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IN THIS ISSUE: Hawk Watch EXPLORE THE SKIES FOR MIGRATING BIRDS OF PREY



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For kids and Families

Iowa DOT prepares for your Safe winter travel far ahead of first snow

ADVERT SEMENT



While folks are getting back to the routines of fall, the Iowa Department of Transportation has been crunching numbers, filling salt storage, and prepping equipment to help you get where you're going this winter.

Data drives everything we do at the Iowa DOT. Every one of the 9,403 centerline miles we service is analyzed for the best way to keep travelers moving safely during a storm. Using information from previous winter seasons Buying in quantity lowers the price. Craig Bargfrede, the Iowa DOT's winter operations administrator, said this year's average statewide salt price is around \$68 per ton. He said, "Because of the way our contracts work, we are also able to offer cities and counties the opportunity to use our volume contract price to buy salt for themselves at lower prices. Especially for smaller cities and counties with limited staff, it eliminates the need for them to go

helps us know where to plant living snow fences and where we can apply more or less chemical treatments during a winter storm based on atmospheric conditions and highway geometry.

Rock salt is the primary deicing material to combat winter storms. Each year, the department uses approximately 150,000 tons of rock salt to keep Iowa highways clear of snow and ice. Typically, the rock salt used in Iowa comes from underground mines in Kansas or Louisiana. The salt is purchased each season through a competitive bidding process for delivery directly to 113 delivery points managed by the Iowa DOT. Kansas salt is shipped to Iowa delivery points using rail and trucking. The Louisiana salt is brought to Iowa via barges on the Mississippi River and then trucked to the delivery point.

Research has shown that rock salt in its solid form is not the best way to combat snow and ice in many instances. The solid material tends to bounce around and get swept into the ditch, which does no good for the roadway and can be damaging to the environment. Iowa DOT adopted the policy of pre-wetting all salt as it is applied to the roadway, reducing the bouncing and scattering affect. This simple application process helps keep roads safer and keep chemicals out of the roadsides.

How much does rock salt cost?

The Iowa DOT contracts for a year's worth of salt at once.

through the bidding process on their own."

Anti-icing

In the fall when overnight temperatures can dip below freezing, it isn't unusual on a sunny day to see Iowa DOT snowplows out on the roads spreading brine. While it may seem counterintuitive, a layer of brine on the road prevents ice crystals from forming and bonding to the pavement when the temperatures dip below the freezing point. Even when daytime temperatures are above freezing, once the mercury drops overnight, pavement temperatures can reach lows that lead to frost and ice formation. This is especially true on bridges and overpasses that don't have warmer earth underneath them. The Iowa DOT often treats these areas early in the winter season to prevent unexpected slick spots on bridges. It is an important proactive step that keeps you safe and moving on the roads.

In addition to making roads safer by preventing slick spots, the process of anti-icing can save the Iowa DOT time and money because it allows the roads to be treated during normal business hours when Iowa DOT garages are at full staff and not incur overtime to bring employees in overnight.

So now you know. The next time you see an Iowa DOT truck spraying brine on a sunny afternoon, you'll know to be prepared for possible frost or ice on untreated roads overnight. THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

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Squirrel hunters know the woods like few others. So get inspired to work on your shooting accuracy and practice your in-field patience for this once popular, but now oft-overlooked quarry.

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Writer and photographer Ty Smedes captured this soaring red-tailed hawk photo while on raptor assignment last fall. His page 48 story will inspire you to attend a hawk watch event to see and learn about raptors from experts.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

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Southeast Iowa's 9,148-acre Shimek State Forest is one of the largest remaining single pieces of contiguous forest in Iowa. Its large unbroken tracts of oak-hickory forest mixed with nearly 1,000 acres of planted pine. stands make it worth a visit. PHOTO BY JAKEZWEIBOHMER in out

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IOWA OUTDOORS

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Contributors



BRIAN GIBBS, a former Clayton County naturalist, has been addicted to wild places ever since his father first took him trout fishing in Yellow River State Forest. His passion for teaching others about enjoying and conserving natural beauty led him to work in such scenic places as Glacier National Park. When not teaching, Gibbs explores the natural beauty hidden amongst the bluffs and valleys of northeast Iowa. He now works at Effigy Mounds National Monument.



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DNR MISSION

To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life

in-lowa 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.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

DNR volunteer programs help lowans give back to lands, waters and skies. 515-725-8261 or lowodor.gov/volunteer

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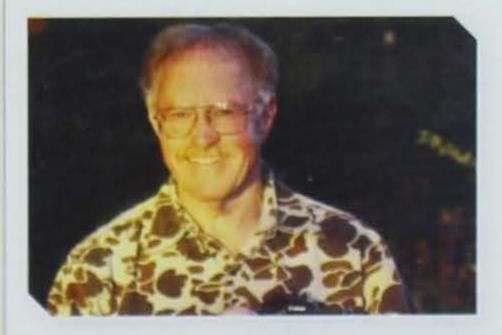
Charitable giving of land, funds, goods and services greatly enhances lowa's outdoors. Call Kim Rasler at 515-725-8440.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT ----

Support wildlife diversity and REAP. Take your license plates and sehicle registration to your county treasurer's office to buy a phensant, engle, goldfinch, deer or trout natural resources plate.



DAN MAGNESON grew up in the southwest Iowa towns of Red Oak, Shenandoah and Clarinda, and today works as a fisheries biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Washington state's Olympic Peninsula. He believes the 1950s and 1960s were the absolute golden era of being a kid, and that nowhere on earth was this more true than in Iowa.



TY SMEDES is a full-time writer and photographer from Urbandale. Published in dozens of magazines, his work includes images of wildlife, wildflowers and scenics. He teaches photography classes and leads photo tours to the Sierras and Africa. His recent book, *The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles*, is sold at *iowon.com* or **1-877-899-9977 ext 211**.

Myth Busters

IF I DON'T RAKE THE LE THE GRASS WILL DIE

I t's called fall for a reason, that time when leaves blanket Iowa lawns. But don't drag out that rake quite so fast.

Sure, a thick leaf blanket will stifle the lawn, and some maintenance is necessary in such cases. Mulch leaves with a lawnmower, compost them or discard curbside in compostable bags. In the compost pile, dry leaves are an excellent carbon source that help balance out wetter green materials like grass clippings and food scraps. Allow leaves to decompose with ample air and moisture to speed the process.

However, if leaf cover is light to moderate and substantial patches of grass peek through, leave the leaves alone or mow them with the rest of the lawn. Decaying leaves act as a natural mulch and fertilizer, discouraging weeds from popping up in the spring and providing extra nutrients for grass and gardens. The leaves will help build the soil, improving its ability to hold moisture.

The leaves also help provide habitat and sustenance for small wildlife. Critters like squirrels, birds, toads, caterpillars, beneficial insects and chipmunks use leaf litter either for food, nesting material or shelter. By not raking, there is a better chance of enticing these and other animals into your yard.

GOT A QUESTION? SEND TO: AskTheExperts@dnr.iowa.gov

Ask THE Expert What's the difference between diving and dabbling ducks?

These classifications are based on similar external shapes and behaviors among species. Both dabblers and divers are common across lowa, although dabbling ducks are generally more widespread, but diving ducks are found in higher concentrations.

DABBLING DUCKS are wide-billed, largewinged ducks, like mallards, wood ducks, wigeons and teal that live and feed in shallow water. Wide bills make dabbling ducks adept at filter feeding on algae and floating plants.

"These are the ducks people see bottoms-up, which usually means they're feeding on various plants and invertebrates in the water," says DNR waterfowl biologist Orrin Jones.

DIVING DUCKS—canvasbacks, redheads, scaup and ring-necked ducks—prefer deeper, open water, and submerge themselves while diving to find food like rooted plants and crustaceans. Their bills are smaller, better adapted to digging around searching for food, and their compact wings aid propulsion and decrease resistance while swimming.

Perhaps the most notable difference between dabbling and diving ducks is the position of their legs. Dabbling ducks' legs are much closer to the center of their body, which makes them good at paddling, walking and jumping into the air. Diving ducks' legs are situated further back. This is great for swimming, but makes walking much more difficult. It also prevents them from launching or springing smoothly into flight like dabbling ducks, so they must get a running start across the water surface similar to geese.

Jones says although dabbling ducks can dive underwater and divers can walk on land, these behaviors take extra effort and are less common. Ducklings of all species commonly dive, as their small size helps reduce resistance and diving may be required to reach food.

PHUI U BY

According to Jones, knowing what type of duck you want to hunt should factor into what equipment you buy. Dabbling ducks don't necessarily require decoys, and don't disappear underwater, which makes them easier to hunt. You don't have to have anything more than waders, a gun and appropriate licenses. Hunting for diving ducks usually requires a larger body of water, a seaworthy boat and lots of decoys as these birds are highly social.

Outdoor Skills

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

Fall Feed Bag

The age-old adage fish "put on the fall feed bag" to get ready for winter is true...but only partially. There are other reasons fish get hungry in the fall, says Joe Larscheid, chief of the DNR's fisheries bureau. "It's kind of like the proverbial perfect storm, so to speak," he says. "Yes, fish sense a need to fatten up for winter, but cooling water temperatures also invigorate lethargic summer predator fish. And aquatic vegetation—a favorite hideout of prey fish—is dying back, leaving smaller fish more vulnerable." With cooler water temps and fewer hiding spots, predator fish spend more time in shallower water chasing bait fish. Larscheid recommends targeting bays, rocky points and drop offs. Fall is the time to go bigger with bait and lures

as fish get more aggressive, he says.

Caulk It For Energy Savings

Drafts can account for up to 20 percent of household heat loss, with cracked window and door caulking a main culprit. Find drafts by scheduling an energy audit, or hold a candle near windows and doors. If the flame flickers, there is a draft. Remove old caulking and replace with new. The best time to caulk is when temperatures are above 45 degrees.

Long fall treks through fall-colored hillsides are exhilarating, but a nagging blister can end the hike in a hurry. Guard against them by slipping on a pair of thin, light dress socks before donning outer socks. The inner dress sock acts like moleskin for your foot, allowing friction between the two socks versus your foot and the outer sock. Choose "slick" synthetic dress sock fabrics over cotton.

SOCK It Up Butterc

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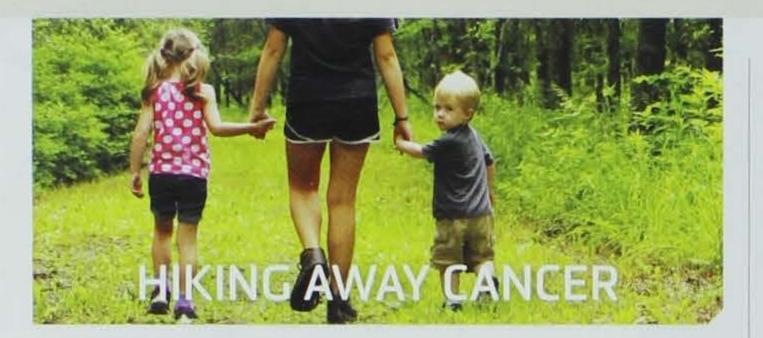
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IOWADNR.GOV 11

Together OUTDOOR FIT BY TIM LANE

ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



magine being diagnosed with cancer but then hearing about a painless cure. Or imagine being told you are likely to get cancer this year, but that a preventative measure exists that costs next to nothing and is fun. Can you imagine how exhilarating that news would be?

Well, get excited.... about life and a new study detailing the benefits of activity and cancer prevention. In past articles I have written that getting outdoors can help prevent some cancers but I was admittedly vague on those specific illnesses. But now I can give specifics. The supportive study details the relationship between physical activityspecifically leisure-time activities—and cancer. The bottom line? The more you move the lower your risk of developing 13 specific cancers.

In this mega study, the risk of contracting seven cancer types was 20 percent lower (or more) among the most active participants than those who were far less active. These findings come to us from the dedicated researchers at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), part of the National Institutes of Health, and the American Cancer Society.

Their data came from "population-wide cancer prevention and control efforts" and then published by Steven C. Moore, Ph.D., and colleagues, in a recent issue of JAMA Internal Medicine.

But Why? Helping adults answer children's nature questions

MASON, 14, IN DUBUQUE, ASKS: A blue bullfrog in Iowa? What causes that?



By mega study, I mean multiple studies over 11 years involving 187,000 individuals focused on associations between physical activity and cancer risk. Now to the specifics. Their findings conclude active lifestyles have a positive reduction in colon, breast and endometrial cancers. On the "gray" side there is still inconclusive data to make similar claims for other cancers. Perhaps because those studies had fewer participants.

The investigators were confident asserting leisure-time physical activity is associated with lower risks of colon, breast and endometrial cancers, esophageal adenocarcinoma, liver cancer, cancer of the gastric cardia, kidney cancer and myeloid leukemia. "Myeloma and cancers of the head and neck, rectum and bladder also showed reduced risks that were significant, but not as strong. Risk was reduced for lung cancer, but only for current and former smokers; the reasons for this are still being studied," they wrote.

For these studies leisure-time physical activity was defined as voluntary exercise such as walking, hiking, running, swimming and other moderate to vigorous intensity activities. "The median level of activity in the study was about 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week, which is comparable to the current recommended minimum level of physical activity for the U.S. population," they indicated.

So get out and get active in Iowa's outdoors, folks. It's not only fun, but could prevent cancer, too.

Learn more about cancer at *concer.gov* or 1-800-4-CANCER.

TIM LANE is a nationally-recognized authority on public health and physical activity. He is past president of the Iowa Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

This summer a photo of a blue frog in southern I lowa was sent to DNR through social media. This is at least the fifth blue bullfrog we've heard of, with one DNR staffer remembering another blue bullfrog from the same county about 20 years ago. Another photo last year from western Iowa shows a gray-blue bullfrog. The other two blue frogs were also reported from southern Iowa.

Several genes make a frog green or brown. The genes control structures in a frog's skin layers. The lower skin layer reflects light, and as that light passes through the upper skin layers, various wavelengths are filtered out so the frog looks green or greenish-brown.

In some frogs, a genetic mutation removes some of the skin's ability to produce yellow pigment. That can filter out certain wavelengths, which results in a blue bullfrog. Leopard frogs can also be affected by this.

Blue frogs are a rare sight in the wild as they are more easily visible to predators. So, they get eaten faster than their normal green to brown colored relatives that blend into green vegetation and brown mud in ponds and lakes.

If you've seen a blue bullfrog, let us know!



OCTOBER "WITCH" WALK

Take a Short, Guided Hike to a Pioneer Cemetery to Dispel a



Wind your way through carpeted prairie and looming trees with October's Hike in the Wild, hosted by the Dickinson County Conservation Board.

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Discover mysteries of the past as you explore the Loon Lake area, on the border of Minnesota and Iowa, and take in the scenery.

"Participants can expect a short hike to the cemetery with a walk around the site to discuss some of the folklore and history behind the site," says Bryanna Kuhlman, the environmental education coordinator.

In the late 1800s, settlers started a town called Petersberg next to Loon Lake, a source for drinking water and crop irrigation. Life in the community was not easy, as harsh winters and low food supplies made them weak. The people that settled this land came here to "brave the new frontier" according to a dedication outside the cemetery.

Mary Jane Twiliger, a teenager who lived in Petersburg

in the 1880s was visiting family in Cherokee when she became ill and died. Later, a local man tried to keep vandals off his property by creating a ghost story about Mary Jane. Legend says, Mary Jane and two others were witches who were beheaded with an axe by the townspeople.

The tombstones, subjected to a history of vandalism and destruction, can be found at the south end of the lake. The buried's tombstones are becoming buried in shrubs and wildflowers. The cemetery is perched on a hill that overlooks Loon Lake.

The trek is open to people of all ages and there is no registration necessary. Participants will meet at the Dickinson County Nature Center, 2279 170th St. in Spirit Lake, at 9:30 a.m. on October 24. From there, a caravan will take participants to Loon Lake. Kuhlman recommends bringing walking shoes, weather appropriate clothing, drinking water and a camera.

Together

NEW AND IMPROVED SHOOTING FACILITY OPENS SEPTEMBLE

If you're an old gun or never knocked an arrow, this newly revamped shooting facility offers education and a variety of shooting options in a family-friendly, safe and welcoming setting.



Closed for the last year and a half, the DNR's Olofson Shooting Range and Training Center near Polk City just got a total makeover. The all-new facility features 10 ranges each at 30, 50 and 100 yards, an archery platform tower to safely simulate shooting from a tree stand, a 3D archery range trail and can easily and safely accommodate 100 shooters.

