

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2009

IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION




IN THIS ISSUE:

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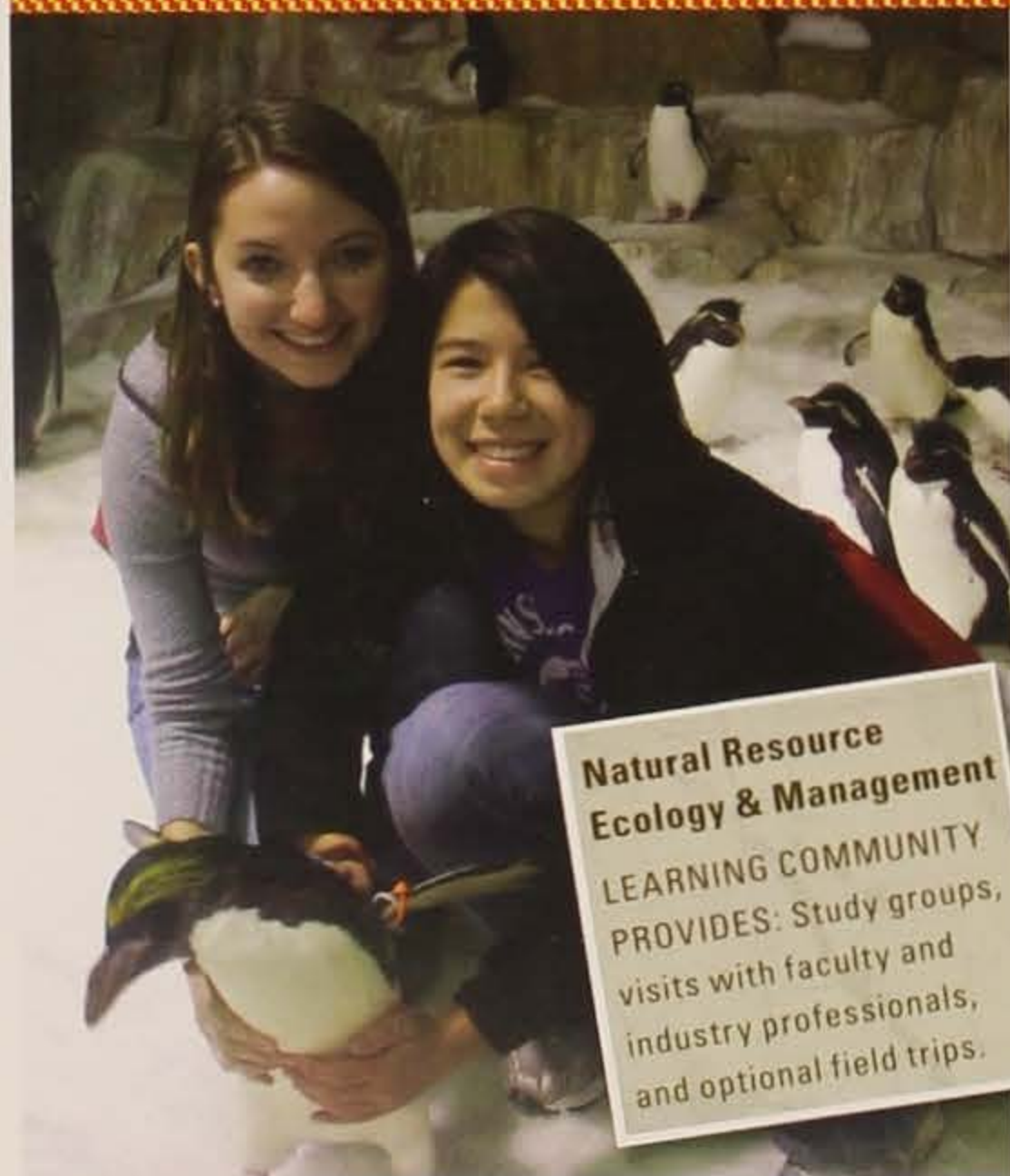
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NATURE AND HUMANS FIND THEIR OWN GAIT AT THE NATURAL GAIT

CABIN FEVER

If camping in the Yellow River State Forest is too chilly this time of year, then the nearby Natural Gait resort is your place for a cozy weekend that is all about you.

Owners Howard and Donna Bright bought a chunk of land along the Yellow River more than 20 years ago. "For the Woodland people, this was holy land," Bright says simply, spreading his hands to indicate the forested ridgeline where most of his cabins sit, and the clear trout stream below, where a fishing line looks big as baling wire.

Standing on nearly 400 acres, the resort is horse-friendly, like most of this area, and includes the Brights' wildflower seed company, Ion Exchange. The cabins aren't the light version found in most resorts, either. Their thick timbers, wood-burning stoves and reclaimed lumber and barn pieces are as comfortable as they are beautiful, jutting from a lovely landscape in a way that begs for steaming coffee on the porch, or a rowdy round of cards at night.

If you stay at the Ion Inn, the original lodging next to the Brights' house, you can wake up, cross the gravel road and start fishing first thing in the morning.

"A lot of the time, when man comes in, he destroys the very thing he came to see," Howard Bright says. "That didn't happen around here."

A typical fall morning at the Natural Gait unfolds atop a high ridge, in a cabin overlooking farmland and streambeds. The sky will turn pink, and then purple, and so on, until a full electric blue illuminates the bright beauty of fall.

This is the kind of day that'll convince you how important it is to get grounded in the land before you have to entertain all those relatives at Thanksgiving, and then, seemingly minutes later, at Christmas.

So whether it is before the holidays or if you need a rest afterwards, get out there, if only to hunker down in a cabin, its chinks lined by thick rope so the drafts can't diminish the efforts of a thick, popping fire in the stove.

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JIM FRINK This talented Prairie States Mushroom Club member excels at composing and capturing portraits of mushrooms. Examples of his stunning photos can be seen online at www.geocities.com/iowamushroom and also at iowamushroom.smugmug.com.



MIKE KREBILL A member of Iowa's Prairie States Mushroom Club, Krebill loves going out on forays to discover new fungi. Once a naturalist and science teacher, and now enjoying retirement, Krebill taught many to safely identify, cook and eat wild mushrooms.



JEN WILSON is a travel and features writer based in Des Moines. Her work appears in *National Geographic Traveler*, *Frommer's Budget Travel*, *Midwest Living* and *Esquire*. She is spending 2009 in Europe for her upcoming book, *Touching Up My Roots*. Follow their journey at www.touchingupmyroots.com.

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To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life for Iowans and ensure a legacy for future generations.

EDITORIAL MISSION

We strive to open the door to the beauty and uniqueness of Iowa's natural resources, inspire people to get outside and experience Iowa and to motivate outdoor-minded citizens to understand and care for our natural resources.

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The Keepers of the Land program matches volunteers with natural resource service needs statewide. Give back to Iowa's lands, waters and skies. Call 515-281-0878 to match your interests with needs or visit www.keepersoftheland.org.

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ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Linda and Richard Scarth of Cedar Rapids photographed this non-edible turkey tail (*Trametes versicolor*) at Morgan Creek Park in Linn County where it was growing low to the ground on a fallen tree. See more of the Scarth's images in their upcoming book "Deep Nature: Photographs of Iowa" available in October from the University of Iowa Press (1-800-621-2736). The book images focus mainly on plants, fungi and insects. "We're just trying to point out all the beautiful little things that people walk past," says Linda. www.scarthphoto.com

ABOUT THE COVER

Veteran staff photographer and writer Lowell Washburn photographed 5,000 migrating monarchs at the Union Hills Waterfowl Area in Cerro Gordo County. "I was surrounded by so much life and yet so much silence at the same time. It was humbling. Although photography is a great communications tool, this is one of those moments when no photo can do the scene justice. There was no substitute for being there."



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Get your licenses now, with deer numbers remaining strong and pheasant populations on the rebound, Iowa hunters are in for a pleasant surprise.

BY JOE WILKINSON PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN AND ROGER HILL

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ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

PINE CREEK GRIST MILL

Wildcat Den State Park



You don't need a time machine to step into the past; all you need is Heritage Day at Pine Creek Grist Mill in Wildcat Den State Park. This year, the annual Heritage Day will take place September 19. On average, about 1,500 visitors journey to the mill to experience what life was like in the 1800s.

Pine Creek Grist Mill was built in 1848 by Benjamin Nye, the first settler in Muscatine County, and quickly became the center of the community when other settlers flocked to the area to have their grain ground into flour. In 1883, flood waters almost destroyed the mill, but the community came together and helped get it back in working order. The deteriorating mill was bought by the state in the 1920s as part of Wildcat Den State Park.

In 1996, local volunteers banded together and formed a group called Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill and worked tirelessly to restore it. After 30,000 hours of hard

work, the mill was functioning once more. "Once we got it working, we thought people should come see it," says Tom Hanifan, president of the Friends.

Now, each September, visitors are invited to share the history and the lifestyle of the Pine Creek Grist Mill community and participate in old-time activities the entire family will enjoy. Heritage Day features the Rubber Ducky Dam Race, canoe rides, American Indian crafts, games, music and homemade ice cream from the Friends. There is also old-fashioned photography, broom-making and blacksmithing. For those with an interest in the paranormal, there's an opportunity for grave witching—the curious practice that allows people to identify unmarked graves—at the Nye Cemetery.

If you can't make it for Heritage Day, the mill is open weekends until Oct. 11 from 12:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.pinecreekgristmill.com.

Together

BY MEAGAN SAVAGE PHOTOS COURTESY NANCY BROWN



To learn more or buy her works, contact
Nancy Brown at Fancy Feathers
1605 Seneca RD NW
Swisher, Iowa 52338-9524
Call 319-329-3769 or email ndb10@msn.com.

FEATHER ART

When it comes to the craft of recycling, nobody does it quite like Nancy Brown of Swisher. Instead of plastic bottles, glass jars and aluminum cans, she reuses something much more natural—pheasant feathers that would otherwise be disposed of by hunters.

“It’s such a tragedy,” says Brown when she thinks about something so beautiful being tossed out.

Brown’s solution was to take the plumage and make them into something unique, decorative and absolutely beautiful. She began by making Christmas ornaments in 1993, originally as a gift for her son, using feathers from the first pheasant he bagged.

Her ornaments caught the attention of a few friends. Gradually, she began taking her creations to craft shows and festivals. After some encouragement from a friend, by 2006 Brown turned her hobby into *Fancy Feathers*—a bona fide business.

But she continued to craft for fun, too. In 2007 one of her creations earned her a blue ribbon at the Iowa State Fair in the Seasonal Decoration category.

But then, “My creative mind got a little bored,” she says. So she started looking beyond pheasant feathers and began working with wild turkey feathers. Originally, she thought wild turkeys were rather ugly birds, but upon further inspection, she found their feathers have a wide variety of patterns, colors and textures. She made a wreath using turkey feathers that earned her second place at the Iowa State Fair.

If you want your own Nancy Brown original, don’t expect to find any of her work at department stores. Though she’s had offers, she refuses to have her work mass-produced. “I want my things to be one-of-a-kind and unique,” she says.

Some pieces incorporate more than just feathers. Brown often uses antlers, spurs, cattails and acorns in her work. “It’s my effort at recycling,” she says.

CREATE YOUR OWN FEATHER ART

What you’ll need:

- Wild game feathers with a variety of colors and textures
- A wreath form (straw or floral foam) from craft store
- Hot glue gun and glue sticks
- Acorns, pinecones or other natural items you’d like to use to decorate your wreath
- Pencil

NOTE: Plumage from any legally harvested game can be used for ornamental and decorative uses, but songbird and endangered or threatened species feathers cannot be possessed for any reason or use. While feathers from legally harvested upland game birds can be bought and sold, migratory game bird feathers cannot under the federal Lacey Act.

Begin adding feathers to your wreath by poking them into the wreath form. If you’re having trouble getting the end of the feather into the form, use a pencil to poke a starter hole.

When you poke the feather into the form, make sure it is parallel with the wreath and not sticking straight up. Continue to cover the entire wreath with feathers, adding several layers, making sure to overlap so the form doesn’t show through. Add as many feathers as you’d like to get the look you want.

When the wreath is covered, add a bow, or use a hot glue gun to affix a cluster of acorns, pinecones or cattails as decoration. You can even add a few extra feathers to the cluster to create more detail.





WEIGHT OF THE WORDS

BY TIM LANE

The problem with play is that it is taken too lightly. The very word conveys a sense that it is unimportant and fluff. There may be things that are farther from the truth, but not many. In this case, think of the truth as the Sun, and this dismissive assumption of play as a moon of Pluto, Charon perhaps.

I know that words like work, family, health and education are in a different weight class when used in conversation. There are many such words that simply convey more gravitas. So let me call on some allies of play here, like: clinical reports, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR).

The American Academy of Pediatrics issued a clinical report in *PEDIATRICS* (Vol. 119 No. 1) on the importance of play. The premise of the article is that "play" (or free time in the case of older children and adolescents) is "essential to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of children and youth."

The report points out that play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the UNHCHR. The U.N. sees it as "a right of every child." They also see many challenges from child labor, exploitation, war, violence and poverty. But they also feel it is a problem in affluent areas with abundant resources where there is a great deal of stress on achievement and grades and thus a great deal of stress period.

The Academy laments that in an increasingly hurried and pressured culture that play is losing out to overly structured activities, even if some of those have the best of intentions. In their words "Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth." The report goes on to strongly suggest that pediatricians, parents, schools and communities go out of their way to allow their patients, children, students and citizens to play.

There is even greater value when parents engage fully with their children but there is also value when children spend some time doing what appears to be nothing. "Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers."

Play is a cherished part of childhood yet it is eroding away. It offers important developmental benefits for both children and adults. Iowans need to place play on a pedestal, celebrate its benefits, and maintain appropriate and safe environments for this to occur.

Tim Lane is the fitness consultant with Iowa's Dept. of Public Health. A marathoner, former National Ski Patrol director, climber and volleyball coach, he has cycled across America and is a regular on RAGBRAI. He helped design and promotes Live Healthy Iowa.

But Why?

Helping adults answer children's nature questions

BY A. JAY WINTER

A. Jay Winter educates up to 20,000 Iowa children each year as the DNR's training specialist at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center.

Where do bugs go in the winter?

- THOMAS, COUNCIL BLUFFS, AGE 6

A variety of things happen to bugs in the winter. Some hibernate, some migrate south, some are kept warm and safe in eggs and cocoons until spring, and some naturally die.

According to Donald Lewis, extension entomologist at Iowa State University, most insects become dormant when the temperature drops below 45 degrees. These bugs are completely inactive—they don't move, they don't grow, they don't even eat. They usually hunker down for the winter underground, in trees, logs and even in your house.

It isn't easy to survive the harsh winter temperatures. To cope with the cold, some insects produce a chemical very similar to the antifreeze you use in your car. According to Lewis, they need this to survive because insects don't produce their own heat like humans do.

Several varieties of butterflies and moths remain in the cocoon stage for most of winter, waiting to emerge when the spring brings warmer weather. Some adult butterflies, like the monarch, migrate south for sub-tropical temperatures in Mexico (Read more on page 30).

Even though many bugs die during winter, most have the opportunity to mate and lay eggs before they go, leaving a whole new generation of creepy crawlies for next growing season.



The Deer in the Headlights



Ever herd the myth that deer freeze in the headlights of oncoming vehicles because these runners in the night are blinded by the light. Recently we've been *rutting* around the Internet to see if this *tail* is true. Although we can't *track* down a definite answer, the following *points* lead us to make another *call*.

Deer are nocturnal and see best at night, which is when they are most active, thus increasing your chances of seeing a deer freeze in your headlights. However, if you happen by a deer—whether in your vehicle or in the middle of the woods during daylight hours—they will act similarly and freeze.

Because of this, a better explanation of why deer freeze is simply because they're afraid. Fear is a vital survival mechanism that prepares the deer for "fight or flight." This physiological reaction of the sympathetic nervous system occurs in any animal when it encounters

an apparent threat (such as an oncoming vehicle). The response includes the release of hormones—such as cortisol and epinephrine—that speed up the heart rate and increase blood flow to the muscles, allowing the animal either to fight or flee.

Additional research suggests that the sympathetic response in mammals may involve up to four stages, in the following order: **1**) immobility (freezing in place), possibly while taking stock of the situation **2**) fleeing or seeking to flee **3**) fighting and **4**) "toxic immobility," or "playing dead." The research also suggests that the first stage of immobility may have a protective function, making it harder for predators to distinguish mammals.

We're not trying to *buck* this wide-held belief that deer freeze due to bright lights, but we're quite sure we can shoot this one down and tag it as false.

Ask The Expert Sarah in Jamaica asks, "So what do I do if I encounter a deer on the road?"



So now you know the real story behind the "deer in the headlights" cliché (see above). But what do you do when you come upon a deer in the headlights?

While it may be instinct to swerve, it's best to follow the Department of Public Safety's sage advice: Don't Veer For Deer. Most deer crash injuries and deaths result when drivers attempt to avoid the animal, often resulting in drivers losing control, colliding with other vehicles or fixed objects. Your best bet is to brake firmly, steer to maintain control and stop safely in your lane or along the road shoulder. And always use your seatbelt in case you do strike the animal.

Fall is Iowa's busiest season for deer versus car meet-and-greets. Animals are on the move feeding or being pushed by field work or hunting activities, and the mating season (rut) is in full swing. While dawn and dusk are typically prime deer movement times, during the rut, travel time is anytime. Be extra cautious driving through prime deer habitat (wooded areas, river corridors and food sources), don't out-drive your headlights and increase your following distance with fellow motorists. If you see a deer crossing the road, assume more may be following.

GOT A QUESTION? Send to: ASKTHEEXPERTS@DNR.IOWA.GOV

TIPS, TRICKS AND MUST-KNOWS TO ENHANCE YOUR OUTDOOR FUN



Look UP

If your pheasant hunting party subscribes to the drive-and-post method, plant your posters uphill of the drivers. Pheasants tend to retreat uphill, flushing when the cover runs out. It's also a safer practice, since hunters are typically more visible.



**STEEL
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Have wet matches or an empty lighter taken the spark out of your fire-starting prowess? Use steel wool and a 9-volt battery to get the home fire burning again. Rub the two items together until the steel wool ignites, then add dry starter material like leaves or dryer lint to create a flame. Add larger material as the fire grows.



« Pack'n Heat

Autumn cyclers can face a variety of weather. Stay ready with easy-to-store **arm, leg or knee warmers**, perfect for chilly starts. Choose one that wicks moisture to stay dry. Select a size that doesn't bind for comfort and mobility. Look for reflective materials for added safety and soft, elastic grippers that prevent slippage.

Find a local bike store at www.bikeiowa.com or visit outdoor gear websites such as www.rei.com.

