SPRING 2018

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A youthful outlook, undying passion and a favorite lure teaches this author a valuable lesson on the simpler life. **STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAN MAGNESON**

ABOUT THE COVER

Hooded mergansers are often considered one of lowa's most regal ducks. This striking male made its presence known on a central lowa wetland, sparring with another male for territory rights. **PHOTO BY TY SMEDES**

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Nothing beats the camaraderie and tranquility of a day on a trout stream—or a lake or pond strengthening bonds with family and friends. Here, two anglers ply the waters of Waterloo Creek near Dorchester in Allamakee County. PHOTO COURTESY IOWA TOURISM OFFICE

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ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Despite other artificial nest boxes in the area and in similar habitat, some are always more attractive and competition ensues—evident by these two merganser hens' interest in the same box. **PHOTO BY** *TY SMEDES*

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Contributors



JEFF WILKERSON, an avid angler from Decorah, was inspired by the story, "99 Counties of Fish," that ran in the March/April 2016 issue of *Iowa Outdoors* magazine. He and his wife, Kristin, set out to discover Iowa and catch a fish in all 99 counties. It is a lifetime goal, with one angler so far reaching 16 counties and the other 17. Despite a fight with cancer, Jeff and his wife continue their quest, blessed with the experiences and discoveries made along the way.



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INR MISSION

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

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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 book, The Return of Jonot's Bald Engles, is sold at iowon.com or 1-877-899-9977 ext 211.

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Myth Busters

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



"HUNTING AND FISHING FUNDS ARE USED FOR OTHER THINGS"

There's been a lot of discussion recently on license fees and how the funds are spent. Here's a little background on financial support for Iowa's natural resources.

Two primary funding sources support management of natural areas for Iowa's hunting and fishing activitieslicense fees and federal excise taxes.

The first source is fees from sales of hunting, trapping and fishing licenses. The second source is federal excise taxes on firearms and ammunition (Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937) and federal aid to states for management and restoration of fish (Dingell-Johnson Act of 1950).

"All of these revenues go to Iowa's Fish and Game Trust Fund for use by the DNR's bureaus of fisheries, wildlife and law enforcement to provide high quality and diverse

resources, and to make sure everyone is playing by the rules," says DNR director Chuck Gipp.

In 1996, 88 percent of Iowa voters approved adding this Iowa Fish and Game Trust Fund to the state constitution. creating a fund that can *only* be used for fish and wildlife purposes. The fund does not pay for trails, campgrounds, state parks or state forests.

Revenues in the fund have gone from \$66 million in 2011 to \$58 million in 2016 to \$53 million in 2017. The Iowa Legislature has provided money for specific projects but the bulk of Iowa's work to support wildlife and fish habitat, management and research has been supported by you-the license buyer.

State park funding comes from two revenue sourcesstate general fund money and from revenue generated within the park system from fees paid for camping and lodge and cabin rentals.

Ask THE Expert Should I be worried about bark falling off my tree?

Indy in Grinnell asks: Should I be

linden, walnut and willow trees. They *worried about bark falling off my tree?* usually happen on south or southwest sides where they get more late winter and early spring sunlight. Frost crack and sunscald can also occur when trees are planted outside their hardiness zone.

Trees suffer damage in a variety of ways-from insects and mower dings to improper planting and care.

And while any damage should be checked out by a certified arborist or professional forester, sometimes the damage is an act of nature and may not mean the end of life for the tree.

Frost crack is one example. While it appears destructive, it is normal in states that enjoy all four seasons. Frost cracks are vertical cracks often noticed on the trunk.

Those alternating freezing and thawing temperatures of late winter and early spring forces bark to contract during colder nights, then expand when warmer temperatures arrive the next day.

Sunscald is another condition. During temperature fluctuations, warm and sunny days can break the cycle of dormancy. When temperatures drop below freezing at night, plant tissues can die, resulting in strips of peeling bark. Smooth-bark trees are most susceptible.

Cracks tend to be more prevalent in sycamore, maple, apple, cherry, chestnut

WHAT CAN YOU DO

Well, nothing, except have the tree checked for healthiness. Sealants don't aid the healing process. Just keep the crack clean and leave it open. In most cases the tree will heal itself. You can wrap the wound in winter to prevent additional cracks, but make sure to remove it before warmer temperatures arrive. Planting shrubs around the base of the tree may also shield the trunk from large fluctuations in temperatures. Proper mulching and watering during droughts can help, especially with preventing sunscald. Just don't water when the ground is frozen.

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10 IOWA OUTDOORS SPRING 2018

Outdoor Skills

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

Sleepy Angler No More

For much of the year, early morning is prime for fishing, but that may not hold water in early spring. Try late afternoons and early evenings after cold waters have warmed up throughout the day, making fish more active just as the sun goes down.

Spring is a pretty time to samp. but it can pose challenges While warmer than winter, wet clothes from a spring rain can create higher concerns for hypothermia than dry clothes in freezing temperatures. And if you're just gearing Up and choosing a shelter, know what fits your needs. A "three-season" tent rating refers to how well the tent handles snow-loading and wind-toading. So those tents may not hold up to heavy, wet spring snows from a sudden squalL If expecting to camp during snowfalls, opt for a sturdier four season tent.

-22

Catch More Sluggish Fish

Early spring anglers should give fish more time before setting the hook. Early spring means colder water, and sluggish fish might need a little longer nibbling time to get bait and hook into their mouth.

ige:

Tips For Ticks

Bothersome ticks can also transmit diseases that pose potential health concerns, especially in spring when outdoor activities pick up and tick emergence is highest. To better spot ticks—especially poppy seed-sized nymphs, wear light colored clothing. Keep them away with DEET-based repellents and tuck pants into socks and sleeves into gloves. Following outdoor fun, run clothes through a high heat clothes dryer cycle for about 10 minutes to kill any hidden hitchhikers.

Together OUTDOOR FIT

ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



Today I bring news that will make you smile, especially since one of the evidence-based scientific studies I read covers the relationship between smiling and performance during physical activity. But first a word about the breadth and scope of the research.

There are so many studies about the benefits of physical activity that researchers are looking high and low for new fields to explore. Let me illustrate. A Korean study focused on age-related macular degeneration, and from this side of the Pacific, another examined intense treadmill exercise for those recently diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. The interesting aspect of the Korean study was a negative outcome for vigorous exercise five or more days a week-but only for males. That study associated a 54 percent increased risk of macular degeneration in men and was drawn from reviewing the history of 211,960 men and women ages 45 to 79. Now if you have read this column over the years, you know I marvel on how 99 percent of studies show positive health benefits of exercise. I guess this falls into that other 1 percent. (That study was in JAMA Ophthalmology) But researchers in Colorado found intense exercise can be safe for those diagnosed of Parkinson's disease and may slow the progression. This study states beneficial impact was only seen with vigorous and not gentle exercise (JAMA Neurology). And overall, many studies rank outdoor activity as a much better choice than indoor exercise. But my favorite, in Psychology of Sport and Exercise, reports researchers from Ulster University in Northern Ireland and Swansea University in Wales gathered a group of experienced recreational runners and had them alternately grin and grimace as they ran. The participants were not told the nature of the study and rather told it was on "running economy" (a measurement of oxygen per stride at various speeds). Participants were told to "smile continuously but sincerely, to frown, to relax their upper body by imagining they gently held a potato chip between loose fingers or, as a control, to use their normal get-me-through-this-run mental techniques." Some were most economical when frowning, but most were most economical when smiling. As a group, their economy rose up to 2.78 percent more efficient, a "meaningful difference in competitions," but perhaps meaningless when choosing to simply hike our many state parks. But then as I sit here writing this and think about paddling. walking, swimming, wading, climbing, I- you guessed it-smile.

But Why? Helping adults answer children's nature questions

BOBBY, 9. IN MADRID, ASKS: Why do birds migrate and show up at different times?



Food availability is the principle driving force behind migration. If birds didn't migrate, their food source would rapidly deplete, decreasing survival and breeding success. Migrating birds typically winter in the south, some as far as Central or South America, where food sources are high, then migrate north in the spring as food here regenerates. Habitat, weather and changes in day length play roles as does the length of the migration. Birds that winter in southern states don't have as long to go as those in Central and South America.

The theory from the "smile" study is that it may aid economy by a "reduction in muscular tension," just like visits to state parks.

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. Over time, birds have adapted migration patterns, timing and locations to take advantage of preferred conditions for raising young. Those conditions may vary between species and revolve around specific food sources, adequate shelter and whether or not they form breeding colonies. In essence, it all boils down to survival of adults and offspring.

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The number of birds in any location during migration can vary daily, even hourly. However, most birders agree the best time to birdwatch is the first two hours after sunrise and the last two before sunset.

While most view robins as the first sign of spring, turkey vultures are the true harbinger as they head north as the snow melts in search of fresh, thawing carrion. Waterfowl are on their tail as they follow open water north. Shorebirds typically arrive in April and May, followed by warblers, thrush and bunting species the first half of May.



UPGRADE MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH INTO A WEEKEND FAMILY GETAWAY

The ever-popular Mother's Day Brunch attracts not only those seeking a fine family meal at the beautifully appointed Lakeshore Grill at Honey Creek Resort State Park, but families seeking a weekend escape at the Lodge or cottages.

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"The Lakeshore Grill has beautiful, gorgeous views from the expansive windows that overlook that lake," says resort marketing manager Elizabeth Colosimo. She says many families turn the traditional brunch into a family weekend getaway. "Families of multiple generations get together and rent a cottage or stay in the lodge," she says. "The marina is open, there is kayaking, yoga and plenty of outdoor activities. The resort also has yard games outside for families, such as giant Jenga. The indoor water park and game room is a hit with kids.

From the deluxe omelet building station to sugared French toast and Belgian waffies and biscuits and gravy, no one leaves wanting. The carving station features baron of beef, ham and chicken. There is a pasta and salad bar, and to finish off, a dessert station. And what better way to burn off that feast than with a day on the lake or a hike.

Pricing: Adults \$23.99, seniors \$20.99, children ages 9 to 12 \$9.99, kids ages 5 to 8 \$6.99 and under age 5 eat free. Hours 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. A similar brunch is held on Easter Sunday, which this year is April 1.

Mother's Day is May 13. Brunch reservations highly recommended. Call 641-724-1430. Rathbun Lakeshore Grille is located inside The Lodge on Rathbun Lake, located at Honey Creek Resort: 12633 Resort Drive, Moravia, IA 52571. For lodge and cottage reservations, visit honeycreekresort.com or call 641-724-9100 or 866-797-5308.

IOWADNE GOV 13

Together SIMPLE DIYNEST BOX

L et our feature story on hooded mergansers and wood ducks (pages 42-49) inspire you to attract them to your area with these easy-to-make DIY nest box plans. They work best where these ducks love to nest—wooded wetlands, riverbanks and shorelines.