"We can have a lot of people shoot here safely," says

Ajay Winter, a DNR training specialist and range manager. "And do so in a totally welcoming, clean atmosphere. We want to help you be safe and shoot competently in a supportive environment." He says one-on-one instruction is intended as time allows.

A grand opening is set for the night of September 14, with tours, but limited shooting. Specials will be offered



Reasonably priced range lane fees. No gun or bow rentals or sales. Hours 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily (closed Mondays and Tuesdays.) Located 4.7 miles north of Polk City on N.W. Madrid Blvd., immediately adjacent public hunting land surrounding Big Creek State Park. No reservations—first come first served. *515-669-7201*. Learn more at *iowadnr.gov* (*search "shooting sports."*)

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New additions include more frequent sporting clay opportunities, five-stand shotgun shooting, an archery range, a 3D archery trail spans two acres and features everything from realistic woodchucks, fox and coyote to deer, bear and bison. The separate tower allows archers to safely simulate tree stand conditions to hit four-foot square targets at 15, 20, 25, 50 and 60 yards. Old favorites-trap and skeet-round out the range experience.

A 50-person audio/visual enriched classroom allows for hunter education, shooting sports clinics as well as natural resource education for shooting-related and other topics such as fly-tying, public meetings as well as a rentable space for groups.

Lost In Iowa weekend getaways

Top Park Cabins FOR Fall Getaways

Enjoy an Overnighter to Soak up Changing Seasons.

Settle in and enjoy the serene outdoors and the Changing seasons of fall and winter at these year-round cabins. In the off season, the appealing, quiet solitude of Iowa's state parks offers a completely different experience versus busy summer weekends. Here are some top picks for quiet getaways.

Lake Darling State Park, Washington County Hike through re-established prairie trails and wind through heavily wooded timber to a cemetery dating back to the 1800s. Explore nearly 18 miles of shoreline trails

along the tranquil 300-acre lake and look for fall color reflected from wooded hills and valleys. Then relax in an

16 IOWA OUTDOORS SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017



Adirondack chair on the back deck in one of six new, fully furnished, modern family cabins (each sleeps six, with two bedrooms) a full kitchen and bathroom.

ack

Backbone State Park, Delaware County Ramble the extensive, heavily forested trail system under a riot of fall color and cast for trout in the park's gurgling stream, then unwind in one of 16 year-round cabins. Four deluxe cabins sleep nine, four two-bedroom family cabins sleep six and eight one-bedroom cabins sleeps up to four. Cabins book quickly for weekends and holidays, but for weekday travelers, you'll own this park.

IOWADNR GOV 17

Lost In Iowa weekend getaways

Bigger Cabins for Bigger Groups: Black Hawk State Park, Sac County and Springbrook State Park, Guthrie County

As the weather cools, fish instinctively want to put on some weight. At Black Hawk, cast for channel catfish, crappies, walleyes, bluegills, sunfish and several types of bass. Then savor a hearty meal of fresh fish in the deluxe fourbedroom family cabin that sleeps 12 comfortably. Enjoy the secluded, spacious Sherburne Cabin at Springbrook that sleeps 10 to 14. With four bedrooms, three baths, two living rooms and full service kitchen, this getaway is nestled in a wooded area on the park's secluded west side, with a scenic overlook and great opportunities to view wildlife.

Honey Creek State Park, Appanoose County

Rustic pine log camper cabins offer a sense of pioneer lifestyle—but with heat and electricity. Here's the go-to for those willing to rough it a bit. Hunters and anglers enjoy these four camping cabins to take advantage of 21,000 acres of state and federal public lands in the Rathbun Lake recreation complex. Camping cabins are not equipped

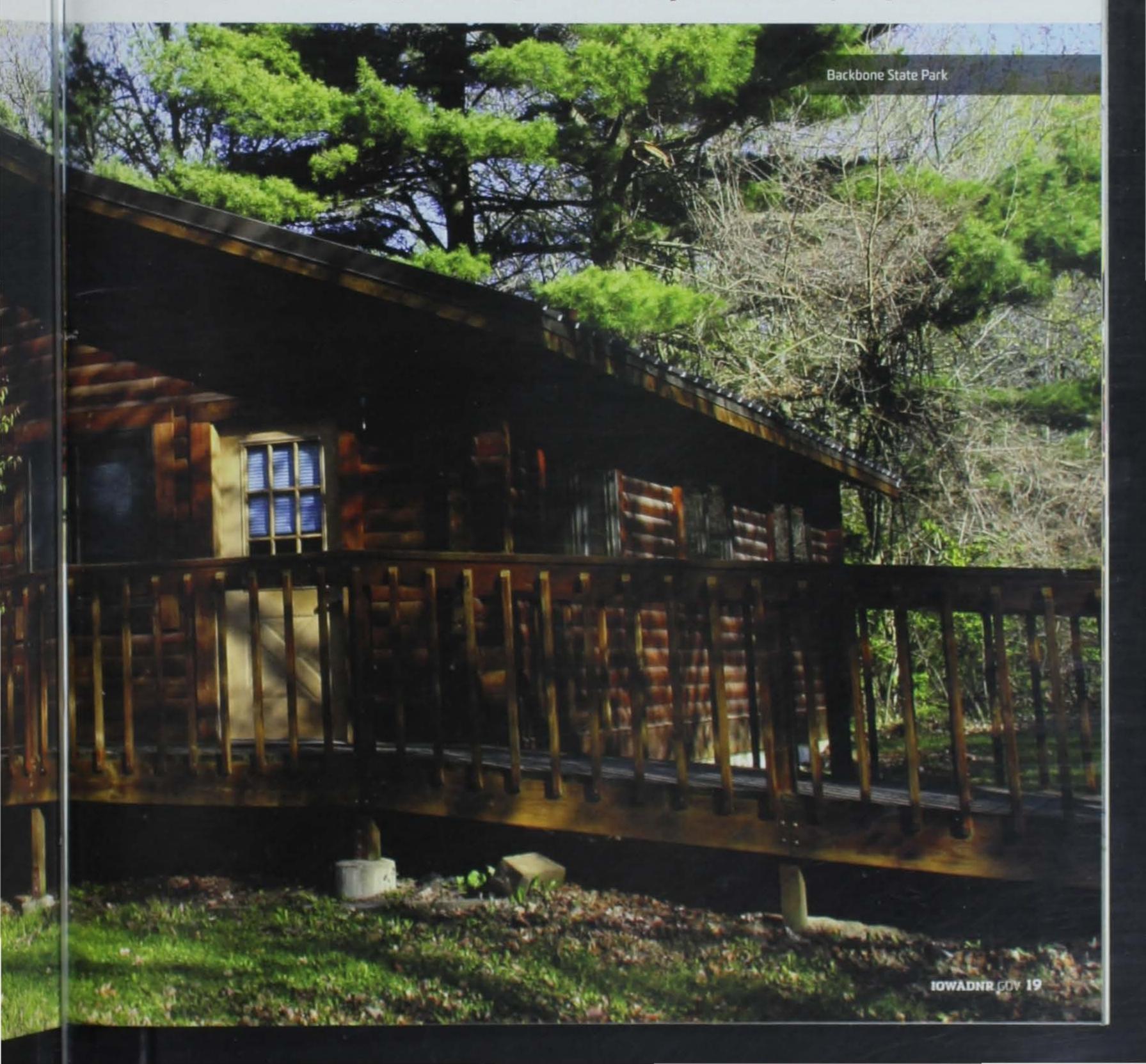


with running water, modern restrooms or showers, however they are located next to the campground's heated shower/restroom building, and a water hydrant is outside each cabin. Cabins come equipped with a small refrigerator and microwave.

Honey Creek Resort, Appanoose County

Luxury cottages offer bedding, fireplaces and TVs in one-, two- or three-bedroom models with fully-appointed kitchens and wraparound porches. Set among rolling, timbered hills against a background of Lake Rathbun, Iowa's second-largest lake, the resort is an angler's delight and the 18-hole award-winning golf course is nestled in 240 acres of rolling prairie to challenge any golfer. The resort features numerous outdoor recreation activities, a full-time activities staff and special festivals and events all year. A 105-guest room lodge with indoor waterpark, full restaurant, conference center and exercise gym are popular for weddings, reunions and other events.

Details are available and reservations can be made at *www.honeycreekresort.com* or by calling *877-677-3344*.



o for oy Lake

LostInIowa weekend getaways

Get Cabin Details and Make Reservations

Choose from 45 year-round cabins, starting as low as \$35 per day. Each has a two-day minimum stay. Visitors need to bring bedding, towels and some cooking utensils. Some cabins are handicapped-accessible and pet friendly. Cabins can sleep between two and 12 people, depending on the type. Get all the details about each cabin, amenities, park maps, addresses and make reservationsat *iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com*orcall *1-877-427-2757*.



After exploring and fishing the mile-and-a-half long, halfmile-wide lake or traipsing through 700 acres of fall color laden hardwoods, a peaceful night in a cabin is in order. Pick from six year-round studio cabins (each sleeps four). With 380 acres of public hunting land adjacent the park, cook up a cabin meal of pheasant, rabbit and squirrel.

Lake Wapello, Davis County

Wander seven miles of lakeshore trails to find that ideal

spot where fall color from wooded hillsides reflects off the water. The timbered landscape, shaded picnic spots and lake provide a quiet elegance which makes Lake Wapello one of southern Iowa's best-kept secrets. Spend a few nights in the two-bedroom, cedar-sided "Cabin Number 13"—a year-round cottage that sleeps six.

Pine Lake State Park, Hardin County

Four cabins are huddled along the banks of the Iowa River adjacent a pleasing mix of woodland, river and



lakes. Snuggle in on a brisk late fall evening, warmed by crackling wood heat of the fireplaces. Built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Work Progress Administration, these classic stone and timber structures have unmatched charm. Pine Creek and Bittersweet cabins accommodate up to six people, Goldfinch and Sandstone up to four.

Waubonsie State Park, Fremont County

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Venture into far southwest Iowa to enthrall at the rarest

vistas of the Loess Hills landform. Miles of trails wind along windswept ridges down into gorges and valleys. Two cabins sleep up to 10 and six. Both have stone, wood-burning fireplaces to warm up beside after of day exploring this nearly 2,000-acre park.

Two camping cabins are available year-round. Both have stone, wood-burning fireplaces. One is a two-bedroom cabin that sleeps 10 people. Both lack nearby heated showers and restrooms, and with only an outside pit latrine, these camping cabins appeal to hardy visitors.

LOST IN IOWA STORY AND PHOTOS FROM THE PATH LESS PEDALED

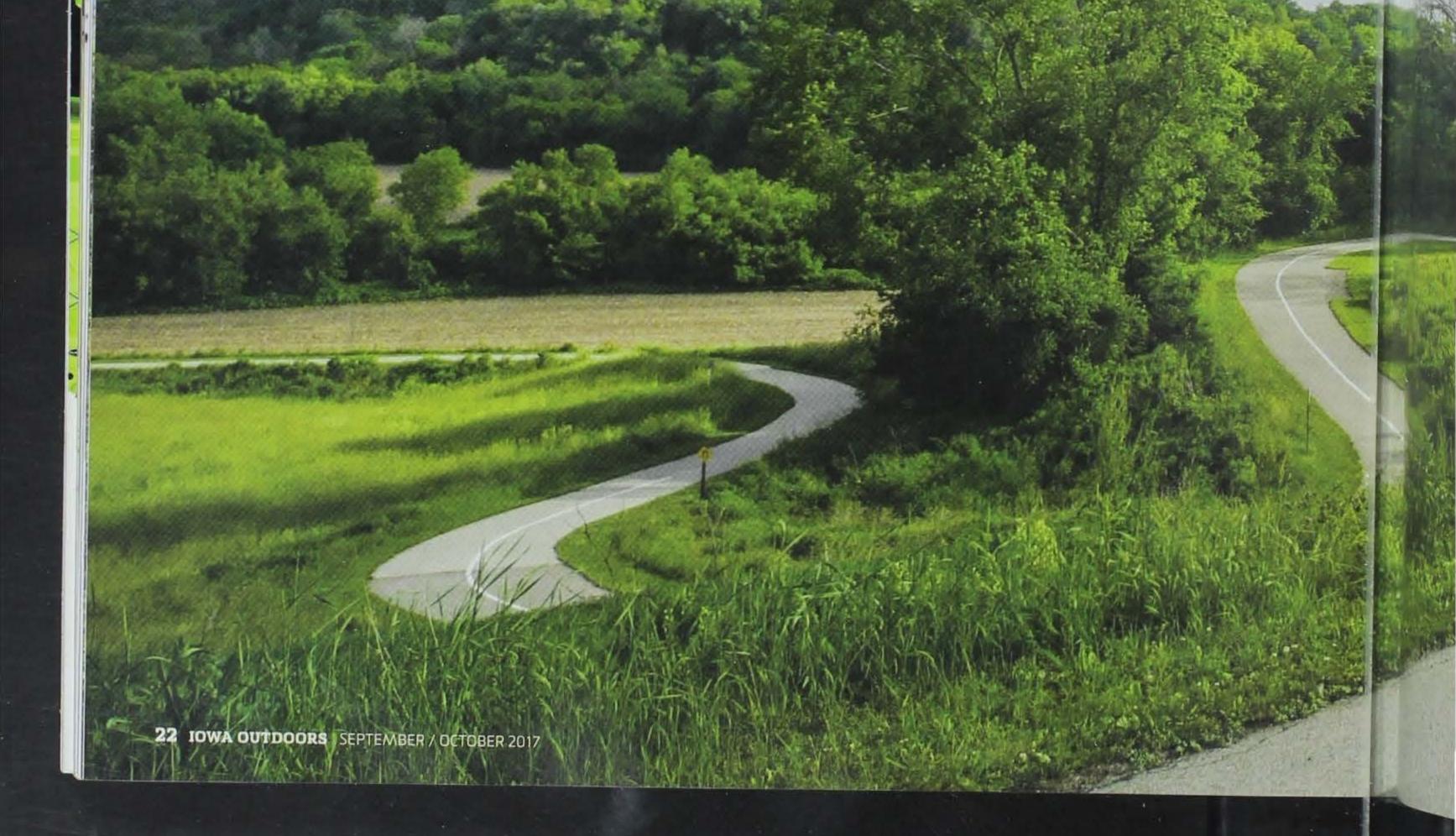
ZEpic Adventures FOR IWO Wheels

From Exploring Hills and Dales Around **Decorah**, to the Gravels of Greater **Grinnell**, these Bike Rides Put You Near Nature.

In Search of Iowa's Hilliest Ride

There is a naggingly persistent myth that Iowa is flat. You would be forgiven for looking at the corn fields from a car window and believing this rumor, but hop on a bicycle, and you'll quickly learn that Iowa's landscape is characterized by constant hills. Almost anywhere in the state, you'll be climbing up one hill, then descending another. However, if you really want to laugh at the myth of flat and test your climbing legs, head to Decorah, in the northeast corner of the state.

The college town of Decorah sits at the edge of the Driftless Area. This unique geologic region is marked by deeply carved river valleys, limestone bluffs and karst topography. Whether you're looking for gravel or paved cycling routes, there is no mistaking the Decorah area for flat land, and you'll find that the





The secluded Trout Run Trail is an 11-mile loop around the city of Decorah. It crosses cold water trout streams five times and runs past the DNR's trout hatchery. Stop in for a visit as you pass by to learn about trout production and stocking. Learn more at troutruntrail.com.

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Lost In Iowa







Cycling the Trout Run Trail, visiting Decorah's quaint downtown eateries and shops and exploring local springs and trout streams are popular local attractions. The historic and



luxe Hotel Winneshiek is also popular with visitors as are area campgrounds.

roads wind tightly around the landscape as they rise up and over hill after hill.

The small community of Bluffton sits roughly 12 miles to the northwest of Decorah and is a popular riding destination. For a paved road ride, follow Pole Line Road to Bluffton Road. This hilly out-and-back route provides not only climbing but also stunning views of the surrounding valleys. You can grab a mid-ride ice cream break at the Bluffton Store, or cross the Upper Iowa River to the Bluffton Campground for a perfect picnic stop beneath the shade trees along the river. For a mixedterrain road ride with even more elevation gain, follow Wagon Road to Scenic River Road to the spectacular Chimney Rock area. The route follows low-traffic roads alongside small farms and rocky bluffs and is accented by short, punchy climbs.

