



Editor's Note: Correction was made to spelling error of Chichaqua Bottoms. Please use this version.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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- [Puccoon Prairie shines at Chichaqua Bottoms](#)
- [Des Moines Clay Crushers dominate Iowa's Scholastic Clay Target Program International Skeet Championship](#)
- [Scholastic Action Shooting Program prepares for State Championship competition](#)

## Puccoon Prairie shines at Chichaqua Bottoms



*Hairy puccoon is in bloom at the 10-acre Puccoon Prairie that is part of Chichaqua Bottoms in northeast Polk County. Photo courtesy of the Iowa DNR.*

About a quarter mile off county road NE 112<sup>th</sup> Street sits a 10-acre sand prairie tucked into the southeast part of the roughly 11,500-acre Chichaqua Bottoms complex in northeast Polk County. Puccoon Prairie developed as part of a 15-foot-high sand bar from the old glacial Skunk River before the river was rerouted, and is home to unique plants and wildlife that prefer a sandy, desert-esque ecosystem.

Sand prairies, similar to fens and goat prairies, were often passed over when Iowa was settled because the areas were difficult to work with. Today those areas are home to unique plant and animal communities.

Walking in from the road, small sand mounds dot the area, many with holes dug by coyotes or badgers looking for a meal of gophers. The sand mounds become more frequent closer to Puccoon Prairie.

There's a distinct ridge dividing Puccoon Prairie that was once a fence line. The section to the south of the ridge was less disturbed and has more plant diversity. That diversity began creeping north of the ridge after Puccoon Prairie was acquired in 2004.

"Sand prairies are harsh," said Loren Lown, of Pleasant Hill, retired ecologist with the Polk County Conservation Board and historian of Puccoon Prairie. "It's tough for anything to grow on it but there are things that have adapted to it."

False boneset is one of those plants, Lown said. It has incredibly deep roots and is a fall pollinator frequented by monarchs. Junegrass is here because it needs a substantial sand component to survive. Porcupine grass seeds itself by corkscrewing into the ground, or pantleg or an unfortunate dog's nose. The plains pocket mouse is here because it doesn't need liquid water to survive. Iowa is on the far eastern edge of its native range.

The area is home to hoary, hairy and fringed puccoons, whirled milkweed, sand milkweed and green milkweed, sand evening primrose, white sage and three types of panicgrass.

Monarchs and bumblebees are bouncing from the yellow flowers of the hairy puccoon in bloom. The aptly named blue racer rocketed away of the unwelcomed visitors on this late May morning. Dickcissels, grasshopper sparrows, field sparrows, bell's vireos, red-eyed vireos, meadowlarks and jumping mice are here.

Puccoon Prairie is also home to various ant species, tiger beetles, gophers, badgers, coyotes and the incorrectly named velvet ant, which isn't an ant at all but a wasp. The females are wingless resembling hairy ants. Word of advice, Lown said, is to not pick up velvet ants because they have a stinger and can sting through your fingernail.

### A quiet place

"Outside of some birders or people looking for a good walk, Puccoon Prairie doesn't get many visitors unless it's hunting season," said Todd Gosselink, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "This is a unique prairie right here in Polk County that not a lot of people know about. It's one of our few sand prairies in the state."

Prairie plants bloom at different times during the spring and summer, Gosselink said. Blue eyed grass bloom is over but the hairy puccoon with its yellow flowers is in bloom right now making Puccoon Prairie worth a visit, he said. A word of advice to those interested in making the trek – apply bug spray to avoid being a magnet for ticks and mosquitos.

### Managing the sand prairie

Managing wild places is often a battle to keep certain species from encroaching on the area and changing its makeup and Puccoon Prairie is no different. The challenge here is to keep wild sumac from expanding west.

"It's a native plant but we don't want it to take over this unique sand prairie ecosystem," Gosselink said. "Sumac a difficult plant to control. Fire doesn't work. Pulling by hand or cutting and treating the stumps seems most effective but we don't want to negatively impact other plants when we do the removal."

Polk County Conservation Board arranged a volunteer day with a local Pheasants Forever chapter to remove the sumac, but more work is needed.

"Polk County does a really good job of getting volunteers out here and working on the area," Gosselink said. "We have a really unique partnership with Polk County and work closely with them to manage Chichaqua. We also engage our neighbors in the ag community to help with projects like using haying as a method of tree control, and with conservation groups and the interested public who help with specific tasks, like sumac removal."

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## Des Moines Clay Crushers dominate Iowa's Scholastic Clay Target Program International Skeet Championship

The Des Moines Clay Crushers dominated the Scholastic Clay Target Program's International Skeet Championship held this past weekend at New Pioneer Gun Club, in Waukee.

Mathew Brindley and Jake Campbell finished first and second respectively in the men's individual competition, and Bailey Oliver finished first in the women's individual. Together, the three posted the top team score for the weekend.

Athletes from Oskaloosa and Pella also finished in the top three places. Upon completion of the event, athletes were invited to the National Junior Olympic Match in Hillsdale, Mich., in July.

### International Skeet Championship Results

#### Men's Individual

1. Mathew Brindley, Des Moines Clay Crushers: 105
2. Jake Campbell, Des Moines Clay Crushers: 96
3. Alec VandeNoord, Pella Shooters Club: 95

#### Women's Individual

1. Bailey Oliver, Des Moines Clay Crushers: 74

2. Megan Vos, Oskaloosa Shooting Team: 57

### **Men's Collegiate Individual**

1. Brandon Salevsky, Oskaloosa Shooting Team: 98
2. Zachary Salevsky, Oskaloosa Shooting Team: 92
3. Ethan Herr, Oskaloosa Shooting Team: 85

### **International Bunker Trap Team Standings**

1. Des Moines Clay Crushers: 275
2. Oskaloosa Shooting Team: 212

The Scholastic Clay Target Program is the largest, fastest growing, and most exciting youth clay target program in the US. Student athletes from elementary through high school and college have the opportunity to compete in sports such as trap, skeet, and sporting clays, as well as Olympic disciplines like bunker trap and international skeet. The next championship competition is the American Trap Championships June 8-13, at the Iowa State Trapshooting Association Homegrounds, near Cedar Falls.

The SCTP is a youth development program, first and foremost and we do this through the shooting sports and competitive shooting. The SCTP's mission is to help kids reach their highest potential in becoming the best athletes and young adults they can be. For more information on the Scholastic Clay Target Program in Iowa, contact Chris Van Gorp, shooting sports coordinator for the Iowa DNR, at 515-313-8048 or [chris.vangorp@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:chris.vangorp@dnr.iowa.gov).

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## **Scholastic Action Shooting Program prepares for State Championship competition**

The Scholastic Action Shooting Program will hold their Iowa State Championship match on June 5 and 6, at the Olofson Shooting Range, near Polk City. More than 80 athletes ranging from grade school through high school will compete.

The Scholastic Action Shooting Program combines precision and speed as contestants shoot a series of 5 different targets in four stages for a timed score. Athletes will compete with rimfire pistol, rimfire rifle, centerfire pistol, and pistol caliber carbine.

"All SASP activities incorporate two key elements- safety and fun. The Scholastic Action Shooting Program provides an opportunity to Iowa's shooting sports athletes to learn to safely handle, use, and maintain firearms while also learning to compete in these sports," said Chris Van Gorp, shooting sports coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

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