Both species are secondary cavity nesters—meaning they can't create their own nest hole in a tree like a woodpecker can, so they rely on pre-existing holes. These may be made by other species or created by natural processes of decay or limb breakage. They also readily use built nest boxes.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS ON PLACEMENT AND CONSTRUCTION:

- Recess the bottom 1/4-inch so rain doesn't seep across the floor into the nest.
- Install nest boxes near, or over, water.
- -Use naturally rot-resistant cedar lumber
- Add hardware cloth inside below the hole so young can climb out
- Add 2 to 3 inches of wood shavings to the bottom of the box.
- Clean shavings out annually and add new wood shavings
- Place box 4 to 6 feet high on a pole, post or tree with box opening

1" x 12" x 10" board, preferably cedar,



- facing water.
- Use 10- or 12-inch-wide lumber. Increase nest success with a predator barrier attached to box poles using metal conical guards, slippery plastic or other barriers.





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GO OUTDOORS. GO CONCRETE.







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From the Archives

A RETROSPECTIVE ON STORIES FROM DECADES PAST

FISH TALES

Lands Eight Carp With a Single Cast — May 1944 According to the Cedar Rapids Gazette, a small boy fishing from the First Avenue bridge lost his stringer containing eight carp. Some days later George Peacock and Frank Stouralt pulled in their line and found the stringer with eight carp still alive. The fish had travelled more than five miles downstream from the First Street bridge.

A Cat, a Rat and a Dog -June 1945

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J.B. Huisman, a retired farmer living west of Holland, hooked a fine catfish on the Iowa River near Eldora after a long wait. As the fighting cat approached shore, it was grabbed by a muskrat, and during the struggle the fish escaped and the muskrat was hooked. During the excitement the family dog jumped from the bank to tangle with the muskrat. The muskrat escaped and the dog was hooked. Huisman rolled up his line, spit in the river and went home in disgust.

This Perch is Packing Heat —July 1943

Clemons Meier of Davenport was fishing along the Mississippi River near the city, according to the Davenport Democrat, and had a vicious strike. He set the hook and after considerable struggle landed a large perch. He also had hooked a 12 gauge shotgun and landed it. Witnesses to the incident estimated the gun had been submerged for 10 or 15 years, the barrel being badly rusted and the stock deteriorated.

Dog Catches a Dogfish —July 1945

Twelve-year-old William Siverly of Burlington thinks his fox terrier dog Skeeter should be called a "fish terrier." Bill went fishing in a drainage ditch near Oakville and was kept very busy watching two lines. While tending one line, the cork bobber of the other line jiggled, and before he could reach the pole, Skeeter jumped into the water, grabbed the cork bobber in his teeth, and after a brisk struggle dragged cork, line and a large dogfish (bowfin) out onto the bank,

A Self-Cleaning Fish —September 1945 Bill Bright, 16, Iowa Falls youth, recently caught a 10-pound catfish in the Iowa River. Bill noticed that the catfish was bulgy and thought it had swallowed a stone, but upon dressing it, its stomach was found to contain a full-sized bar of hand soap.

A Tie For Silver -June 1945

Mrs. Charles Jones of Independence and Eldon Jensen of Holstein, while fly fishing at Buffalo Run on Spirit Lake, both caught the same fish—a 2.5 pound silver bass. Both flies were traveling side by side on the retrieve, the fish struck, and both flies were hooked about a quarter of an inch apart in the silver's wide mouth. The two anglers played and landed the fish. No word on who took home the catch.

Inspired by Iowa Outdoors Magazine, an Angler Dreams of Fishing all 99 Counties BY JEFF WILKERSON

hen I moved to lowa just over two decades ago at the age of 32 after 10 years in California it was, corny as it sounds, like landing in the middle of paradise.

home was built, with Winneshiek and Allamakee counties the nearly exclusive focus of my outdoor activities. In how many of those 99 counties had I caught fish? Four-despite my intense focus on the outdoors.

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Sure, the students I was teaching were bright and eager to learn and the dark skies were astronomy-friendly, but it was the variety of outdoor opportunities that caught me by surprise. The best fortune had befallen me. My job was a perfect fit and never had I lived anywhere with such an outdoor smorgasbord "right outside my door."

Month after month, year after year, a tiny bit at a time, I learned the woods, streams, prairies and lakes, always discovering something interesting and figuring out which special places were "mine." I grew closer to the land with each passing year-hiking, hunting, floating, fishing and developing gardens at home. Before I realized what was happening, I had begun a streak of taking fish or game in consecutive months, a streak at 201 months as I write this. I grew to be intimately familiar with so many wild places it was impossible to visit them all in a year, but they were all now a part of home. While my parents were still able to travel, they came up from my native southern Indiana twice a year, hunting morels and catching trout in the spring, and hunting pheasants, ducks and grouse each fall.

Against that backdrop. I was startled when I read "99 Counties of Fish" in the March/April 2016 Iowa Outdoors. It was the magazine's first "Where to Fish in Each of Iowa's 99 Counties." I had no idea how narrowly my Iowa

My wife, Kristin, and I made a pact to catch a fish in each of Iowa's counties, getting to know the state beyond our idyllic northeast corner. It was but a minor concern that such a project would have made more sense launched from somewhere closer to the middle of the state, since we envisioned this as a lifelong undertaking, spanning the 15 years until retirement and well into that golden era.

It surely wasn't a surprise to me that we would tackle a slowly unfolding, gently flowing endeavor like this. My 201 continuous months of taking fish or game involved studying the same tiny patch of sky every clear night from February to October since 2003, looking for the subtlest changes in the stars-changes that might have been missed without that steady observation through the years. I'd hate the thought of moving because the battle between the blackberry thicket and the rest of the backyard is just getting interesting. Obviously, I am a long-term project fan.

Two years later, the "All 99 Counties" project (what a clever name for it) is progressing nicely as we have expanded the "completed counties" to include many of those closest to us in the northeast corner of the state as well as from several forays outside the area. For better or worse, the mission has added occasional tension to our outings-picture us far from home with only one of us catching a fish.



Darkness is coming on fast and the drive home already feels like a major mountain to climb. So far, when needed,

walleye and smallmouth bass.

On Sunday, we hit Bloody Run Creek to clean up an

a "miracle" has happened at the end every time except one, leaving one of us with 17 counties while the other has 16. Don't worry Mahaska County, we don't hold it against you.

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Sometimes our quest leads us to fishing what might be best described as a "kiddie pond." Then there was the evening we were in a county park pitching tiny jigs under a bridge where water spilled over a lowhead dam. Occupants of car after car suspiciously eyed these middleaged adults who seemingly should have better things to do than lurk next to a park road trying to catch the smallest of warmouths and chubs. Hey, a quest is a quest.

Last August, we decided to take a few days off to fish around home and perhaps add a few lowa counties before the new students arrived for orientation and the hum of the school year resumed. We had day-to-day chores to tackle as well, and on a Friday, I took care of one of those chores by visiting the doctor after a morning of work and before we headed to Coldwater Creek to catch some trout.

When we returned home, a text message from the pharmacy stated my prescription was ready—odd since I was not expecting one. Then I saw a phone message from the clinic, simply saying "Call us Monday." The blood work I had done must have suggested something. My PSA was 65, I knew that was bad, but not how bad, so I got online and sleuthed through the possibilities while we continued fishing—the next day at Yellow River for sauger. earlier attempt. I had managed to get my Clayton County fish. Kristin hadn't, but she did this time. Monday was one of the best trips of the year. We caught largemouth bass, crappie and bluegill at Airport Lake in Chickasaw County before heading west to Lake Smith in Kossuth County. We found that lake weedy and difficult to fish, but did manage several small largemouth bass using our smallest Rapala Minnows and Rebel Wee Frogs.

Heading back home we stopped at Crystal Lake in Hancock County and had our best action of the day, with a mix of decent crappie and bluegill and one very nice northern pike. As usual, we got home well after dark, exhausted but with three more counties added and a newly honed appreciation for a lot of beautiful Iowa countryside.

That 65 PSA? It was exactly the very high-risk advanced prostate cancer one would expect it to be. We are several months into what will be another long project—if things go well enough that is. I never took a day in the outdoors for granted, relishing each breath in the field, but learning that the median life expectancy for those with metastatic prostate cancer is less than four years has made the days afield this past fall even more special. And it added a bit of urgency to our 99 counties project and other parts of my life that have been unfolding slowly and gently for so long. Wherever this new journey leads, I know I've been blessed my entire life, especially this past 20 years getting to know the special places of Iowa—my home.



18 IOWA OUTDOORS SPRING 2018

RESORT State Park

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Leaves bud sooner and flowers bloom earlier in extreme southern lowa, as it's always a tad warmer here. Here are a dozen-plus unexpected happenings and adventures you can enjoy when you visit.



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Lost In Iowa

BUST OUT A BIKE

Explore miles of trails at the resort with bikes that come free for guests including mountain bikes and even a few bike trailers to tow small children. Bigger kids will enjoy pedaling on the tag-a-longs, and tandem bikes are always fun for couples.



The resort offers a birding backpack for guests that includes identification books, binoculars and gadgets to help you learn bird calls. With feeders behind the activity building and a bird blind on the first loop of the nature trail, beginners and young kids can easily spot birds. The lake holds waterfowl and lots of gulls—always popular with kids.

AND FOR SERIOUS BIRDERS

Use Honey Creek Resort as a gateway to nearby Sedan Bottoms Wildlife Area located southeast of Centerville. The 30-mile drive rewards visitors with 4,400 acres that anchors most of the public land in the greater Sedan Bottoms Bird Conservation Area, spreading across 37,000 acres of public and private lands. With an array of prairies, savannas, forests and floodplains, this region, of which more than 20 percent is permanently protected, offers important habitat to many birds. Of the 253 bird species documented here, 73 are classified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The grasslands support declining nesters like northern harrier, Henslow's sparrow and bobolink. Lowlands entice migrant marsh species, such as northern pintail, black-crowned night-heron and Nelson's sparrow. Woodlands echo with the calls of the red-shouldered hawk, along with neotropical songbirds like Acadian flycatcher, Kentucky warbler and scarlet tanager. The area serves as an important stopover for shorebirds, including American avocet, marbled godwit and short-billed dowitcher. Download a bird checklist and maps at iowadnr.gov (search "BCA").

20 IOWA OUTDOORS SPRING 2018

HIT THE LINKS AND TUNE YOUR SWING

Tee off on The Preserve—the 18-hole championship golf course on Rathbun Lake that's ranked in Iowa's top five best public courses. But first, knock the winter rust off your swing with a spring tune-up from Darin Fisher, a PGA class-A golf professional with 20 years of teaching experience and head golf pro at the resort. With expansive lake views, the course is designed for all ages and skills. With a perfect blend of great golf, greens that roll true and natural landscapes, the 7,000-yard

course meanders through scenic prairie and oak savannas, and is Audubon-certified in recognition of its sustainable practices. The course boasts five sets of tees, carts with the latest GPS technology and a well-stocked pro shop. Call the pro shop at 877-677-3344 or visit honeycreekresort.com/galf.