Decorah is blessed with a spiderweb of surrounding roads, both paved and gravel, so there's no shortage of potential riding routes (there's even a mountain bike park). Information and assistance can be gleaned from the helpful staff at Decorah Bicycles, located at the west edge of downtown. The shop also rents a variety of road and mountain bikes in case you visit the area without wheels of your own.

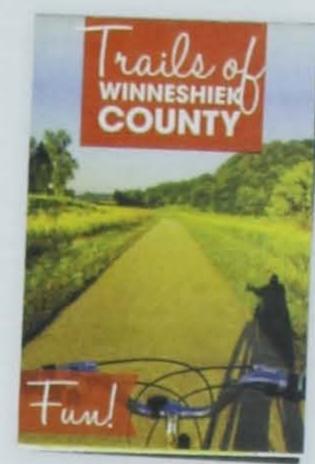
If you've punished your legs enough and still want a bit more mileage, or if you're just looking for a leisurely ride, be sure to ride a loop around the Trout Run Trail. One of the most unique trails in the United States, this 11-mile loop encircles the town, passing dairy farms and top-notch trout-fishing access. Bring along your fly rod if you're out in the evening when the trout are active, or simply stop at one of the many benches to watch others improve their cast. As you ride, keep your eyes peeled for the bald eagles that nest near the river.

As you pedal back into town, be sure to stop at the Whippy Dip ice cream stand, conveniently located next to



Insider Tips

If you plan to fish while you bike the Trout Run Trail, pick up a copy of the beautifully illustrated map, which highlights some of the best fishing spots. If you're short on flies, stop by the Decorah Hatchery, the local outdoor store. If your bike ride leaves you thinking that Decorah seems very similar to Norway, you wouldn't be the only one. In fact, Decorah was largely founded by Norwegian immigrants, and you can learn more at the Vesterheim Museum.







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MAINUNG PHOTOS BY JAKE ZWEIBOH

Decorah Bicycles. On a hot day, you may be greeted by a bit of a wait at the old school walk-up window, but it's worth it for a refreshing soft serve cone or slushy.

For a filling post-ride meal, stop into local favorite Mabe's Pizza. Mabe's offers not only delicious pizzas, but also entrees like broasted chicken. And folks avoiding gluten will be happy to note that Mabe's offers a gluten-free pizza option.

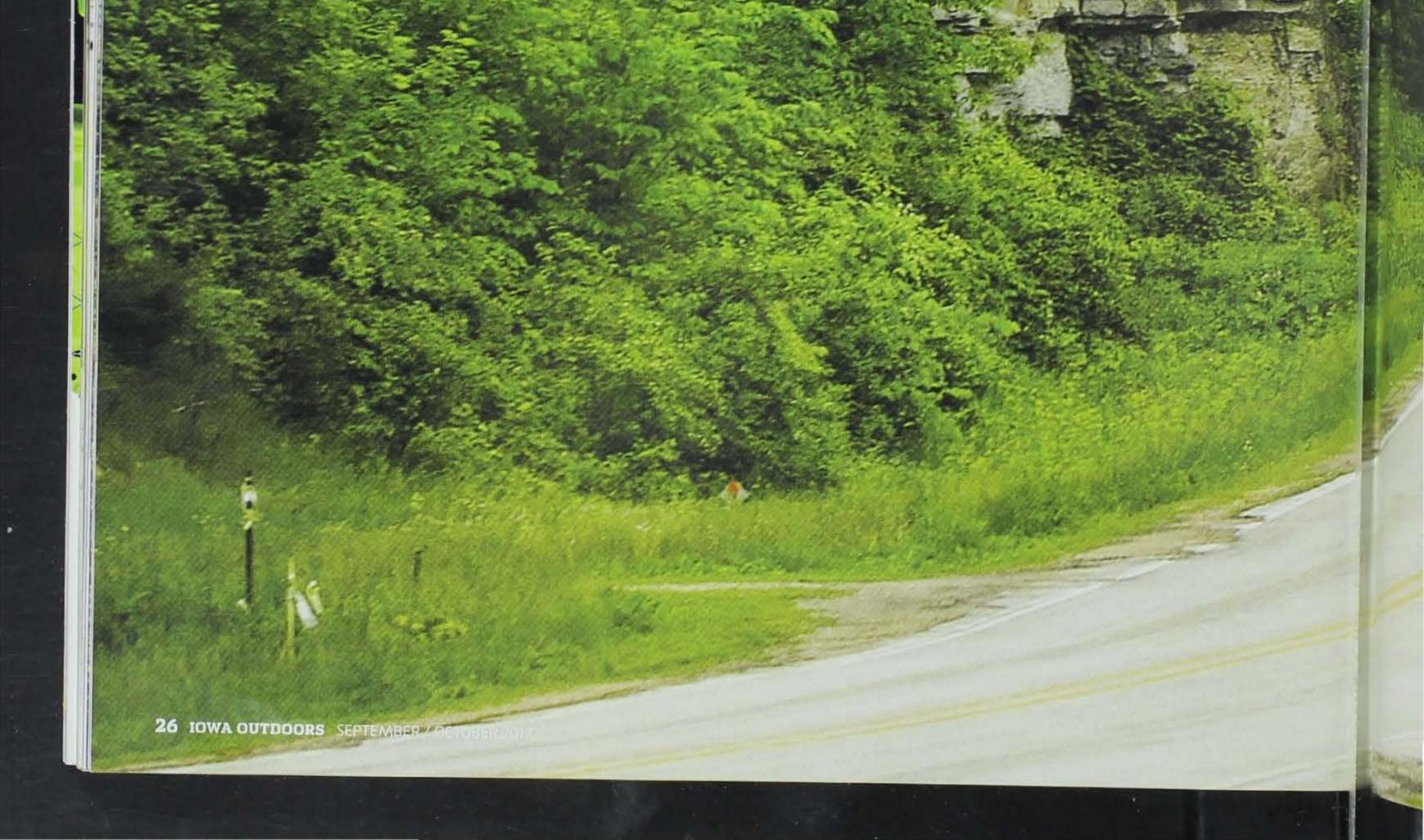
If barbecue whets your appetite, check out Old Armory BBQ and its neighbor Courtyard & Cellar. Order your meal to go (both the beef brisket and pulled pork plates are exceptional, as are the mac and cheese and green bean sides), then grab a table in the courtyard and order a drink from the outdoor beer garden.

Or if you're looking for a more intimate dinner setting, reserve a table at La Rana. This cozy neighborhood bistro features locally-grown fare and an ever-changing menu and invites you to settle in for a delicious meal with good company. No trip to Decorah would be complete without a stay at the historic Hotel Winneshiek. The beautifully renovated boutique hotel is within easy walking and biking distance of everything in town and is delightfully bike-friendly. Bring your bike into your room if you like (be careful not to leave grease on the beautiful furnishings), or park your bike in the secured room next to the front desk (it's specially outfitted with bike hooks).

As you explore the variety of Decorah's cycling options, you'll find yourself marveling at the changes in terrain and topography. You'll parallel limestone bluffs and the river, wind beside small working farms and wideopen vistas, pass tiny communities and ghost towns-all leading you to wonder if you're still in Iowa, or if you've secretly stumbled into rural Europe. Whichever direction you set your wheels, you'll ride out into the remote countryside where you can daydream and "get away from it all," with the peace of mind that you're never really that far from town (and a shower and a good meal).



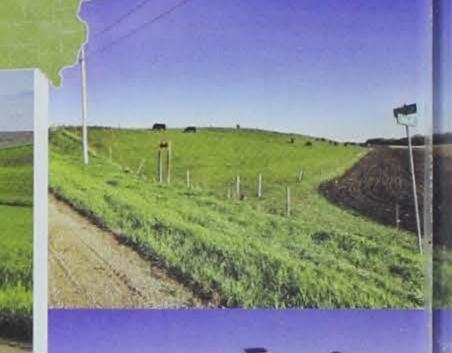
Challenging mountain biking, steep county blacktops or the tranquil Trout Run Trail offer cycling opportunities for all interests. Many families venture here for not only cycling, but hiking, trout fishing, paddling the limestone bluff-strewn Upper Iowa River and camping along gin-clear waters.





Lost In Iowa







Gourmet Gravel Getaway in Grinnell

Riding bicycles on gravel roads is rapidly growing in popularity across the United States. The appeal is simple: they are low in traffic and high in scenery and adventure. For many, the quaint college town of Grinnell is Iowa's gravel capital.

Grinnell is home to one of the most challenging and renowned self-supported gravel endurance bike races in the United States: Trans Iowa. Limited to only 120 participants, Trans Iowa takes its riders on a 300-plus-mile vision quest across Iowa's gravel and level B roads. For many, the mere act of finishing is an accomplishment. The difficulty of the race is legendary (Trans Iowa 11 saw no "official" finishers) and has created a mystique about the gravel roads in central Iowa.

The good news is: you can experience these same

mythic roads for yourself and get a glimpse into the race without having to tackle the event itself. You can punish yourself as much or as little as you want and end the day with a warm shower and glass of wine or a cold beverage.

For the intel on the best gravel roads to ride and last-minute bicycle needs or repairs, Grinnell's local bike shop, Bikes to You, has you covered. The owner, Craig Cooper, is an avid gravel enthusiast and can help you craft a route to suit your needs. Want big miles? Short and hilly? Want to ride past the iconic red barn that marks the finish line of Trans Iowa? He knows all the roads and can help make your bike gravel-ready. Bikes to You also offers gravel bike rentals if you don't have a suitable ride.

A block away from the bike shop is the Grinnell Main Street Lofts, a unique lodging option offering elegant and modern accommodations with easy access to post-ride "recovery" meals. All the units are beautifully furnished



This loop is the perfect introduction to gravel riding in central lowa. Leaving from Bikes to You, it takes you on some quiet residential streets out of town. In short order, you'll be off the tarmac and on to some fun. The route takes you on some great rolling hills that will make you wonder if you're still in Iowa or weren't magically transported to pastoral Europe. On a hot day, you'll be glad that it passes by Rock Creek State Park where you can take a break under the trees or go for a quick wade in the lake. You'll also pass the Red Barn that has been the official Trans lowa finishing site for the last few years.

From the famously grueling endurance gravel bike ride, The

Trans lowa, to those seeking peaceful rides on rural gravel and a stop at Rock Creek State Park, the greater Grinnell area offers quiet for many urban riders from the Des Moines and Cedar Rapids metro areas.

with modern decor and have a large screen cable TV, WiFi and a full kitchen.

But let's get serious, after a long ride, who wants to cook? To sate the never-ending cycling hunger, La Cabana Grill serves hearty cyclist-sized burritos and sizzling fajitas that make for a perfect lunch stop.

For dinner, Prairie Canary is a refreshingly minimalmeets-Heartland restaurant that wouldn't be out of place in the hip districts of Austin or Portland. Lightly crisped Brussels sprouts topped with parmesan cheese, served with a chili aioli, make for a healthy but satisfying appetizer. The kale salad topped with a well-done steak is a great option for those who are gluten free or cutting down on carbs.

If you need snacks for the ride, McNally's Foods is a full-service market with organic food, a vast selection of beer and wine and a deli that makes sandwiches you can stuff in your jersey pocket for the road. After your day's ride, you can unwind and recount your heroics with a nice glass of wine and an appetizer at Solera Wine Bar. The cozy bar has a nicely curated selection of wine and beer as well as light snacks. It is a decadent way to end the day after hours in the saddle hammering on level B roads. The vision of cozying up to the bar provides great motivation to pedal faster.

You can feed the mind as well in Grinnell. Pioneer Bookshop is a great independent bookstore downtown where you can find some post-ride reads. The Faulconer Gallery, located on the Grinnell College campus, is open year-round and showcases works of regional, national and international significance.

Gravel riding can be dirty and challenging, but your post ride doesn't have to be. There's nothing quite like the promise of a good meal to make you push the pedals a little harder.

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Lost In Iowa

Gravel Riding Tips

Tire choice is essential. Anything less than 35mm tires will have your head rattling. 40mm tires with a light tread are ideal for most of the gravel and B roads you will encounter.

Ride right. Although gravel roads are less traveled, you will encounter the occasional farm vehicle. It is best to ride to the right side of the road, especially when cresting hills.

Be prepared. It is no fun to break down in the middle of nowhere, and gravel riding can bring you to some far-flung places. At the very minimum, pack basic repair tools and a cell phone.

Beware of the peanut butter. If it's.

raining, think twice about the road conditions. B roads will turn into thick derailleur-destroying peanut butter mud. Trans Iowa racers have no choice but to ride through it, but you can always wait for it to firm up at the wine bar.



For the intel on the best gravel roads to ride and last-minute bicycle needs or repairs, Grinnell's local bike shop, Bikes to You, has you covered. The owner, Craig Cooper, is an avid gravel enthusiast and can help you craft a route to suit your needs. Want big miles? Short and hilly? Want to ride past the iconic red barn that marks the finish line of Trans Iowa? He knows all the roads and can help make your bike gravel-ready. Bikes to You also offers gravel bike rentals if you don't have a suitable ride.



Blazing WITH Beauty

Secrets of the Cedar Hills Sand Prairie

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRIAN GIBBS

32 IOWA OUTDOORS SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017

Both prairie coreopsis and the sun shine yellow and gold after a thunderstorm rolls through the 36-acre Cedar Hills Sand Prairie, located 10 miles northwest of Cedar Falls in Black Hawk County.



T is the fifth sweltering August day in a row. I've had a bellyful of summer and have developed a strong case of summer malaise. The heat and humidity the past few days has created an internal fog that only weakens any sane person's desire to spend more time sweating outdoors than necessary. My senses need an airing out



and a predicted cold front will do just the trick. I thumb through the pages of *A Guide to Iowa's State Preserves*, and the next day I find myself driving to Cedar Hills Sand Prairie, just north of Cedar Falls.

Surrounded by a sea of agriculture, the 90-acre state preserve is an island of biological diversity that supports more than 360 species of native plants, 60 bird species and 50 different butterflies. I arrive at the prairie just after sunrise and realize I forgot my hiking shoes; but I'm already here and the prairie is calling, so my sandals will have to do. Overnight, the temperature dropped into the 40s, and an eerie fog hangs over the preserve. Dewy spider webs cling to the stalks of big bluestem and Indian grass. Each ray of sunshine highlights a million water droplets on the mystic prairie. The morning dew feels good on my bare legs. Sandals allow the pencil tip sand particles of the prairie to tickle my feet. Eventually, things change once I reach the preserve's fen.

Clouds roll in overhead as I step into the fen. A few steps in and I am coated in a rich hummus soil called palms muck. Nearby, a bumblebee makes its way inside the cobalt flower of the bottled gentian. A monarch floats by and makes me feel like a kid again. Eventually, I migrate out of the mud and perch on top of a large sand dune. The magenta blooms of rough blazing stars coat the hill. Languid from the cold front, insects grip to the warmth of the blazing stars. Little bluestem is losing its blue-green color and is turning copper-red. The ripening reddish seeds of side oats gramma cling to the stalk like a pole vaulter. I pick up two hands of sand and let it trickle through my fingers like an hour glass. I drift asleep in the overcast sky and wonder what the preserve would have looked like thousands of years ago.

According to geologist Jean Prior, "The region would have been an incredibly cold place with permafrost, freezing and thawing taking place. Turbulent winds would have been responsible for depositing vast amounts of sands to the area. These sands that form the ridges, dunes and blow-out basins is eolian, that is deposition by the wind. The source areas of the sand could be the Cedar River or Beaver Creek, or both, or the broad surrounding Iowan Surface landscape as it was developing in the geologic past 16,000-21,000 years ago." These geologic processes account for the preserve's rolling topography and help pack an incredible amount of biodiversity inside its relatively small area.