PRESERVING HUNTING'S FUTURE

MARTHA OLSON, JEWELL

Daughters honor father's conservation ethic with youth hunting area

These 210 acres of Winnebago County farmland have provided for the Holland family since the 1870s, and now the family is returning the favor. They enrolled the entire farm in the Wetland Reserve Program and partnered with the Winnebago County Conservation Board (CCB) to manage 140 acres as a youth hunting and education area. Herbert Holland lived on the farm northeast of Leland for more than 70 years, passing his conservation ethic on to his children, including Martha Olson of Jewell. "Father was always a very good steward of the land. Because the land provided for him, he wanted to protect the land the best he could," she says. That respect led him to preserve native oak savannas, plant all tilled areas to tall grasses 20 years ago, protect the stretch of the Winnebago River that flows through the farm and restore wetlands. "You can see the family has a real attachment to it and wants to see it preserved for future generations," says Winnebago CCB Director Robert Schwartz, who points out that the land is nice wildlife habitat, too. "The land has been resting and we've seen an influx of wildlife return, things we never saw as youth growing up," says Olson, who's observed deer, wild turkey, pheasant, Canada geese, waterfowl and eagles. That set up the opportunity for Olson and her sister, Diane Rickerl of South Dakota, to use the land for local youth, creating the Holland Prairie Conservation and Youth Hunting Area. "We thought there was a need for inexperienced young hunters to have safe hunt experiences and to have the land there as a teaching tool," she says. Only one group (including a mentor) is allowed to hunt at a time—visit winnebagoccb.com to apply for a hunting slot.



MONARCH MATRIARCH

DELORES MASER, OKOBOJI

Friend to migrating monarchs also promotes the outdoors and education to children

Delores Maser is northwest Iowa's official Butterfly Benefactor. She's the original founder of the Dickinson County Monarch Butterfly Festival. As initial attendance increased and the festival quickly outgrew its single tent facility, Maser donated the money for construction and development of the now popular Butterfly House which today holds a complete monarch nursery, microscopes for young scientists and other educational aids. According to current festival organizers, Maser was instrumental in establishing the site's permanent butterfly garden where monarchs come to lay eggs and caterpillars feed on a diet of milkweed leaves. She was key in developing the registered Monarch Way Station where late summer and fall migrants pause to refuel on their way to Mexico. "Environmental education is so very important," says Maser. "When I was young, kids were more aware of the natural world. We used to play in the dirt. Today, it's all plastic. Kids are losing touch with the world around them. People have worked hard and it's really been thrilling to watch the festival grow into what it is today," she adds. "To see all these children arrive here with their parents is very gratifying. We hope what they learn here will help kids become more aware of and sensitive to nature." —BY LOWELL WASHBURN




CREATING STEWARDS OF THE LAND

DICK JENSEN, ELGIN

Fayette County farmer buys land, creates programs to connect kids with nature

The famous Field of Dreams may be a couple of counties over, but the "if you build it, they will come" mantra is driving one Fayette County farmer to carve out his own piece of heaven. In 2000, Dick Jensen bought several miles of old railroad land, including three miles along a trout stream, in the hopes he could help kids and adults reconnect with the land. "Kids are burning more kilowatts than calories today. We have children who really haven't been outside—even playgrounds are synthetic," says Jensen. "I could provide a scenic hiking area, where young folks could have a meaningful immersion in nature." While hundreds of school kids from the county have traveled to his farm for field days for years, he founded Take A Kid Outdoors in 2006 to help kids become good stewards through programs. Each September, third graders learn about trout, forestry, erosion and more. He works with the Fish Iowa! program to take kids fishing. High school students make wren houses, job-shadow soil scientists, plant trees and learn to use Global Positioning Systems. "His drive to get people outdoors is never-ending. He practices what he preaches with how he has applied conservation to his own farms," says Jerry Muff, Fayette County District Conservationist. Jensen, a Fayette Soil and Water Conservation District commissioner, has worked on conservation issues, donating land for parks and developing the Echo Valley Educational Nature Trail along Otter Creek. www.takeakidoutdoors.org

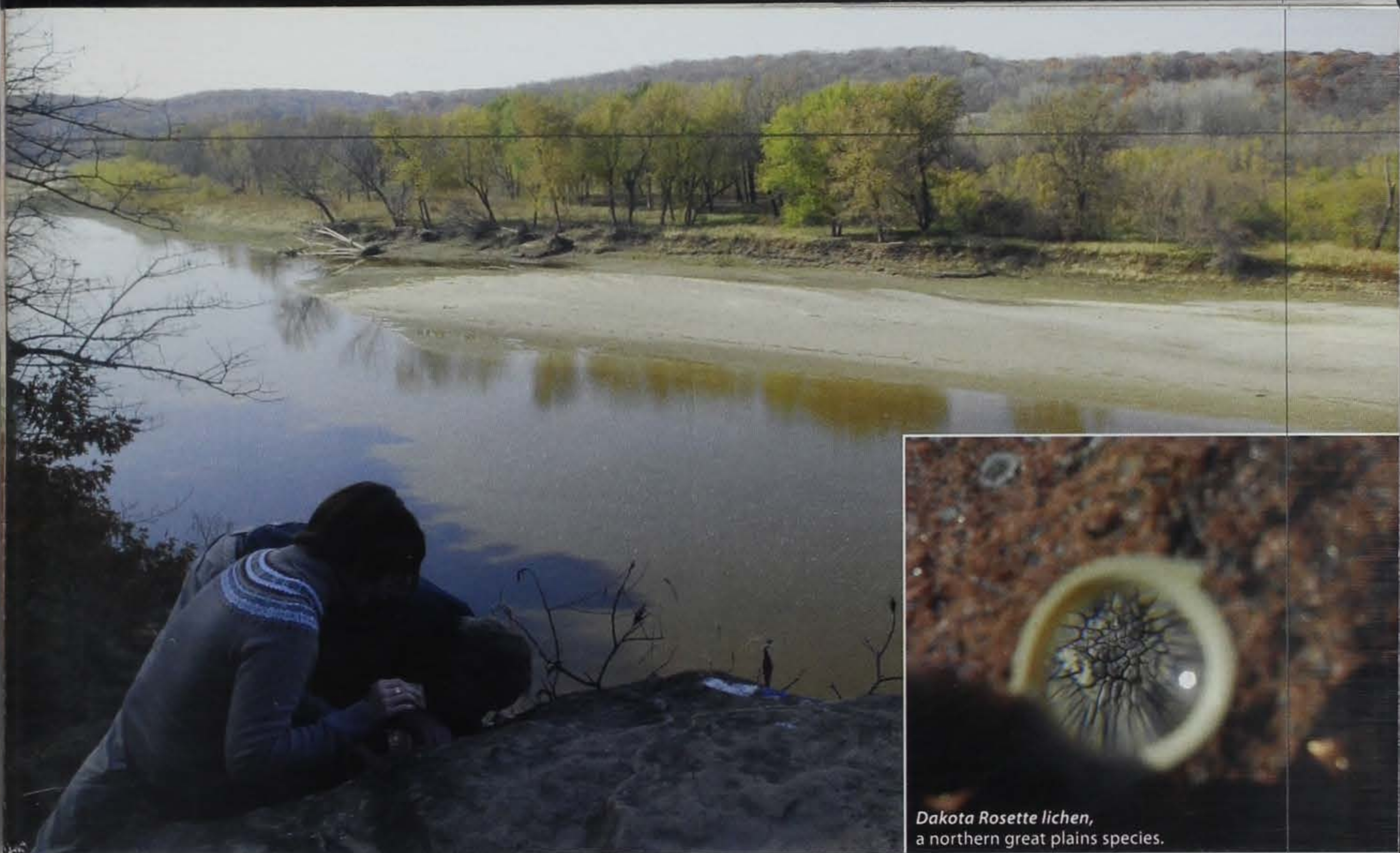




DNR ecologist John Pearson peers at lichens through a hand lens at Ledges State Park's new interpretive lichen trail that highlights 40 lichen species. OPPOSITE: Writer Jen Wilson and Pearson look for leather lichen, also known as stipple scale, on an overlook above the Des Moines River. INSET: Dakota rosette lichen, a species found in the northern great plains.

Playing In the Forest

In Boone County, water-carved sandstone cliffs and tiny pockets of wilderness have transformed into the state's hardest-working playgrounds.



Dakota Rosette lichen,
a northern great plains species.

The giant canyon crease is dark and ancient. Golden claws drip over the rocky edges as you navigate past bright green nodules like fluorescent spaceships. Soon you'll enter a hairy orange forest up ahead, so you dip into a fairy goblet full of fresh morning dew to gear up for the journey.

So goes a hike through Ledges State Park if you're an ant or an amateur lichenologist. You can explore central Iowa's Boone County in so many ways—including through the lens of a 10-power magnifying glass studying these bizarre, colorful lichens on an old tree. But there are other solid contenders for a fall weekend in Iowa's fertile center. By mountain bike, on a sturdy pair of hiking boots, in a kayak and with a wine glass in hand—just to name a few.

DISCOVER THE WILD WORLD OF LICHEN

State ecologist John Pearson stands up, brushes off, and steps away from the ancient oak covered in lichen. Once again, Ledges State Park becomes what it is to the unaided eye: dense woods slashed by sandstone cliffs and a pristine wading creek winding past picnic spots where you once tossed a Frisbee with your college buddies.

With Ledges' new lichen trail by the east entrance, Pearson has added a new dimension to central Iowa's biggest and best-used park, 15 miles west of Ames. Lichen is a hybrid of 99 percent fungus and 1 percent algae, and exploring its weird wonderlands is a lot like navigating a bizarre H.R. Pufnstuf set. It's a study in nature's minutia, which, turns out, is just as awesome

as the big stuff.

"Lichen is the inverse of the grand landscape," says Pearson. "Whole canyons and towering sequoias—in miniature."

Well-suited for anyone who finds Ledges' 13 miles of steep trails intimidating, the lichen trail is a short and easy walk marked by interpretive signs highlighting tiny psychedelic lichen fields. Its names sound like they were made up by nail-polish designers. Lacy Lemon, Dakota Rosette, Mint Moonglow, Pixie Cup. Lichen grows anywhere it thinks it's on a limestone cliff—from CCC stone structures to skyscrapers.

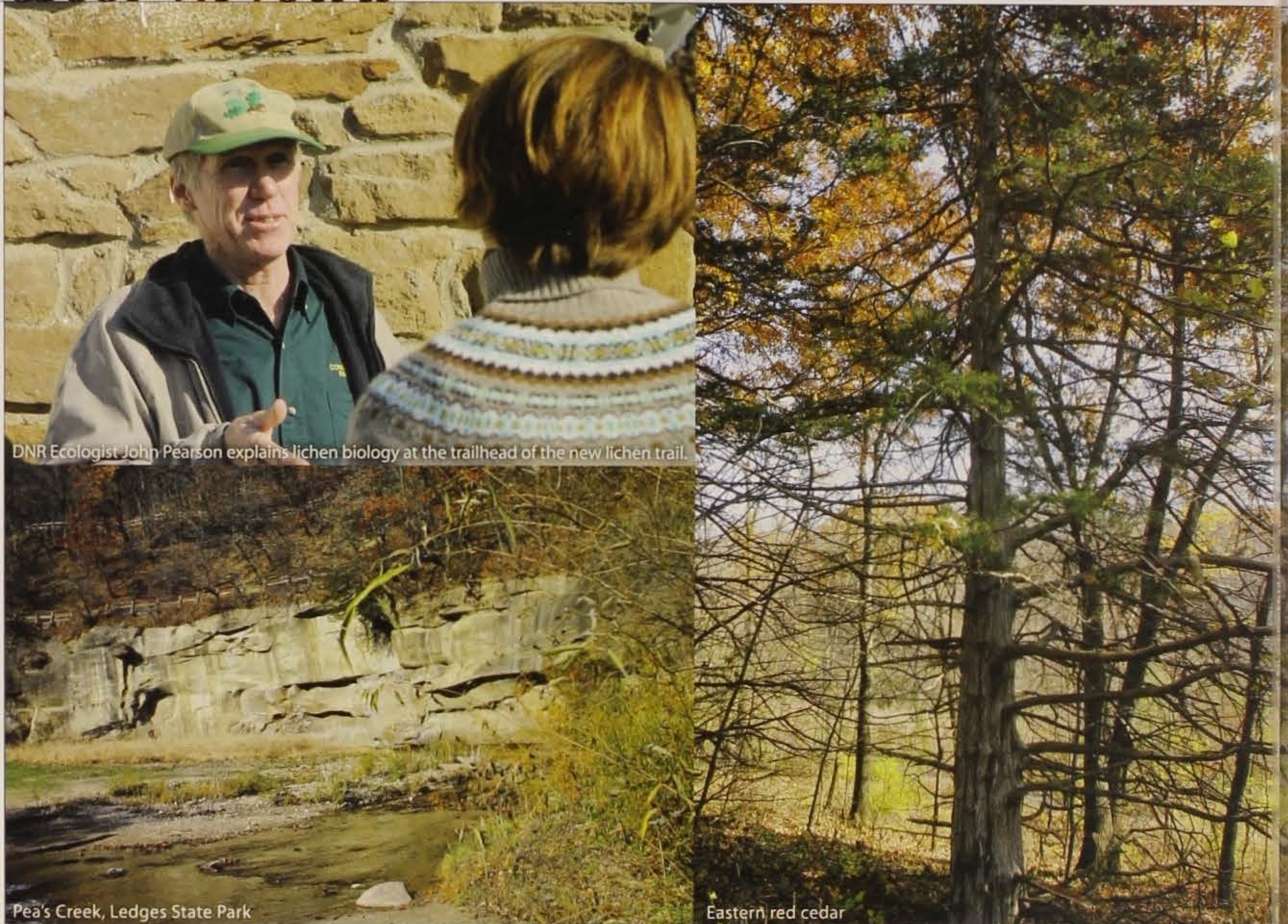
"Even in the harshest man-made environments, natural elements will find a home," says Pearson. "If you've got a hand-lens in your pocket, you're always within walking distance of a whole new world."

A LOCAL FAVORITE FOR MILLENIA

People have wandered Ledges' 1,200 acres for at least 4000 years now, according to the Sac, Fox and Sioux artifacts found in the park burial mounds. Its craggy bluffs are products of Iowa's ancient sea channels. "Where you see solid rock today was once a sandbar in a flowing river," says Pearson.

The popular graffiti on Ledges' canyon walls dates back to when the park was established in the early 1920s. Local merchants carved their logos into the rock, best seen along Pea Creek Canyon, where you can comfortably wade three seasons of the year. "Early billboards," says Pearson. "The outer quarter-inch of

Lost In Iowa



DNR Ecologist John Pearson explains lichen biology at the trailhead of the new lichen trail.

Pea's Creek, Ledges State Park

Eastern red cedar

these limestone cliffs is very hard, but once you punch through, it's like a bowl of sand."

Today, the popularity of picnic sites and 95 campsites is due to Ledges' rock-star scenery. "There are so few places like this in Iowa—so natural and at the same time so accessible," says Pearson.

White fingers of sycamore trees reach into the wide vistas overlooking the Des Moines River. On the park's easy Lost Lake Trail, you'll wander through abandoned farm pastures and past eastern red cedar that at 80 years are spry compared to those clinging above Pea's Creek that probably started growing back when Bill Shakespeare was a young literary upstart. The Des Moines River is wild here, and a paddling trip skims the long axis of Iowa's remaining natural area for hours, even days. (Put in at the Saylorville Wildlife Area on Highway 30; a good take-out point is at the Laurie Ramp on Highway 210 near Madrid). Wide sand bars are great for river breaks—or to scavenge buffalo bones and teeth.

"You can find relics of the pre-settlement landscape embedded in these sandbars," says Pearson. "They're carried downstream during high flows, but the heavy objects like buffalo skulls filter out and end up on shore."

McCoy Wildlife Area buffers the park, making it even more robust. A DNR Wildlife Research Station is just around the corner (*see sidebar, page 23*).

FILLING THE WEEKEND DANCE CARD

For a weekend in the area, the Iowa Arboretum in Madrid is a good stop for avid gardeners. The Iowa State Horticultural Society has showcased what grows well in the state for 40 years on 40 acres of trees, perennials, herbs and hostas.

"If someone's considering a specific tree, here they can see its true size and natural location, so they're not guessing what it's going to look like when it gets bigger," says Kevin Lantz, facilities manager, who mentions that the nut-tree collection and the oak trees representing each of Iowa's governors are the most popular. Most unusual: the dwarf conifers and a rare pyramidal-shaped sugar maple.

May through October, Boone County travelers can book Boone Scenic Valley Railroad excursions. Visit the hill of moraine soils left from the receding glaciers where the vineyards of Snus Hill Winery in Madrid grow. The winery's Friday night live music is worth a visit, with free daily tasting.

TOOLS FOR AN AMATEUR LICHENOLOGIST

Give this obscure, up-and-coming nature geek pursuit a try. TIPS FROM JOHN PEARSON.

1. A hand lens that magnifies objects a minimum of 4X, but not more than 10X. (Ordinary magnifying glasses are usually just 2X or 3X, not powerful enough to see the fine features of lichens.) Found at college bookstores, or search online for "hand lens," "magnifying glass," or "botany loupe." Cost \$5-\$15.

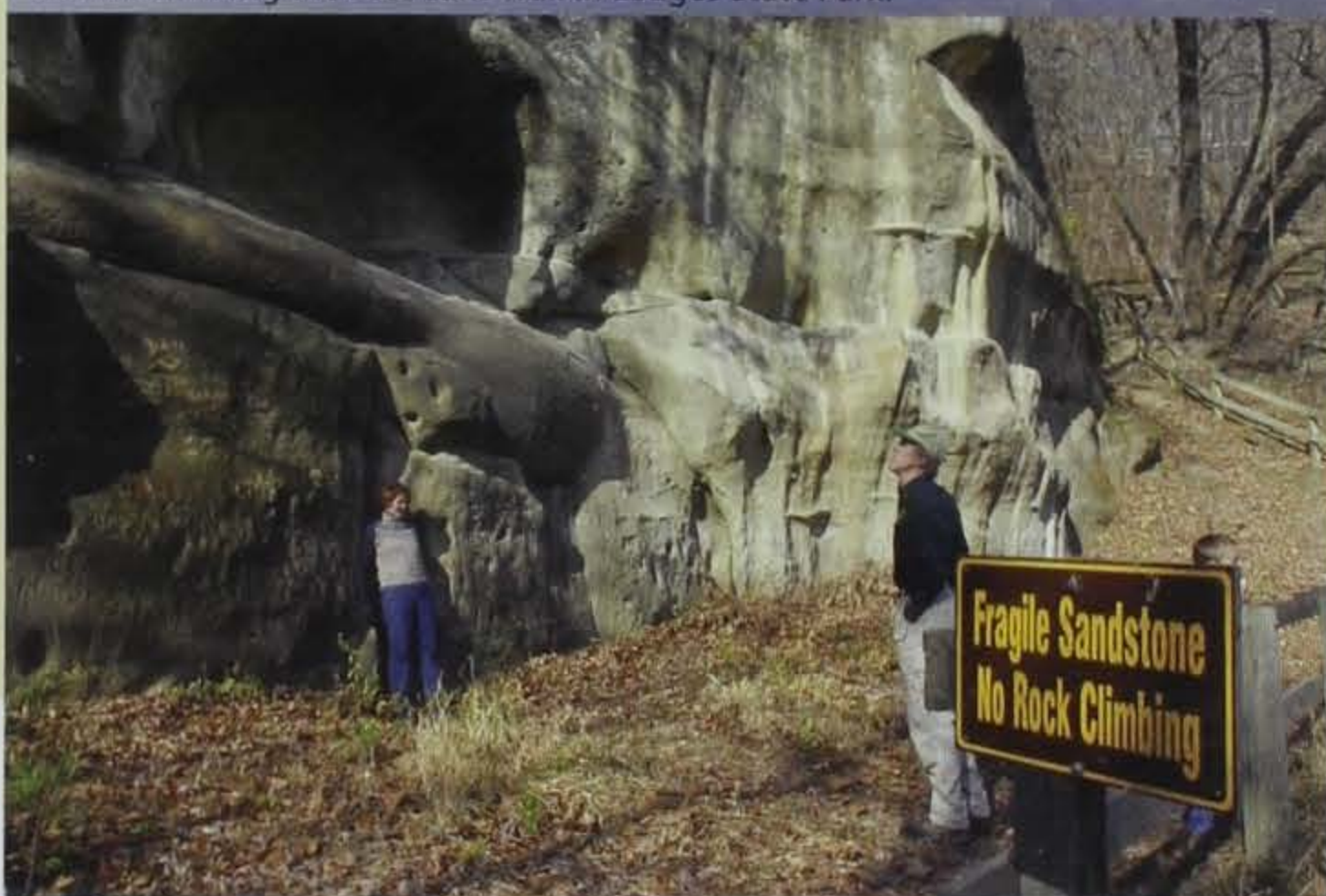
2. A guidebook. The now-standard encyclopedia of American lichens is "Lichens of North America" (www.lichen.com/book.html), but at a cost of \$110 and weighing 10 pounds, this is a stretch for most budgets. Another useful field guide is "How to Know the Lichens," which is out-of-print but can be found at some public libraries, or used on www.amazon.com. A new, portable guidebook for lichens in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota is "Lichens of the North Woods" by Joe Welewski, though at this moment, there just isn't a book that is up-to-date, portable, and focuses on Iowa (or even Midwest) lichens.