HONEY OF A QUILT SHOW

The popular 9th annual quilt show features gorgeous and intricate quilts, demonstrations, vendors, raffles and door prizes both days. On Sunday, nationally known quilt book author and designer Judy Martin of Grinnell will speak and present a trunk show display of her works. Also Sunday, a veteran will be honored with a quilt of valor ceremony. Saturday, March 3 hours 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday March 4 hours 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Cost §5 per day or §8 for weekend pass. For more details and agenda, find "Honey of a Quilt Show" on Facebook.

Lost In Iov

HIKE OUR TRAILS

The Savannah Ridge trail at Honey Creek Resort is a 3.5-mile trail winding through native prairie and woodland habitats. Enjoy interpretative signs along the way to help understand southern Iowa's flora and fauna, or visit a wildlife viewing blind to see birds and deer. The rock-chipped North Shore Trail runs 8-miles one way from the resort to Prairie Ridge Park, operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.





FIRESIDE CHATS

Gather around the large outdoor fire for s'mores and nature stories. And if the weather is inclement, no worries, the event is held in the lobby to take advantage of the great stone fireplace. Saturday features a lobby program at 11 a.m. to build outdoor skills while learning about everything from birding to fish identification and making fish prints.



WE'RE HERE, NATURALLY

Honey Creek Resort's naturalist staff coordinates dozens of planned recreational and nature programs—just ask staff for a schedule when you visit, or go to the resort's events calendar at honeycreekresort.com.



PITCH-BLACK STARRY SKIES PERFECT FOR GAZING

Take advantage of local dark skies for a bit of stargazing or peer at the full moon. Enjoy the stars on your own, or take part in a staff-guided night tour to delve into the constellations, myths and legends of the night sky. Lighting at the resort illuminates downward to preserve the night sky to keep the stars brightly lit and give visitors spectacular night views. New this year are sky watch activity backpacks complete with star charts, night-vision-saving red flashlights and constellation stories.



GEOCACHE OF SECRETS

Enjoy Honey Creek's hidden spots with 20 on-site caches. Experienced cachers can search for the 200-plus caches around Lake Rathbun. The resort has GPS field packs available for checkout for geomuggles (those new to the activity).

Lost In Iowa

NATURE CENTER

Visit the nature and activities center from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. to get up-close looks at native reptiles, touch mammal furs, check out a field pack, get answers from naturalists, take a guided hike or learn how the building is powered by the sun. Naturalists give programming for young and old alike.

THE COTTAGES AT RATHBUN LAKE

Luxury cottages are the perfect place to make yourself at home and relax. Nestled between Rathbun Lake and The Preserve golf course, The Cottages capture the essence of the classic Midwest family

retreat. Pairing upscale interior design with all the comforts of home, each cottage includes a beautiful full kitchen, a wrap-around deck with scenic views, outdoor fire ring and cozy touches like a fireplace in the living room.



To learn more about the resort and to see our schedule of upcoming events, visit honeycreekresort.com or call 877-677-3344.

Id You Know?

The resort stays green by using the sun! The sun heats hot water used by the 105-guest rooms in the lodge. A 400,000 BTU solar thermal hot water system also helps heat the indoor water park. Check out the many green initiatives in and around the resort while visiting.

SPRING FISHING

There's fish aplenty at Lake Rathbun, Iowa's largest waterbody, with 34,000 acres to explore. It is also one of the state's premier ice-out catfish destinations. Cut bait is favored by local anglers for the first few weeks following ice-out. Anglers often fill their 15-fish limit (large reservoirs have the same limit as rivers).

The lake is a perennial favorite for crappie mid-May to mid-June. It will be a banner year for 9- to 12-inch fish, with bigger possible. White bass and hybrid striped bass are back, too, with many running 12 to 20 inches. Be prepared to push your light tackle to the limit. "When you hit white bass, the action is fast and furious," says DNR fisheries biologist Mark Flammang. Catch dozens of fish in a day.

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BY SHANNON HAFNER

 ast year, we recruited readers to join a mission by taking someone fishing. We called it Mission Fishin' and asked you to share your stories and photos. And you responded. re

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Readers took kids, friends, coworkers and neighbors and turned them on to the joy of angling. You shared your stories with letters, emails and posts to the DNR's Facebook, Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag **#MISSIONFISHIN**. The photos here are from that campaign, submitted by readers.

Thank you for getting out, having fun and bringing many new anglers along for the journey. Keep it going!

This year we have 10 categories of recommended angling fun—everything from beginner to challenging, best with a boat, off the beaten path, master angler worthy and best for the whole family.

Keep sharing your photos and stories with us and most importantly, keep taking someone new to fishing with you!



#MISSIONFISHIN

Bring the whole family

AUDUBON-Littlefield Lake is popular for all ages. Catch 15- to 20-inch-plus channel cats, 8-inch bluegill and 9- to 10-inch crappie. Well-manicured shore access. Camping, beach, playground, trails and a live bison display.

CLAY - Easy fishing for bluegill, crappie and lots of catfish at Scharnberg Pond. Great access with a handicap accessible fishing pier and rock jetties. Camping, cabins, beach, playground, hiking trail and paddle boat and canoe rental at the county park.

DAVIS-At Lake Wapello State Park, hit one of Iowa's premier largemouth waters with good bluegill (6- to 8-inch) and improving crappie numbers (up to 11 inches). Miles of lakeside and park trails take you to prairie, woods and wetlands. Shaded picnic areas, family cabins and a revamped, rebuilt campground with lake access.

FLOYD-Plenty of bass, catfish and panfish await anglers at Rudd Lake, off Highway 18 east of Rudd. Find bluegill around pallet structures within casting distance of two jetties. Look for largemouth near cattails and other submerged vegetation. With extremely clear water, early morning and late evening is best for channel catfish (9 to 22 inches). Boat ramp, trail, picnic area, playground and a beach. Close to a city campground, too. trails, playground, lodge and captive elk herd.

MUSCATINE—Start the day in Muscatine at Discovery Park Pond, close to many attractions including the Muscatine Arboretum and Fuller Park. Excellent bluegill, largemouth bass and channel cat fishing and a chance to catch a trout stocked each spring and fall. Try a chunk of nightcrawler under a bobber for 'gills or chicken liver for cats. Catch bass with a variety of lures, from rubber worms to topwaters to Beetle Spins. Try flashy spinners for hungry, stocked trout; dough baits, corn or other scented baits work best after trout settle in. Stroll to Heron Hideaway Pond, with its renovated shoreline, located behind the Environmental Discovery Center. The center's large aquarium features local fish species.

SAC – Keep kids busy catching lots of largemouth at Black Hawk Lake, renovated in 2012. Spring and early summer walleye fishing has been great the last two years. Cast off Ice House Point (part of Black Hawk State Park) for buckets of 8-inch bluegill and 10-inch-plus crappies. About half the shore is public, with restrooms near most public accesses. Two campgrounds on either end of the lake make for a perfect family getaway. Great playground in Speaker Park, across the street from the lake, and a new splash pad scheduled to open by the end of May. Miles of hiking trails within walking distance of the lake and a paved bike trail that runs 30-plus miles to Carroll.

FRANKLIN-Plan a family fishing and camping trip to Beeds Lake State Park near Hampton. Use several jetties, a two-mile lake trail and a pier to catch 7- to 7.5-inch bluegill, 7- to 10-inch crappie, a few 7- to 10-inch yellow bass and quality largemouth, too. Enjoy a relaxing lunch at a shaded picnic area along this quiet, no-wake lake.

JOHNSON-Hook family memories at Lake Macbride State Park catching bluegill, walleye, channel catfish and crappie. Easy access to limestone shores, numerous fishing jetties and a handicapped accessible fishing pier. It's Iowa's only spot to catch the prized Kentucky spotted bass. Pontoon, motorboat, canoe, paddle boat or kayak rentals.

ROSSUTH-Put the family on spring crappie and bluegill over 9 inches at Smith Lake north of Algona. Bass have an 18-inch minimum, so large fish can be found. Find outdoor activities at Water's Edge Nature Center on the west shore. Campgrounds, fishing docks, playgrounds, boat ramp, jetty, hiking trail and a couple beaches.

MONROE-Lake Miami is one of the fastest improving lakes with bluegill at 9 inches and bigger. Great largemouth bass fishing with 18-inch fish common. Crappies improving with 10-inchers. Campground, cabins, TAMA- Good shore access at Casey Lake for bluegill, largemouth, and channel catfish. Cabins, campsites, natural areas, hiking trails and a wildlife exhibit at the county park.

UNION-Green Valley State Park, north of Creston, was voted one of Iowa's Best Family-Friendly Places to Fish and Boat in 2017. Cast for 14- to 18-inch bass, 6- to 8-inch bluegill, 7- to 9-inch crappies and 12- to 15-inch walleye-some top 20 inches. Rent a pine log cabin, camp, walk lakeside trails, swim or enjoy a picnic.

WARREN-Take a camping and fishing outing at Lake Ahquabi State Park south of Indianola. A fishing pier, jetties and trails provide access to bluegill, redear sunfish and crappie. Fish late April through early June. Rent a canoe, kayak or stand up paddleboard. Explore the nearby Annett Nature Center or attend outdoor events at the Izaak Walton League clubhouse, across from the park entrance.

WINNESHIEK-Trout Run is great for all skill sets. Stocked weekly April through October with hatchery raised brook and rainbow trout or wild brown trout. Wander the hatchery grounds, feed the fish, walk through a prairie, picnic or access a multiuse trail circling Decorah. Catch a glimpse of the world famous Decorah eagles.

#MISSIONFISHIN

Perfect for beginners

ADAIR-With easy access jetties and a paved lakeside path, Greenfield City Reservoir is heaven for new anglers to hook bluegills, crappies, channel catfish, largemouth and an occasional walleye. May and June are prime for crappies and bluegills on spawning beds.

ALLAMAKEE-Patterson Creek, northwest of Waukon, is a good choice for fly fishing newbies. Grazed pasture provides easy walking and little casting obstruction. Almost two miles of stream on private property is open to public fishing. Stocked weekly (except in July and August) with catchable rainbow trout, it also sustains wild brown trout.

CARROLL—Tons of access at Swan Lake State Park helps newbies get close to the action. Reel in lots of bluegill and crappie from nine jetties, an enclosed fish house or shoreespecially late May and early June.

DUBUQUE— Catch bass and bluegill using two accessible jetties and a paved trail around Bergfeld Pond. Playground at the Bergfeld Recreation Area by the fairgrounds.