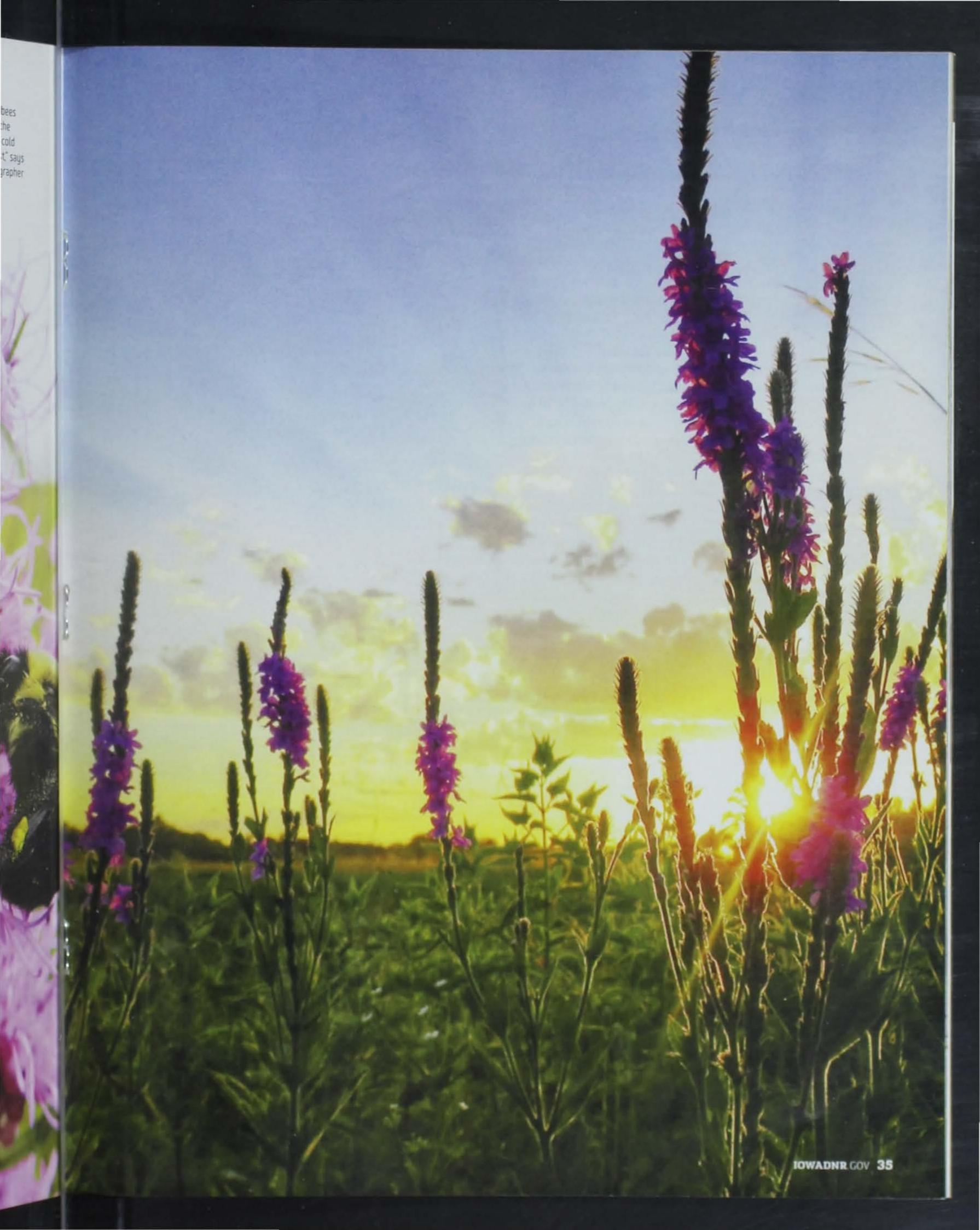
Ownership/History

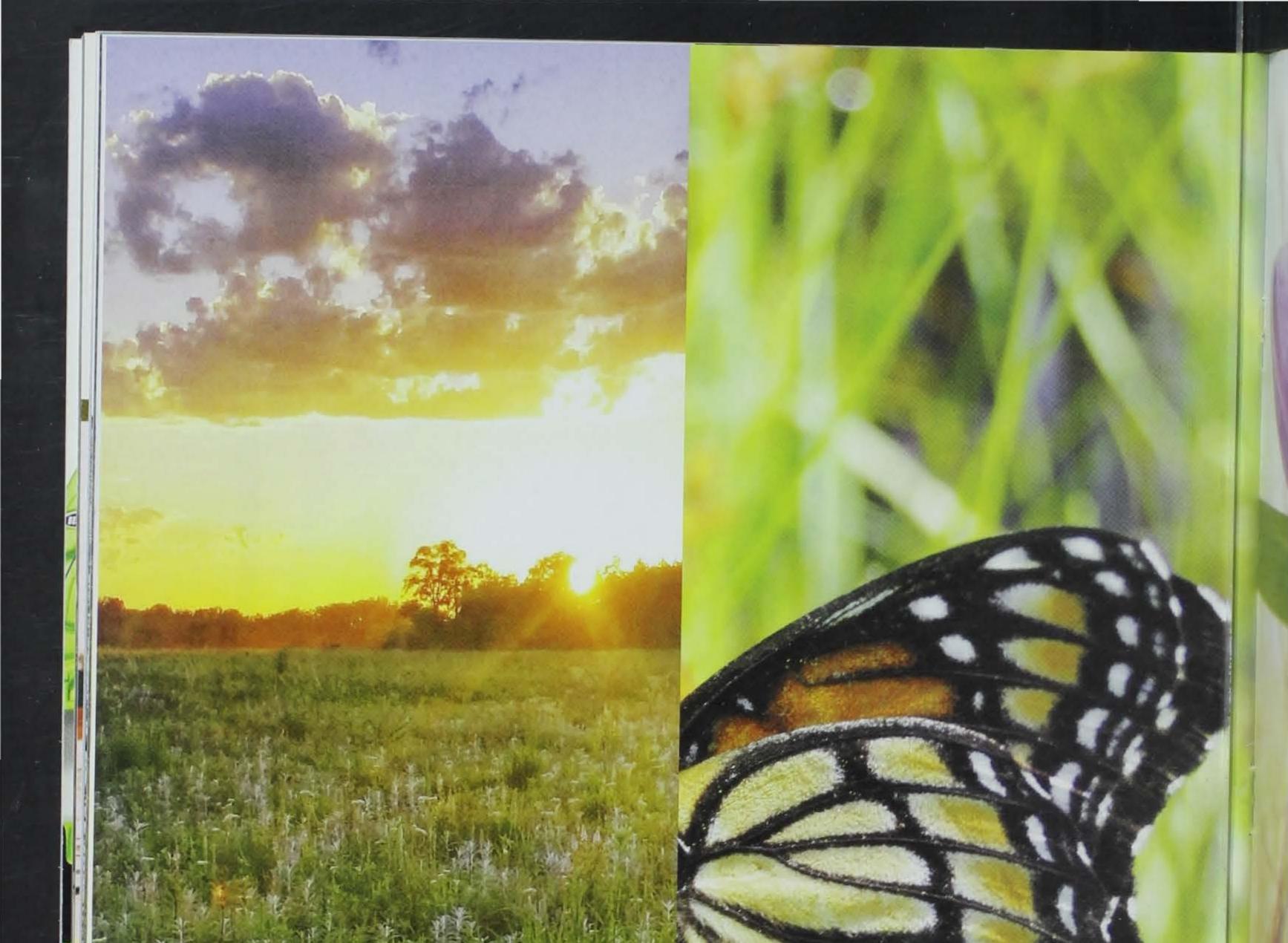
From 1969-1985, Cedar Hills Sand Prairie was informally managed by University of Northern Iowa faculty, students and volunteers. In 1985, the Mark Family sold what is now Cedar Hills Sand Prairie to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) for a pretty penny of \$3,000 an acre. Since the transfer, TNC has co-managed the prairie alongside faculty from the University of Northern Iowa Biology department and staff at the Tallgrass Prairie Center. Hopeful to learn more about the preserve, I set up an appointment to talk with Dr. Daryl Smith, former center director and longtime UNI Professor of Biology. The majority of Smith's 50-year career has been spent teaching others about the ecological importance of the North American tallgrass prairie. He has inspired thousands of students to see the beauty of prairies, written dozens of scientific articles and co-produced the one-hour documentary film called "America's Lost Landscape: The Tallgrass Prairie." I'm thrilled when he agrees to meet with me to talk about the Cedar Hills Sand Prairie. Inside the center, Dr. Smith greets me with a warm handshake. After introductions, he hands me a letter to read while he finishes searching through the preserve's archives. The letter was addressed to Smith in 1986 by Emmet Polder, who grew up a mile north of the preserve. Highlights of Polder's observations from the prairie in the 1930s included a variety of wildlife: short eared owls, lark sparrows, northern phalaropes, yellow headed blackbirds, prairie chickens, red squirrels, long tailed weasels, least weasels and spotted skunks. I muse at Polder's staggering observations and decide to show Smith a picture of an attractive pink plant I took out at the prairie. I'm hopeful it's some rare species, but within a few seconds Smith identifies the plant as a Deptford pink, an escapee from

"Loads of bumblebees seemed glued to the blazing stars one cold morning in August," says writer and photographer Brian Gibbs.

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LEFT: The sandy soils of this prairie are carpeted with hoary vervain and sage during mid-summer ABOVE: A viceroy is often confused for a monarch, but the thick black line that crosses hindwing is a dead giveaway. RIGHT: A bee pollinates bottle gentian in bloom in wetter areas during August and September.

6 IOWA OUTDOORS SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017



flowerbeds of Europe. As Smith motions for me to follow him back to his office, a foreign anxiety fills me. I forgot to write down any interview questions.

The first thing one notices inside Smith's office is a prairie print with a quote from early prairie restorationists Jim and Alice Wilson: "There is a mysterious something about the native grasses—a power, a spirit, a mystique that both stirs and quiets the soul." My nerves are eased by the photo. Before I can gather my thoughts into questions, Smith asks me where I went to school. When I announce I'm a UNI alum, he inquires if I ever took one of his classes. "Sadly no," I respond, but Smith is undeterred. "Well then, we have a lot of catching up to do," he replies with a smile.

Smith reveals that he spent most of his early life in the shadows of trees along Sugar Creek in southeast Iowa and that he was a late bloomer to the prairie. His legacy in prairie restoration may have taken a different path if he had not visited Cedar Hills Sand Prairie. "My first visits to Cedar Hills Sand Prairie helped transition my interest from plant physiology to prairie restoration," Smith shares with me.

Back in the 70s

Smith's first visit to the preserve was in 1970. He'd started teaching at UNI and was notified of the prairie's significance by UNI graduate student Glenn Crum. Crum had been conducting research on sedges in the area and discovered a diverse array of prairie plants growing in the sandy soils surrounding a swell in the prairie. Crum eventually became so fascinated with the place that he would chose to write his thesis on the flora of the prairie in 1972. Three years later, the first burn of the prairie was conducted by prairie ecologist, Roger Landers, Smith and a group of volunteers. I share my own astonishment of the sheer amount of flora found at the preserve, specifically the number of blazing stars, to which Smith cheerfully chuckles, "You should have seen it back in the 70s!" He then looks at me and laughs again, "I'm not sure I'm giving you much to quote here." I smile back and ask if I can use his remark about the prairie in the 70s. Smith's memory of the prairie's positive response to burn was documented in a legendary photo of the area taken in the mid 1970s by prairie enthusiast Carl Kurtz. In Kurtz's picture, a fuchsia explosion of blazing star fills the frame. Kurtz recalls he spent nearly five hours wandering amongst the "wild extravaganza of blazing stars" the day he captured the photo. Kurtz, who has more than 35 years of prairie planting experience, believes there is still much to learn about the ecology of the prairie. "We know so little about prairie succession. What are the triggers or stimuli which bring about these fleeting once-in-a-lifetime events? Is it heat, wet or dry weather, the presence or absence of

soil nutrients, the effects of grazing or having or some other factor we can neither see nor detect? Since this display of blazing stars has not occurred again in 40-plus years, are the plants still there waiting for just the right conditions?" ponders Kurtz.

At the conclusion of my interview with Daryl Smith, he jokes that though I didn't take his class, he still has something he wants to give to me. He disappears from his office for a moment and returns with a copy of Iowa writer John Madson's landmark prairie book, *Where the Sky Began*. Smith recalls that when he first met Madson in the 1980s, he asked the writer if he would sign a copy of his book. In an act of reciprocity, Madson obliged, then thanked Smith for "carrying the prairie torch in Iowa."

Passing the Torch

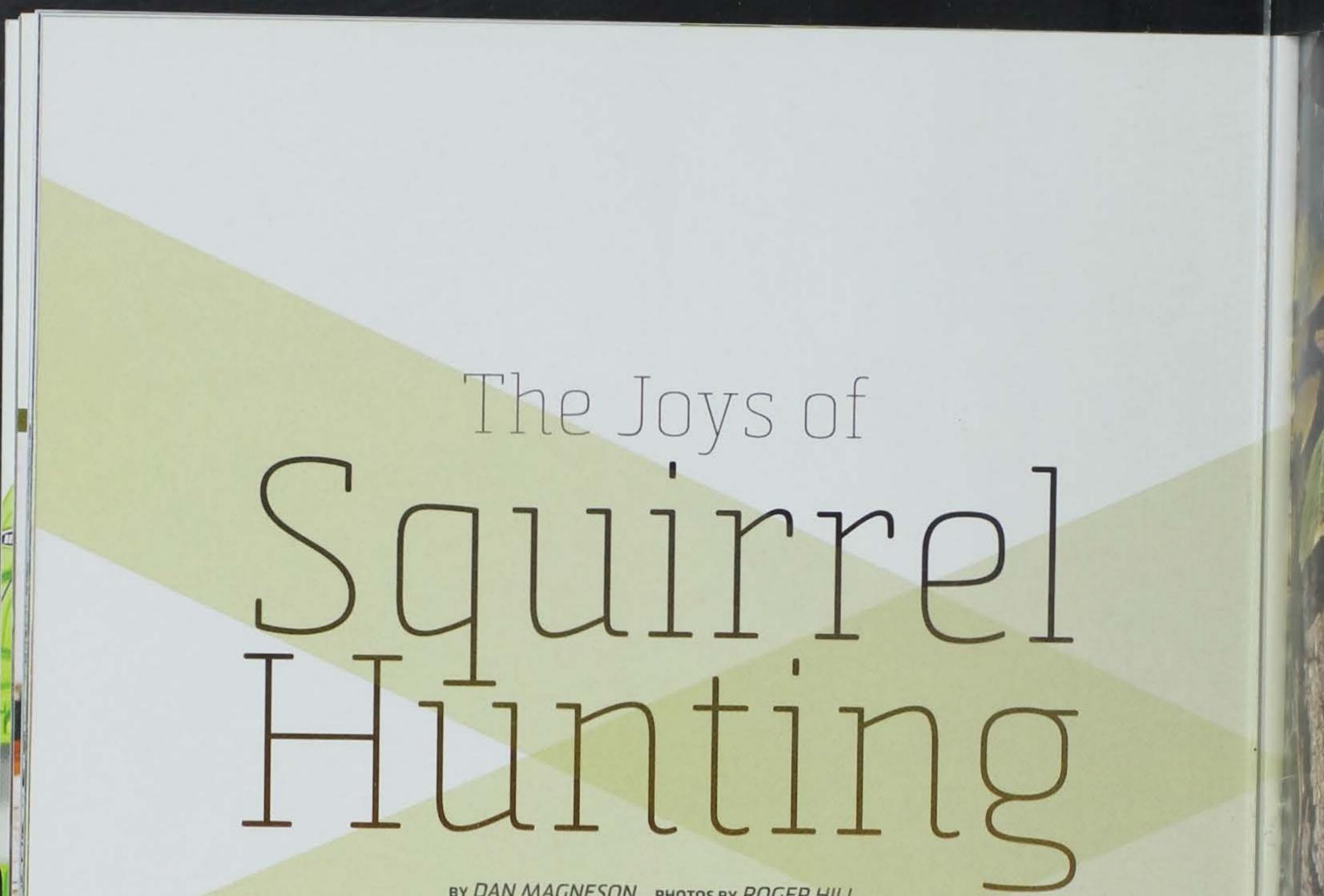
On a sunny June day in 2016, I revisited the Cedar Hills Sand Prairie to see what floral treasures could be in bloom. A quick check of the preserve's logbook reveals that people from five states have visited the preserve in the past year. One gentleman even celebrated his 60th birthday by taking photographs in the preserve. After reading the log book, I run into Jim Weimer, the Black Hawk County Conservation Board's wildlife conservationist.