3. The Ledges Park page at www.iowadnr.gov has a lichen trail guide and photo gallery. A website for the Lichens of Wisconsin is useful for Iowa: <http://www.botany.wisc.edu/Wislichens/>.



View from along the Lost Lake Trail in Ledges State Park.



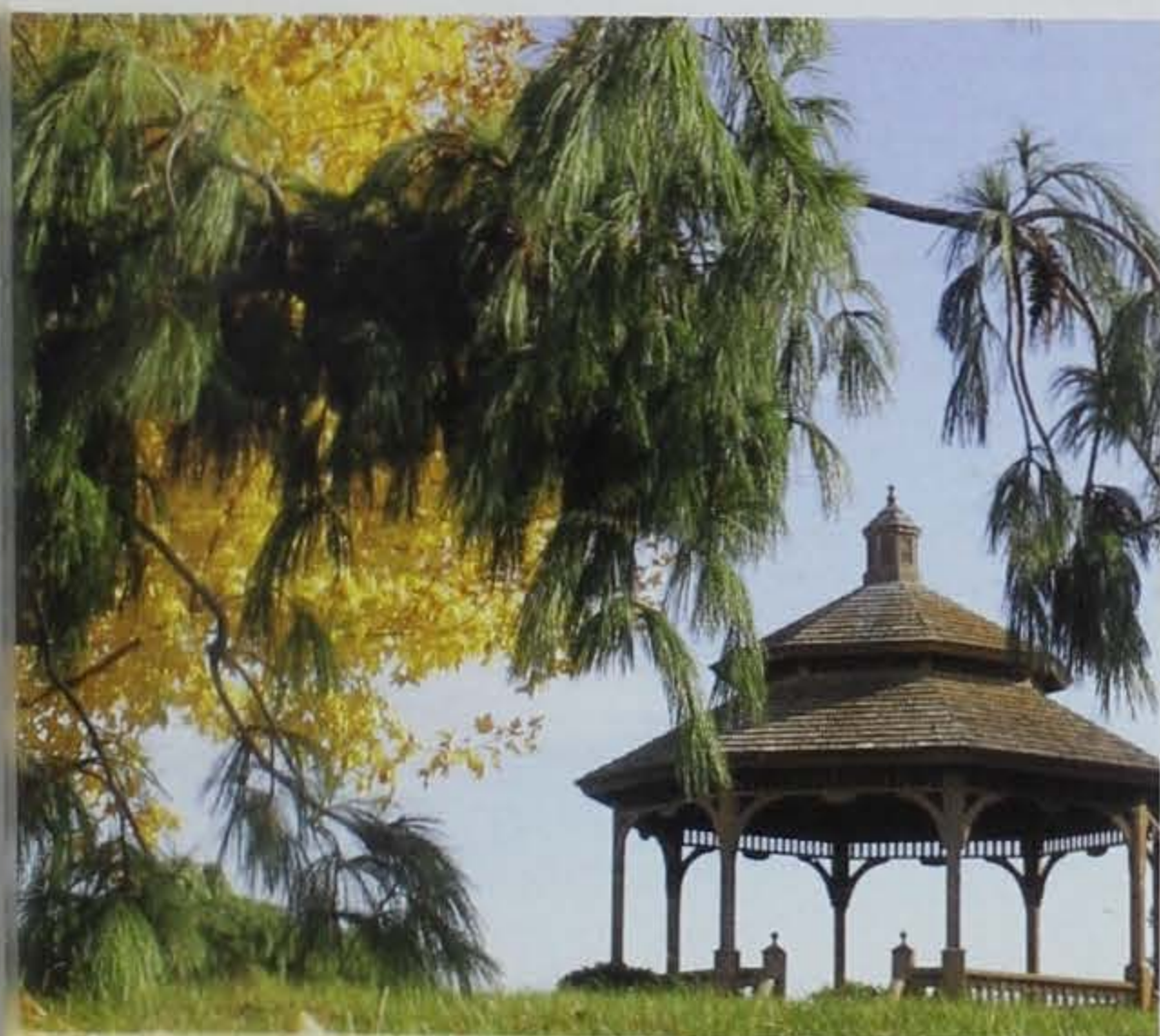
But the most underrated recreation activity in Boone County is a visit to Seven Oaks Recreation Area. A ski hill in winter, Seven Oaks transforms into a technical single-track mountain biking trail in warm weather—complementing its canoe and kayak rentals, shuttle service and other sports.

"Single-track is a lot of up-and-down hills, zig-zagging through trees," says manager Joel Bryan. "We get a lot of I-80 business travelers who don't know what to expect when they get here. It's just Iowa, right? But when you have 240 vertical feet in black-dirt mountain bike trails, they're overwhelmed."

Chad Beyer, 32, of Hampton, adjusts his helmet before a ride. "It's been awhile since I've been here," he says, one leg covered in tattoos. He'd heard good things about Seven Oaks, and wanted to check it out for himself. "This place has almost doubled in size since they hosted the Iowa Games years back. I wanted to see how it developed."

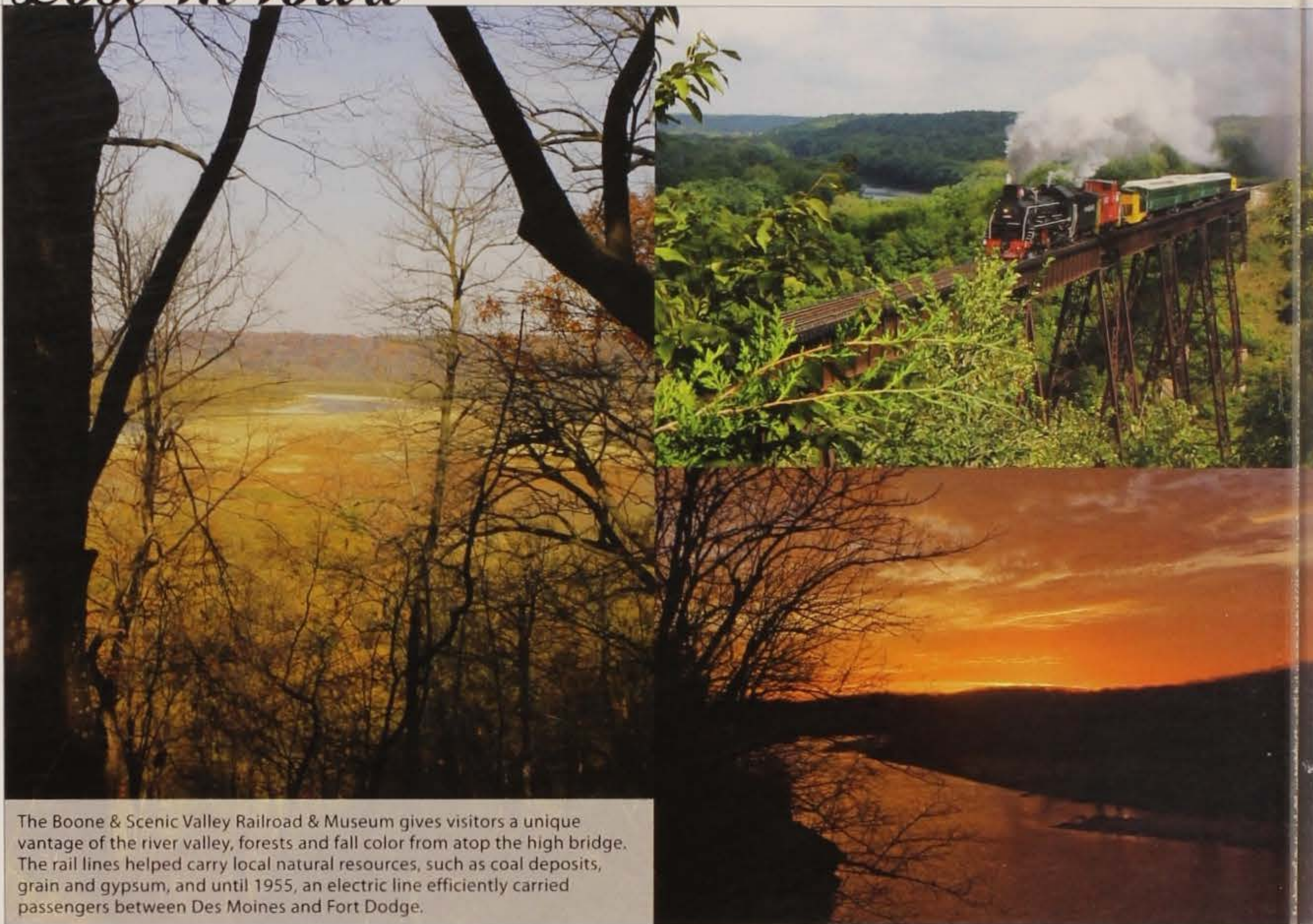
The same could be said for many visitors who haven't been to Boone County for awhile, maybe since those Iowa State University days when Ledges was everyone's favorite day trip. These concentrated bursts of natural wilderness among the fields and farms have only gotten more fine-tuned. New developments are as vivid as tiny patches of lichen. And just as subtle, till you get in close.

"On the scale of nature, we occupy the middle," John Pearson says.



THIS PHOTO: The gazebo at the Iowa Arboretum is surrounded by 378 acres and hundreds of plant and tree species. ABOVE LEFT: At Ledges, 300-million-year-old bedrock and sandstone create unique passages along Pea's Creek in the canyon area. While the above eastern cedar is only 80 years-old, others in the park are 300 to 600 years of age.

Lost In Iowa



The Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad & Museum gives visitors a unique vantage of the river valley, forests and fall color from atop the high bridge. The rail lines helped carry local natural resources, such as coal deposits, grain and gypsum, and until 1955, an electric line efficiently carried passengers between Des Moines and Fort Dodge.

"The grand landscapes and the tiny ones fascinate us. The extremes." And here, you'll find both equally entertaining.

WHERE TO STAY

Ledges State Park. 1515 P Ave., Madrid (515-432-1852; www.iowadnr.gov) offers 95 campsites; 40 with electrical, 42 non-electric, and 12 hike-in. Modern facilities and playground.

Don Williams Recreation Area cabins, 5 miles north of Ogden on P-70; (515-353-4237; www.wccta.net/gallery/bccb). Three brand-new lakeside cabins on this county park lake are so secluded that they seem intentionally hidden from public view. There aren't even park signs to direct you to them (take a right on the little access road just past the run-down tennis courts). Great lake views but few windows and no fireplace. An easy amble on the Lakota Trail probably won't get much in the way of wildlife sightings, but it's a pleasant walk and talk for a lazy weekend. Lots of docks for fishing boats, and a nine-hole golf course nearby. \$85/night.

Iowa 4-H Center, 1991 Peach Ave., Madrid (515-795-3338; www.iowa4hcamp.com). File this one under Little Known Treasures: Situated on 1,100 acres of wooded bluff and native prairie directly next door to the Iowa Arboretum, rent single cabins and whole villages here year-round and

take advantage of the secluded beauty whether you're a 4-H member or not. Climbing wall, cross-country skiing and 380-foot-long zip line among the many activities. Cabins from \$75 per night (sleeps 6) to \$175 per night (sleeps 10).

WHAT TO DO

Dutch Oven Bakery, 605 Story St., Boone (515-432-9567; www.dutchovenbakeryiowa.com). From home-made biscuits and gravy for breakfast, to the grilled Reuben on rye for lunch, this family-owned bakery is more than just its awesome pastry case.

Snus Hill Winery, 2183 320th St., Madrid (515-795-3535; www.snushillwine.com). A fourth generation family farm that's joined the Iowa wine revival. Live music on Friday night and Sunday afternoons.

Seven Oaks Recreation Area, 1086 222nd Dr., Boone (515-432-9457; www.sevenoaksrec.com). Paddling shuttles, plus canoe and kayak rentals, available til October. Mountain biking is \$3 per day.

Iowa Arboretum, 1875 Peach Ave., Madrid (515-795-2619; www.iowaarboretum.org). A free "Library of Living Plants."

Boone Scenic Valley Railroad, 225 10th St., Boone (800-626-0319; www.scenic-valleyrr.com). 🚂



So what exactly does the DNR Wildlife Research Station in Boone County do? We asked Doug Harr, the DNR's wildlife diversity program coordinator.

GIVE US THE READER'S DIGEST VERSION OF THE BOONE WILDLIFE RESEARCH STATION.

It houses several DNR entities. Upland Wildlife (pheasant, quail, rabbits, et cetera) and Wildlife Diversity (nongame wildlife) staff conduct surveys, estimate populations and recommend habitat practices. The human dimensions specialist studies how people relate to and use wildlife resources. Also in our office is the wildlife management biologist and wildlife statistician for the Saylorville Wildlife Management Unit. The fisheries program includes an aquatic invasive species biologist and staff, area fisheries manager and staff and specialists in fisheries data management and information technology.

DESCRIBE SOME OF THE WORK BEING DONE.

Tracking and forecasting pheasant populations to set annual hunting seasons, combating invasive species such as zebra mussels and Eurasian water milfoil, restoring peregrine falcons and osprey to their historic Iowa range, and conducting a statewide baseline inventory of nearly 1,000 species of wildlife, from butterflies and toads to chipmunks and songbirds. And that's just the short list.

SO, WHAT DO WILDLIFE RESEARCHERS DO ALL DAY?

Including a station administrative assistant, 19 DNR employees are here, along with additional temporary help. Research biologists and technicians spend many hours in the field, especially spring through fall, conducting surveys to inventory wildlife and prepare population estimates. Others compile, sort, classify and analyze data, prepare research reports and make written recommendations for wildlife and fisheries management. The Wildlife Diversity staff also presents public programs, restores key species like peregrine falcons to the wild, and works with land managers to determine the best management plans for all species. Fisheries biologists track and attempt to control invasive species, make recommendations for stocking fish in public and private waters and compile data for research reports.

WHY IS A RESEARCH STATION LIKE THIS IMPORTANT?

This research station is one of three in Iowa—Clear Lake and Chariton also have one. They control costs because they consolidate staff into one place, and give a central gathering place to exchange ideas and share libraries, resources and equipment. In particular, the Wildlife Diversity (non-game) Program staff must closely coordinate with each other to conduct surveys, reintroduce wildlife, and tabulate, store and interpret data.

WHAT CAN READERS DO TO HELP OUT?

We need "citizen scientist" volunteers to help with frog and toad surveys, bird surveys and other collecting of information about wildlife. Check out www.iowadnr.gov and click "Non-Game Wildlife" for details. Because so much of our program is funded by donations, tax check-offs, specialty license plate sales, publication sales and other voluntary sources, such donations and purchases help keep our work afloat.

GIVE US THE TOP 5 INTERESTING FINDINGS FROM YOUR OFFICE'S RESEARCH?

1. Bald eagles have recovered their numbers and spread across the state much more quickly than anyone would have considered possible 25 years ago. More than 200 pairs now nest here, and up to 4,000 eagles may be found wintering near open water on Iowa's larger rivers.
2. Conservation of many lesser-known species can be accomplished only by protecting very large, connected areas of habitat rather than just tiny parcels of land.
3. Rare Henslow's sparrows are being discovered in larger numbers and in more parts of the state as grassland/pasture conservation and management techniques improve.
4. Spotted skunks, once common around many Iowa farmsteads and fence lines, have almost completely disappeared from the state due to massive conversion of weedy habitat to clean, row-crop agriculture fields.
5. Migrating bats are killed in significant numbers when passing through wind farms being established on the Iowa landscape, unless wind farm sites are carefully chosen to avoid their flyways.



Ben Schottler beams as he shows off the nine-point buck he dropped on the opening morning of the 2008 Special Youth Challenge deer hunt. With him (L TO R) are guides Gordon Smith, Rich Schottler and Mike Hansen. Northwest Iowa's Special Youth Challenge (SYC) Ministries provides opportunities for youth with special needs or life threatening disease or injury to develop skills and enjoy the outdoors. Smith and Hansen are SYC volunteers. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Smith, Hansen and young Schottler get a close-up view of the shooting zone outside their blind; the video sight helps lock in hunters' aim.



SPECIAL YOUTH, SPECIAL HUNT

BY JOE WILKINSON PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

From the darkness of the blind, Braxton Wiebusch adjusts the 12-gauge shotgun mounted in front of him. In the dim, just-before-dawn light, he could pick out a nice buck that had walked into view. Still, he could not put the crosshairs on the kill spot just behind the buck's shoulder. Exchanging whispered comments with guide John Bauer, he let the buck walk. After all, it was barely shooting time and this was opening day. There would be more deer.


And there were. A couple young deer stepped—and stopped—within range just a few minutes later. This time, the image on the tiny video screen was sharper. One was only about 35 yards out. Hand on the trigger-plunger, Braxton had a decision to make. Again, he passed. “I want to see if I can get a big buck,” he announced to Bauer and guide Noe Marymor. Inches away, in the “second row” of this large box blind, his mother Michelle Vasek could take a breath again. As her son locked in on the deer, Vasek's hands were not covering her ears. They were clasped tightly to her face. Hoping? Praying?

For the next couple hours there were plenty of pheasant cackles from the native grasses on Bauer's land below

the picture postcard bluffs above the Little Sioux River in Cherokee County, but no more deer. Now was time for breakfast and a group picture. A cell phone call brought in a big pickup to haul the entourage back to civilization. Mom plowed Braxton's wheelchair across the uneven grass to the open truck door. From there, with help, he could hoist himself to the floorboards. Diagnosed as a toddler, muscular dystrophy has robbed his 13-year-old legs of their ability to function. He could still pull himself by his arms into the seat, though. And he did.