JASPER-The secluded 28-acre county-owned Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve Lake has fantastic fishing for 13-inch crappies and 9-inch bluegills. A mowed trail rings the lake with access made even easier with a north end

JEFFERSON - Catch lots of bluegills at Jefferson County Park Pond in Fairfield. Most run 6.5 to 7 inches. Bring tackle for many species-bass and channel catfishing is also good. Jefferson County Park has a campground, restroom, shelters and a nature center.

LOUISA-Usually uncrowded, Virginia Grove Pond has lots of hungry fish to keep newbies busy. Stocked with largemouth, bluegill and channel cats. Use chicken liver on a medium to large hook under a bobber for catfish. Nightcrawlers are always good. The pond is isolated from the campground, restrooms, playground and hiking trails.

LUCAS-All anglers are successful at Red Haw State Park. Great bluegill fishing with 8.5- to 9-inchers and redear up to 11 inches. Loads of quality largemouth and crappies, too. Easy bank fishing with several jetties and many shore accesses. Shady campground overlooks the lake, picnic areas by water's edge and a multi-use trail. Enjoy thousands of redbud trees in bloom mid- to late-April.

LYON-Quickly learn fishing basics at Lake Pahoja with fast biting largemouth and lots of bluegill and channel cats. A 3.5-mile concrete trail inside the county park surrounds the lake. Rental cabins overlook the lake. Paddle boat, canoe and kayak rentals, playground and swimming beach.

pier. Relax with a snack in the picnic area.



RINGGOLD-Great shore access and recently added spawning beds and rock piles for bluegill, bass, wipers, channel catfish, yellow perch and crappie at Fife's Grove Park Pond north of Mount Ayr.

STORY-Excellent shore access to Dakins Lake, north of Zearing, with two jetties and a dock with a cleaning station. Catch many bluegill and bass. Stocked 2014, bluegills now push 9 inches. Camp in the well-kept county park.

TAMA - Easily catch hungry largemouth bass at Union Grove Lake around the fishing jetties and rocky shore. Loaded with 6- to 7-inch bluegill and 8- to 10-inch largemouth bass. Renovated and restocked in 2015.

TAMA-Catch lots of 9-inch yellow bass near shore at Otter Creek Lake near Toledo around Memorial Day. Bluegill, bass and crappie, too. Fish cleaning station near the ramp.

WINNESHIEK-Fish attractors added to Lake Meyer provide hideouts for bluegill, crappie and bass. A concrete ramp provides easy boating. Abundant shore access. Two jetties access deeper water. Picnic areas, campground, playground, ball diamond and trails in the county park.

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Fun Weekend Getaways

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ADAMS-Excellent shore access and jetties make it easy to fish at Lake Icaria. Use small jigs and minnows for bluegill up to 8 inches and crappie up to 11 on fish mounds. Cast nightcrawlers or cut bait along the bottom of rocky shoreline areas or the fish mounds for excellent numbers of channel catfish of all sizes. Camping, cabins, nature trails, playground and beach at the well-maintained county park.

ALLAMAKEE-There's a perfect trout fishing spot for all at Yellow River State Forest with easy access to adventurous treks at Paint or Little Paint creeks. Wild brown, stocked rainbow and brook trout challenge beginners and experts. Camping, hiking and horse activities, too.

BOONE-Venture to Don Williams Lake in the county's largest park. Great fun for all with a campground, beach, playground, trails, golf course and cabins. Catch plenty of crappie and bluegill. Dock fishing is good, especially late April and May when crappies spawn. From a boat, drift jigs down the middle of the lake during mid-summer.

DELAWARE—Unique experiences for all ages await at Backbone State Park—trout fishing, cabins and camping, paddling and rugged trail hikes. Explore clear, cold-water Richmond Springs with easy trails. Keeper brook and rainbow trout stocked weekly April through October. Use small spinners, jigs, prepared baits or flyfish. Running through the heart of the park, the Maquoketa River yields brown trout in upstream areas and smallmouth bass below Backbone Lake. Easy lake access for small bluegill, crappie, largemouth and white sucker.



the spring. Catch bass up to 20 inches and 18- to 20-inch

FAYETTE-Volga Lake is surrounded by Volga River State Recreation Area with camping, hiking and horse trails, hunting and shooting opportunities and wildlife watching. Known for great panfish and bass, it hides an overlooked cache of catfish that routinely measure 23 inches.

IDA-Stay in a lake cabin at Crawford Creek and enjoy a weekend of fishing for jumbo bluegill, large crappic and an occasional big perch (plus a solid largemouth population). Beach, hiking trails, picnic shelters and paddle boats.

JONES-Excellent river fishing at Wapsipinicon State Park south of Anamosa plus caves, golf and unforgettable views. Famous for walleye, smallmouth and channel cat, especially below the dam near the park entrance. Camping, hiking trails, lodge rental and playground.

MONTGOMERY-Viking Lake State Park is activity loaded-lakeside camping, playground, beach, boat rental, restaurant and trails. Cast off jetties for 10-inch crappie in channel cat in summer.

O'BRIEN-Mill Creek Lake near Paulina is a destination with big bluegill and crappie to enthrall kids. Family fun with camping, cabins, concessions, lodge, hiking and biking.

TAYLOR-Reserve a cabin or campsite at Lake of Three Fires State Park—the region's most scenic—northeast of Bedford. Catch 9- to 11-inch crappie with some over 12 inches, largemouth over 20 inches and lots of 8- to 9-inch bluegills. Antique shops and golf course nearby.

VAN BUREN-Enjoy a fun weekend at Lake Sugema Recreation Area. Campground and playground, plus excellent largemouth, crappie and bluegill fishing. Cast for just about any species on the Des Moines River next to Lacey Keosaqua State Park. Campground, playground and hiking trail. Stroll the rustic Villages of Van Buren County-a tourism destination.

WASHINGTON-Lake Darling State Park features new year-round cabins or camping cabins. Excellent spring crappie bite near submerged structure of rip-rap shorelines; many crappies are greater than 10 inches. Many bluegill 8 inches or greater and lots of 18-inch bass. Mile-long ADAcompliant fishing trail from upper arm to campground and many revamped jetties.

#MISSIONFISHIN

Urban hot spots

BLACK HAWK—Venture to the Cedar River in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo metro area for great walleye, smallmouth bass and channel catfish action. Shore fishing is good with access in downtown Waterloo, several city parks, Black Hawk County Park and George Wyth State Park (which also has camping.) Use crankbaits or jigs tipped with minnows or crawlers. Small boats are best with shallow water in some channel crossovers. Cedar Falls and Waterloo offer lots of family fun with miles of bike trails, dining and sports and entertainment venues.

LINN—Find clear water and amazing views at Prairie Park Fishery in northeast Cedar Rapids on Otis Road. It's popular for largemouth, crappie, bluegill, walleye and white bass. Trout stocked each spring and fall for more fishing



fun. Use a small bobber and small hook tipped with an inch of nightcrawler or prepared bait. Good shore access with walk down areas and jetties. Other areas best reached by canoe, kayak or rowboat. Explore the Cedar River with access by the hard surface trail that loops around the lake. Boat ramps provide access to the lake and river.

MUSCATINE-Deep Lakes, a small urban lake complex, is stocked with muskellunge every two years; the largest are 28-inches. A series of deep interconnected lakes and ponds are surrounded by extensive sand prairie habitat for a unique watchable wildlife experience. Good bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass and channel catfish fishing. Boat ramps, beach, hiking trails and restrooms.

POLK—Plan a quick get-away at Big Creek Lake State Park near Polk City. Use small tackle and light line to catch aggressive bluegill close to shore late May and early June. Here, May is best for walleye. Use the numerous jetties, a universally accessible fishing pier or visit Big Creek Marina to rent fishing boats, pontoons, water bikes, kayaks and more. Kids enjoy the large playground and cabanas near the popular beach.

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POTTAWATTAMIE—Lake Manawa State Park offers fun for all ages and skills. The spring crappie bite draws a large crowd. Summer fishing focuses on channel catfish. Cast for trophy size (24-inch-plus) walleye and wipers (a cross between a female striped bass and male white bass) stocked each year. Wipers are explosive fighters—use shad-imitating lures to hook one. Keep the kids entertained all afternoon with an abundant population of yellow bass. Jetties and pier provide access. The state park has a nature trail, lakeside picnic shelters, playground and canoe rental.

SCOTT—Fish are well-fed and growing fast at Lost Grove Lake, six miles east of Eldridge. Catch 8-inch bluegill, muskies up to 34 inches, 14- to 15-inch walleye, bass (some above 15 inches) and crappies (many 10-plus inches). Easy access with ADA compliant fishing trails and jetties. Platforms help anglers get to deeper water. Spawning beds and culvert piles are within casting distance. Pines Point is loaded with structure such as brush piles, tree reefs, stump fields, hinged trees and terraced lake bottom. Popular spot for canoe and kayak anglers.

WOODBURY—Bacon Creek Lake, a fun family fishing destination on the east edge of Sioux City, features clear water, a paved loop trail, playground, restrooms, picnic area and dog park. Catch bluegills and crappie in shallow areas during the spawn (spring and early summer) then move to the deeper water in the upper area of the lake. Cast for rainbow trout stocked each fall.

Master Angler worthy

BUTLER AND BREMER-Trophy walleye up to 30 inches and lots of 15- to 20-inchers live in the Shell Rock River. Cast jigs, crankbaits or live baits. In springtime, look for schooled fish below dams, obstructions and cobble bottom areas. In summer, cast a jig and crawler, or try crankbaits.

DICKINSON-East Okoboji Lake in the heart of the Iowa Great Lakes has a great, diverse fishery with trophy channel cat, muskie, bass, northern pike and yellow perch.

HOWARD-Stocked fingerling northern pike improve your chances to catch a trophy fish on the Turkey River near Cresco. Dam modifications at Vernon Springs Park improved angling. Also stocked with walleye fingerlings. Best fished with small watercraft.

IOWA-Cast for master angler-size redear sunfish (11-inchplus) at Lake Iowa north of Millersburg. Good bluegill, largemouth bass and crappie fishing, too.

LOUISA-Explore the endless chain of connected lakes,

chutes and sloughs of Lake Odessa for trophy 10- to 12-inch-plus crappies. Use a crawler and bobber or jig and 1-inch paddletail plastic body. Catch lunker largemouth with spinnerbaits near logs, beaver dams or rip-rap. Plenty of shore access, ramps and habitat.

MARION-Explore the Whitebreast arm and marina at Red Rock Reservoir for a chance at a master angler-sized crappie. Large white bass and hybrid striped bass provide exciting action. Watch for gulls hovering over surfacing baitfish and toss silver or white lures into the frenzy. Fish below the dam February through May.