The meeting is a bit serendipitous as Weimer was my first mentor/supervisor out of college. I haven't seen him in several years and feel lucky to reunite with him in the outdoors. After catching up, he shares with me that the conservation board is managing and maintaining the prairie through a transfer agreement with The Nature Conservancy. According to the agreement, "the foremost goal is of protecting the ecological significance of the property and preserving and restoring the native vegetation communities and all native species." Weimer asserts that the conservation board will be working diligently to remove invasive species and control woody vegetation on the site. I ask him where one of his favorite places in the preserve is. Weimer points to the southern section of the prairie where the conservation board recently conducted a prescribed burn. I travel that direction and venture to the dunes where I saw the bounty of blazing stars blooming last year. The June sun hangs high in the sky and the mystique of the prairie fills my senses. The recent burn has helped turn the prairie into a cornucopia of color. Prairie phlox splashes the landscape with lavish shades of purple and pink. The purifying smell of white sage drifts over the sands. The flute-like song of a meadowlark resonates from a fence post. A monarch rests on a stalk of little bluestem. I arrive at my destination, gilded in the profuse blooms of hairy puccoon. A dickcissel sings a simple song, equally ceremonial as the torching of the prairie. I dig my toes into the charisma of the prairie, thumb through the pages of Where the Sky Began and feel like I'm experiencing Iowa as it once was.



LEFT: Dickcissels are a frequent nesting bird in the prairie. Over 50 bird species call this prairie home. BELOW: A black saddlebags dragonfly takes rest. RIGHT: Carl Kurt'z splendid August 1974 photo of blazing star in bloom at Cedar Hills Sand Prairie.





BY DAN MAGNESON PHOTOS BY ROGER HILL

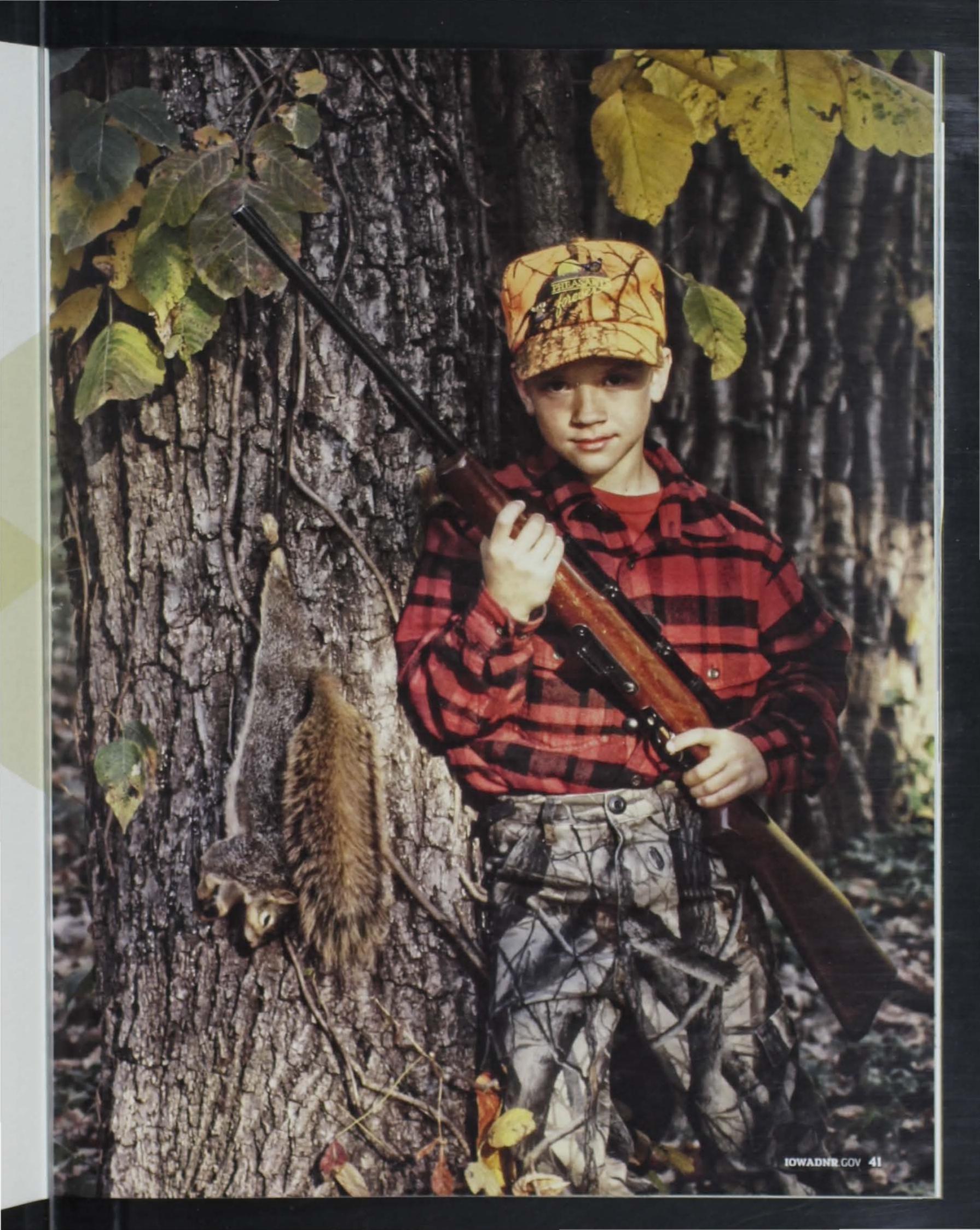
here comes a certain September day when you step outside and instantly know in your heart autumn has definitely arrived. never mind what the calendar officially says.

For me, I think it is because the sunlight takes on a yellowish quality. And I know before much longer, flies begin acting crazy, boxelder bugs cluster on window screens, you smell burning leaves, you see the high bright stadium lights across town and hear crowds in bleachers at football games.

A smoky-gold harvest moon hangs over the horizon, and cornstalks rattle in the breeze. A fire feels so good on chilly evenings, yet you sleep so soundly with the windows open overnight.

Mulled apple cider has that biting tang. You hear snow geese moving south and try to pinpoint their progress by watching for them to periodically blot out the stars...but it doesn't work.

It is also prime time for hunting squirrels.





QUIET IN THE WOODS

You learned very early to ease your car door shut upon arriving near your hunting spots and not let car keys or loose change jingle in your pockets while you erstwhile refrain from talking. I recall once even having a watch that ticked so audibly that I wouldn't wear it into the woods.

You settle into place under an oak tree in the pre-dawn blackness and notice how much more numerous the stars seem when away from the lights of town. It is so quiet that if it weren't for the sound of your own breathing, you would wonder if you had lost your hearing. When you do finally detect even the smallest of sounds, the pre-dawn stillness is such that it amplifies it into a loudness you swear is audible a mile away.

Then comes a palette of colors, making squirrel hunting among the most visually-rich experiences of all hunting. You look easterly and see red, orange and yellow leaves against that backdrop of a sunrise richly hued with rosy-scarlet, saffron, salmon, tangerine and mauve with brilliantly gold-edged, thin and slate-blue clouds all around. And upon taking in this stunningly-spectacular scenery, you'll reflect this is Iowa at its very best.

You hear the forest starting to stir, with the raucous racket of blue jays above all else. You've already discovered places with lots of blue jays have great squirrel hunting, and that blue jays have a large repertoire of calls besides just jay! jay!; my personal favorite has always been the call that sounds like Once outside the canopy of the trees, the sky opens up toasty-warm and unobscured, as blue and unblemished as a robin's egg. It's going to be yet another glorious and golden day of Indian summer.

Sumac leaves at wood's edge are impossibly red, looking instead like Christmas poinsettia bracts. Woolly bear caterpillars march purposely across the earth, and grayish-brownish Carolina grasshoppers that blend in so well against the dry ground snap into flight, exposing black wings with yellowed margins. They pop upward with a short staccato machine-gun sound, then dip silently and briefly before repeating the yo-yo-like process. You wonder why that first hard and heavy frost is termed a "killing frost" when it usually takes a long series of them before the bugs are all done in, and meanwhile you admire the resilience of insects in surviving nightly temperatures dipping below freezing.

This is the time of year that a crisp apple really hits the spot—so too does a pear when the absolutely-exquisite combination of sweetness and softness perfectly coincide.

LESSONS FROM THE HUNTS

Every year, you treasure squirrel hunts—and recount all the things you've learned along the way.

First and foremost, country squirrels may look like their tamer and trusting town brethren, but that is where any similarity ends. Country squirrels are shy and wary and not used to seeing people coming their way. They tend to view humans as a potential threat. At first sight, rural squirrels try to put as much distance between themselves and people as possible and generally make themselves still, silent and scarce. Two Iowa tree squirrels can be legally hunted: the smaller gray squirrel-called a "cat squirrel" in the Deep South-has a white belly and whitish-tipped guard hairs on its tail, rendering it a frosted appearance. Gray squirrels are sociable and gregarious, full of chatter. They start their day at first light, and prefer interiors of deeper, denser and brushier sections of timber. They are nervous and hyperactive, fleet of foot and very nimble. The fox squirrel is considerably larger, with a grizzled back, a belly colored about like the innards of a pumpkin and a tail with buffy tips on the guard hairs. They are generally more silent and solitary, and although lumbering and lethargic when compared to the zippy gray squirrels, they are still agile and speedy. Fox squirrels favor the fringes of woods and smaller and more open woodlots and tend to wait longer in the mornings before becoming active.

"parliament, parliament."

Looking through the woods toward the gathering light, you spy that unnatural vertical bounce and hear a whipping swish-swoosh sound as a squirrel trades the limb of one tree for another. Still as a statue, moving only your eyes, soon you spot movement and see the fuzzy edges of the squirrel's tail light up all silvery-white as it catches the soft and slanting rays of early morning light.

The squirrel is coming your way! You ever so slowly raise your rifle, seek out and align the crosshairs, and begin taking steady aim; this isn't easy shooting, because a big ol' fox squirrel will—at most—have a head about the size of a lemon, and with a young gray squirrel it will be more like a lime.

Very slowly, you squeeze the trigger. The sharp crack of the .22 long rifle cartridge sounds, and the squirrel tumbles earthward.

The woods fall silent. Staying put, you mark the squirrel's location and begin waiting once again. The hustle and bustle of the woods slowly picks up again as the shot fades from memory, and the whole scenario is repeated a few more times before the squirrel activity slows while the sun climbs higher.

You rise and stretch, creaky and cramped, but you know that squirrel hunting is quite literally a pain in your neck if you are doing it right. You gather up your squirrels in the still chilly air, and head out of the woods.

SILENT TIPS FROM THE OAKS AND ACORNS

There are two general groupings of oaks and acorns. Some nuts are strongly preferred by squirrels over others. The white oak clan—which includes the bur oak so common in Iowa—have leaves with rounded edges, and acorns with a smooth shell inside. The nut or meat of these is sweeter and more palatable to squirrels.

The red oak clan—which includes the pin oak—have leaves with more sharply angled lobes coming to a fine point or prickle. Their acorns are velvety-hairy on the inner surface of the shell, and the nut is comparatively bitter due to higher tannin levels.

And where they grow can make a big difference in how many squirrels you'll encounter: slopes facing the moister north and east may hold a heavier nut crop than trees growing on slopes facing south and west.

SQUIRREL HUNTING BASICS

There are two basic ways of successfully hunting squirrels.

The first is the insidious and deadly "sit-and-wait" approach, which can account for a lot of squirrels in the bag. This is a fine method for dry conditions when it's hard to move without making a lot of noise, and good camouflage makes it an even richer and more vivid experience—you'll be amazed how alive the woods become after you've been still for awhile. Animals aren't quick to recognize humans when sitting in camo and remaining still, especially among cover that breaks up and blends your outline even more and you add to that taking pains in masking your face.

Birds come in extremely close, and I've seen more deer, coyotes, 'coons, foxes and 'possums than any other kind of hunting I've ever done. How did they ever manage to get so close before I finally realized they were there? And if you fire a louder weapon, such as a shotgun, in the later wintry woods, don't be surprised to find yourself falling all at once from one spot signals a possible squirrel somewhere up there. Easy does it: move as slow as molasses in January so as not to alarm the squirrel overhead, always carefully keeping cover of the larger tree trunks between yourself and the squirrel as you move into position for a shot.

If lucky when it comes to locale, a damp creek bottom makes for a great hunting route through the woods, and luckier still if a recent rain has washed away noisy leaves. Tiptoe along the soft earth to hear a squirrel rummaging through fallen leaves. Peer ever so slowly over the bank and slowly take aim, cautiously moving only when the squirrel is digging again and not looking in your direction, then freeze in place as it sits back on its hind legs to eat an acorn. Sometimes, a second squirrel will appear. They can get so busy chasing one another you can sometimes take them by surprise and bag both—but more often than not they both escape. Finally, after what seems an eternity, the rifle is level and you begin squeezing the trigger...

SHOT PLACEMENT

For their size, squirrels can be pretty tough customers, and head shots may be the only kind to securely anchor them. And never shoot at a squirrel just poking its head out of a tree hole, because the now-dead squirrel will fall backward into the cavity and be unretrieveable.

By concentrating solely on head shots—which also best preserves meat quality—one learns that successful squirrel hunting hinges directly upon superb marksmanship, and all that practicing beforehand with your rifle pays off. Sighting in your rifle carefully and checking to see which ammunition your particular rifle shoots the best sure helps, and selecting the right rifle scope is another important part of the hunt. You'll soon discover scopes gather light and better illuminate the target in the dappled and dim lighting under a leaf-clogged canopy, and that scopes with thick crosshairs at all but the very center where they meet up are best. The heavy black outer portion is easier to visually find, and the slender, thread-like center doesn't obscure a small target.

soon surrounded by an expectant audience of chickadees.

If you are an antsy and fidgety type who finds it excruciating to sit still for any length of time, try to hold out for at least 20 minutes minimum, but 30 to 40 minutes is better. If you do bag a squirrel, reset your timer to zero and start anew. If not, move at least a football field away as quietly as possible. Keep alert as you wait for the scolding chatter of squirrels and sounds of their movement emanating from the trees and dry leaf litter on the forest floor; these clues tell the direction you next want to move. Even the sound of squirrel claws against rough bark will carry a surprisingly long distance on a dead calm day.

The other major method is known as "still-hunting," and amounts to very slowly slipping and sneaking through the woods, looking and listening all the while. The watchwords here are stealth, stalking and silence. No one believes in the old adage "haste makes waste" more ardently and resolutely than a still-hunting squirrel hunter.

Still-hunting works best after a rain or during mistingdrizzly conditions, which renders leaves underfoot soft and silent. Many times pieces of an acorn shell falling like raindrops has alerted me to the presence of an otherwise-unseen squirrel feeding overhead, and while you rather randomly see autumn leaves wafting-wobbling down in that slip-sliding fashion here and there, a cluster Beyond oaks, watch those really huge cottonwoods for squirrel activity; even when standing at the base of these towering old-timers, there is a lot of vertical distance above you. These monsters are more likely to have cavities to house denning squirrels, plus all that towering height gives the squirrels a greater sense of security.

Cottonwoods also have a propensity for growing thick and heavy limbs that are more horizontal than vertical. And evasive squirrels have a penchant for flattening themselves atop these broad limbs; you'll often see a hint of hair protruding and attesting to this fact. But unless there is a very steep hill nearby allowing you to gain elevation enough for a shot or you have a whole lot of patience to wait it out, you might as well go look for a



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less elusive squirrel.

You likewise learn to keep a sharp eye on those tilted tree trunks whose crown a windstorm has half-toppled and intertwined into the branches of neighboring trees; probably popular because they make for easier climbing than a normal and sheer vertical tree trunk, they seem to be especially busy travel routes for squirrels.

OTHER SQUIRREL ACTIVITY CLUES

Observe signs of squirrel activity when you first size up a section of woods for future squirrel hunting: corn cobs drug in from adjacent cornfields lying on the forest floor, shredded fruits of osage orange at the base of those trees and parts of acorns, hickory and walnut shells sitting atop the more-favored elevated and flatter spots such as bigger logs, tall stumps and the sturdy corner post of a fence.

With both the osage and nut sign, look intently to see the lighter and brighter edges indicating it is indeed fresh sign, and not darker oxidized cuttings indicating it is older.