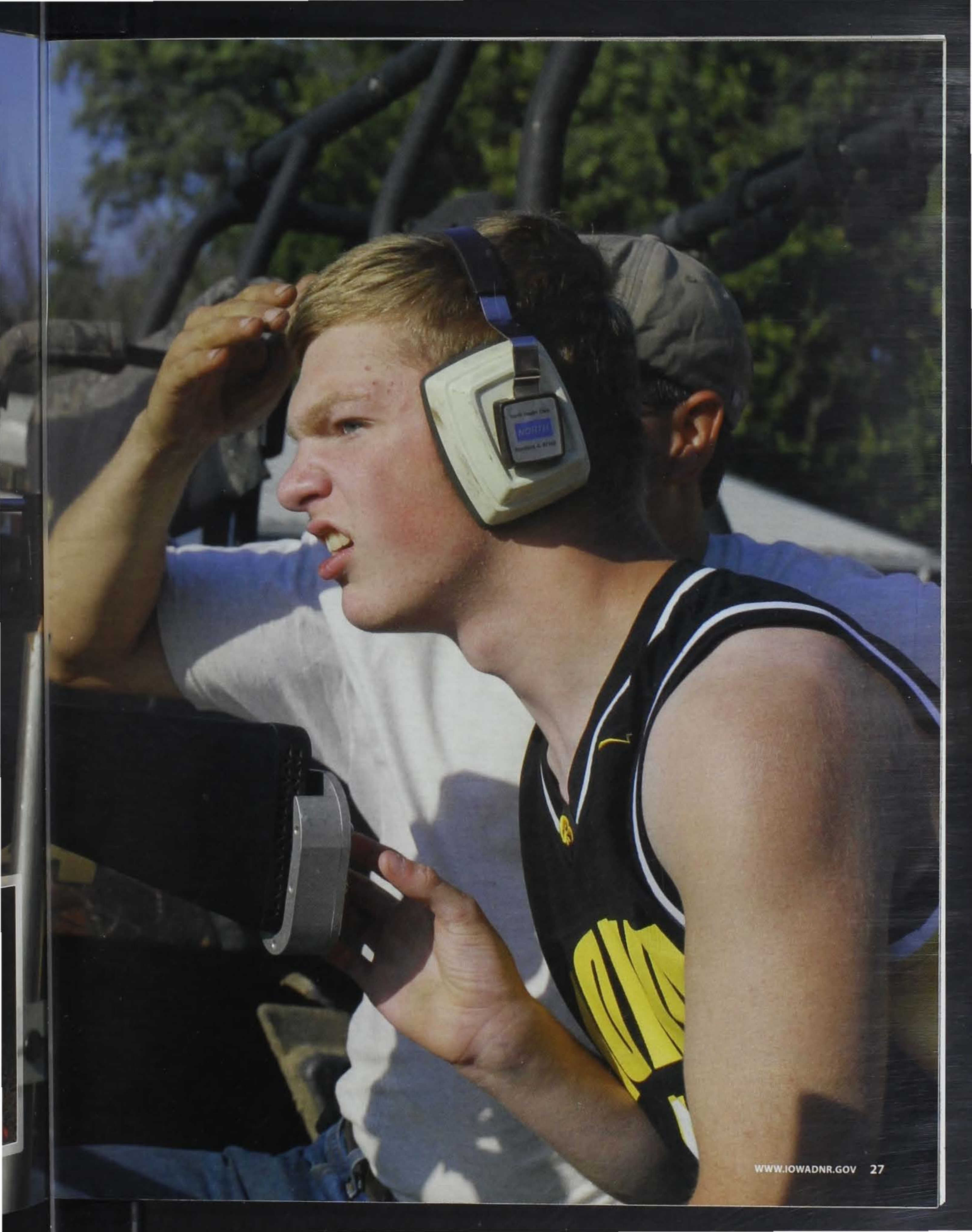
Guides? Group pictures? Mounted shotgun? No, not your typical deer hunt. But then, Special Youth Challenge (SYC) Ministries in northwest Iowa pretty much breaks the mold. “We try to enable those with disabilities to go out and hunt and enjoy God's great outdoors with the help of mechanical aids and, of course, guides and many volunteers,” explains co-founder Denny Somers.

Somers and wife Kathy again provided their rural Webb farm as Special Youth Challenge headquarters for the 2008 hunt. Their yard was crammed full of SUVs and pickups. The machine shed serves as dining hall. Across the farmyard, most of the 19 hunters and their guides had returned. A few had shot their deer on this first morning.



Custom made shooting stands designed and built by Jay Kleinwolverink provides secure placement of the firearm while allowing fingertip control to the side and up and down. As an SYC volunteer makes adjustments on Mitchell Tuttle's gun scope and shooting rack, the Vinton boy sights in his gun the evening before his 2008 hunt. The adjustments paid off. Tuttle harvested a nice buck for all the effort.





Have a young, disabled hunter who could benefit the team aspect of SYC?
Contact: Special Youth Challenge Ministries, 800-469-2083 <http://syciowa.com/>



"HOLY COW, I DID IT, MAN!"

-BEN SCHOTTLER



TOP PHOTOS: Participants fill out pre-hunt paperwork following dinner and an inspirational program. BOTTOM PHOTOS: SYC Ministries volunteer Darlene Wise hands out handmade quilts to each 2008 hunter. Braxton Weibusch smiles as he is presented with a tail and bear plaque from his first-ever turkey taken during the SYC's spring hunt. OPPOSITE PAGE: No one will be prying Ben Schottler's hands off the trophy buck he took during the 2008 hunt. The Loveland, Colo., native was one of a half-dozen nonresidents who took part in the hunt.

The scene was a mishmash of camouflage, hunting gear and jovial men and women as well as wheelchairs, crutches and fragile bodies stung by disease or disability.

The sum of all these parts, though, is a well-oiled hunting machine; one cranking out big-time memories. "We had been sitting for awhile. There was an owl hooting. Then all of a sudden, a big nine-point buck popped out on the right hand side of our blind!" recalls Ben Schottler, talking through every step of his hunt. Every step. "I took a 60 yard shot and it turned out to be good." As they got back into the blind, though, things got really interesting. "About 10 or 15 minutes later, a big doe came off the left hand side. It was only 30 yards. That was a good shot," Ben had to admit.

From Loveland, Colo., Ben had a tag to spare, allowing that second shot. In Iowa, nonresident deer hunters pay for an antlerless tag as well as their any-sex permit. Typically, twice as many nonresidents apply for the 6,000 available tags. Many hunters have to wait a year before they are drawn.

Mitchell Tuttle, of Vinton, dropped a nice buck, too. "I picked this nice doe out of the bunch. We couldn't follow her, so I moved over to this other one and took him down. My guides were really great."

SYC staff knew Iowa needed new rules to give disabled and terminally ill kids from across the nation a better chance at hunting here. They made their case with state Rep. Gary Worthan of Storm Lake and Sen. David Johnson of Ocheyedan. Both quickly sponsored a bill with support from the DNR. With a growing number of organizations working with the

disabled, in 2008 the Iowa Legislature approved a law allowing disabled and terminally ill youngsters to forego the traditional application process. Most of the 20 or so SYC hunters are from Iowa. About half a dozen, though, hail from out of state. Many don't have a year to wait.

As volunteers began skinning and processing the morning's five deer, the rest of the camp queued up for breakfast. Or maybe it was lunch by then. Goulash, wild game gumbo and plenty of Friday night leftovers.

That's right. Friday night. It would have been hard to beat that SYC kickoff dinner. Roasters of beef, mashed potatoes and vegetables crammed the serving window at the Sioux Rapids American Legion and Community Hall. All that and a table groaning with 33 homemade desserts satisfied more than 150 people. Like an army, a deer camp travels on its stomach.

During the evening's program, each hunter received a homemade quilt from Darlene Wise. Braxton picked up an award—a plaque with the mounted tail and beard

from the jake he dropped that spring during SYC's turkey hunt. "I like hunting and fishing. I like a lot of sports," he explains quietly. "I don't want to just be looked at as the kid in the wheelchair. I don't like that."

He's in the school choir. He'd like to get a wheelchair hockey league going in St. Cloud, Minn., like they have in the Twin Cities. He has a chance to go pheasant hunting this fall. He's also among the 20 hunters signed up for this year's SYC deer hunt. The kid loves to hunt.

That's why mom and dad bring him. That's why mom bear hugs a son as big as her, to hoist him out of his wheelchair. "We don't know if we have tomorrow," she explains. "Because of the progression of his disease, two years from now he may not be here or have that quality of life."

Like anything that's done well, there are a lot of people involved. "We have a 10:1 ratio here. We'll have one kid hunting and 10 people helping in some way," explains Somers. "Whether that would be cooking, cleaning up, helping build blinds, guiding, it doesn't matter. We have 10 people taking care of each of them."

Volunteer Jay Kleinwolterink of Hospers designs and builds the aluminum shooting racks. Once in place, it



takes just a touch from the hunter's hand to swing the firearm left or right, up or down. People would pay big money for these in the store. There will be 20 in service by fall. Cooks make mountains of food appear, at all hours of the day. Volunteers process deer. Guides give up days to scout and then sit for hours with someone they just met.

No second thoughts. It's their mission. "I just can't imagine not going hunting. The idea of going out and helping

appealed to me," says guide John Bauer. "Maybe some day, somebody can help me. I enjoyed getting to know Braxton, to see how excited he gets about something we take so much for granted."

For families often overburdened with medical bills, there's not a lot of cash sitting around to spend on hunting gear or travel expenses. When needed, Special Youth Challenge picks up everything from airfare to blaze orange. Fundraisers brought in \$25,000 in 2007, and another \$16,000 last year. And SYC certainly doesn't have a lock on those grounded-in-faith intentions. Around Iowa, nonprofit groups have assisted hunting operations for outdoor enthusiasts who can't quite manage it themselves.

Debilitating disease? Inoperable brain tumor? What kind of Opening Day complaints do you have? Sometimes, the journey takes a side route through reality.

Or as Ben Schottler put it, tagging his nine-point buck, "Holy cow, I did it, man!" 🐾



DELICATE AVIATORS' AMAZING ODYSSEY

September's Monarchs Embark on Nature's Most Incredible Migration

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

As the days grow shorter and fall approaches, newly emerged monarch butterflies become restless. Although the bright orange- and black-winged insects currently visiting backyard flowerbeds may appear identical to those seen earlier in the summer, they are biologically different from all others. The group of adults currently flittering about are so unusual that scientists give them a special name—this year's final crop of young are the annual super generation.

Unlike their predecessors, whose entire life cycle could be measured in mere weeks, super generation monarchs complete a three-thousand-mile-long migration marathon, acquire the remarkable ability to halt aging and then stay alive for more than eight months—the rough equivalent of a human living six centuries.

The annual cycle begins high in the remote volcanic mountains of central Mexico. With the arrival of spring, monarchs that hatched the previous summer in Canada and then migrated to Mexico last autumn, suddenly respond to the irresistible call to move north. But their second migration will be brief and adults will never see their Canadian homeland again. Arriving on the plains of Texas, the ancient insects pause to mate, lay eggs and die.

Caterpillars emerge, grow, form chrysalises, and become

adults. Second-generation butterflies continue the flight north. Soon they, too, will stop to mate, lay eggs and die. The cycle continues until, four or five generations later, in a few months, monarch butterflies began appearing in Iowa. The airborne relay race continues until, sometime in August, the species reaches its final destination on the Canadian prairies.

Arriving at the relay's northernmost finish line, these adults are the great-great-great-grandchildren of the monarchs that left Mexico just four to five months earlier. It is their offspring that become super monarchs, that unique generation that embarks on one of the animal kingdom's most incredible journeys.

Unlike previous generations, super monarchs do not mate or lay eggs right away. Instead, they devote all their energy to feeding. Their only interest is to drink nectar and build fat reserves for the grueling task ahead.

But the seasonal clock ticks with little time to waste. Within days of emerging as adults, the super generation begins to move southward. Not just in a general southerly direction, mind you, but rather on a specific and well-defined course that leads to the exact same winter roost trees used by their great-great-great-grandparents the winter before.

Taking advantage of favorable breezes, monarchs travel

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Bull thistle, *Cirsium vulgare*



Traveling up to 3,000 miles to migrate from Canada to central Mexico, no other species of butterfly in the world completes such a stunning migration like the monarchs of North America.



LEFT: Five-year old Dani Mergem of Minnetonka, Minn at the annual Monarch Butterfly Festival in Okoboji. When late summer and early fall monarchs emerge they are biologically and behaviorally different from those emerging earlier in the summer. The shorter days and cooler air of late summer trigger changes. Even though these butterflies look like summer adults, they won't mate or lay eggs until the following spring. Instead, their small bodies prepare for a strenuous flight to their overwintering roost in Mexico. **BELOW:** Lisa Pleggenkuhle Grummer of Hancock County puts the sneak on a group of migrating monarchs. She has marked more than 5,000 butterflies since 1994, reporting the data to Monarch Watch, a non-profit research group based at the University of Kansas (monarchwatch.org). **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Tagged and ready to go, data is collected by Pleggenkuhle Grummer before she releases the monarch to continue its arduous journey to central Mexico.



50 to 60 miles per day, taking time to replenish spent fuel reserves as they continue to gain weight during migration. The flight is not without casualties. Losses from storms, unexpected frosts and highway traffic exact a deadly toll.

UNLIKELY OASIS PROVIDES MONARCH SANCTUARY

To a casual passerby the spot would likely appear insignificant, if it would even be noticed at all. Just a scraggly cluster of 20 ash trees, with most reaching less than 20 feet in height. Located in the heart of the 2,200-acre prairie wetland complex of the Union Hills Waterfowl Production Area in Iowa's Cerro Gordo County, the volunteer trees are the last reminder of a long abandoned homestead.

But first impressions can be deceiving. During fall migration this apparently inconsequential grouping of 'weed trees' serves as a butterfly oasis. Overnight, this seemingly unlikely spot becomes temporary host to one of the region's greatest natural wonders as a monarch roosting area.

The transformation begins as the annual super generation of migrating monarch butterflies arrives from Canada. Attracted by more than 2,000-acres of nectar-producing goldenrod, blazing star, and other late blooming prairie plants, the monarch hordes pause to take on fuel before continuing the rigorous journey to central Mexico's Sierra Madre mountains.

Following a full and exhausting day of migration and

feeding, the colorful insects assemble at the roost during late afternoon and then spend the night in deep, torpor-like sleep. The migration begins with just a handful of butterflies checking in for the night. But soon dozens become hundreds, hundreds become thousands.

Numbers may fluctuate dramatically. It's early September, and this year's flight is approaching its peak. Yesterday the roost contained just shy of 4,000 migrating monarchs. This morning, there are more than 5,000.

Resting wingtip to wingtip, there are so many butterflies here you can almost feel them breathe. But the silence is deafening. The sun is just coming up and it is so still—so incredibly quiet. For those used to photographing birdlife, and surrounded by their songs, it is utterly amazing to be surrounded by so much life and yet so much silence at the same time.

Photographing the experience is humbling. It doesn't take long to realize the task is impossible. Although photography is a great communications tool, this is one of those moments when no photo can do the scene justice. In this case, there is simply no substitute for being here.

MIGRATING TO MEXICO

The sun has cleared the horizon now and, influenced by its warming rays, the waking monarchs begin to slowly flex their wings. A half-hour later, the first individuals break from the orange clusters and take to the air. Unlike

(Continued on page 36)

FOR THIS NET-WIELDING BUTTERFLY ENTHUSIAST, SEPTEMBER IS ALL ABOUT MONARCHS

Hancock County's Lisa Pleggenkuhle Grummer is a monarch tagging machine. As a volunteer with Monarch Watch International, she has single-handedly captured, marked and released more than 5,000 monarchs since 1994. Her labor of love is paying scientific dividends. Researchers have recovered more than 50 of her tags—nearly all from butterflies wintering in remote volcanic mountains near El Rosario in central Mexico. The returned tags represent more than 2 percent of the total Monarch Watch database for the entire state of Iowa.

But that's only the beginning. Her fascination with monarchs extends far beyond catching and tagging migrating adults. To increase backyard butterfly survival, she collects monarch eggs, cultures the caterpillars they become, provides mesh incubators as caterpillars become chrysalises, and liberates newly emerged crops of adults.

She raises up to 500 monarchs per season. Late summer is the busiest, raising young as well as collecting and tagging

migrating adults.

In early August, she's hunting for eggs daily, but doesn't start tagging until Aug. 20, to wait for the super generation of migrating butterflies to arrive. "I don't want to put a tag on anything that isn't going to go south," she says.

By early September, she might easily catch more than 100 butterflies daily and net more than 30 at once. "When that happens you know you're really having fun," she says.

"The fall migration is fascinating, and conditions have to be spot-on perfect," she says. "Triggered by shorter days and north winds, their instincts just take over. Monarchs can travel 50 miles per day. With the right winds, they'll make 100 miles."

But migrating monarchs can't just flap their wings all day. That would be too costly. To save energy, they take advantage of wind currents and soar like eagles. "It's amazing to think of a monarch traveling all the way from Canada to the mountains of Mexico," she says.

LEFT: Map showing fall migration pattern of monarch butterflies ranging from Canada to mountains of central Mexico.



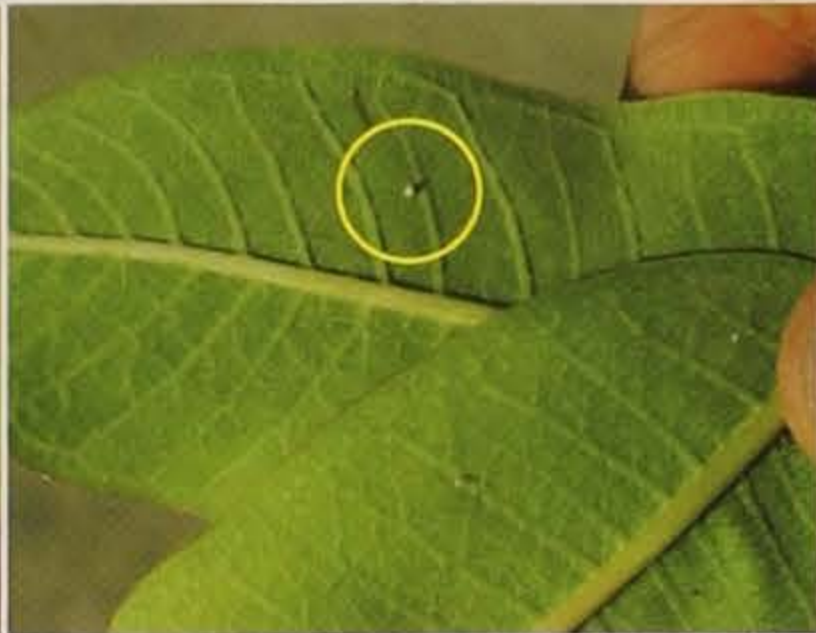
A roost of resting monarchs in Cerro Gordo County. The butterflies depend upon nearby nectar-producing prairie flowers for fuel to continue their migration to Mexico.



MONARCH LIFE CYCLE



STEP 1: Mating



STEP 2: Egg



STEP 3: Caterpillar (Larvae)



STEP 4: Ready to morph



STEP 5: Chrysalis



STEP 6: Ready to emerge



STEP 7: Monarch emerges

(Continued from page 32)

birds, there is no organized flocking. Instead, each butterfly randomly flits in the direction of the yellow and purple flowers that dot the prairie landscape. The numbers increase until the sky fills with monarchs. For this year's super generation of monarchs, a new day of migration has begun.