MONTGOMERY-May and June are best for hooking largemouth bass over 20 inches and white crappies over 14 inches at Viking Lake State Park.

UNION-Catch largemouth-some over 20 inches-at Twelve-Mile Creek Lake, east of Creston. Elusive 10- to 12-inch jumbo yellow perch also lurk there.

VAN BUREN-Lake Sugema is a trophy channel cat haven. Cats exceed 10 pounds, sometimes much larger.

Catch lots of fish fast

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is at McIntosh Woods State Park.

APPANOOSE-Push light tackle to the limit catching hybrid striped bass and white bass by the dozen at Lake Rathbun. Lots of fish between 12 and 20 inches. Rathbun is Iowa's perennial crappie hotspot and hot this year for 9- to 12-inch crappies, especially mid-May to mid-June.

BLACK HAWK-South Prairie Lake near the UNI-dome in Cedar Falls, has good catches of crappie, bluegill and bass. Use live bait in late spring. Trails along with a fishing jetty and accessible pier provide good shore access.

BUENA VISTA-Have fun catching and releasing slot-limit walleye (17 to 22 inches) at Storm Lake; lots of keepers, too. Use live minnows under a slip bobber or white twister tails from shore, or toss or troll shad-colored crankbaits April through June. Anything silver works as shad and emerald shiners are main forage fishes. After ice-out, try shad guts or cut bait on windblown shores for channel cat. Tons of public access and family parks.

CERRO GORDO-Fill stringers with yellow bass at Clear Lake every spring—the Island and Dodge's Point are favorite hotspots. Catch 14- to 20-inch walleyes (14-inch minimum) on live bait rigs or crankbaits April through June. Great shore and boat angling. A handy fish cleaning station **DECATUR**-Bluegill fishing was phenomenal last year at Little River Watershed Lake, especially for fish over 9 inches. Catch lots of largemouth bass (some over 20 inches) with jigs or plastics fished near cedar tree brush piles, along weed lines or rock piles. Slowly troll jigs tipped with twister tails or Lindy rigs with live bait along rock structure or mud flats for spring walleye (12 to 22 inches).

DES MOINES-Don't miss the hot panfish bite at Big Hollow near Burlington each May. Catch 9-inch-plus bluegill and big crappies. Use a 32nd-ounce jig with a 1-inch paddletail body for panfish. Excellent bass lake for 15-inch plus fish. Lots of timber, hidden coves and structure, so bring plenty of jigs and lures. Stocked muskies prowl the waters. Camping, a beach, boat ramp and jettics.

HOWARD-Excellent shore access at Lake Hendricks for bluegill, crappie, largemouth and channel cat. Plenty of places for fish to hang around with rock piles, crappie condos, pallets, concrete culverts and cedar trees, most within casting distance of shore.

KEOKUE-At Lake Belva Deer near Sigourney, big fish in big numbers await-plenty of bass exceed 20

#MISSIONFISHIN

inches, bluegill to 9.5 inches and pound-and-a-half redears. Excellent channel catfishing, too. Fish for large green sunfish along the rocks on the dam; use a chunk of worm under a bobber. ADA fishing pier, restrooms, gravel boat ramp and lake trail.

MAHASKA-Hawthorn Lake south of Barnes City has huge populations of bass up to 20 inches. Catch 25 fish a day. Abundant channel cat with some greater than 4 pounds. Crappie up to 9 inches and muskies up to 40 inches. Try the road grade, shallows on either end of the dam or the arm opposite the dam for spawning bluegills.

POLK—Find fast action for 7- to 9-inch crappie at Blue Heron Lake in Raccoon River Valley Park in West Des Moines. Drift and cast small, white jigs late April into

June. It also boasts a quality channel catfish population. A pier provides easy access for all ages and abilities. Fun to fish by canoe or kayak.

POWESHIEK-Catch lots of 7- to 9-inch crappie at Diamond Lake west of Montezuma. Excellent access with 11 jetties. Fish cleaning station, paved trails, playground and many picnic spots. Boats with electric trolling motors only allowed on the lake.

SHELBY-Bluegills are big and black crappies aplenty in Prairie Rose Lake near Harlan. Quickly fill a stringer at the gravel spawning beds and rock reefs early May to mid-June. Find a printable fish structure map at iowadnr. gov/fishing/where-to-fish. Abundant bass provide great catch-and-release fishing (15-inch minimum length).

Off the beaten path

ADAIR-Largemouth bass and channel catfish grow big at secluded Meadow Lake. Catch 7- to 8-inch bluegills and 8- to 12-inch crappies. Spring bite is best.

CARROLL COUNTY-Hike in 1/4-mile to Tigges Pondbuilt and stocked several years ago with largemouth, catfish and bluegill that exceed 8 inches.

with small boat or kayak.

LEE COUNTY-It takes a hike to get to White Oak Lake in Shimek State Forest near Ft. Madison. Catch 8- to 9-inch bluegill and 9- to 10-inch redears. Fish off the dam, or float a bellyboat to inaccessible shores. Drive to Shagbark Lake for 9-inch bluegill and a shore trail. Enjoy massive white pines throughout the forest. Campground and hiking, too.

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CLAYTON-Escape to small, North Cedar Creek for quiet fishing among mature forests. Use a smaller pole under dense tree cover. Deep holes and fast moving runs hold stocked catchable rainbow and brook trout in the lower end and wild brook and brown trout upstream.

CLINTON COUNTY-Find Hagenson Pond off highway 67 south of Camanche. Usually not a lot of angler activity. Keep kids busy with good numbers of 12- to 15-inch bass and 6.5-inch bluegill, along with catfish.

DALLAS-Escape to Beaver Lake in rural Dallas County. Boaters find good panfishing at this small lake full of timber. Abundant crappies, mostly 7- to 9-inches, with some 10- to 11-inchers. Bluegill numbers are strong, with 7- to 9-inch fish.

EMMET-Ingham Lake has good walleye and yellow perch numbers. Part of a large natural lake complex, there's plenty of water to explore.

JACKSON-This section of the Maquoketa River is less crowded than popular upstream segments. Recent river surveys show a great population of big channel catfish. Use cut bait or crawlers in wood habitat. Best accessed

MARSHALL-Find superb largemouth bass, bluegill and channel cat fishing at Green Castle Recreation Area. Several jetties for easy access. Great place to fish from a canoe or kayak as motorized boats are not allowed. Picnic areas, hiking trails and universally-accessible facilities.

PAGE COUNTY-Once a limestone quarry, Ross Area Pits County Park features deep, clear-blue water surrounded by trees. Catch bluegill exceeding 8.5 inches and 10- to 12-inch bass among sunken boats.

PALO ALTO-New populations of yellow bass at Five Island Lake and Lost Island Lake will keep you busy from boat or shore. Both lakes have a diverse fishery.

POTTAWATTAMIE- Farm Creek/Young's Pond, built 15 years ago between Griswold and Carson, is in its prime. Look for spawning bluegills and crappies along the dam in spring. Launch a small boat from the ramp in summer to fish over the old creek channel for suspended fish.

WORTH-Fabulous bluegill fishing at Silver Lake with lots of 8- to 10-inch fish. Abundant 15- to 17-inch largemouth bass after renovations in 2013. Two jetties and a concrete ramp provide easy access. Spend the night at the county park on the north shore.

Unique fishing experiences

BENTON COUNTY – Shoreside campsites at Hannen Lake, southwest of Blairstown, let you fish right outside your camper. A beautiful rental cabin sits right next to the water. Kids will revel in catching and releasing 8- to 12-inch bass (15-inch minimum). Excellent shore access.

DICKINSON – As Iowa's largest natural lake, something is always biting at Big Spirit Lake. Renown for great walleye fishing, don't overlook dozens of other species, too.

GUTHRIE— Float or wade a section of the Middle Raccoon River for lots of 10-inch smallmouth with an occasional one over 14-inches. Use lead head jigs tipped with a half a



crawler in pools, around rocks or below riffles. A catch-and-release

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only regulation protects the population from Lennon Mills dam down to the Redfield dam.

HANCOCK-West Branch Iowa River. Hike for pike along the wildlife area where East Twin Lake flows into the river. Use lures, jigs and minnows or spoons. Good spring and fall pike fishing when water flows from the lake.

JACKSON- Full of self-sustaining wild browns, South Fork Mill Creek is great for adventurous or experienced trout anglers. Use spinners, jigs and live bait for 8- to 13-inch trout. This small stream in Big Mill Wildlife Management Area is almost entirely on public property.

LINN-Enjoy a quiet afternoon at Palisades-Kepler State Park fishing a scenic stretch of the Cedar River with limestone bluffs and huge sand bars. Excellent white bass, walleye and northern pike fishing below the old lowhead dam. Shovelnose sturgeon and channel catfish action picks up late spring and summer. A popular area for kayakers to begin their journey down the river. Hiking trails, camping, rock climbing, playground and boat ramp.

MADISON COUNTY-Stand atop a natural limestone ridge at historic Pammel State Park to watch the Middle River flow in four directions. Excellent channel and flathead catfishing, especially below the ford. Spend a night in a Yurt style cabin. Search for geocaches along the Backbone and Lodge trails.

MITCHELL-Explore Iowa's western-most trout stream, Turtle Creek, just north of St. Ansgar, and its two miles of public fishing. Stocked with rainbow and brookies weekly from April through October, it also boasts wild browns.

POLK-Adventurous anglers find rewards in the Des Moines River and Raccoon rivers in the spring and early summer when game fish migrate upstream looking for spawning habitat. Catch a diverse mix of walleye, white bass, hybrid striped bass and flathead and channel catfish below riffles/low-head dams and deep water pools. The Scott Avenue and Center Street dams in downtown Des Moines are popular fishing spots.

SKUNK RIVER-Find flathead and channel catfish near downed logs, brush piles or creek mouths. Use live green sunfish under a large bobber to entice the biggest cats. Good freshwater drum in many stretches excite new anglers. Try nightcrawler rigs or small jigs. Immediately put drum on ice to preserve freshness for a tasty treat.

#MISSIONFISHIN

Up for a challenge

ALLAMAKEE—Unstocked French Creek is a paradise for avid anglers to test their skills. Gin clear water and wary, wild brook and brown trout make for challenging fishing. Its plentiful public areas are artificial-lure-only and brown trout is catch-and-release only.

APPANOOSE—Best fished by boat, Rathbun Lake is known for large walleyes with 17- to 25- inch fish most common. When other walleye fisheries slow down, find the bite here in the warm weeks of June to August.

CERRO GORDO—If hooking a trophy muskie is on your bucket list—come to Clear Lake for 40- to 50-inch fish. Be ready for a workout with these large predators—it takes many casts with good sized baits.

CLAYTON—Full of habitat and lined by vegetation, Hewett Creek at Ensign Hollow Wildlife Management Area has lots of wild brown trout. Only artificial lures can be used and all trout must be immediately released.