SQUIRREL CALLIN' SKILLS

Trying to call squirrels adds immensely to the fun-and to the bag. I myself had a commercially-made call, an Olt "Perfect Squirrel Call" to be exact, but you can also try homemade or improvised calls, such as a bolt and a jar lid, a pair of empty shotgun shells or plastic picnic knives or the serrated edges of two quarters. It is not coincidental that master squirrel hunters of your youth evolved into expert anglers, outstanding duck hunters and deadly bow hunters of trophy bucks. These were the folks who showed you, when hunting all alone and dealing with a treed squirrel who invariably scurried around the trunk so that it was always opposite you, that if you hung your jacket on a bush or tied a long cord over to a bush and started jerking it, you could trick that squirrel into thinking there were now a pair of hunters and then he'd slip around that tree trunk and finally present you with a shot. Old timers taught you that early in the season, when the leaves were mostly still on the trees and squirrels. stayed up in those trees, to hunt into the backlighting of the sun to better pick up any squirrel movement. Then late in the season, after the leaves were down and squirrels were mostly feeding on the forest floor, keep the sun at your back so the glare might make it harder for the squirrel to discern your approach. And avoid having low sun off either shoulder, casting a long and unwanted shadow that adds to your overall movement and thus tip off the squirrel lurking nearby. Come to think of it, these were the very same guys who could always hone a knife to razor's edge; quickly and easily build a campfire; were good at making mental maps and always knew right where they were, seldom getting all turned around and lost; set up a cozy campsite; use an axe effectively and efficiently, and whittle a piece of wood into something that actually looked like what they said it was supposed to be. In short, these guys worked at being real woodsmen.

And you grinned when you watched the prowess of the left-handed, sharp-shooting sniper Private Daniel Jackson in the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, because you just knew, you'd just bet anything that level of proficiency had first started to develop while he was squirrel hunting as a youth back in his native Tennessee. Because you know probably above all other types of hunters, any rifle-toting squirrel hunter worth his salt has really dialed into the combination of a sure aim and a steady hand.

You found out that when the wind is strong enough to toss the trees, you might as well stay home unless you knew of a sheltered and calmer hollow somewhere. Wind makes squirrels stay inside shelter, and even if one ventures forth, it is very tough to locate amidst all that motion. And ditto for trying to sneak through woods with crusty, crunchy snow underfoot.

While sitting in the woods so long, you learn about the different trees and vines. Poison ivy is really common, you'll notice, and sure does get mighty pretty in the fall. At first glance, that other vine climbs too, but look closer and you'll count five leaflets instead of three: that's Virginia creeper. What's that wickedly-thorny vine with the curling and coiling tendrils? Greenbriar. How about that tree with the decidedly-tropical look about it? That's a catalpa tree. And when you hunted that old pine windbreak, wow, did that strong sunlight beating down on the pine duff ever smell so good! You'll have time to ponder birds, too. Those northern flickers sure do spend a lot of time on the ground. Then you notice some have a moustache mark extending from the base of the beaks down the sides of their face, while others lack it. Congratulations, you can now tell a male from a female. And why is it with so many birds that the male is so much more colorful than the female ... but it is not at all that way with blue jays? Once early in the season, I happened across a hen quail with an apparently very late brood of chicks. She immediately went into that broken wing act to lure me away. I had known killdeers would do this, but I hadn't known bobwhites would do this also.

You've been the only one out in these woods the entire time. If people knew how wonderful, how truly enjoyable these mornings really were and how tasty squirrel, biscuits and gravy (or squirrel and dumplings, for that matter) really is for breakfast, you'd probably have to shove over onto another stump somewhere and share these woods.

But they are apparently entirely in the dark—after all, there's no one around but you—and it's a secret that you plan to keep to yourself for as long as you can!



lowa's most common hawk, the red-tailed, often perches along roadways to scan for voles, snakes and other small prey.

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48 IOWA OUTDOORS SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017



VVALUI TIME!

Fall is when birds of prey migrate. Attend a Hawk Watch Event to see and learn about fascinating raptors.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES





Well-known biologist and ornithologist Jon Stravers originated the idea for a hawk watch when he proposed a location along the Missouri River to start one. He contacted local birders, including Loren and Babs Paddleford, who got funding and started formal counting in 2002. Located at the Hitchcock Nature Center, outside of Honey Creek in southwest Iowa, an observation tower commands a lofty, stunning view of the Loess Hills and is staffed by trained volunteers who point out passing raptors to visitors.

Hitchcock Nature Center



ach fall, from September through December, bird-of-prey enthusiasts gather at hawk watches around the state to observe and count eagles, hawks, falcons and other raptors as they migrate south. Using thermals and up-drafts along major river valleys, thousands of these fascinating creatures follow Iowa's "hawk highways" as they make their way south from northern nesting grounds.

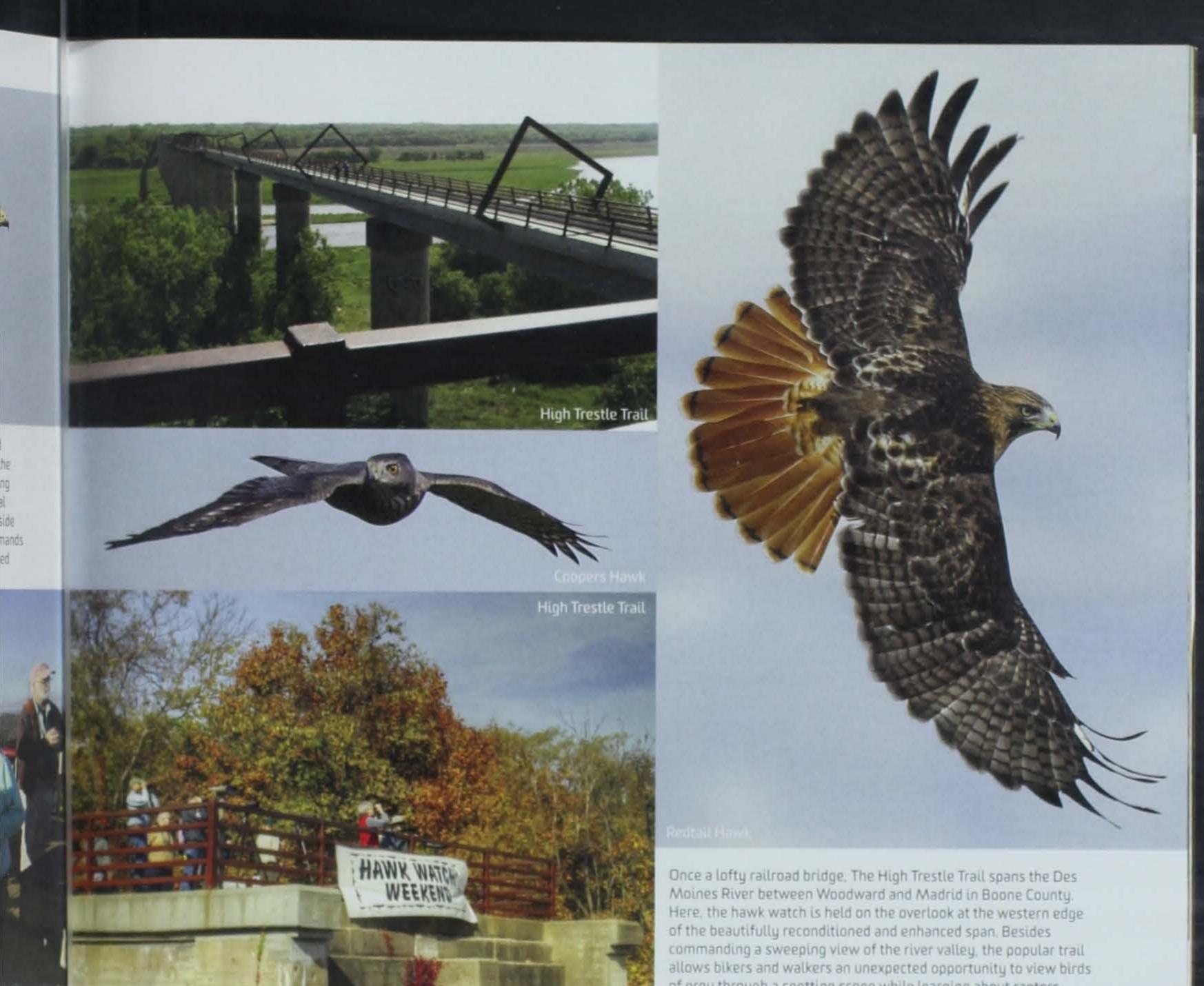
With organized hawk watches all across Iowa, nature lovers can attend one in their area. Across the state—from west to east—here are four hawk watches to choose from:

Hitchcock Nature Area Hawk Watch, Pottawattamie County

It's long been known that Iowa's Loess Hills create thermal up-drafts that aid raptors during migration. For instance, the occurrence of a cold front brings northwest winds, which strike western sides of these hills, creating updrafts that allow raptors to conserve energy by riding them southward during migration.

Well-known biologist and ornithologist Jon Stravers originated the idea for a hawk watch when he proposed a good location along the Missouri River to start one. Jon contacted some local birders, including Loren and Babs Paddleford, who got a little funding and started formal counting in 2002. Located at the Hitchcock Nature Center, outside of Honey Creek in southwest Iowa, an observation tower commanding a lofty, stunning view of the Loess Hills is staffed by trained volunteers who point out passing raptors and identify them for visitors. The tower is staffed seven days a week beginning sometime in September into December, when most migrations end.

"The data from Hitchcock and other hawk watches across the eastern U.S. is used by the Hawk Migration Association



of North America to reveal trends and population changes throughout the eastern half of North America," says raptor biologist and hawk watch facilitator Jerry Toll. (Hawk-watch International collects and analyzes data from hawk watches across the western states.)

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Populations can be affected by climate change or loss of habitat. These watch events are ways raptor populations are monitored. Other methods, such as Christmas Bird Counts, have limitations as several raptor species have already migrated.

"Hawk watches provide a better picture of the metapopulations of raptors," says Toll. To staff the hawk watch tower from September through December, Hitchcock volunteers make it happen. Long-time volunteer Clem Claphake, says "Hawk watches have value as indicators of how raptor populations are doing, and in particular we've witnessed a big drop in numbers of migrating American

of prey through a spotting scope while learning about raptors.

kestrels over the last few years. Our baseline data from early years allowed us to see this trend. The high population of migrating raptors along the Loess Hills also indicates it will never be a good place to put wind turbines. We already have data to back this up."

High Trestle Trail Hawk Watch, Boone County

Once a lofty railroad trestle spanning the Des Moines River between Woodward and Madrid, the High Trestle Trail Watch is held at the overlook at the west end of the beautifully reconditioned and enhanced bridge. Having completed a sixth year, organizer and retired DNR wildlife diversity biologist Doug Harr stresses hawk watches allow discovery of migration routes unknown for certain species. And sometimes here in central Iowa we find some raptors we didn't expect. For instance,

Favorite Moments from Past Hawk Watch Events

Etched into his memory, Mark Proescholdt of the Grammer Grove hawk watch recalls mid-September migrations of broadwinged hawks.

"Some of the kettles (groups of hawks) number into the hundreds and it is just spectacular," he says. "One day I and two friends from Madison County counted 996 broad-wings in the last 1.5 hours of the day. The thermals had died down and broad-wings were coming lower and lower—eventually settling into the trees nearby to spend the night. And of course anytime you spot a merlin or peregrine falcon, it's wonderful!"

Doug Harr of the High Trestle Trail watch says "a couple years ago we were standing at the overlook. We watched a peregrine falcon dive and chase some pigeons right under the High Trestle Bridge. So we were actually looking down at this peregrine falcon diving under the bridge and reappearing on the other side. It was a miss for the falcon, but was the highlight of the day, for those who witnessed it." up to the Bower Tract; a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, where hawks were trapped and banded by two staff from the Mcbride Raptor Project. A tent was set up, and participants watched banding and raptor release throughout the day. About 90 people rode the shuttle to the bluff top, excited to watch trapping, banding and release of wild birds."

Hitchcock naturalist Rene Stroud says visiting seventh graders peppering staff and volunteers with questions showed their excitement. Seeing the migration in person reminds people that everyone is connected, she says.

"It's helpful for people to learn that some of these raptors fly clear to Argentina and may have difficulty finding food along the way or be affected by pesticides when they arrive. This helps widen one's perspective and provides a bigger view of this phenomenon," says Stroud. "I recall being on the observation tower when a raptor flew by very close—providing an amazing look at the details of the bird. There was silence from the crowd until the bird had passed by, followed by a collective "aaahhhh!" It almost felt like we were up there with the raptor ourselves."

Hawk Watch Locations & Dates

 Raptor flights generally begin around 10 a.m. when thermals start, and end around 6 p.m. during peak fall season in late September and October, but weather conditions can alter this daily timetable dramatically.

 Hitchcock Nature Center Hawk Watch 27792 Ski Hill Loop, Honey Creek—Hawk watch daily, on nature center observation tower – Sept. 1 to Dec. 20. 712-545-3283, pottcoconservation.com

Last fall's Marquette Hawk Watch left an imprint on Billy Reiter Marolf. "Every half-hour, shuttles transported the public from the Driftless Area Wetlands Center High Trestle Trail Hawk Watch 2335 Qf Ln, Madrid—viewing platform at west end of the High Trestle Trail Bridge spanning the Des Moines River valley between Woodward and Madrid. For parking, follow Hwy 210 west of Madrid, turn left onto Qf Ln. Walk or bike one mile of trail to the west end of the bridge. Scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sat. in early October. For more details contact Marlene at 515-291-3000 or email*mehresmon@iowawildlifecenter.org.*

 Grammer Grove Hawk Watch - 2030 -127th Street, Liscomb – Watch dates and days of week may vary – check the Marshall County Conservation Board early Sept. for dates and times.

 Marquette Hawk Watch - 509 US-18, Marquette. To date the Hawk Watch has been timed for the 2nd weekend of October, but the date may change. Check with DriftlessAreaWetlandCentre.com or 563-873-3537 for dates and times.



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at west end spanning etween rking, follow left onto Qf sill to the west or 10 a.m. to For more 291-3000or lifecenter.org

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> With long tail and short, rounded wings, the apile Cooper's hawk can give high-speed pursuit of other birds, seemingly melting through cluttered forest canopies, while dodging tree limbs and trunks.

American Kestrel

ABOVE: As North America's smallest falcon, the American kestrel is a fierce little predator. It hunts for insects and small rodents, perching on wires or poles, or hovering above fields and roadside ditches. Kestrels are declining in parts of their range. RIGHT: The Swainson's hawk is seen only in significant numbers in western Iowa. In fall, they migrate to Argentina—one of the longest migrations of any American raptor.



Driftless Area Wetlands Center, Marquette, Clayton County

although the Swainson's hawk is generally found out west, we did see a couple coming down the Des Moines River. Birds are simply one good indicator of the health of the environment." These records are sent to the DNR's wildlife diversity program to help track hawks and other birds of prey and to monitor how each population is doing. The other benefit is educational—pointing out raptors as they pass by to the public and watching people get excited.

"If we can get people to understand more about birds that migrate through Iowa, they may also begin to understand how important the environment is to those raptors. This is the perfect place, adjacent the High Trestle Bridge on this viewing platform, which commands a great view of the Des Moines River valley. And being located along one of the most popular bike trails allows bikers and hikers to cross the bridge and stop by to look through a spotting scope and learn about raptors."

Marquette Hawk Watch, Clayton County

A tradition at Effigy Mounds National Monument since 1984, three to four years ago the annual hawk watch was handed over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Driftless Area Wetlands Center at Marquette and Upper Iowa Audubon" says Billy Reiter Marolf of the service. "The Upper Iowa Audubon folks set up scopes and have binoculars available at the Driftless Area Wetlands center. These expert birders identify birds for the public, as they fly over. About 200 people stop by the wetlands center, and staff from The Minnesota Raptor Center may bring several live birds and do four raptor programs throughout the day," he says. This watch is often timed

Bald Eagle

BELOW: The blue-jay sized sharp-shinned hawk is the smallest hawk in North America. A smaller relative of the Cooper's hawk, sharpshinned hawks are agile fliers that speed through dense woods to surprise prey, typically songbirds. They carry their prey to a stump or low branch to pluck it before eating. Swallowing feathers is not normal for them, as it is for owls.



Golden Eagle

Sharpshinned Hawk

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for the second weekend of October during National Wildlife Week, but banders would like to hold it a couple of weeks earlier to catch more diversity and to perhaps catch the broad-wing hawk migration.

