrival! These birds are migratory, so they inevitably leave each fall before the cold comes and when they return it is a sure sign that the weather is warming.

Turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) can be easily recognized by their large dark bodies, and small, featherless, red heads with white-ish beaks. It is actually their heads that give them their name because they closely resemble wild turkeys on first glance. When in flight, the silhouette of their wings makes a classic "V" shape. The feathers on the wing tips also look somewhat finger-like. They can be seen soaring over open areas like farmland and roads, but you often have to look very high up to see them! They can soar on thermal currents that carry them up and up and up.

We often see vultures at the Wapsi Center (like the one on the sign) and they tend to congregate on the communication tower at the top of the entry road to roost at night. They are diurnal (awake in the daytime), so they roost on the tower overnight before heading out again to feed in the daylight. One morning I counted around 30 on the tower!

Turkey vultures are carnivores, feeding only on meat. While they do eat meat, it



**Turkey Vulture**  
**on Sign:**  
**Becky Baugh**

is important to note that it is not in their nature or ability to attack living prey, so there is really no need to fear these large birds. They feed on carrion, or dead animals. Primarily they will feed upon dead mammals, but will also eat dead snakes/other reptiles if they find them. They locate their food using their incredible sense of smell because, if you didn't know, dead animals stink! Turkey vultures have one the largest olfactory (smell-interpreting) systems of all birds, which gives them the ability to smell a meal from up to a mile away! Also, remember the red featherless heads? Well, in addition to their keen sense of smell, the bald head is another key part of their adaptive biology when it comes to what they eat. Their food of choice can be quite messy, so the lack of feathers on their heads makes meal times less messy by preventing bits of flesh from getting stuck in their feathers.

Turkey vultures play an important part in keeping the environment clean. One of the coolest things they do, without even trying, is help reduce the risk of disease transmission. They have very acidic digestive juices that kill "bad" bacteria like botulism and salmonella and destroy viruses, thus preventing these things from spreading.

One other cool thing about birds in general, is that their bones are hollow! This helps reduce body weight to increase ease of flying. Last spring we found a turkey vulture dead on our property and we were able to salvage a few bones and see this first hand.

Personally, I find bones and skeletal function quite fascinating, so I did a series of videos on our Facebook page about skulls, including one on the turkey vulture.

Check out our page at [www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation](http://www.facebook.com/scottcountyconservation), to see this video along with several others. I hope you get a chance to enjoy these cool birds and many, many others as the weather warms! Happy trails!



**Turkey Vulture skull**  
**showing large nostrils and**  
**hollow wing bones**

# HELLO PARKER!

Hello! My name is Parker Hill and I am the new AmeriCorps member at the Wapsi River Center. I will be working here into the fall before I return to school to study for my MS in Ecology and Conservation.

I was born and raised in the Quad Cities and graduated from Bettendorf High School in 2015. I then went to study at Central College in Pella, Iowa where I received my BA in Biology and Environmental Sciences while running track and cross country. After graduating in May of 2019 I began service with the Peace Corps the following September. I served as an Agroforestry volunteer in Senegal, a small country in West Africa. I lived and worked in a small village near the country's eastern border where I helped develop youth environmental education programs and assisted with local conservation efforts.

I am very excited for the opportunity to work with the Wapsi River Center team! I am very

passionate about the study of nature and ecosystems and am looking forward to assisting with public outreach so I can share that passion with the community. I hope my experience here will provide me with further knowledge and skills to allow me to have a long, productive career in conservation.



Photo: Wapsi Staff

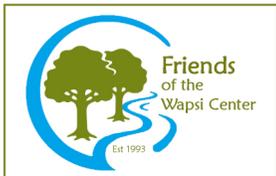


**“BECOME A WAPSI RIVER CENTER FRIENDS MEMBER TODAY!”**

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[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

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**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.

# THANK YOU!

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## SPONSOR AN ANIMAL PROGRAM ~ WAPSI RIVER CENTER

A very important part of environmental education at the Wapsi River Center revolves around the live animals displays. Each year thousands of visitors come to learn about the wild animals that are found in the region. In cooperation with the *Friends of the Wapsi River Center* volunteer group, the sponsorship program was developed to meet the needs of caring for our live animals.

### Sponsorship Levels:

**Amphibian ~ \$15**

**Reptile ~ \$25**

**Raptor ~ \$50**

(frog, toad or salamander) (snake, aquatic or box turtle) (screech or great horned owl)

Upon sponsoring an animal, you will receive a packet of information containing:

- \* A fact sheet of your animal with photographs
- \* A certificate of appreciation
- \* Recognition of sponsorship on the animal's enclosure at the Center

If you are interested in an annual sponsorship of one or more of our animal, you may send a check payable to the *Friends of the Wapsi Center* to the address below or donate items appropriate to the care of our animals. If you are interested in donating or have further questions contact the Wapsi River Center.

**Wapsi River Environmental Education Center**

**31555 52nd Avenue**

**Dixon, Iowa 52745**

**(563)328-3286**



WAPSI RIVER E. E. CENTER  
31555 52ND AVENUE  
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