CRAWFORD—Nab challenging monster-sized bluegill (9.5-inch-plus) at Yellow Smoke Park Lake. The water is extremely clear and the fish are wary to bite.

Redear sunfish over 12 inches are hard to come by. Largemouths provide a lot of catch-and-release action (10- to 14-inch fish) with the chance to hook a lunker.

DICKINSON—West Okoboji Lake has held the state record for smallmouth bass since 1990. Great destination for anglers looking for big bass.

LINN—Excellent chance to catch the elusive muskie at Pleasant Creek Lake. Many 35- to 42-inch muskies with some real monsters up to 50-inches. There is a 40-inch minimum length limit on muskie.

POTTAWATTAMIE—Cast for walleye and wiper (a cross between a female striped bass and male white bass) at Lake Manawa. Fingerlings stocked each year produce trophy sized (24-inch-plus) fish. Action starts soon after ice out, continues into spring and heats up again in the fall. Explore the new depths and drop-offs added in 2016.

WAPELLO-Des Moines River sturgeon fight in the spring. Bounce a crawler and slip sinker off the bottom. Excellent channel and flathead catfishing, especially below the hydropower dam. Also great fishing for walleye, white bass and hybrid striped bass.

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#MISSIONFISHIN WINNER

34 IOWA OUTDOORS SPRING 2018

Mississippi River

DUBUQUE—The great Mississippi River is the go-to spot, known here for great bass, bluegill, catfish, crappie, freshwater drum, sauger and walleye. Shore fishing is limited, so most fishing is by boat. Action peaks for sauger and walleye in the tailwaters of Lock and Dam 11 in March and early April. Use heavy river jigs or pull three-way rigs tipped with minnows. The Massey Park Boat Ramp south of Dubuque has easy access to some of the best side-channel and wing dam water. Good backwater habitat is near Mud Lake Park Boat Ramp in north Dubuque. Use a slip bobber rig near brush or rock habitat tipped with nightcrawlers for bluegill and bass, or minnows for crappie and bass. After fishing, find local eateries in Iowa's oldest city and visit the Mississippi River Museum.

JACKSON-Lots of public access to popular areas on Mississippi River pools 12 and 13 for spring walleye and sauger, and summer bass, catfish, crappie, bluegill and drum. Easy boat access below dam at Bellevue—a pretty rivertown with blufftop camping and vistas at Bellevue State Park south of town. A small hook tipped with a nightcrawler and weighted with a sinker or split-shot will catch most species. Good shore access below the dam, near the DNR fisheries station, Pleasant Creek, Green Island and Spruce Creek County Park.

Best with boat, kayak or canoe

BUCHANAN-Kayaks and canoes are best for rock riffles in this stretch of Wapsipinicon River. Good channel catfish, northern pike, smallmouth and walleye fishing.

CASS—Have lots of summer fun drift fishing at Lake Anita State Park for bluegills up to 9.5 inches and 9-inch crappie. Hang a 1/32ndounce jig tipped with worm over the side, let out 30 feet of line and drift with the wind. You need a boat, kayak or canoe to get after mid-lake suspended fish.

CLARKE-Troll the dam or points at West Lake Osceola for feisty 14- to 20-inch wipers. Catch largemouth, some exceeding 19 inches, along creek channels or points.

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DICKINSON AND CLAY-Little Sioux River-Easy walleye and catfishing with plenty of access along the Little Sioux River through Dickinson and Clay Counties.

FAYETTE-Below Fayette, the Volga River flows through Volga Lake State Park making tight turns around moss and fern covered limestone bluffs, springs and seeps. Catch smallmouth, rock bass, suckers and a few trout. Many entry points provide easy access for canoe or kayak fishing. Water often gets too low for floating mid-July to September.

HARDIN-This stretch of the Iowa River is an excellent half-day outing. Float past dense forested hills and limestone cliffs for smallmouth, walleye, pike and catfish. Put in at Alden Canoe Access and float to Iowa Falls.

HUMBOLDT-West Fork Des Moines River. Great public access at the Rutland dam through Humboldt city parks down to Frank Gotch County Park (good shore casting) for walleye, smallmouth and channel cats.

LINN COUNTY-Paddle secluded back areas of Pinicon Ridge Park west of Central City. Cast for smallmouth. walleye and northern in the Wapsipinicon River. Climb the observation tower for valley view, or tour the 5-acre Alexander Wildlife Area. Hiking trails, camping, playground and boat ramp.

MONONA-Escape to Oldham Lake outside Soldier for peaceful fishing. Good numbers of 8- to 10-inch crappie and nice bluegill (7.5 to 8 inches). Little public access, so use a small boat, float tube, canoe or kayak.

WASHINGTON-Crawford Pond's small, gravel ramp is perfect for launching canoes, kayaks and small boats. Look for large bluegills and redear sunfish suspended near submerged brush piles and pallet structures. Come spawning time, find slab 9-inch redears along the east shoreline next to the white pines. Keep bait small and slow your bait action to encourage these wary fish to strike.

WEBSTER-Explore Brushy Creek's abundant habitat. Fish areas where multiple habitats meet such as a weed line running into standing timber next to a rocky point. Home to large walleye, monster cats and 40-inch muskie.

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University of Iowa camps get kids off electronics and

into the outdoors

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOE WILKINSON

A stching the homemade boat ride the current past their monitoring points, 8-year-old Madelyn Grothus could see the difference a 1-inch cloudburst produces.

"When it rained last night, it made the water faster. When it is deeper, like today, it makes the current faster."

Though certainly not hydrologists, Madelyn and other day campers "got it," watching the stream wind through the sandstone bluffs in the lower end of Ledges State Park near Boone. Ask them, and they describe plugging orangeflagged wire stakes in Peas Creek the day before. They timed objects—sticks, bark—as they floated from marker to marker, then did it again, with the faster flow. Some figured out they should have measured variables—like depth and stream width before each "run." In one spot, a silt dam had washed out, sending water to a different channel. It changed results, too.

36 IOWA OUTDOORS SPRING 2018


Wildlife camps held by the University of Iowa's Recreation Services department are getting kids out of the house and immersing them in the outdoors. The original camp began in 1991 with the mission of awakening and awareness and appreciation of the natural world. It has since expanded to several state parks to spread that mission to more lowa kids. Search "wildlife camps" at ulowa edu for more information and registration windows.





And of course, they were impressed by how cold the water was, deer and raccoon prints in the sandbars and how the bluffs directed the shallow stream to the Des Moines River a couple hundred yards away.

Welcome to Wildlife Camp 2017. The University of Iowa's Recreation Services department—with help from DNR park staff—offered six options last year for weeklong summer day camps. Kids going into third through sixth grades could choose from Ledges, Maquoketa Caves, Viking Lake, George Wyth, Mines of Spain and Springbrook state parks and recreation areas.

Similar to the university's 20-year-strong "School of the Wild"—offered to all sixth graders in the Iowa City Community School District—the program immerses kids in the outdoors. They prowl through the woods, get nose-toantenna with butterflies and other pollinators on the prairie, learn basic identification of many prairie plants and locate land snails and raccoon prints along streams.



Education times Recreation Equals Fun! "We hope to inspire action by specifically teaching students behaviors and actions they can take to make a difference," says camp director Jay Gorsch. "We teach them how to build bird houses and feeders. We emphasize how to recognize, avoid spreading and even remove invasive species."



Each week's camp depends on the outdoor skills and teaching strengths of its counselors, ranging from college students to grandparents. Different local presenters are invited daily for demonstrations of their specialty.

"Skills range from kayaking, archery, fishing, use of an atlatl and many others," says Gorsch. "It might mean tapping local experts, park staff, an archeologist, beekeeper, school teachers and others."

For the most part, though, the young conservationists were just having fun. Scores of frogs and turtles in adjacent Lost Lake were on full alert, as Ledges park manager Andy Bartlett led the noisy parade on a one-hour geocaching expedition. The inquisitive, laughing visitors had the time of their lives.

Across the state the next week, campers at Maquoketa Caves started the day with wickiup readings—tales of Native American life—or other stories about living wild.

"The willow frame wickiup has been there for a couple years," explains park manager Scott Dykstra. "On our first day, we did some reconstruction work, some repairs." The temperature in the park can be dialed down about 30 degrees. "We have 16 caves marked on our map—more if you get off the paths," says Dykstra. "And the campers couldn't wait to go caving and creek stompin'."

"That was a pretty good experience for us," says 8-yearold Evan Mayberry of Urbandale. "Setting up the wickiup, exploring caves, the wildlife trivia game. I liked this better than other types of camps I've been to." So much so, he came to Maquoketa Caves after spending the week before at Ledges. Each evening then, it was back to the park's campground, where he camped for two weeks with his grandparents.

These day camps are the real thing. Insect bites and droopy late day eyelids go hand-in-hand with catching frogs, exploring caves and learning wild Iowa history from experts. Sack lunches from home, required water bottles and occasional quiet time, helped counter frequent 90-degree heat.

"It's tempting to stay indoors and in front of iPads, on computers or in front of TVs. It's easy to do that," Gorsch says. "It's probably a little more natural for kids to do that these days, instead of being outdoors. We want to try to get them outside."



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And the reviews were good. "I liked the hikes and the caving," 9-year-old Shelby Eberhart of rural Maquoketa says. "The wickiup was cool. We learned it cannot be transported place to place...but it lasts three to five years. With the caving, I was getting worked up—nervous because of the 10-foot drop in one of them." She seemed okay with it, though, on the day she looked back at it.

Prior to camp, Justus Frese couldn't explain that odd bulge in the stem of a tall prairie plant. By Wednesday, he had the answer for a local television crew. "That's a boll on a goldenrod plant. There's a larvae or caterpillar inside. The egg was laid by a goldenrod wasp," he says. And by early fall? "It will eat its way through that (boll) and come out as an adult." That afternoon on the news, a central Iowa audience knew it too.

DNR wildlife diversity biologist Stephanie Shepherd led one of those hikes.

"We were primarily looking for butterflies using the prairie. I pointed out a couple important nectar plants, too," she says. "As far as butterflies, we had silver-spotted skippers each day and also great spangled fritillaries, Eastern tiger swallowtails and Eastern tailed blues, so good representation from most butterfly families."

The kids don't remember all the names, but now they clearly understand how dependent one layer of wildlife is on the plants many of us ignore all our lives.

Sometimes, the day's lesson takes a twist depending on what sneaks in at night. Left behind food scraps and

wrappers in the lodge at Ledges were scattered all over the lodge floor on Thursday morning. That prompted park workers to set a live trap. The 29 campers started their Friday with a ring-tailed guest and an impromptu discussion about why raccoons belong in the wild, not depending on humans for a meal. The message of "carry in and carry out" trash was driven home.