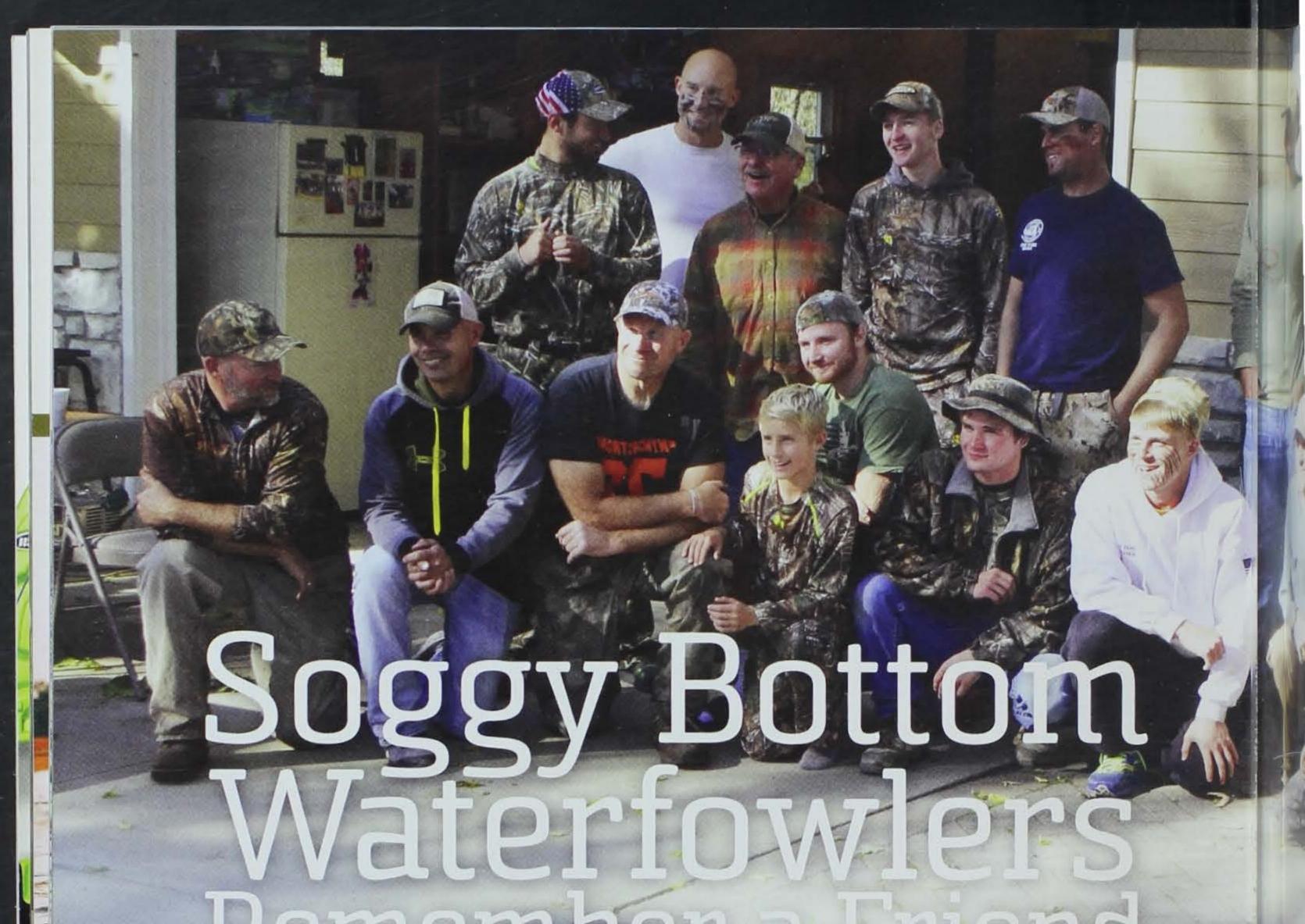
Grammer Grove Hawk Watch, Marshall County

"Twenty-seven years ago, on the way home from a canoe trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area of northern Minnesota, my mom stopped at the hawk watch at Hawk Ridge, in Duluth, Minnesota," explains Grammer Grove Hawk Watch organizer Mark Proescholdt. It was her inspiration that led to the first hawk watch at Grammer Grove.

"Mom passed away a few years ago, but I've continued the hawk watch. Right now I count hawks on Monday and Wednesday afternoons, which are my days off," he says, adding lots of volunteers also make it happen. The watch occurs 12 miles northwest of Marshalltown at Grammer Grove Wildlife Area along the Iowa River valley.

"All hawk watches are valuable in monitoring the numbers of various raptor species as they migrate south. When all hawk watches report in, that's when we can see any trends that may stand out," says Proescholdt. Their data is sent to the Hawk Migration Association of North America, the DNR, the Iowa Ornithologists Union and the Marshall County Conservation Board.

"A couple of times I've been asked for hawk migration numbers by those contemplating placement of wind turbines. We usually coordinate with Marshall County and other organizations to invite the public to attend on weekends, and we've also been visited by home-schooled groups," he says.



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STORY AND PHOTO BY JOE WILKINSON

n a clear day, with light southeast wind and temperatures in the low 50s, it would be a great morning for a mid-autumn walk. But not the best conditions for hunting.

A small flock of geese had worked the 30 decoys dotting the corn stubble, west of nine layout blinds, just outside Solon in Johnson County. "Two geese were close enough for a shot, but we held up, thinking the group might circle once more," explains hunter Colton Dall. It did not. Still, it was not a washout. A couple hunters worked a wooded creek 70 yards away and dropped a duck. Even better, they spent the morning with family and friends—in the outdoors. But this morning was dedicated to one who was not there.

Done for the morning, the Soggy Bottom Waterfowlers yanked corn stalk camouflage from the layouts, pulled decoys and piled into pickup trucks or walked across the field for a ride back to "camp."

That would be a remodeled garage and driveway in

North Twin View Heights, west of Solon. The goose hunters compared notes with another dozen-plus team members. Hunting out back, on the Coralville Reservoir, they had better luck, dropping a half dozen ducks.

Crowding into the garage to fill breakfast plates, they filed past a 6-foot door poster of the friend, brother and son who was not there. Tanner Wymer, 17, drowned in a January 2016 canoeing mishap on the reservoir, about a mile away.

"It just popped into my head one day, the idea of a hunt to 'give back;' to have participants hunt with our team members," recalls organizer Graeson Dall. "My parents, our team members, coach (Brad) Wymer (Tanner's dad) all thought it was a great idea, too.

"We hunt a lot, we guide other hunters. We are planning on guiding veterans on hunts, in the future. We videotape hunts, take part in fundraising events," says Dall, who recently graduated from Solon High School. Dall lined up prizes and a sponsor to donate the blinds. Word



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e ture. We " says thool. ids. Word spread last fall to the point 23 hunters were on the water or in the field this day. A dozen volunteers back at camp set up the meal, decorations and program.

"We spent the morning hunting—Tanner's friends, family—and came back to a meal with more family, to have a good time, to enjoy the day," reflected Wymer. "Graeson wanted the hunt to be a way for us all to do something fun and honor a great young man who also had a passion for the outdoors."

Each hunter made a freewill donation to be part of the event. Half of them hunted the day before, too, when a few more ducks were flying. The Soggy Bottom boys lined up the boats, hunting areas, blinds and matched up hunters on land or water, depending on his or her choice. Many went home with a prize, beyond the bonus of keeping a friend in their memories.

"Greason's initiative to organize this hunt as a way to get us together is much appreciated. He did an incredible job," says Wymer. "Putting money toward the Tanner Wymer Memorial Fund and Scholarship was certainly not expected. Proceeds from the hunt will help out a Solon student pay for their (college) books for a year or help defray tuition costs along the way."

The Wymer family has felt support from so many in the Solon community in the last year and a half. With continued support, they see the fund evolving, perhaps "evolving into more of a foundation with an impact that is more far reaching than providing a handful of scholarships to college-bound students," offers Wymer. "I do not know what that looks like yet, but do know that I want it to reach and support a wider scope of individuals, in a way, to touch lives the way Tanner did."

Learn more about this "bunch of hardworking Iowa boys that live and breathe the outdoors" at soggybottomwoterfowl.weebly.com

THE TANNER WYMER MEMORIAL FUND is maintained at the Solon State Bank, P.O. Box 129, South Market Street, Solon, IA 52333.



Put This Tree Watering Tip on Your Bucket List

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A dding new trees to your landscape can be rewarding, adding beauty to your yard, value to your property and potential energy savings in your home. And fall is a great time to add a tree. But like anything new, your addition needs a little bit of TLC. Proper mulching and consistent, timely watering is critical the first year or two after a new planting.

Having likely spent its early growing years in a nursery or landscaping setting, your newly planted tree is used to daily watering, says DNR Forestry Programs Coordinator Laura Wagner. While the tree still needs water, in the case of new plantings, less is often more to encourage a healthy root system.

"We recommend weaning the tree off daily watering by watering 1 to 2 gallons of water per caliper inch (the diameter of the trunk measured 6 inches from the ground), every day the first week, and every other day the second week," Wagner advises.

After the first two weeks, she recommends watering one to three times per week, 2 gallons each time for a 1-inch diameter tree. Larger trees should get 1 to 2 gallons per caliper inch each time. Water until the ground freezes. Resume watering in the spring once the ground thaws.

There are several methods to maintain proper soil moisture for your new planting. Some drag a garden hose to the tree bases, set it on a slow trickle and leave it for 15 to 20 minutes. Others buy slow release bag systems at a cost of \$15 to \$30 per bag. But you can make your own slow feed waterer with nothing more than a 5-gallon bucket. Drill one to two ¼-inch holes through the bottom edge and fill with water based on the guidelines above. Thoroughly clean the bucket or choose a food-grade bucket.

"Whether you use a bag, bucket or hose really doesn't matter," Wagner says, "The key is getting the water to the tree root ball."

Wagner employs the bucket system by drilling two holes on one side of the bottom of the bucket. The bucket is placed atop the mulch ring with the holes closest to the tree trunk to ensure the root ball is getting maximum moisture. A proper ring of mulch is shaped like a donut, with no mulch near the tree trunk. This prevents rot.

Wagner says the amount of water a new planting needs is dependent on soil type, temperature and mulching.

"Dig a couple inches down in the soil. If the soil is dry, water."

Dubuque Leads the Way in Solar

One is Iowa's Largest Solar Array, Another Turos Unused Industrial Site into a Power Producer IN CELESTE WELSHHONS

ubuque is Iowa's 10th largest city as well as it's loldest-and it's now notable for solar power, too. Alliant Energy is building two solar arrays this summer. The larger, on the west side of town, is currently Iowa's largest solar array at 21 acres-a five-megawatt solar garden with 15,600 solar panels to power 727 homes.

The other sits atop a long-unused brownfield property downtown near the Port of Dubuque at the site of the old A.Y. McDonald Mfg. Co. foundry. This 1.2-megawatt project encompasses six acres with 3,500 solar panels to power 125 homes.

A brownfield is a site where environmental

Dubuque Development Corporation.

Cooperation and mutual benefit helped. Multiple entities took part including the DNR, DOT, A.Y. McDonald Company, Alliant Energy, the City of Dubuque and the EPA. Everyone has benefits whether it be A.Y. McDonald Company not needing to pay for mowing services on the unused land or Alliant Energy establishing more commercial solar arrays.

As far as expanding into solar energy, "We want to make sure we are on the front end of that wave, and not trying to catch up later," says Rick Zimmerman, Strategic Project Manager for Alliant Energy.

contaminants hinder property resale, redevelopment or reuse. In this case, the area underneath the solar array is filled with metals and wastes from a facility relocated in 1983 to make way for a highway project. For 30 years. the downtown site sat idle-until the solar project. built specifically atop a protective soil cap that keeps contaminants undisturbed.

If the solar array had not been built, "it would sit there like it has for 30 years with nothing on it," says Mel Pins, coordinator of the DNR's Brownfield Redevelopment Program who helped answer questions about project feasibility and provided connections to EPA staff who had approval authority.

The downtown project also showcases interactive educational displays, a lit bike trail that connects to the Heritage Trail bike path, real-time and historical energy production data and an electric vehicle charging station.

Native prairie plants that support pollinators are planned to beautify and reduce maintenance costs.

"This project represents three major positives. The first is that it takes another very large step toward the city reducing its greenhouse gas footprint by replacing non-renewable energy sources with renewable energy. Secondly it creates a higher use for urban property that had lain fallow for decades. Third, it creates a public and private collaboration which allows for replication in Dubuque and other communities," says Dave Lyons, Sustainable Innovation Consultant for the Greater

According to Lyons, it made perfect sense. Dubuque doesn't produce enough energy to sustain itself and must import energy.

"Every kilowatt we generate in the community is an import substitution model. That's a kilowatt or BTU that we don't buy from someone else in the world," says Lyons.

Free energy efficiency audits are available, and a large number of Dubuque residents and businesses take advantage of the offer versus other communities. Before installing a solar array on a home, ensure you already utilize energy efficiently, says Lyons.

"It's no accident that you're seeing some very aggressive commercial implementation. It's no accident you're seeing a very nice wave of residential implementation of solar. Also, it's not an accident that you're seeing this linked to energy efficiency reviews," says Lyons.

And there is plenty of room for more large-scale solar projects in Dubuque. "The city has a long history of successful sustainability initiatives," says Zimmerman.

Citizens are savvy about sustainability and excited to have new initiatives. It makes solar the perfect addition.

"They already had sustainability goals and a plan in place. so the solar was just a part of that." says Zimmerman.

The DNR offers financial assistance for brownfield redevelopment. For details, visit iowodnr.gov or contact Mel Pins at mel.pins@dnr.iowo.gov or 515-725-8344.

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My Backyard

Spreading Monarch Saving Seed Balls

BY CELESTE WELSHHONS

Milkweed Matters began in 2014 When group founder Kelly Guilbeau began throwing loose milkweed seeds along the RAGBRAI route. The following year, seed ball dispersal began with 2,000 thrown during the ride in collaboration with another organization; Monarchs in Eastern Iowa. Last year the number of seed balls jumped to 58,459—made at 79 different events statewide by 3,406 people.

During RAGBRAI 2017, Guilbeau says 5,000 to 7,000 seed balls were handed out to riders daily. "It's making a large and sustainable impact, and to continue that every year makes a lot of sense," Guilbeau says.

Milkweed seed is too light to throw.

The seed ball helps it go further, protects seeds from blowing away, and aids in dispersal for hard-to-reach areas.

The seed balls lay out all winter (seeds need exposure to cold to become viable) and when spring rains come, they break down to grow.

Milkweed Matters received a mini REAP grant to further their efforts and educate people about milkweed's link to monarch butterflies. A hurdle in restoring milkweed is people's perception, says Guilbeau.

Milkweed is not a weed. It is the only food source for monarch caterpillars. And the plant has declined recently by 80 percent nationally.

"I'd say 85 to 90 percent of riders we talked to during RAGBRAI don't know milkweed is the only host plant for the monarch," says Guilbeau.

Roadside mowing and spraying also challenge milkweed. Sustainable roadside management is necessary.

During the ride, cyclists are instructed to throw them in un-mowed, un-sprayed ditches. That's not easy. Last year, some riders reported no suitable areas during a day's ride.

Milkweed Matters receives seeds donated from volunteer's backyards or roadsides. About 200,000 seeds are needed per year. "This is a pretty low budget project that relies on the help of others," says Guilbeau.

Visit *milkweedmatters.org* or *facebook.com/milkweedmatters* for more details.



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Help Struggling Monarch Populations With Diy Seed Balls

Make your own seed balls this fall when milkweed seedpods are ready. Disperse them in the autumn while biking, walking or even horseback riding. Seventeen milkweed species are native to Iowa—all provide food for monarch caterpillars. If collecting your own, leave at least 10 percent to spread naturally.

Loose milkweed seed is too lightweight to go where directed. The weight of the seed ball aids throwing, especially for hard-to-reach-areas, and keeps seeds from blowing away.

Seed balls lay out all winter (seeds need exposure to cold to become viable) and when the snow starts melting, the seed ball breaks apart for spring growth.

Milkweed sap is an eye irritant, so wash your hands after contacting sap.

SUPPLIES:

Local clay and soil Milkweed seeds separated from fluff Bucket (a S-gallon bucket yields about 1.000 seed balls)

Long trays Water Newsnanors or tarn fo

Newspapers or tarp for covering surfaces Trowel for mixing (optional)

Step 1: Make Your Mixture

With hands, mix one part soil to one part clay and add water to reach cookie dough or Play-Doh consistency.

Step 2: Begin Rolling

Grab a small chunk and roll to the size of a cherry tomato. Poke a hole in the ball and place four seeds inside. Reroll to cover the seeds.

Step 3: Let Dry

Place freshly rolled balls in a single layer on trays for at least 48 hours until hardened through.

Step 4: Throwl

Throw or place seed balls late summer and fall. They must be outside over winter (the seeds need exposure to cold) to grow in the spring.