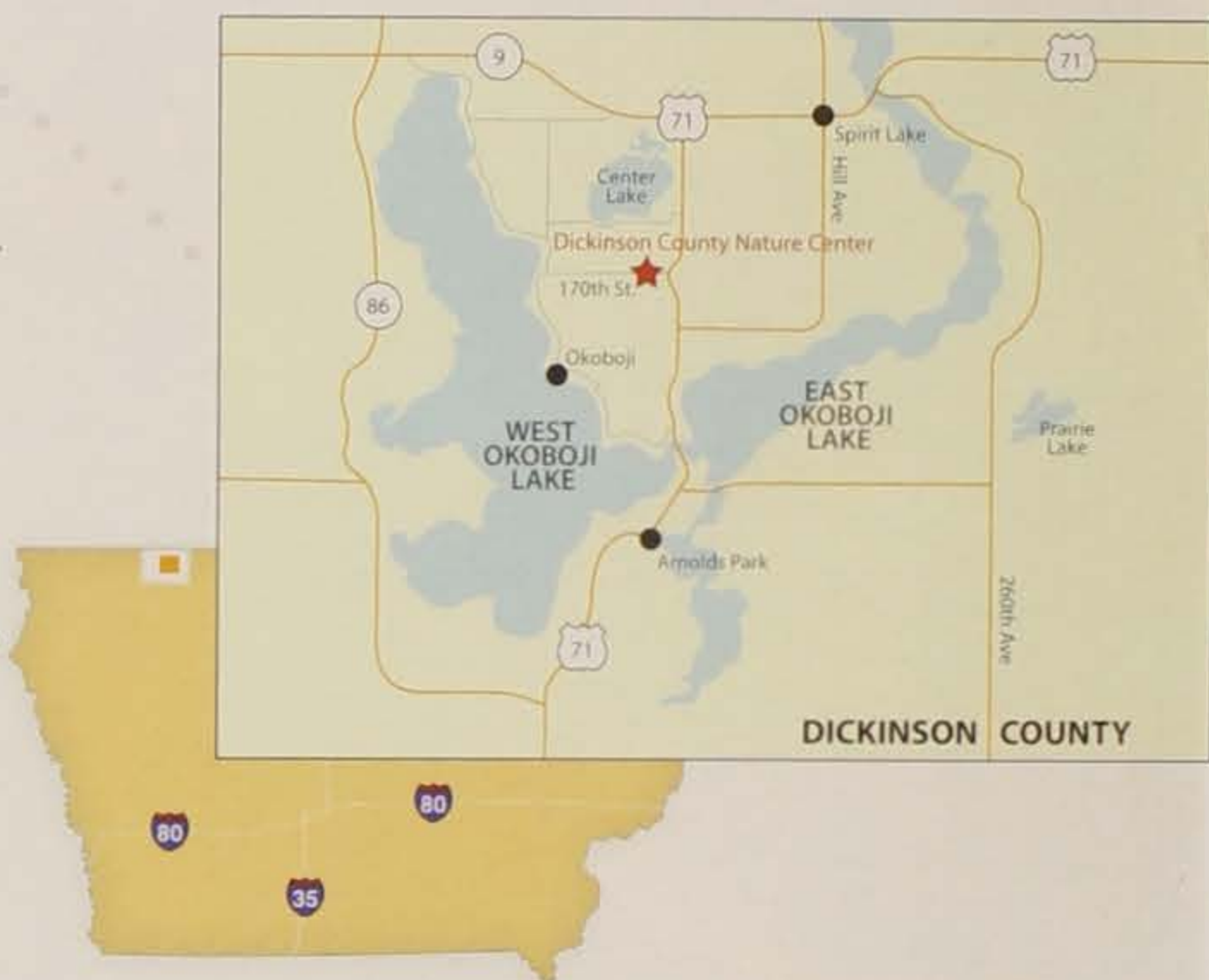
As the migration moves southward, the pathway narrows. Survivors concentrate and merge into huge butterfly clouds that fill the skies like orange glitter. Finally, following more than two months of rigorous travel, the super generation arrives in Mexico. With frayed wing edges and missing scales, many appear tattered and worn, while others appear largely unscathed.

One final and seemingly impossible hurdle must be conquered before the insects can finally rest. That challenge is to reach the perfect winter climate found solely among the high elevation, mountainside firs that stand more than 10,000 feet above sea level.

The task is daunting but crucial. Winter is fast approaching and no monarch eggs, caterpillars or adults remain to the north. For weary migrants, the only chance of survival lies in successfully reaching the perfect environment of the volcanic forest.

The future of the species hangs in the balance. Everything is now staked on the worn, four-inch wings of those who have made it this far. The butterflies begin their ascent and within days begin filtering into the two-

mile-high winter roosting sites of their ancestors. Home at last to a place they've never been, the super monarchs slumber until lengthening spring days rekindle the age-old urgency to move north and lay eggs on the leaves of milkweed plants, giving birth to another generation. 🦋



LEFT: Callan Hinn, 11, of Spirit Lake goes nose-to-nose with a butterfly during the annual Monarch Butterfly Festival in Okoboji. **ABOVE:** Dickinson County naturalist Barbara Tagami explains the monarch life cycle to festival participants who catch, tag and release monarchs to aid research about the amazing migration. **OPPOSITE, FAR RIGHT:** Hallie Welding, 10, of Spirit Lake holds a certificate for festival tagging.

Habitat destruction affects monarchs, whose caterpillars feed on milkweed plants, which along with adult nectaring plants, are vulnerable to herbicides and pesticides used by landscapers, farmers, gardeners and others. To offset the loss of milkweeds and nectar sources you can create "Monarch Waystations" (monarch habitats) in home gardens, schools, businesses, parks, nature centers, roadsides and other areas. Without a major effort to restore milkweeds, monarch populations are certain to decline to extremely low levels. Order a kit at http://monarchwatch.org/waystations/seed_kit.html



Meadow blazing star, *Liatris ligulistylis*

**August 29
FOURTH ANNUAL MONARCH BUTTERFLY FESTIVAL**
Enjoy butterfly gardens and activities at Dee and Kate's Butterfly House. Learn about life cycles, their incredible journey, make a craft and tag butterflies as part of the Monarch Watch program. Free event through the *Dickinson County Conservation Board* (712-338-4786) Held 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Aug. 29 at *Dickinson County Nature Center, 2279 170th Street, Okoboji.*

DICKINSON COUNTY BUTTERFLY FESTIVAL CONNECTS KIDS WITH NATURE

The ear-to-ear grin said it all. Hailie Welding was having the time of her life.

Welding had just selected, captured and successfully tagged a migrating monarch butterfly.

"This is so cool," exclaimed the Spirit Lake 10-year-old. "Just a few days ago my monarch was still a caterpillar. Today it's a beautiful butterfly and ready to fly to Mexico. Mexico is a long, long ways from here," she adds.

Ready for release, the newly tagged, brilliantly colored monarch stood poised on Welding's fingertip. Facing the breeze, the insect slowly flexed its wings and then buoyantly lofted into the warming autumn air. As the butterfly soared higher, Welding squealed with delight as an exuberant crowd of onlookers cheered.

During the next several hours, similar scenes were repeated as dozens of youngsters tagged and released butterflies. The event took place last September as part of the annual Monarch Butterfly Festival. According to Dickinson County Naturalist, Barbara Tagami, the festival takes monarch mania to unprecedented levels.

"The monarch festival is becoming one of our most popular events and around 200 people have shown up so far this morning," says Tagami. "The monarch butterfly is such an incredible creature and there are so many lessons—so many important links that can be connected—when we use this insect as an educational tool.

"Although everyone is welcome, a lot of our activities focus on young people," says Tagami. "Kids are just fascinated by insects, and we use that as a tool of discovery. I like to think

that children are just little people who are still free to discover nature. Learning about the amazing life cycle and migration of monarch butterflies is an excellent way to help kids connect with nature."

Much of Dickinson County's monarch festival involves hands-on activities. During the "Bugology Hike," for example, participants are encouraged to spread across the landscape and collect any insects they come across. Upon returning to the festival's Butterfly House headquarters, budding scientists use their detective skills to conduct thorough "insectigations" of their specimens. Other hikes include searching for caterpillars among the milkweed leaves of an official Monarch Watch Way Station, or attempting the capture of migrating adult monarchs stopping to visit the nectar-rich flowers of the butterfly garden.

For kids who don't manage to catch adult monarchs, there are sure-fire, second-chance opportunities for success. All that's necessary is to step inside one of the festival's butterfly-filled screen tents where youngsters pick and choose the monarchs they will tag. Once their monarch is recorded and released, each participating youngster receives a personal certificate to commemorate the event.

"I think people are beginning to understand that kids have become so techy these days that they are losing touch with the natural world," says Tagami. "We absolutely have to change that. It is so important for young people to connect with nature and the outdoors. Understanding the wonders and needs of something like the monarch butterfly is one way to make that happen."

Autumn Staycations

BY JENNIFER WILSON ILLUSTRATIONS BY STUDIO Z

Fall color, big woods, maple syrup and solitude make for wonderful weekends. Here are three options.



VISIT BEAUTIFUL

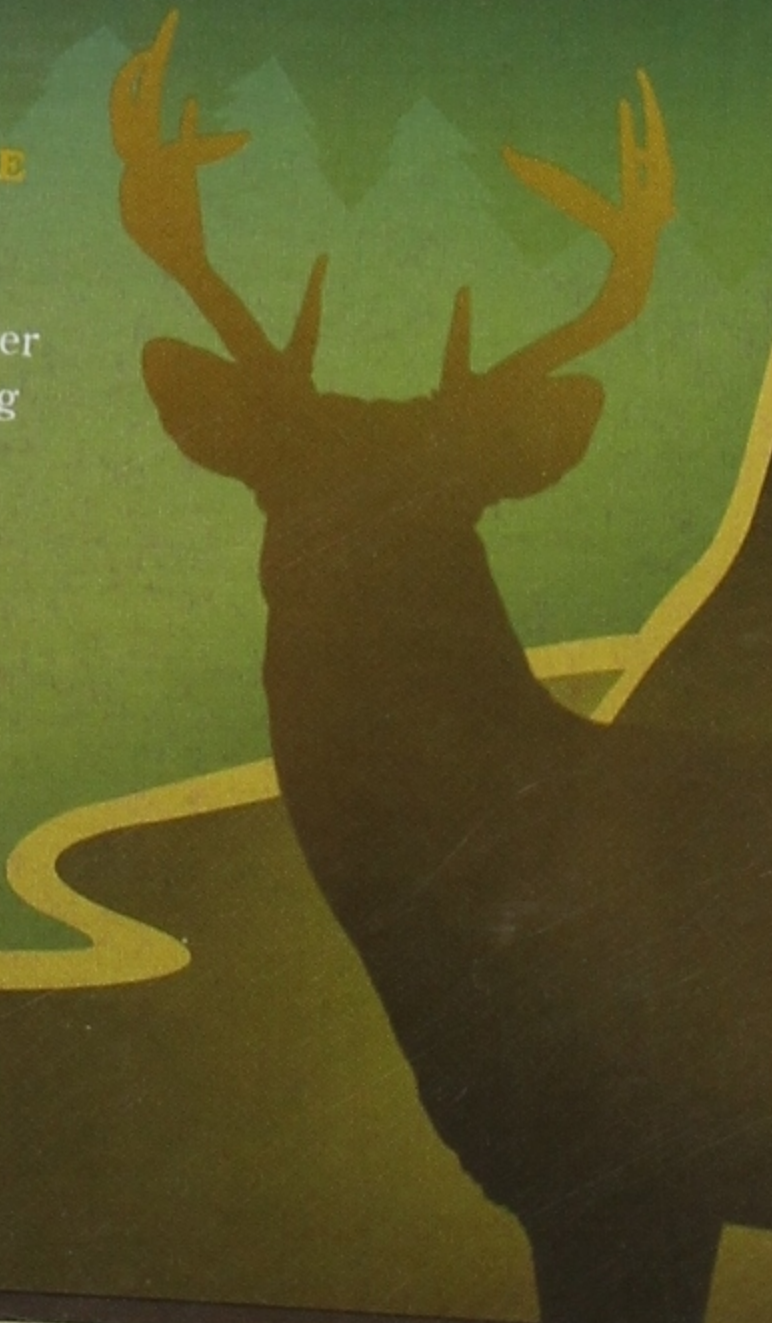
SHIMEK


STATE FOREST

HIKING IOWA'S BACKCOUNTRY?

Finding remote wilderness doesn't have to involve coptering into bear country. Shake the crowds and go deep at **SHIMEK STATE FOREST** in far southeast Iowa. If you're a hunter, you'll get your game on with fall mushrooms, deer, turkey, small beasts and antler sheds. Fishing, hiking, birding, mountain biking and cross-country skiing are popular, too.

Best part: As one of the state's largest contiguous blocks of timber, many of Shimek's patches of woods are rarely seen by human eyes. Its five small mirror lakes look like artwork on inspirational posters. (319-878-3811; www.iowadnr.gov).





**GREEN'S
SUGAR BUSH**
Maple Syrup

WHERE FALL COLOR TURNS INTO PANCAKE-TOPPING
"We've been making maple syrup since 1851," says Karen Green of *Green's Sugar Bush in Castalia*, 17 miles south of Decorah. Hike and view the maple colors, then return around the first week of March when the Greens begin tapping their trees and visitors gather to watch until the season ends around the first week of April. Wander 36 acres of timber, buy syrup, and send the kids on horse-drawn wagon or pony rides. For two weekends in a row during March, the Greens host a Sunday pancake feed, too, for a small fee. It's only a 15 mile drive to Gunder, home of the Irish Shanti bar (and the mighty Gunderburger), and 30 miles to the Mississippi River. Sounds like a road trip to us. The million dollar question: *Does Iowa syrup taste different than Vermont syrup?* "It shouldn't," says Karen Green. "Maple syrup is maple syrup. You're making it from a hard maple tree no matter where it grows."

Mail orders accepted.
One gallon of syrup
\$45, or \$3.60 per pound.
Bring your own container
for a discount. No credit
cards. (563-567-8472;
[meyershavenhorseand
auctionco.com/greens
sugarbush.html](http://meyershavenhorseand
auctionco.com/greens
sugarbush.html)).

FALL COLORS OF IOWA



STUNNING LEAF PEEPING WITH RUSTIC DIVERSIONS

Leaves are leaves. Drive anywhere in fall, and the entire country is covered with color-morphing foliage, right? You'll be gaga over the colors at Iowa's best bet for rock-star chlorophyll drama—the Mississippi River. **THE CLIFF-SIDE VISTAS OF PIKES PEAK STATE PARK** in northeast Iowa in particular (563-873-2341). If you're not up for tent camping, overnight at The Natural Gait in Monona and snuggle in to a rustic cabin in front of a wood burning stove as the air turns chilly. Drive to **YELLOW RIVER STATE FOREST** and cast for trout on Paint and Little Paint Creeks. (*The Natural Gait*, 877-776-2208; thenaturalgait.com).

PHOTO BY KEN BLOCK, NPS

Accepted.
byrup
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OYSTER MUSHROOM (above)
Pleurotus ostreatus
EDIBILITY: Choice
Photo by Roger Heidt

OYSTER MUSHROOM-young
Pleurotus ostreatus
EDIBILITY: Choice
Photo by Jim Frink

ON THE HUNT FOR FALL MUSHROOMS

BY MIKE KREBILL

When it comes to hunting mushrooms, the spring morel mushroom is king of the woods. Yet fall is a fabulous time to be outdoors, and a great time to take your family mushroom hunting. The days are cooler, the colors beautiful and the still-warm earth and September rains produce a riot of mushrooms. While it is true you won't stumble upon the prized morel, there are plenty flavorful fungi to be found.

FLAVORFUL FALL FUNGI

Lion's Mane (scientific name *Hericium erinaceus*) looks like a cheerleader's white pom pom and tastes like lobster. Sulfur mushroom (a.k.a. *chicken of the woods*) has a texture worthy of its name, with an uncanny resemblance to chicken when cooked in chicken stock. The hen of the woods has its own taste, and is delightful grilled and basted with barbecue sauce.

The Chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius* in particular) is slightly peppery, but eagerly sought after here and abroad. My sister's favorite is a gray to black chanterelle known as the black trumpet. It would be nice if the King Bolete were more common in Iowa; its meaty texture and nutty flavor have made it beloved here and in Europe. Oyster mushrooms, a very popular edible with a pleasant, fruity smell, does not taste like an oyster; the name refers to the shape of its cap.

Other good-to-choice fall edibles include the Shaggy Mane, the Giant Puffball and two of the smaller puffballs that grow on wood. My seventh grade students loved to coat small pieces of giant puffball with onion ring batter, deep fry them

to a light golden brown, and then dip them in ranch dressing. I consider the taste bland when cooked up any other way.

"Giant Puffballs are bland when they're cooked in butter in a pan, even though that's how most people eat them," agrees Dave Layton, president of the Prairie States Mushroom Club. "But unpeeled and raw in salad or on a sandwich, they're delicious. They're one of the few I eat raw and I've shared them that way with others without problems, although many experts advise against eating any wild mushrooms raw. Always sample new mushrooms cautiously whether raw or cooked."

GETTING STARTED

The best and safest way to begin learning about mushrooms is to get outdoors with someone who can identify them. This is critical if you intend to collect and eat mushrooms, as you must be certain of their identity and edibility. Most states, like Iowa, are blessed with a mushroom hunting club located via a simple Internet search. Members range from experts who study fungi for a living to long-time hobbyists to neophytes. By taking

your family on forays (mushroom hunts) with a club, you will have fun and a wonderful opportunity to learn.

Iowa's club is the Prairie States Mushroom Club www.geocities.com/iowamushroom/. Click on "Forays" in the sidebar and you can learn the date, time and location of the next outing. The Website is informative, with photos and links that open up a new world for you. For those who don't have Internet access, contact current PSMC President Dave Layton, 542 Ninth Ave. S., Clinton, Iowa 52732; 563-242-0880. The club has a quarterly newsletter available by mail.

COLLECTING GEAR & TIPS

For carrying mushrooms, a basket or a mesh bag is preferred. Waxed paper, waxed sandwich bags or paper lunch sacks help separate, keep clean and protect different kinds of mushrooms. Never put mushrooms in plastic bags; they will spoil quickly.

A gardening trowel simplifies digging around the base of mushrooms to make sure they are not Amanitas. (Amanita mushrooms have a volva, a cup-like sac around the base of the stalk, and a ring around the stem—important characteristics in identifying this group of mushrooms with deadly poisonous members.)

A knife is handy to cut through the mushroom's stalk, its attachment to wood or to trim away bad parts or dirt. A 1.5-inch paintbrush is handy for brushing off mushrooms to clean them.

Insect repellent helps when the bugs are bad. Apply it before leaving the car so you do not need to carry it. Deerflies may be a nuisance in early September; wear a cap for protection. Before setting off through tall grass, brush or woods, defend yourself from ticks by stretching your socks over your pant legs. That will keep them from crawling up inside your pants and biting you or burrowing into your skin before you get back home. Be sure to inspect yourself carefully when you return home.

As far as other collecting gear, a hiking stick is useful. Besides assisting you up and down hills and when crossing creeks, it can be used to move leaves and bend small plants to spot hidden mushrooms.

Letting people know where you are going is a good precaution when heading outdoors. A whistle and cell phone can aid others in finding you if you become lost or injured. A compass might help you get back if you take a bearing before you start walking. Some people like to carry along a GPS unit. A camera is handy. Personally, I like to carry a water bottle. I get thirsty hiking around.