In every location, kids and their parents expressed excitement to continue visiting the park after the camp ended. Through the week, many families went right back into the park—swimming, camping or just exploring what "their" camper was excitedly sharing.

"It's an amazing opportunity for collaboration between the instructors, park staff and area resources. One professional was learning from another, in his or her different expertise," says Gorsch. "The camps provided an opportunity to dispel misconceptions, overcome fears, make new friends...try new activities."

Should a 2018 "go ahead" come, the university and DNR would like to set up at the same six locations, maybe add two new ones, as well. Gorsch says the age range or maybe a second week of day camping might be offered because of all the feedback.

"I pretty well like this better than other camps I've been at," Mayberry says. "I learned about animals, by their poop, what they eat, what eats them. We had a falcon (demonstration), archery, we set up a wickiup. I'd never been in one before. It was cool."



GET INVOLVED

For details, search "wildlife camps" at uiowa.edu, or contact Jay Gorsh at 319-461-5700, Jay-Gorsh@uiowa.edu. Sign up for their newsletter there, too.

DAY CAMP SUCCESS LEADS TO MORE CAMPS

The University of Iowa holds summer, spring and winter day camps. In addition to the six camps last year, a second camp has been added at Springbrook State Park near Guthrie Center, as well as camps at Lake Darling near Brighton, Walnut Woods in West Des Moines and Waubonsie State Park near Hamburg. Since 1991, registration has grown from less than 200 a year to more than 1,700, which is why early sign-up is advised. Cost is \$150, but stipends may be available.



Hoodies Woodies

Competition for the wood duck nest box was fierce but wait a minute—that's a hooded merganser!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES

It's a reflective moment as the male hooded merganser patiently waits for his mate near the artificial nest box she has chosen to investigate.

The gaudy red, white, green, chestnut, and golden colors of the male wood duck are stunning. Widely regarded as the most beautiful duck species in North America, he is indeed a masterpiece of nature.



of those magical mornings for anyone lucky enough to be spending time outdoors. I'm sitting in a photo blind along a Beaver Creek backwater, just south of Granger in Polk County. Across from me, a pole-mounted wooden nest box stands watch above a little pond, safely above the reach of yearly floodwaters. It's one of about 25 wood duck nest boxes I maintain throughout the wetland. I'm hoping to photograph the colorful and charismatic pair of wood ducks that have set up housekeeping.

The hen lays an egg each morning until her clutch of up to a dozen is complete, and I'm waiting for her to arrive. All is quiet, except for the occasional raucous calling of a red-bellied woodpecker, clinging to the dead tree behind me, when a whoosh of wings breaks the silence. A beautifully plumaged wood duck hen swishes across the water, no more than 40 feet away, followed by her strikingly colorful, iridescent mate.

She shuffles her feathers and begins swimming purposefully toward the nest box, followed by her handsome suitor. Pausing in front of the pole, she fixes her gaze upon the entrance hole, and seems ready to make her ascent, when from within the box a scratching noise can be heard. Having already claimed the nest box as her own, another hen pops into the entrance, craning her neck to see what's going on outside. But it isn't another wood duck—it's a hooded merganser.



Fighting Mergansers

The occupant carefully surveys the neighborhood below to ensure everything was safe, and then flutters down to the water, where she is joined by a handsome hooded merganser drake—her mate. Displaying his beautiful black and white crest and golden brown sides, he swims to her side.

Not to be deterred, the hen wood duck regards them for a few moments, bobbing her head a few times (signaling her intent to fly) and then ascends to the nest box, vacated only moments ago. As she disappears into the structure, her mate, in colorful breeding plumage, quietly drifts nearby. Soon he swims to a nearby log, hops out and preens, rearranging his stunning plumage.

After a few minutes of grooming, with head tucked,

he's ready for a nap. Meanwhile, the merganser pair loafs nearby, and all is momentarily tranquil.

With a whistle of wings and twin splashes, another pair of hooded mergansers land no more than 20 feet from the first pair. The first merganser drake is agitated and swims towards the intruding pair.

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With head held high, he expands his dark throat and beautiful black and white crest. A display of head-throwing ensues, with a backwards jerking of the head, touching his back, followed by a low-pitched frog-like croak. But the intruding newcomers hold their ground as the defending pair moves ever closer. Conflict erupts as the displaying drake's mate cruises past him during a pause in his routine. A line is crossed when the intruding male makes a pass at her. Having had enough, a boil of water

Suddenly, conflict erupts as the displaying merganser drake's mate cruises past him, while he pauses during his display routine. A line has been crossed, as the intruding male makes a pass at her. The defending male has had enough, and a boil of water erupts as he lunges at the offender—bill opened in defiance, while the hen scoots away to calmer water.

erupts as the defending male lunges at the offender—bill opened in defiance. Scooting to the side, the hen deftly avoids the mayhem. But the fight doesn't last long as the intruder quickly backs off, retreating to the far end of the pond to rejoin his own mate. Having reunited with his mate, the defending male again erects his crest, throws his head against his back and utters his guttural victory cry. All is settled....at least for now.

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As the sun rises ever higher, casting a golden light across the little backwater, the woodie hen emerges from the nest box. She flutters down to the water where her sleeping mate awakens and quickly rejoins her. Each morning, she will lay another egg, until a full clutch of up to a dozen eggs have been laid. It is then that she will begin incubation, emerging only to feed and drink, until nearly 32 days later, when her ducklings begin hatching. She will call to them as they hatch—encouraging them with her soft calls. The ducklings quickly imprint on their mother's call, and when all are hatched (in about 24 hours) she will flutter down to the water and coax them out using the same call. The young of cavity-nesting ducks seemingly have springs in their legs, and one by one they leap and climb the hardware-cloth ladder to the entrance hole, perching precariously before bravely leaping to the waters below. When all have safely assembled, she will lead her brood of ducklings to a favored feeding area where they will grow quickly, eating insects and aquatic invertebrates, which supply important protein. But today she is still building her clutch of eggs and won't be incubating them for a few more days.



Wood duck drakes—a confrontation

Although strikingly marked, with white divots on her chestnut-colored breast, her own short crest and white teardrop eye markings, the female wood duck is out-classed by the gaudy red, white, green, chestnut and golden colors of her mate. Widely regarded as the most beautiful duck in North America, he is indeed a masterpiece of nature.

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As the regal pair feeds along the edge of the pond, it is again peaceful until a second swoosh of wings and twin splashes punctuate the stillness. As with the mergansers, a second pair of wood ducks has arrived, for they've seemingly taken a liking to the same little pond. And as with the mergansers, the first wood duck drake also assumes a defensive position between his mate and the perceived rival drake. They maintain their distance, and a peaceful coexistence between the two pairs seems possible until the newly-arrived male glides a little too close. The defending male lunges across the water and toward his rival, with head stretched for ward and open beak. He means business, and the second male quickly scoots away. Again, all is calm on the little backwater.

A nest is the best

Most students of nature are familiar with the decadesold practice of building and placing artificial nest boxes

Suddenly the defending male wood duck lunges across the water and towards the rival drake, head and neck stretched forward, and with open bill. He means business and the second male quickly turns and scoots away.

in lowa wetlands and along streams for wood ducks. As our country was settled, vast stretches of bottomland hardwoods were cleared, resulting in the critical loss of trees with essential nest cavities. The nest box program provided a way to make up for the loss of natural nest cavities critical to wood duck reproduction. The late Dr. Frank Bellrose of the Illinois Natural History Survey successfully pioneered this technique in the 1950s. Following his successful efforts, nest box programs have become popular with government agencies, conservation organizations and private citizens to increase wood duck populations.

So Different, So Same

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Wood ducks and hooded mergansers love wooded backwaters, share similar habitat and are cavity nesters. lay a similar number of eggs (about a dozen), incubate for the same duration and call their young from the nest some 24 hours after batching. But that's where the similarity ends. Hooded mergansers often lay their eggs in other females' nests: "brood parasitism" similar to the practice used by brown-headed cowbirds. A neighbor once told me he watched a woodie hen lead a group of ducklings along a water way, and half of her brood was composed of mergansers. The wood duck is of the puddle duck family, while the hooded merganser is one of three merganser species belonging to the diving duck group. Paddle ducks possess the typical mallard-like bill that most of us are familiar with, while mergansers are equipped with a long and narrow serrated bill used for catching and devouring minnows and other small prey. like crayfish. They find their prey underwater by sight, and can change the refractive properties of their eyes to improve their underwater vision.

This hooded merganser hen is using the same artificial nest box as the wood duck hen. Mergansers often lay their eggs in other females' nests, called "brood parasitism", which is similar to the practice of brown-headed cowbirds. A neighbor once told me he watched a woodie hen lead a group of ducklings along a waterway, and half of her brood was composed of merganser ducklings.

They also have an extra eyelid, called a "nictitating membrane," which is transparent and helps protect the eye during swimming. like a pair of goggles. Wood ducks eat seeds, fruits, insects and other arthropods. When aquatic foods are unavailable they may eat acorns and waste grain in fields.

The legs of diving ducks are set well to the rear of their bodies, requiring them to run across the water to gain speed and become airborne, while puddle ducks use their more forward-mounted legs to spring nearly straight into the air. When surprised, a wood duck can erupt sertically from the water, and has the amazing ability to seemingly melt through the tree-tops as it flees.

A hooded merganser must run across the water to

GET INVOLVED To build and place your own wood duck nest

box, see the plans on page 14.

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Where to find wood ducks and hooded mergansers

Wood ducks and hooded mergansers are cavity nesters, which means they use holes in trees for reproduction. However, many conservation organizations and private individuals have placed nest-boxes along lowa streams and shaded backwaters that are preferred habitat—and both species readily take to them. Wood ducks are sort of the rabbit of the duck world, preferring nesting and loafing areas with over-hanging trees and those that have actually fallen into the water. Hooded mergansers favor the same secluded waterways.

Public areas offering artificial nest boxes and prime habitat where both species may be observed are Desoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge west of Missouri Valley, the Chichaqua Wildlife Area in Polk County, Union Slough north of Algona and any backwater along the Mississippi River.

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Hooded merganser ducklings are easily distinguished from wood duck youngsters by their long and narrow serrated bill that is used for catching and devouring minnows and other small prey like crayfish.

become airborne and takes a more angular flight path through the trees. Although either a wood duck or hooded merganser drake makes an impressive taxidermy trophy, hunters agree the wood duck is top-rated tablefare, while a merganser meal is to be avoided.

Current Status and Looking to the Future

DNR waterfowl biologist Orrin Jones says that like most of our duck species, both species' populations are relatively stable.

"Woodies and hoodies are both very neat little ducks, although they use the same habitat in different ways and from other species of ducks." Looking ahead, Jones see the future of these two cavity-nesting duck species as being a little more secure than prairie-nesting species; where there is so much pressure on the remaining prairie grasslands and wetlands.