Admiration & Legacy

STORY BY HALEY KNUDSEN

Find a volunteer project or post your own event at www.iowodnr.gov/volunteer or call 515-725-826



CARDINAL CREEK

Silently meandering through the lush fields of Iowa, Sewer Creek slowly wears down the soil that hugs the water to a steep slope. Overlooked by residents in the area, Sewer Creek has been an environmental eyesore for decades.

In an effort to revive the creek, advanced placement biology students at Newton High School are gathering support from community leaders to change the name to Cardinal Creek through the U.S. Geological Survey.

Courtney Wolken, whose class is leading the name change, believes this will not only help her students learn, but also improve the surrounding environment in the community.

"The name change would provide a positive step forward in restoring the creek and the surrounding habitat," Wolken says, "I hope this leads to other projects with regards to watershed improvement."

The creek is in need of improvements, like reducing erosion. To have action take place in the near future, the community needs to be made aware of the state of the creek.

The name arose in the 1960s when people dumped trash into the creek without consideration for aquatic life and ecosystems below.

Students believe changing the name of the creek will create a positive

SOLAR ARRAY

After seeing a news story about a local farm run completely off the power generated from a solar array, an idea began to form in the mind of Brian Lammers.

Why are we not doing this in our county parks?

Lammers, executive director for Hamilton County Conservation, has spent the past three years determined to figure out how to make his small idea come to life.

Hardships arose when trying to find a company that would financially fit the plan, given the budget cuts from the state, Lammers explained.

Eagle Point Solar, a Dubuque based company that specializes in solar panel installation, fit the bill. Alliant Energy and Hamilton County Supervisors were also involved in the project.

The project was funded through a power purchasing agreement (PPA); a simple and cost effective financing tool says Larry Steffen, vice president of sales at Eagle Point Solar.

In 2014, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that PPAs were legal, a ground-breaking decision for advancing affordable solar power. This allows government agencies, like Hamilton County Conservation, to finance renewable energy projects through a third party.

With the capacity to finance the project, a 376 module solar array would soon offset the park's electrical needs by 98 percent, the first park in the state to do so.

Eagle Point Solar already had a fund set up to finance the installation Hamilton County provides the land for the solar array and, in return, purchases the power generated at a reduced rate from Eagle Point Solar.

"The project was completed without any complications. Lammers was very certain about the project and had it well planned out," says Steffen.

The Eagle Point Solar team did not sway from the original design and worked with Alliant Energy to complete the project in less than two months.

Even when the sun is not shining, the park will still have energy. Critical information, such as the amount of energy the park consumes, was gathered in conjunction with Alliant Energy to design the solar array to power the entire park. The park uses its banked

connotation between the creek and the community, raise awareness and inform people about the watershed they live in.

The creek runs parallel to the school, making it a potential hands-on learning opportunity for students by interpreting long-term data and identifying possible types and levels of contamination, says Wolken.

"Having students monitor the water quality of the stream following IOWATER testing methods and then possible restoration projects aligns with our course goals," she adds.

The renaming of the creek contributes to the Department of Natural Resources' and the Department of Transportation's efforts to educate and raise awareness in local communities about the dynamics of watersheds, says Steve Hopkins with the DNR's Watershed Improvement Program.

"It's important for residents to know about their watershed. Without their knowledge and action, water quality won't improve," says Hopkins.

When it rains, water picks up artificial pollutants such as motor oil and pesticides which carry chemicals and nutrients that can harm a watershed's ecosystem.

The students generated awareness from local community leaders such as Keri Van Zante, director of the Jasper County Conservation Board, who expressed support in a letter.

"I hope that this is just the first step in improving Cardinal Creek," she writes. "I envision student-led water testing and maybe even some native prairie plantings along the creek in the future."

The renaming was brought up at a Newton City Council Meeting where the council voted unanimously to approve a resolution supporting the students' efforts. The city believes that the name change will provide positive long-term benefits to the community.

Newton mayor Michael Hansen applauds the students. He believes residents will become more aware of their watershed and encourage them to take action to improve local water quality conditions.

energy from these adjustments to power the park through the night.

"We gather weather data from the nearest airport and use software to make adjustment so the park will have power." Steffen says. Lammers wants to be an example for other parks to follow.

"Hopefully it spreads to other parks." Lammers said. "If the space is there, it is at least worth trying to see if a solar array can work." Steffen intends to place a solar array at every park.

Many turn to solar for the cost efficiency. With the installation of the array, the park is able to save well over 25 percent of their annual budget without spending any money, according to Lammers.

Solar panels have become an increasing trend in Iowa. Solar power has experienced a compound annual growth rate of more than 60 percent in the last decade, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association.

Solar energy offers a renewable and sustainable energy source and, unlike wind energy, is silent. With government and state rebates, as well as PPAs, solar power is becoming more affordable and widely accessible. l: aroup photo court



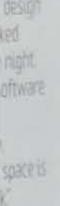
Flora & Fauna BY MARIAH GRIFFITH PHOTO BY RON HUELSE

NorthAmericanRiverOtter (Lonta Canadensis)

These sleek mammals are well known for playful behavior and cute appearance, but they're also recognizable because their range of rivers, streams, swamps, lakes, coasts and reservoirs stretches from southern Florida to the northern reaches of Alaska and Canada.

FOREIGN FOLKLORE

In some Native American traditions and Japanese folklore, otters have a crafty role



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STOP THIEF!

Otters, like chimps and humans, sometimes use objects as tools. One favorite is a rock, used for crushing or prying open bivalves like clams and mussels. This behavior is particularly common in sea otters, but North American river otters occasionally use, and even keep, certain rocks as well. To the dismay of golfers, otters also think golf balls make fantastic toys and will occasionally snag a few off the course to take home.

SINK OR SWIM

Female otters rear their young in underground dens, usually abandoned by previous residents like beavers or badgers. The litter is usually one to six pups, and their family ties remain strong until adulthood. But first, at the tender age of 2 months, the pups take their first swim whether they like it or not. The mother pushes them out of the den and into the water, where the pups flounder a little and instinctively learn to swim while she supervises. Group lessons and interactions like this help pups learn survival skills.

SLIP AND SLIDE

Play continues as young otters mature. Otters build slides on river banks, repeatedly running up the hill, sliding down, and popping out of the water to shake off and chirrup at each other (otters are known for a lot of varied verbal communication). Their long, streamlined bodies are ideal for this sort of fun, and they seem to enjoy it immensely. They'll even build these slides into a snowbank. The love of sliding and sledding is thought to help the otters practice escaping from land-dwelling predators like coyotes.

SKIP THE SALAD

Otters are carnivores, dining primarily on fish and some invertebrates like crayfish and mussels. They also eat small mammals like mice, chipmunks and moles, and birds if the opportunity arises. Their closest relatives-weasels, mink, badgers, wolverines and ferrets—are generally carnivorous too. Herbivorous beavers, on the other hand, are rodents and not closely related.

similar to that of the fox in Anglo-Saxon traditions. In Celtic and Norse folklore, the otter is presented as knowledgeable and helpful, and the literal translation of the name is close to "water dog."

PRETTY PELT

Otters, like beavers and many other furbearing mammals, were trapped extensively during European colonization. Otter fur was considered very fashionable and fancy—used for everything from hats and coats to tie pins and belts. Overharvesting, pollution and habitat loss wiped out the lowa population, but reintroduction efforts-with the help of Iowa trappers- started in 1985, and the population has been steadily climbing ever since, to the point there is a limited tapping season for them (two per licensed trapper).

TALK TO THE TAIL

It's not uncommon for otters to approach 5 feet in length, but over a third of that is tail. Why is it so big? Otters use their tails like a rudder as they swim, and it needs to be muscular to do this job. Occasionally otters are documented using their tails for self-defense, swinging it at a predator as they retreat.

IOWADNR GOV 63



A Taste of Plum Grove

Head to the woods to forage wild plums, and if you make plum butter—like apple butter but more jammy—wash the fruit, but don't worry too much about the worms.

They'll "give it a meaty flavor, so do not be squeamish," according to a recipe Margaret Lucas Henderson recorded from her great-grandmother and Iowa's first first lady, Friendly Lucas. The instructions involve boiling the plums (and worms) in a big pot of water, mashing them through a colander and mixing in lots of sugar—about two-thirds of a cup for every cup of plums.

Is it any good? Staff at the State Historical Society of Iowa entered a batch at last year's Iowa State Fair and won a blue ribbon (With a name like Friendly's, it has to be good).

By all accounts, Friendly Lucas was

Grove after a cluster of plum trees east of the house.

Robert lived out the rest of his retirement there, until his death in 1853, but Friendly stayed through the 1850s. The family sold Plum Grove in 1866, and the deed passed among several owners until the early 1940s, when the state bought the property, restored it and opened it to the public in 1946. The remaining four acres of the original Lucas land are now surrounded by a quiet Iowa City neighborhood and jointly managed by the state and the Johnson County Historical Society.

Plum Grove is open for tours from Memorial Day through Labor Day, with limited hours through October, so you can stroll through the seven-room house and Friendly's garden, which is part of the Smithsonian's Archives Call an armored truck and take to your safe deposit box before anyone becomes aware of such a treasure in your possession.

Start Your Own Wild Plum Thicket

Wild Plum (Prunus americana) Height: 10-15 feet | Rate of growth: fast Soils: rich. moist to well-drained Full sun to slight shade Fall color: reddish to yellow

This small tree forms thickets and has small soft thorns. White flowers appear in April followed by purple, edible fruit good for jams and jellies. Good wildlife food and cover. Adds superb nesting habitat for rarer songbirds like yellow-breasted chat and Bell's vireo. Provides food for bees and many butterfly species. These drought-resistant trees grow in many soil types and form thickets, making it great for windbreaks and erosion control. Order wild plum seedlings in bulk or in the quail, pheasant or songbird packets. To order, search "State Forest Nursery" at iowadnr.gov or call 1-800-865-2477.

an excellent and resourceful cook, skilled at feeding her husband and all seven of their kids with whatever she could scrounge from the pantry and garden of their homes in Ohio, where Robert served in the legislature and two terms in the governor's office (1832-1836), and the fledgling Iowa Territory, where President Martin Van Buren appointed Robert as first governor (1838-1841). He organized the territory's militia, set up the educational system and criminal code, fought against gambling and booze, oversaw Iowa's boundary dispute with Missouri and laid the cornerstone for the original state capitol in Iowa City. But when the Whigs swept to power in Washington, they swept him out of office.

Afterward, the Lucases moved to Bloomington (now Muscatine), then back to Ohio where Robert launched an unsuccessful bid for Congress, and finally in 1844 back to Iowa, where they built a comfortable two-story brick house on 360 acres (legally owned by Friendly) southeast of Iowa City. They named the place Plum of American Gardens. Learn more at *lowoculture.gov* or call *319-351-5738*.

FRIENDLY'S PLUM BUTTER

As recorded by Margaret Lucas Henderson, great-granddaughter of Friendly and Robert Lucas.

- Sneak up on plums and get as many as you can.
- Wash well (a few worms give it a meaty flavor so do not be squeamish).
- Cover with boiling water and cook till
- tender. Take potato masher and mashskins and all.
- If you are short plums and want to use all the bulk available—put skins and all into a colander—use potato masher and mash, mash, mash. Take pits out with your fingers. Put through as much of the skins as you can.
- For each cup of pulp, use 2/3 cup sugar.
- I cook mine in the oven—slowly—testing for consistency.
- Refrigerate a small portion in a saucer to know when the jam or butter is just right.
 Put in jars and seal.

Did You Know?

Four plum species are native to Iowa. Not noticed most of the year, they explode with fragrant white flowers each spring. Plums ripen in September and vary in sweetness from tree to tree. The American plum is found statewide. Find Canada plum on steep hills in extreme northeast Iowa. Goose plum is found in Van Buren and Lee counties. The big-tree plum is scattered statewide.

-MICHAEL MORAIN is communications manager for the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, which oversees the State Historical Society of Iowa.



BY ERIKA BILLERBECK

PAPARAZZI (COPARAZZI?)

You know that time, circa 1987, when you traveled to Disney World? Do me a favor...look at the photograph where you are posing in front of the Disney castle. Yes, yes, I'm sure you did look absolutely darling back then... but this isn't about you....check out the strangers in the background of your photo. Do you see among them an awkward kid with long blond hair? She would be dressed in a sleeveless teal shirt and matching teal shorts, tube socks with red stripes pulled up to her knees, and she is wearing a dreadful blue and white trucker's hat with the giant initials, "EJA," screen-printed to the front? No? Whew.

If you are jealous of me, and thinking that having your own paparazzi sounds downright ritzy, you would be sorely disappointed. There are no fans begging for autographs, there are not droves of people waiting at the end of my driveway with long camera lenses hoping for a shot of me wearing pajamas. My choice of clothing isn't being critiqued by a million tabloid readers and nobody is offering me thousands of dollars to advertise for a hair product. Or any other product. I'm definitely lacking the movie-star income, and since my photographer has never smiled or even waved to me (unless you count the onefingered version), I highly doubt he is taking the time to airbrush the cellulite and wrinkles out of my shots. That is most unfortunate indeed. Maybe I should face the fact that my paparazzi may have more in common with a stalker. The thing is, I have done nothing to deserve taking up so much storage space on his phone. But based on the number of times I have watched him raise it to videotape me as I pass by in my patrol boat, I must be taking up several gigabytes worth of space. Did he have to upgrade his phone contract in order to keep these videos? Inquiring minds want to know ... sort of. I believe my supervisor has been the only person "lucky" enough to view some of these videos he apparently felt obligated after receiving a couple of complaint letters from my number one fan. The main theme of the complaints stemmed from my "follower's" opinion that there is too much law enforcement presence on the lake. That perhaps too many drunk boaters were being "harassed." In essence, it seems we care a little too much about pesky things like "public safety."

OK, now how about your vacation to Niagara Falls? Do you see an oddly dressed 9-year-old wearing a sailor's hat lurking behind your adorable self? You may see her standing at an overlook with a stern look on her face. Because in her mind, sailors (which she is pretending to be), should look stern. Not there either? Thank goodness.

It's possible I'm the only person who has spent a considerable amount of time pondering the fact that my image may be lurking in the background of other people's vacation photos. I can't help it—it creeps me out. It's bad enough knowing that my awkward years are housed in dusty albums of strangers across the country (world??) and that random people might catch a glimpse of me as they reminisce over their trip to Washington, D.C. in 1985. But now it is worse. Much worse.

No longer am I worrying about the grainy and fading photographs taken during my childhood...no, no, I have bigger fish to fry now. Namely those videos of me which are housed on the cell phone of a man I met last summer. Wait. That sounds bad. What I am trying to say is that somehow I ended up with my own paparazzi. And I have no idea how.

Though my supervisor didn't go into specifics about what he saw on the videos, I have a pretty good idea (you know...since I was there and everything). The videos probably included me doing the following things: riding in a patrol boat, administering field sobriety tests, walking up the boat ramp, walking in a parking lot, investigating complaints on the lake, driving my patrol vehicle out of a parking lot, handcuffing drunk drivers, working on paperwork, talking to citizens, stopping boats, checking said boat's safety equipment and shaking the hand of a person I tested for alcohol impairment, and finding none, releasing him.

Here are some things I am worried that he videotaped me doing: picking my nose (only once, I swear), gorging myself on a peanut butter cup Blizzard followed shortly thereafter by a Snickers bar (only once I swear...or twice), walking toward the boat ramp bathroom with the hurried gait of someone who just drank three bottles of Gatorade, putting ice cubes down the front of my bullet-proof vest on a 90 degree day (multiple times), and finally, blowing my nose 200 consecutive times during the midst of an allergy attack.

Now that I think about it—it really comes as no surprise that he was videotaping me. Given my good looks, it is natural for people to feel the urge to photograph me whenever possible. But aside from that, I also happen to work in law enforcement. Which makes it par for the course.

Though people might think it strange if one felt compelled to videotape the work of their dentist, teacher, accountant, attorney, nurse or day care provider, very few think it equally strange to videotape law enforcement professionals at work. But most folks at least wait for something exciting to happen before hitting the "record" button.

But on the bright side, in the event that my own body camera fails, at least I know whose phone holds the



precious evidence to use during a trial to show just how impaired that drunk driver actually was. And therefore, how much that driver endangered the lives of everyone else on that lake. And therefore how much that pesky thing called "public safety" was at risk. And therefore how much our presence on the lake is needed after all.

From now on, I vow to take his attention as a compliment. Next time the phone is raised in the video-taping salute, I will smile, wave, and smile some more...and hide the Snickers bar behind my back.

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