IDENTIFYING MUSHROOMS

There are several ways to identify mushrooms. The simplest and safest way is to take the actual specimens to an expert, and let that person identify them for you. Becoming a member of a mushroom hunting club helps you make those contacts. Tracking down a botanist or calling a herbarium at a college or university may provide

you with references, too. A naturalist who works for a county conservation board may know, or may know whom to ask. Your local Iowa State University Extension office might be able to point you in the right direction. Finding an expert every time you want a mushroom identified may be tough, however, so you should learn how to identify mushrooms yourself.

Sending photos by email, or posting photos online for people to guess at, is not nearly as safe. Identifying a mushroom beyond the shadow of a doubt requires more than a picture. While guesses might help you narrow the possibilities, they do not guarantee the identity of the mushroom—a must if you are entertaining any ideas about eating the mushroom.

You might look through the illustrations in a field guide to mushrooms, and find a match or close matches. Even people who have been identifying mushrooms for years do that. They know, however, that the only sure way to positively identify a mushroom is to have all of the book's descriptive characteristics match the unknown specimen. If you choose this method, be painstakingly sure all characteristics match. If they do not, that is not your mushroom!

A final way is to key the mushroom out. To save time and prevent mistakes in identification, authors of field guides often include a key.

A key separates groups of mushrooms from each other based on true-false statements about their characteristics. Terms used may be new to you, so take the time to learn what they mean. You will probably need to make a spore print, since keys often separate mushrooms by spore color. To make a spore print, place the cap of the fungus down so that half of it is on white paper, half on black paper. (White spores will show up better on the black paper, and dark-colored spores will be easier to see against the white paper.) Cover the cap with a bowl and leave it for two hours before checking it to see if the spores have dropped out.

COOKING MUSHROOMS

Few mushrooms can be eaten raw. Sufficient cooking breaks down some types of toxins likely to make you sick. Conversely, cooking will *not* destroy all toxins and render even poisonous mushrooms safe to eat. Every bit as important to remember is that you must be certain of your mushroom's identity and edibility before you go ahead and cook it. The cardinal rule is **"IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!"**

Like produce, select the best for eating. The nicer they look and the fresher they are, the better they will taste. And just like lunchmeat, raw chicken, raw hamburger, or milk, mushrooms can be spoiled by bacteria, and that can make you sick. Use them right away or dry them. Most mushrooms do not freeze well.

How people react to a meal of mushrooms depends on their body chemistry. My mother became ill from

1) BLACK TRUMPET

Craterellus cornucopioides

EDIBILITY: Choice

Photo by Jim Frink

2) COMMON CHANTERELLE

Cantharellus cibarius

EDIBILITY: Choice

Photo by Jim Frink

3) LION'S MANE

Hericium erinaceus

EDIBILITY: Choice

Photo by Jim Frink

4) SULFUR SHelf

Laetiporus sulphureus

EDIBILITY: Edible (with caution)

Cook thoroughly; eat small amounts

Photo by Jim Frink

5) HEN OF THE WOODS

Grifola frondosa

EDIBILITY: Choice

Photo by Jim Frink



GEM-STUDDED PUFFBALL

Lycoperdon perlatum

EDIBILITY: Good if firm, white inside. Peel.

Photo by Jim Frink







1) KING BOLETE

Boletus edulis

EDIBILITY: Choice

Photo by Jim Frink

2) SHAGGY MANE

Coprinus comatus

EDIBILITY: Choice

Photo by Mike Krebill

3) GIANT PUFFBALL

Calvatia gigantea

EDIBILITY: Choice

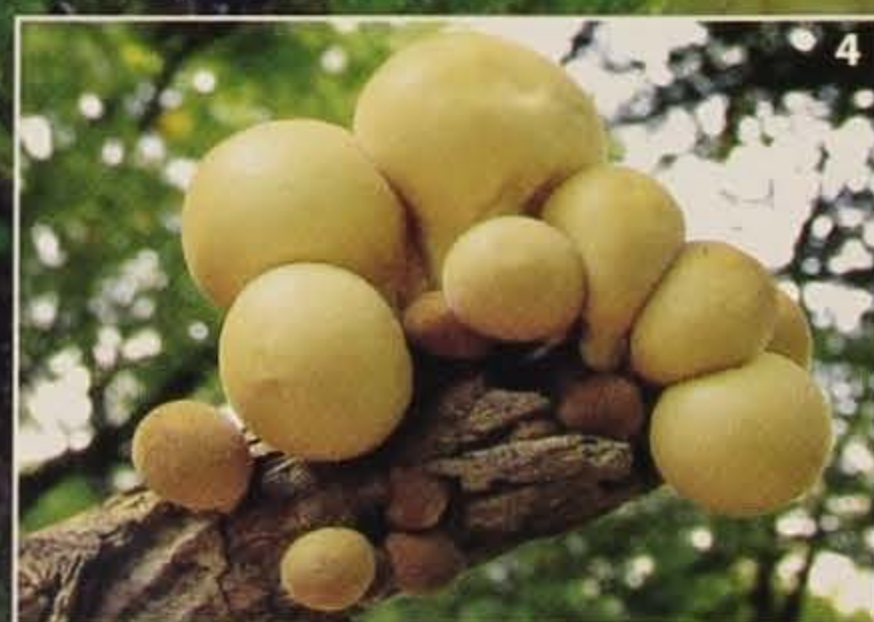
Photo by Peter Hansen

4) PEAR-SHAPED PUFFBALL

Lycoperdon pyriforme

EDIBILITY: Good if firm & white inside.

Photo by Jim Frink



eating the same mushrooms the rest of our family ate. In another Keokuk family, all the women were hospitalized after a meal of mushrooms; the men were not fazed. Avoid problems like this by doing two things: 1) be absolutely certain of the identity of the mushroom, then carefully read about its edibility, and 2) eat a modest amount the first time, no matter how good it may taste. Wait 24 hours to see how your body reacts before consuming any more.

Always save one mushroom back for identification in case it is needed by the hospital. Dr. Lois Tiffany—the revered 50-plus year botanist at Iowa State University, now retired—has long served as a toxicologist for the Prairie States Mushroom Club and has handled emergency calls from hospitals regarding mushroom poisoning. It would help her or other professionals to have a specimen of what was eaten.

Recipes can be found in many mushroom books, cookbooks, and by searching online.

MUSHROOM COMMON SENSE

Rich in vitamin B2, niacin and copper, and low in calories, mushrooms are a healthy addition to any diet. However, some mushrooms can cause gastrointestinal troubles, and in rare cases, even death. Follow the tips in this article, the tips below and the suggested reading to ensure the mushrooms you put on your plate are safe.

1. *Poisonous mushrooms taste nasty.*

TRUTH: According to victims, the *Death Cap Amanita* (responsible for as much as 90 percent of all mushroom poisoning deaths) had a good taste.

2. *Animals leave poisonous mushrooms alone.*

TRUTH: Insects, slugs and chipmunks can and do eat fungi poisonous to humans.

3. *Any mushroom can be safely eaten after cooking.*

TRUTH: No method of cooking will make all poisonous mushrooms harmless.

4. *White mushrooms are safe to eat.*

TRUTH: The most common deadly mushrooms are white (Amanita Group).

5. *Even experts have died from picking the wrong mushrooms.*

TRUTH: This myth is perpetuated every year. Upon closer examination, it is often found that the person who died was far from being an expert and made a foolish mistake that most mushroom hunters would never make. Even collectors who have been foraging for wild mushrooms for only a short period are unlikely to die from mushroom poisoning. All it takes is a little training in the dos and don'ts of mushroom collecting, and the use of common sense. Until a person learns how to distinguish mushrooms based on their characteristics, it is wise to stick with those species that have no poisonous look-alikes. Try new species only

upon the identification by and guidance from knowledgeable collectors who have eaten them.

6. *If it grows on wood, it is no good.*

TRUTH: Some mushrooms that grow on wood are inedible, some are poisonous, and some are downright delicious. Oyster mushrooms, for instance, are always found on wood, and they are considered a choice edible.

7. *It's easy to tell the difference between a toadstool and a mushroom.*

TRUTH: Only if a toad is sitting on it! The distinction between the two is that a toadstool once referred to a poisonous fungus; a mushroom an edible one. That nuance seems to have vanished, and we seldom hear "toadstool" used any more. Instead, we talk of safe mushrooms and poisonous mushrooms. There is no simple way to tell what is safe and what is not, short of spending a lot of time identifying the species. Once the identity is known, the edibility may be stated in the description.

8. *Every edible mushroom has a poisonous lookalike.*

TRUTH: Some do, but many do not. You can be reasonably safe if you stick with the 11 edible species in this issue. It is still wise to make certain they match all the characteristics described in the references listed in the article. Hunting them with the Prairie States Mushroom Club is highly recommended. 🐸

SUGGESTED READING

BOOKS

1. Joe McFarland and Gregory M. Mueller. *Edible Wild Mushrooms of Illinois & Surrounding States: A Field-to-Kitchen Guide.* University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago. 2009.
2. Cora Mollen and Larry Weber. *Fascinating Fungi of the North Woods.* Kollath+Stensaas Publishing <http://www.kollathstensaas.com>.
3. D. M. Huffman, L. H. Tiffany, G. Knaphus, and R. A. Healy. *Mushrooms and Other Fungi of the Midcontinental U.S., 2nd edition.* University of Iowa Press, Iowa City. 2008.
4. Bruce Horn, Richard L. Kay, and Dean S. Abel. *A Guide to Kansas Mushrooms.* University Press of Kansas, Lawrence. 1993.
5. Eleanor Lawrence and Sue Harniess. *An Instant Guide to Mushrooms & Other Fungi.* Crescent Books, New York. 1991.

WEBSITES

1. www.geocities.com/iowamushroom/
2. <http://iowamushroom.smugmug.com/>
3. www.herbarium.iastate.edu/fungi/
4. www.illinoismushrooms.com

2009 HUNTING FORECAST

BY JOE WILKINSON

Have deer bumped pheasants as Iowa's showcase game species?

How long will the whitetail boom continue?

What would it take to return to a million-pheasant harvest?

As Iowa hunters head into their favorite time of the year, a bountiful deer outlook prevails, but serious habitat concerns still hover over Iowa's favorite game bird. Meanwhile, November weather sparks waterfowl questions. And as some take a look at a strong fall turkey flock, most look past opportunities for two species once a backbone of Iowa's hunting heritage.

DEER

Hunters pursuing Iowa's premiere big game species will again enjoy decent prospects for a trophy buck and ample chances in most of the state to harvest does. "Your best hunting prospects, if you equate that to deer numbers, will be in eastern Iowa and then, essentially, the southern half of Iowa. North-central and northwest Iowa have the lowest deer densities," points out DNR deer biologist Tom Litchfield.

Last season, hunters in Iowa reported taking 142,194 whitetails, although biologists know some hunters are still not reporting all harvested deer. Again last season, the harvest of does topped 50 percent. That helps towards the goal of reducing herd numbers to where they were in the 1990s statewide by the spring of 2012.

Hunters can still purchase one any-sex tag for a gun season and another if they hunt with a bow. From there, antlerless tags spread out the opportunities, especially if you are interested in hunting in southern Iowa.

With seasons stretching from late summer to mid-winter, there were plenty of opportunities. Hunters like Nick Henry took advantage of them, tagging a deer in four different seasons. "I like the variety. I hunted from warm weather to mid winter," recalls the 16-year-old Solon native. "It's more fun in the late season. You don't concentrate

PHOTO BY ROGER HILL



2009 HUNTING FORECAST



PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH

on just one deer. There might be 20 running in a herd. You have to change your tactics."

This year, look for fine-tuning in the antlerless seasons and quotas. The big change is dropping 17 northeast and east-central counties from the November and late January antlerless seasons. Available November tags will be valid only on private land. A few more antlerless tags will be available in central and southern Iowa counties. "We are targeting the counties slowest to respond to increased harvest goals," says Litchfield. There are 131,600 antlerless tags available across 77 counties.

Yet the chance for a trophy buck remains strong. "Iowa definitely ranks one, two or three of the 50 states for Boone & Crockett potential entries, depending on who you talk to," says Litchfield with a nod. "One thing raising deer hunting to another level is the quality of our herd; the age structure, the buck to doe ratio. It is accomplished without 'antler point restrictions' or regulations like that."

Even with all those choices, nothing beats a little pre-season homework. "It really became apparent last year. All the rain and flooding changed deer distribution," recalls Litchfield. "Hunters who paid attention to the conditions knew ahead of time which bottomlands flooded, which fields didn't get planted. They could adjust their plans."

Litchfield reminds hunters that nothing beats putting in extra time in the field.

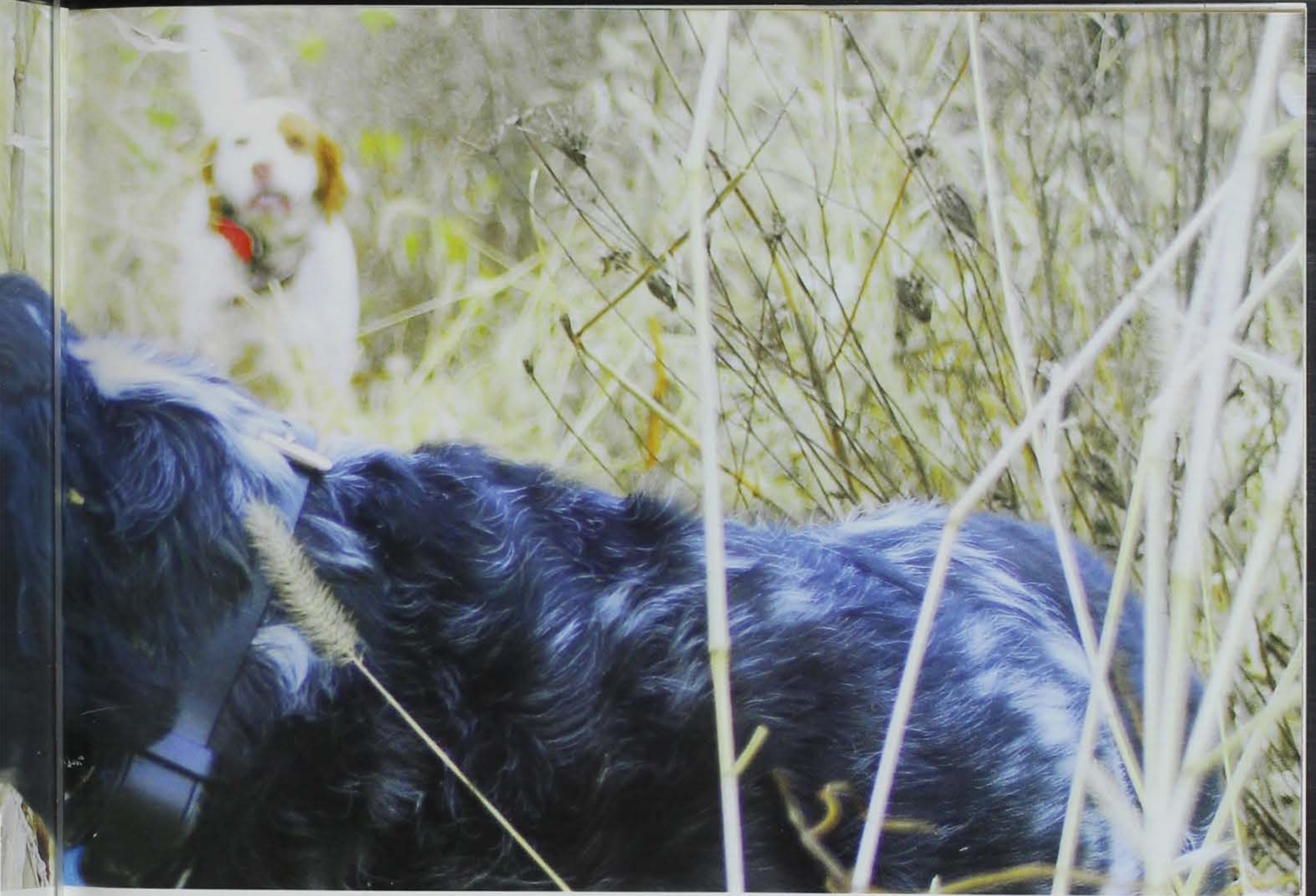
PHEASANTS

It's been a rough decade for Iowa's No. 1 game bird. Blasted by winter cold and snow, flooded by excess spring rain and having habitat disappear under their feet, pheasant populations have been on a downhill slide. Though annual harvests topped 1 million pheasants for years, a record low 383,000 birds were taken in 2008.

The good news for 2009? Bird numbers are up and that should be reflected in the fall season. Still, valuable habitat keeps slipping away.

Weather data—detailing winter snow cover and spring rainfall—give us a first look at the season's pheasant prospects. "We came back to an 'average' winter and spring. "I see pheasant numbers increasing 20 to 40 percent this year," reports Todd Bogenschutz, DNR upland wildlife biologist. "It looks like fair to good populations in northwest, north-central, west-central and central Iowa. And the rest of the state should have better 2009 populations."

Where should you be opening day? "I'd want to be in a grassy area next to harvested fields, say north of I-80 and west of I-35," muses Bogenschutz. "In eastern Iowa, good switchgrass next to a field with the crops out would



be your best bet.” That’s music to the ears of hunters, some of whom skipped pheasant hunting altogether last year. Random sampling indicated just 86,000 license buyers hunted pheasants last year, also a low in 40 years of record keeping.

For many, though, it’s more than just bringing down roosters. Troy Craig comes back from Alaska each fall and hunts in the Kossuth and Emmett county areas. The major reason is to spend time with his son, who lives in Iowa. “Pheasant hunting there is some of the best hunting there is. I like watching the dogs work. That’s as much fun as the hunting.”

A fall rebound sounds great, but one year of normal weather only carries the birds so far. “Even with an above average hatch, Iowa’s lack of habitat remains a limiting factor,” stresses Bogenschutz. “In the peak years of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Iowa had over 5 million acres of suitable pheasant habitat. This past year, that dropped to 3.3 million acres.”

With the current habitat and with just “average” weather, Iowa hunters could harvest 600,000 to 800,000 pheasants in a season. The good ol’ days of a million birds, though? “It would be challenging. We would have to average 35 to 40 birds per survey route. By comparison, last year we averaged 18,” points out

Bogenschutz. “Looking at habitat, you would need 4 to 5 million acres on the ground. Weather factors in, too. It would almost take a mini-drought and 12-inch winter snowfalls for a couple years,” says Bogenschutz, aware that neither scenario is likely to occur.

QUAIL

With a feathered “whrr,” the small gamebird rockets out of the brush-choked thicket. Then another, and another until the eight or 10 or 14 bobwhite quail have flushed from their cover. Maybe you get off a couple shots. If you are lucky, you will pick up a single or two as you trail the broken covey.

In recent years, you have been lucky if you even saw a quail. Changing land use practices have reduced their habitat over the last few decades. Wildlife biologists, working with private landowners and on some public areas in southern Iowa, are working to change that. Edge feathering of ravines, fencelines and small woodlots creates the 10- to 12-foot brushy cover quail prefer. Native grass plantings, like little bluestem, help provide the relatively open ground needed for quail chicks to forage.

Still, it is rare to see a quail in Iowa beyond the southern couple tiers of counties. Slightly more than 13,000 were taken by hunters in 2008. “We still have some

2009 HUNTING FORECAST



PHOTO BY LOWELL WASHBURN

dedicated quail hunters down here," reports DNR wildlife biologist Chuck Steffen. "I think most quail, though, are taken incidental to pheasant hunting."

RABBITS

Give him a brushy woodlot and a nose-to-the-ground beagle, and a rabbit hunter is in heaven. Whether it is through September brambles or fresh February snow, Iowa hunters can stretch their rabbit forays over six months. Yet, like the squirrel hunt, it is a tradition that has faded over the last few decades with the boom in deer and turkey hunting.

Even into the 1960s, Iowa hunters harvested 2 million rabbits a year. In the past two decades, it has dropped from about 300,000 to about 120,000 in 2008. "I have really seen a decline in resident rabbit hunters during my years here," comments Steffen, who has spent his entire 30-plus-year career in southern Iowa. He also said rabbit numbers have dropped over the long term. Still, summer roadside counts over the last decade have been stable.

"We do have a core of rabbit hunters who come from out of state," says Steffen. "They really appreciate having a good place to hunt. Almost all of them run beagles. They enjoy running the dogs, listening to them."

With or without a dog, there is likely prime "rabbitat"

within a few miles of you. "You want brush piles, dropped trees, really thick stuff. They need that structure down close to the ground to protect them from predators," advises Steffen. "If it is close to grasses or clover, so much the better. Rabbits love clover."

And you don't have to wait until the dead of winter, when all the other seasons close, to beat the brush for bunnies. Populations peak in July. That means hunters in September will see more rabbits, before predation takes its toll.

SQUIRRELS

If there is one game animal underused by modern Iowa hunters, it is squirrels. Even into the 1960s, it was common still for hunters to harvest 1.4 million in a year. In the last few years, it has bounced around in the 120,000 to 200,000 range. Still, whether you duck into a timbered hillside, or introduce a young hunter to that first outing, it starts with the right habitat. "Find good mast-producing trees. And sit still," counsels Jim Coffey, a DNR wildlife technician at Chariton. In a good acorn year, that means a nice stand of oaks. Acorn production is not always predictable, though. "I think hickory trees produce a more consistent crop," says Coffey. "Find a hickory grove and you will find squirrels."

Early in the season, stealth is the key. Walk slowly,



quietly and lock down when you spy a squirrel. Later, fallen leaves telegraph your position. That's when you get in early and sit. Let the squirrels come to you.

Generations of squirrel hunters shared a family tradition. Sometimes they'd slipped into the pre-dawn woods. Sometimes they'd go out as a group—after everybody pushed away from the Sunday dinner table. But that was back when a bigger chunk of Iowa's population lived on or near the family farm.

And frankly, it was before whitetail deer and wild turkeys repopulated our woods. Great hunting opportunities, granted, but Coffey wouldn't mind a return to the "good old days," especially where kids are involved. "Squirrel hunting teaches you about the biology of the woods; how the wildlife interact with each other. You built a family tradition with those 8- and 10-year-old beginners. Now, many start by hunting deer and turkeys. I worry that they may never appreciate the excitement of small game hunting."

WATERFOWL

Good waterfowl hunting hinges on water levels, food sources and weather—not only for Iowa-produced ducks and geese—but across Prairie and Arctic Canada, where the overwhelming majority of fall waterfowl begin their

migration. Season dates and limits for waterfowl hunting are set in August, as spring and summer trends emerge. By late autumn, hunters' eyes will be on the northern skies as weather fronts dictate whether waterfowl move south in trickles or in torrents.

Heading into summer, Iowa wetlands were generally in good shape, indicating average to above-average waterfowl production. And some landowners have learned you can build your own. "There's about 10 acres of water there now," says Wendell Jones, of four stabilization ponds and another wetland on his land, west of Crawfordsville in Washington County. "It gets a lot (of waterfowl) in the spring. There's some nesting; mallards, geese and wood ducks around one of them. Mostly, though, it's spring and fall waterfowl."

The property, which was already in CRP, is not "typical" bottomland. "That's the unique thing," says Jones, who works for the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). "We took advantage of topographical features (existing terraces, buffer areas). It could be done by about anyone looking for the opportunity."

Help ranges from technical advice to cost share to annual rental payments, depending on the conservation program that's enlisted. A good first step is stopping in

2009 HUNTING FORECAST



PHOTO BY LOWELL WASHBURN

at your local NRCS or Farm Service Agency office. "The primary purpose is to stop soil erosion, but it pulls in a lot of ducks," notes Jones.

GEESE

Iowa's Canada goose numbers have been relatively stable the last four years. The state's spring breeding population survey indicated no change from 2008. "Unlike the past three years, though, 2009 Canada goose production here should be average to above average. That should result in better hunting success on the opening weekends," forecasts Guy Zenner, DNR state waterfowl biologist.

"Hunters in northwest, north-central and central Iowa should see some of the better Canada goose hunting this season," says Zenner. "Minor April flooding on northeastern and east-central rivers may have reduced production there. As northern migrants move into the state, hunting should improve." However, hunters should expect fewer birds from up north. Cold spring weather delayed goose production in the eastern half of Arctic Canada. As a result, the numbers heading south will be substantially lower than past years.

Weather patterns in Iowa, the upper Midwest and southern Canada dictate when and where those late geese migrate. A strong storm system in Minnesota or Manitoba

may blow tens of thousands of geese right over Iowa, or drop them into waiting wetlands and fields, if it runs out of steam.

Iowa's urban goose zones (Des Moines area, Cedar Rapids/Iowa City and Waterloo/Cedar Falls) will host early goose seasons this year. There will be no statewide September season for Canada geese. "Urban geese are not exposed to the hunting pressure their rural cousins face," explains Zenner. "That is why it is important to put additional hunting pressure on these flocks."

DUCKS

With average precipitation during the summer months, Iowa's wetlands should be in good to fair condition for the arrival of migrating ducks. Conditions through the spring were a little drier than in recent years. Most wetlands had sufficient water to attract breeding pairs. However, adequate rain through July was necessary to see broods through to flight stage. "With additional late summer rain, Iowa's duck production should be about average this year," estimates Zenner.

This forecast went to print just ahead of those critical weeks, as well as release of any breeding bird and habitat information from Prairie Canada. However, Zenner expects average to above average production for ducks in most of the prairie pothole region. "Assuming fair to good



wetland habitat as the fall migration sends birds to Iowa, some of them should stop over.”

Once those migrating ducks touch down to refuel, the availability of late season food and secure cover determine how long they will stay. “Everything hinges on the wetland conditions we have in Iowa in September, October and November and, of course, fall weather patterns. Those patterns dictate when many of the ducks will get here and how long they will stay,” reminds Zenner. “Unfortunately, no one can predict that with any certainty.”

TURKEY

There is no shortage of fall turkey hunting opportunities. The trick may be finding the time to do it.

Iowa hunters reported harvesting 1,075 turkeys last fall. By contrast, the 2009 spring harvest was 10 times that. “It is an underused season. We have good turkey numbers, with a long fall season (Oct. 12-Dec. 4). By the time you consider all your other hunting activities, though, it might be hard to clear a few days to go,” acknowledges Todd Gosselink, DNR forest research biologist.

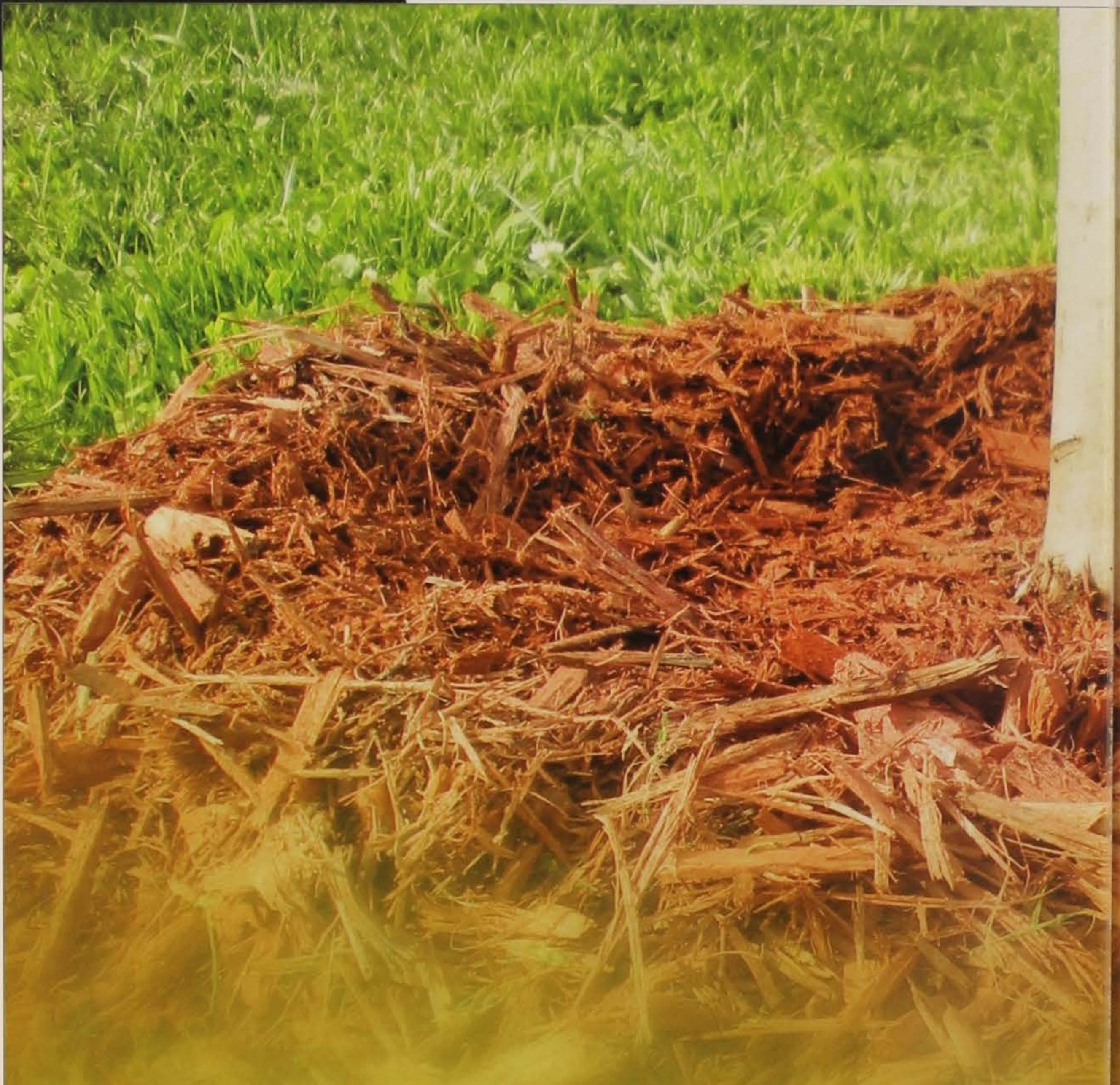
Jim Meier finds time, hunting the home place in Cedar County. His first fall bird came in the first year dogs could be used. He took advantage of years of listening to “turkey talk” when he bumped and scattered fall

flocks. “I heard a group of turkeys over the hill yelping, calling back and forth,” he recalls. “I circled around and scattered them in the set-aside. I gave them that kee-kee-run call and took the first one to come back.”

Since hen turkeys can also be taken in the fall, zones and quotas are established to ward off a drop in reproduction. Studies indicate that 10 percent of an area’s fall turkeys can be harvested without reducing long-term populations. Fall harvest figures—which peaked at 4,000-5,000 two decades ago, and rose back to 3,000-4,000 in the early 2000s, have not approached those levels. Over the last decade, fall turkey hunters have ranged from 10,000 to more than 13,000. Nonresidents are not allowed to hunt turkeys in Iowa’s fall season.

For fall turkeys, your best bet is that gullible, young-of-the-year bird. “We seem to have a decent hatch this year, after three years of reduced reproduction,” says Gosselink, who sees western and northeast Iowa as fall hotspots. “Especially the Loess Hills. That’s a drier climate, more beneficial to hatching and raising poults. And in northeast Iowa, there’s an ideal mix of row crops and woodlands.”

“It’s a bonus bird, is what it is,” assesses Meier. “It’s not like spring hunting, although you still need as much patience, maybe more.” 🐾



PROPER MULCHING 101

Mulching a newly planted tree helps ensure its survival, health and growth. But improper mulching can be detrimental. Maximizing the benefits of mulch is easy if you're careful.



MORE INFORMATION?

For more information about mulching techniques and mulch varieties, visit www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/index.html.

WHY MULCH?

Mulch is important because it helps soil retain moisture and moderates temperature. It also provides extra minerals and nutrients, which reduce the need for other additives. Using mulch cuts down on weed competition, protects the base of the tree from lawn mower damage and, of course, adds to the aesthetic appeal of your yard.

TOO MUCH MULCH

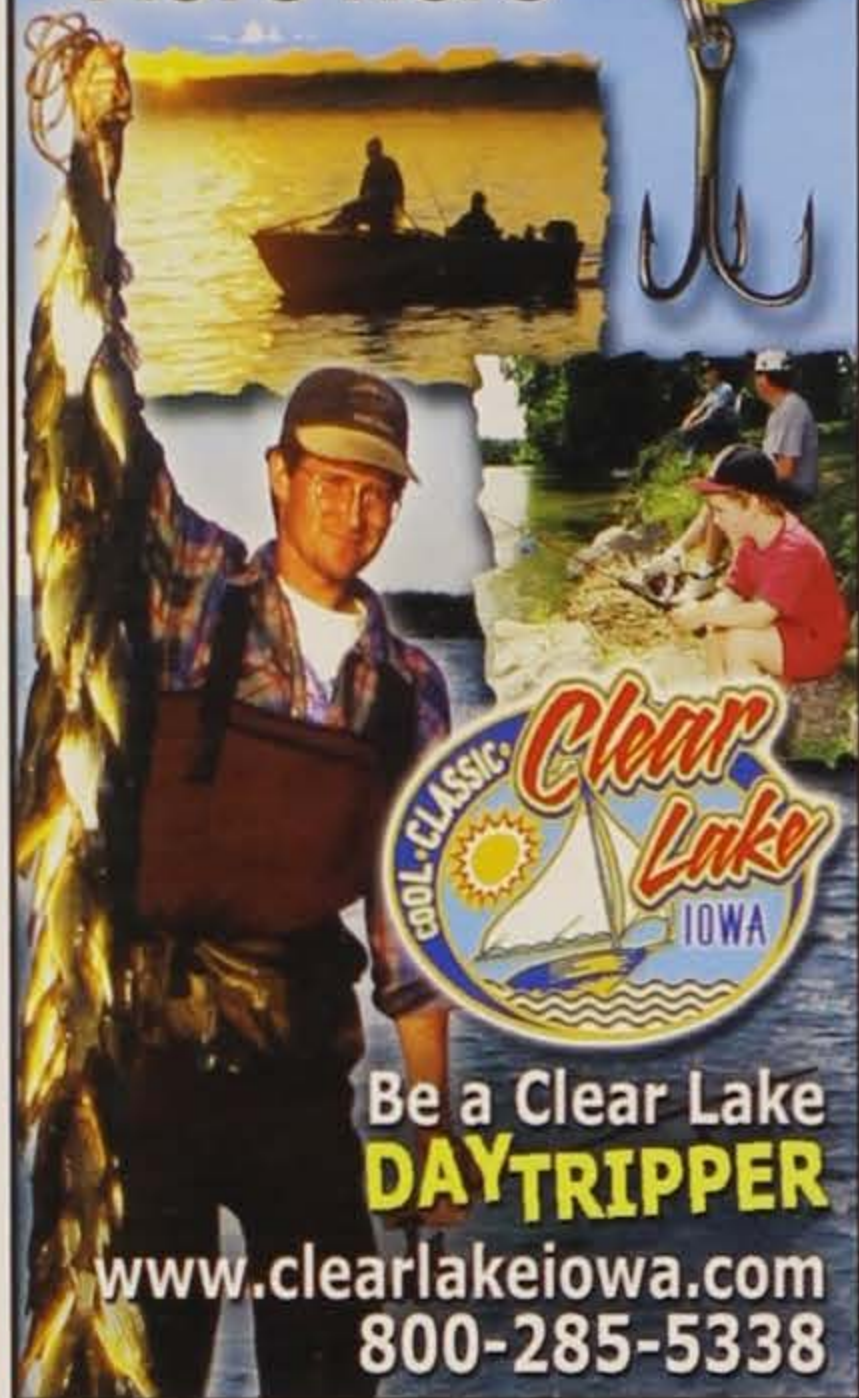
When mulching around a tree, it's important not to just pile it up in a big heap around the trunk. This method traps moisture at the base of the tree, which causes rot and insect problems, according to Emma Bruemmer and Matt Brewer with the

DNR Forestry Bureau. Plus, it can cause tree roots to become overheated and deprive the soil below of much-needed oxygen.

THE ART OF MULCHING

Instead of piling your mulch volcano-style at the base of the tree, create a circular ridge of mulch around the trunk. "You want a doughnut shape," says Bruemmer. Depending on the tree size, leave a 6-12 inch area around the trunk clear and free of mulch. This will prevent rotting and insect infestation, and still provide the tree with important nutrients. Avoid making your mulch layer too thick; make sure it's no deeper than 2-3 inches for the best results.

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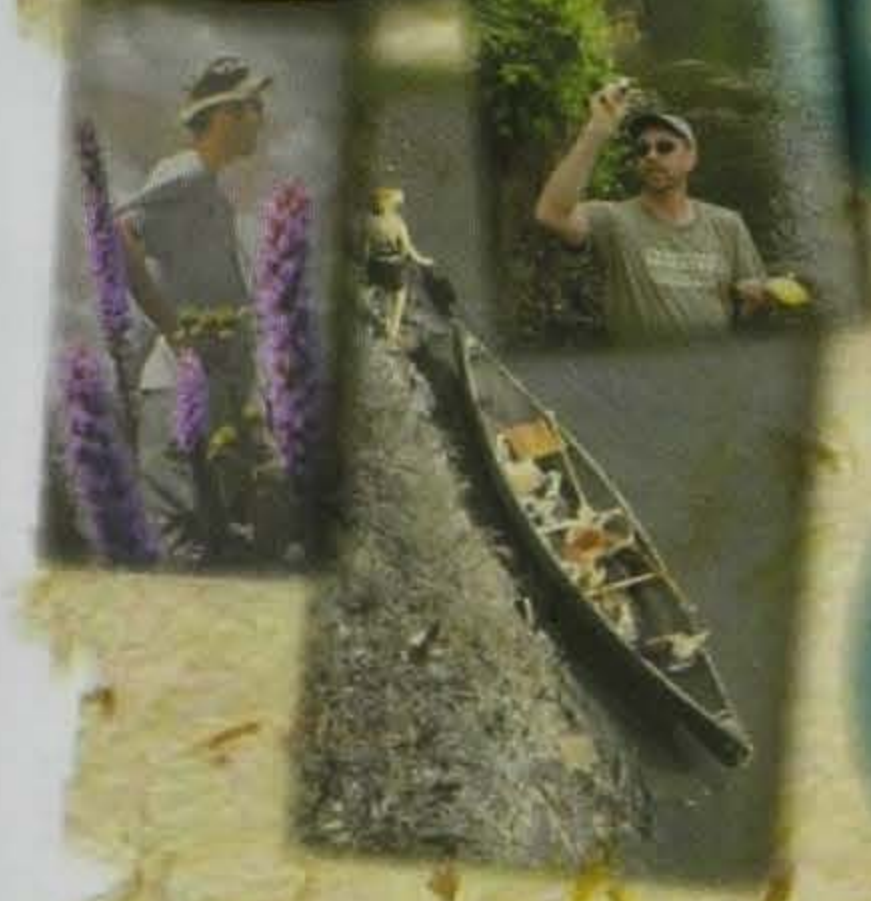
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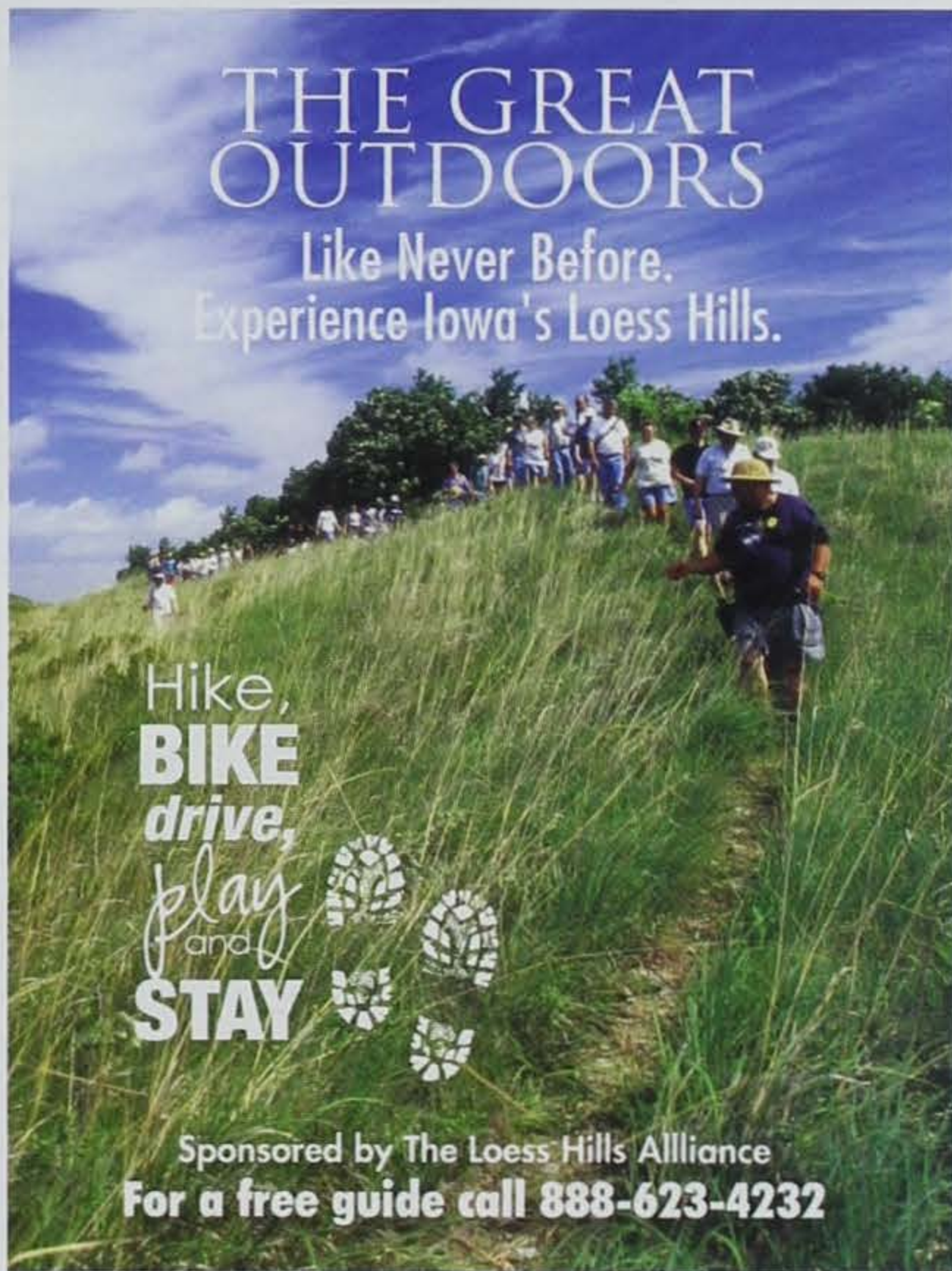
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Turn summer's wild fruit bounty into a sweet treat INSPIRED BY LOCAL FORAGER, NORTHEAST IOWA WOMAN SHARES HER WILD BERRY JELLY SECRETS

Mention the name Susan Kuennen anywhere near New Hampton, and her jellies will likely lead the discussion. Her raspberry jelly—and to some lesser extent—wild plum and grape jelly, are legendary around this northeast Iowa community.

But her more traditional jellies aren't the only ones she's experienced with. Inspired by the epic 1962 Euell Gibbons foraging bible, "Stalking the Wild Asparagus," Kuennen took the author's words on elderberries to heart and gave the published jelly recipes a go—without much luck. She returned to the jellies that gained her accolades, that is, until two years ago when she stumbled across Mike Krebill's recipe for wild sumac lemonade in the July/August 2007 Iowa Outdoors (copies available for \$3.50 by calling 515-281-5918).

Recalling a fondness for the tart elixir, Kuennen decided to give her wild berry jelly test another go. Marrying her new-found information with her previous study and extensive background in jelly making, Kuennen experimented with several techniques, fruits and quantities to come up with these combinations. The results this time were, well, "berry" good.

Each recipe has the same basic cooking instruction that follows.

ELDERBERRY-SUMAC JELLY

2 cups elderberry juice
2 cups sumac juice
1/3 cup pectin or one package Sure-jell
5 cups sugar

ELDERBERRY-APPLE JELLY

3 cups elderberry juice
3 cups apple juice
1/3 cup pectin or one package Sure-jell
6 cups sugar

ELDERBERRY-RASPBERRY JELLY

3 cups elderberry juice
3 cups raspberry juice
1/3 cup pectin or one package Sure-jell
6 cups sugar

ELDERBERRY-GRAPE JELLY

3 cups elderberry juice
3 cups grape juice
1/3 cup pectin or one package Sure-jell
6 cups sugar

1. Sterilize jars, bands and lids. Keep them in hot water until ready to fill and seal.
2. Prepare and measure fruit juice.
3. Measure sugar into separate bowl. Do not reduce sugar or use sugar substitutes. The exact amounts of sugar, fruit and pectin are necessary for a good set.
4. Stir in 1/3 cup fruit pectin or one box of Sure-jell into fruit juice. Bring mixture to full rolling boil (one that

does not stop when stirring) over high heat, stirring constantly.

5. Quickly add sugar to fruit juice mixture. Bring to full rolling boil and boil at least 3 to 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Skim off any foam.

6. Fill all jars quickly to 1/8-inch of tops. Wipe jar rims. Cover quickly with flat lids. Screw bands tightly. Invert jars for 5 minutes, and then turn upright. After jars are cool, check seals by pressing middle of lid with finger. If lid springs up when finger is released, lid is not sealed. The USDA water bath method can also be used.

EXTRACTING SUMAC JUICE

1. Pick the small red berries off the sumac fruit heads until you have four cups. Pick through to remove any caterpillars. Place in strainer and shake over a wastebasket to remove any dirt or dried flower parts.
2. Place the berries in a stainless steel or enamel kettle, cover with water. While this is heating, use a potato masher or wooden pestle to pound and stir for 10 minutes or until water comes to a boil.
3. Remove immediately from the heat and filter through a 100 percent cotton flour sack towel. Bundle the berries by drawing up the sides to form a large tea bag to excrete and filter the sumac juice.

4. Add water if necessary to make 2 quarts or 8 cups of sumac juice.

EXTRACTING ELDERBERRY JUICE

1. Pick elderberries from the fruit cluster, adding one cup of water to each quart of fruit, filling kettle (stainless steel or enamel) no more than half full.
2. Simmer gently for 10 minutes, and then mash fruit with a potato masher or wooden pestle. Simmer for 10 more minutes.
3. Sieve through a colander to remove seeds, filter through 100 percent cotton flour sack towel.

APPLE JUICE

Use fresh-pressed apple juice from a local orchard or make juice by

cooking apples until tender, about 20 minutes. Sieve through a colander and strain. The result is a juice rich in pectin, acid and flavor.

RASPBERRY JUICE

1. Pick fresh raspberries from the garden or wild berries from the woods.
2. Mash the berries and bring to a boil. No water is added.
3. Sieve through a colander to remove seeds, filter through 100 percent cotton flour sack towel.

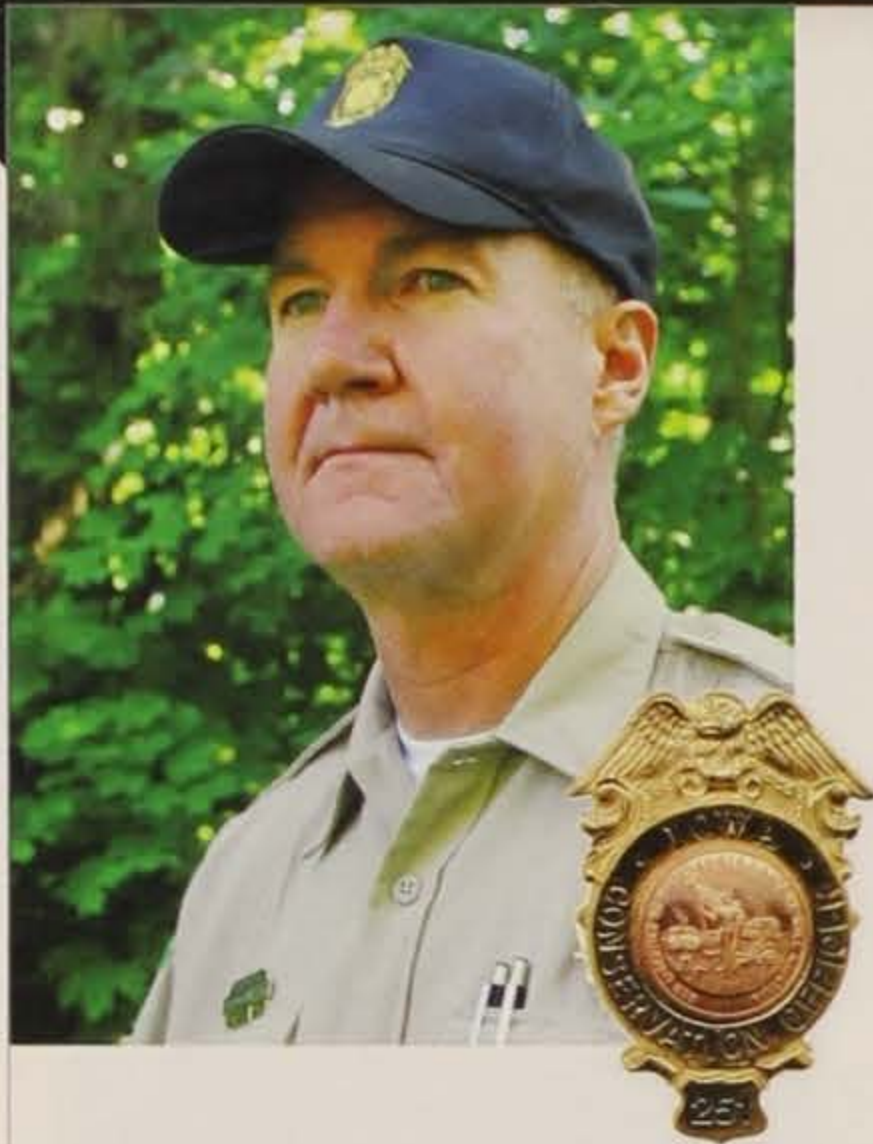
GRAPE JUICE

1. Pick grapes from fruit cluster. Add water, about one cup to each quart of fruit, filling kettle (stainless steel or enamel) no more than half full.

2. Simmer gently for 10 minutes, and then mash fruit with a potato masher or wooden pestle. Simmer for 10 more minutes.

3. Sieve through a colander to remove seeds, filter through 100 percent cotton flour sack towel.





“What Are the Odds?”

Recently I was talking to a local college class of students who want my job. After all these years, my first inclination was to try to talk them out of it, but I explained what we do, told them to stick to their goals and education and be persistent.

I cautioned them that this is a job where you don't always see the final product. It's not like you're on the line adding a part as the product goes by, or in an office and you complete a project and present it. In this line of work, not only is the end result something you can't usually see or hold, many times the job itself is about an intangible. Love of the outdoors and wildlife and devoting yourself to their protection is something you can't really quantify.

So, it follows that many times you wonder if you really accomplished anything at all. Sure, you can sign a ticket to a poacher after you've sat hour after hour and night after night in the same spot waiting for something to happen. Or, you can hand in an accident report, or look at the court documents for a trial and think, “OK, case closed.” But sometimes you still wonder.

Not too long ago I was talking with one of my friends on the police force about our jobs and frustrations. He commented, “Man, what frustrates me is it's the same calls to the same places with the same people all the time. I arrest them, and they're back on the street doing the same thing. Or I go to their house to settle their argument, and pretty soon I get called back, and they're back at it again.”

I could relate somewhat because any officer who's done this for awhile will tell you, in the area they patrol, it gets so you can almost predict what will happen, when it will happen, where it will happen and who will be responsible. Why? Well, as a more experienced officer once told me, “Grandpa was poaching, dad was poaching and now I'm chasing Junior.” One of my neighbors liked to sum it up succinctly, “It's like riding a Hula-Hoop. There's no end to it.” It can be twice as frustrating considering all the ground we have to cover and only so much time to cover it. So, it's easy to go home and wonder, “What am I doing?”

But, sometimes something happens to help you think you've made a difference.

What happened for me started with a phone call during deer season. The caller had watched someone chasing a

deer with a pickup, with someone hanging out the window shooting and killing the deer. Sadly, this isn't unusual in and of itself given we get a lot of those calls during the deer season. What made this one unusual was the caller himself and the lengths to which he went to help me. Not only was he taking the time to report the violation, he told me, “I took a picture.”

“You did what?” I asked.

“Yeah, I took a picture.”

he repeated.

“So you can identify the pickup?” I asked.

“Yeah, I even have a close-up of the license plate.” He proceeded to tell me how he struck up a conversation with the shooter as he





was dragging the deer out and held his cell phone behind his back and took a picture. Once I gave him my e-mail address he sent it to me. It was instrumental in closing a case that led to other accomplices and violations.

But what really struck me was who was calling. It was a man another officer and I had apprehended the previous year committing almost the same violation. It had ended up costing him a lot of money and the temporary loss of his hunting license and hunting privileges. Although we had parted cordially that day, I hardly expected him to one day sit down for a cup of coffee with me, let alone report a violation. I try not to make it personal on my part, and I try to treat people like I would want to be treated, but still, sometimes you wonder if they hum, "Ding dong the witch is dead," as you drive away.

So, it was obvious I was wondering, "Why are you telling me this?" He seemed to read my mind.

"I know you were doing your job. I learned my lesson. I don't hunt that way anymore. And, I don't appreciate anyone else doing that kind of stuff." He said it made people in the neighborhood angry, and he didn't even care if the guy knew who turned him in.

I told him I was glad to hear that, as what had happened in the past was nothing personal, and that I would be in touch with him.

I thought back, and it was only the third time in my career that had happened. The first was a goose hunter

I checked. He said, "You don't remember me do you?" I apologized and told him I check a lot of people, and unfortunately I couldn't place him. "You caught me awhile back early shooting at geese, and you wrote me a ticket. It was the best thing you could have done for me because I learned something, and I want to thank you." I mean, how in the world do you answer integrity like that?

The other one was a guy I had caught in his younger days chasing deer. He wasn't happy about it, and he gave me quite a time. He later told me he had changed his ways, and we had a good conversation.

No, this isn't something where you can often see the results at the end of the day. And, I guess an officer can choose how his or her career can be measured. It might be numbers of tickets or big cases made and that's OK. I've always thought a big part of our job is people and touching their lives. Really, isn't life, at least on some small scale, about how our lives affect each other?

When I think about those three individuals and do the math over 33 years, it comes to about one a decade. Maybe one in 10 doesn't seem like very good results, but I tend to think all the dedicated officers I work with, who love this state and what we have, might every day ponder, "If I could reach just one person..." If so, then in some way I do have something I can see, and I guess I'll consider myself fortunate to maybe even be ahead in the game at the end of the day. 🐾

HONEY BEES (*Apis mellifera*)

There are more than 25,000 known bee species—including at least 3,500 in the continental U.S. alone—although some believe the number is much higher. They are found on every continent but Antarctica, in any habitat that contains flowering plants.

ALL WORK AND NO PLAY

Worker bees are females that do not have the reproductive capabilities of the queen. Although the smallest in the colony, they carry the biggest load. They gather food for the colony, groom and feed the queen, clean house, raise young, build honeycomb, maintain proper hive temperature and protect the colony. If it's too hot, they collect water and deposit it around the hive, then "fan" the area with their wings. If it gets too cold, they cluster together to generate body heat. As sole food providers, they are also primary plant pollinators. Males, or drone bees have no stingers, so it's the worker ladies who pack the punch.

QUEEN FOR LIFE

The queen is the largest in the colony. Her main purpose is to produce eggs. Each colony has only one, hence she is the mother of all bees. In one day, a queen can lay her weight in eggs, or roughly 1,500 eggs. In a mechanism of sex determination called haplodiploidy, the queen decides which eggs are fertilized and which ones are not. Fertilized eggs become females, unfertilized males. If her pace slackens, workers take a recently laid fertilized egg and place it in a queen cell to develop her replacement. Queen bee candidate larva are fed exclusively royal jelly, as opposed to "regular larva" that are fed the creamy substance only briefly after hatch. These "unmated virgin queens" will generally seek out other virgin sister rivals and kill them or be killed.

FREQUENT FLIERS' ENERGY DRINK

To make 1 pound of honey, worker bees must fly 55,000 miles and tap 2 million flowers. In a lifetime, one worker bee will produce about one-twelfth of a teaspoon of honey. Theoretically, the energy in 1 ounce of honey would provide one bee with enough energy to fly around the world, according to NOVA Online.

HONEYPOT

Iowa has approximately 1,500 beekeepers, ranging from hobbyists with a couple hives to commercial producers with thousands, says state apiarist Andy Joseph. There are roughly 30,000 bee colonies in the state, each of which may contain as many as 55,000 bees. These Iowa bees produce approximately 3.1 million pounds of honey per year, worth an estimated \$3.5 million over the last five years, according to the Iowa Honey Producers Association.

WHAT A YEAR MAKES

What goes on inside a bee hive differs with the season. Contrary to other insects and birds, most bee species do not migrate. They are left to live or die in their own environs. In fall and winter, drones—who serve no other purpose than to mate with the queen—are often kicked out of the hive to preserve resources, to quickly die from starvation. Winter takes its toll on older bees. Survivors hunker down to conserve and produce heat, egg laying ceases and brood raising ends. Available food sources dictate when brood rearing begins. As spring arrives, the colony expands as young emerge and drones are produced. Nectar gathering and honey production increase. Workers set about raising a new queen. In the summer, colonies split to form new hives.

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