"We're managing for stable duck populations—with the understanding that populations kind of come and go. What we want to do is provide habitat, so when the right conditions are there, the birds are able to flourish. For instance, when ducks are impacted by drought, we just need to do a good job of providing habitat, so the birds are able to respond when the water comes back." A Fishing Lure's Life Lesson on the Benefits

of a Simpler Life

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAN MAGNESON

The lures came with it. The only other lure in that package that even mildly intrigued me was an elongated popping-style plug with a scooped-out face designed to be fished on the surface. I put it in the top tray of my tackle box, but always seemed to reach past it for something else. As, for the other two lures, I don't recall much about them other than having given them away to a fishing buddy.

At that time, I was an absolute fanatic when it came to fishing for largemouth bass. When I wasn't actually fishing for bass, I was reading or at least thinking about it. And I was almost entirely a catch-and-release angler, knowing even then that you risked your future fishing if you kept too many predatory bass. Subsequently, one could throw the predator/prey ratio out of balance, where prey like bluegills in the farm ponds around southwest Iowa could explode into a huge population of stunted fish.







I kept records of my catches on a 1976 calendar rolled up and stored in a shoebox, and I noted the day I tried that elongated surface plug-May 17.

The act of writing it on the calendar is hazy now, but the event I recorded is still crystal-clear. I had finally tied that lure on, and cast it out near the edge of where a thick, irregular patch of pondweed dropped off abruptly into much deeper water. The plug shuddered and shook and staggered and stumbled across the surface as I retrieved it, making it only a few feet before there was an explosion of water as a large bass slammed into that plug.

I had never caught a bass on the surface, never witnessed that smashing strike and the spraying water, but from the moment that bass was hooked, so was I.

That fish was also the largest bass I'd caught to date, weighing exactly 5 pounds, and to boot, I had caught it on the very first cast with that lure. I proudly delivered the fish to a local taxidermist, one of the very few bass I ever kept.

After that, I only wanted to fish with that lure. Over the next several years, I probably caught at least a thousand bass with it.

I carried and cast—and just plain used it so much you can see the stubborn stains and marks worn into it by the dangling treble hooks. I grew sentimental about the battle-worn, scarred lure and meant to retire it before I ended up losing it for good, and replace it with a newer, but still-similar topwater plug.

Sure enough, while fishing a farm pond one quiet, windless morning, a large bass shattered the still and glassy surface and that lure was gone. All I reeled in was a broken knot.

My tackle box sat on the other side of the pond directly across from me. As I rounded the pond on my way to it, I was kicking myself for having pushed my A battle-worn topwater plug shows the scars chipped and worn paint—caused by more than 1,000 bass the author caught over the years.

luck too far. But as I reached for my tackle box, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the plug floating just a few feet away. I considered myself lucky to have gotten it back, and I never fished with it again, instead making good on my idea to get a newer replacement that would thus hold less sentimental value.

Looking back over 40 years later to when I had originally bought that lure I ended up using so much, I found I had learned another lesson—one about the virtues of a simple lifestyle and the lack of clutter and complexity.

Bass fishing is a hugely popular sport in the United States and is a hobby that can really consume one. There are myriads of different reels, rods and lures and every conceivable kind of gadget and gizmo to "improve" fishing success. I started to take a few steps down that road and already noted the bigger dent in my paycheck and the fact I was lugging more and more along on my fishing trips—but the fun of using that one single lure had, so to speak, reeled me back in. I realized you are better off paring down possessions to fewer, but more highly-prized and more often-used ones and concentrating on becoming even more proficient in their use—practice makes perfect.

I was never much for materialism anyway, and I remember Mom once turning to me, seemingly out-ofthe-blue, and saying something like, "I've never seen a kid who can be so happy on so little."

There was truth to that observation, then and now,

RIGHT AND NEXT PAGE

PHOTOS BELOW,

that many people seem to always want more and more: many kids seem to clamor incessantly for a greater allowance and yet more toys, many teenagers seem to want what the latest fad tells them that they should want, and many adults want the latest state-of-the-art, cuttingedge this-or-that, along with a newer, bigger, fancier house, car, boat, you-name-it to put it in. A few minutes ago, these folks may not have known it even existed, but now suddenly they cannot live without it.

I was content to wear my faded blue jeans, denim jacket and old tennis shoes. All I really wanted was to be





outdoors as much as possible—riding my bike, hiking, exploring, rambling and roaming around, and especially, camping, hunting or fishing. Besides, standing indoors arguing for more "stuff" would have cut into my outdoor time that much more.

I was decidedly low-maintenance, and Mom's only complaint was my minimalistic lifestyle made me more difficult to punish. Taking possessions away or restricting privileges for a given time period meant to punish bad behavior was akin to torture for a lot of kids. I, however, just shrugged and shifted gears into reading books until the storm blew over.

Fast forward to young adulthood and the beginnings of a career, it looked to me that many others just starting out in life seemed to be getting their more extravagant wants confused with their more basic needs. Many appeared to be trying to have virtually overnight what their parents had, apparently failing to recognize that their parents did not have all that when they were the same age and accumulating it was the result of hard work over the course of most of their adult lives.

Over the long run, those folks who have a clear long-term vision, exercise self-restraint and cultivate a then-and-there, delayed gratification mindset are going to do better in all walks of life than impulsive, short-sighted, here-and-now instant gratification types.

I'm not advocating a single-minded focus upon building financial success and thus security; your life is made up of your memories and in order to truly be happy you'll want to skim off some money to have fun along the way. But one has to strike a balance somewhere, because you either pay today with your money or if you don't, you'll pay in other ways on down the road, being caught short in your later years and either not being able to fully pursue the things you always dreamed of doing in retirement or possibly by not being able to retire at all, at least not fully. It is better to be young and poor than to be old and poor. As you get progressively older, it also becomes progressively-apparent that life's most important things aren't "things" at all-it is those around you which draw breath-your family, friends and pets. Material possessions that mean the most will likely have less economic value than sentimental value. Think what you would grab first in a fire-your child's labored attempt at printing the letters of the alphabet on now-yellowed tablet paper; the photo albums of your family and friends in their younger days and all those neat places you visited and all the fun times you had on vacation; those little trinkets and keepsakes your grandparents gave to you; the puppy collar from that old dog you loved so much and cried so hard over when he died.

As a species, we sure seem to like to invent things that allow us to sit, and especially behind a screen or a steering wheel. You don't have to be burning gasoline in order to have fun, and the things that do require driving have a higher upfront cost. Plus, the more there are moving parts, the more maintenance it will likely require, and thus the more it will burden both your wallet and your spare time. The backpack, the tent and the canoe are all better for both your body and your budget.

With a vehicle, aim for good fuel economy, which translates into saving money. An ounce of prevention really is worth a pound of cure, and it is amazing how long a vehicle can last if you are meticulous about properly maintaining it: a few hundred thousand miles at least.

The overall goal isn't to amass a big pile of money

so you can roll around in it or someday move into a big mansion and ride around in a chauffeured limousine. Rather, the appeal lies in the fact that accumulating wealth will eventually give you better control over the way you spend your time, who you spend your time with, what you spend your time doing, when you want to spend that time, where you want to spend your time and how you want to do something.

And while they are still slaving away back at the office, you will have a serene smile on your face and loads of care-free days to spend outdoors, casting your very own heat-up old bass plug upon the placid waters of your very own pond.

"Dollars are like walnuts, you can either munch on them or you can plant them. But when you are patient, and watch them turn into towering and far more valuable trees, it is worthwhile."





Put Down Some Super Roots

Better tree stock, policy changes and new online sales make ordering trees from the State Forest Nursery a snap.

Ordering trees from Iowa's go-to source for high-quality, genetically diverse tree seedlings just got easier and more convenient. A new online sales site features dozens of quality native Iowa trees and an easy check-out process. All trees are grown from Iowa seed sources to harvest the bounty of native genetics that have thrived here in our soils and weather against disease, insects, droughts and floods for many thousands of years.

The benefits of Iowa-based tree genetics is not available at many retailers, whose tree stock may originate from other parts of the nation. It's always best to plant trees grown from locally-adapted seed. The further a tree is planted from its seed source, the greater the risk of suffering from disease or early mortality.

Also new are changes to how nursery stock can be used to accommodate a wider audience of people wanting to order bulk trees:

 Customers can purchase trees in bundles of 25, compared to previous order minimums of 200.

- Seedlings can be used for any purpose, including windbreaks or decorative landscaping.
- People who purchase nursery seedlings can resell them or give them away. Before, state laws dictated nursery stock had to

be planted by the purchaser.

The nursery has made other improvements besides easier ordering. Advanced techniques for seed selection and growth produce higher quality seedlings with higher survival rates.

According to nursery manager Aron Flickinger, the nursery provides affordable, quality native plant material for numerous natural resource needs.

"Planting trees and shrubs can help landowners reach

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DID YOU KNOW?

A STREET BOOM STREET STREET

During World War II, Iowa's forest resources played a significant role in the war effort. By the spring of 1944, Iowa's lumber production had grown five times the pre-war level. And the most outstanding item was the production of lumber from black walnut trees. Iowa's timbers and forests provided enough saw logs and lumber for lowans to manufacture approximately one million black walnut gunstocks, ranking second nationally for this vital product. Order your own walnut seedlings or dozens of other native species from the State Forest Nursery in Ames.







The DNR's State Forest Nursery provides affordable, high-quality native tree seedlings for timber production, wildlife habitat, land restoration, erosion control and other conservation-related endeavors to landowners in lowa and other states. Located on 98 acres just south of Highway 30 in Ames, the nursery was established by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and has operated continuously ever since. The nursery sells around 1 million seedlings per year, and 3 to 5 million seedlings are grown on-site at any given time.

a variety of goals," says Flickinger. "Trees from the State Forest Nursery are a cost-effective way to create wildlife habitat, beautify landscaping, improve erosion control, establish windbreaks and even save energy through shade."

Tree varieties include 20 species of native hardwoods, nine evergreen species and 14 smaller trees/shrubs. Prices range from \$.30 to \$1.40 per seedling, and tree species are sold in three size ranges, with the tallest around 30 inches. Some species are available in only one or two sizes, and may also be available for spring delivery rather than fall. Orders can be placed anytime between Aug. 1 and May 31. As part of the ordering process, customers can choose a shipping window for delivery—fall shipments begin the last week of October, and spring shipments begin April 1.

The DNR's State Forest Nursery is located in Ames. For more information visit the online sales site at *nursery.lowodnr.gov* or call during regular business hours, Monday–Friday, (800) 865-2477. DNR's expert nursery staff can assist with species selection and answer questions about your tree needs and nursery offerings.

My Backyard

Food Waste and Plastics top Iowa's Garbage Heap

BY JESSIE BROWN

A recently released study shows what Iowans are throwing away, and what could be spared from the landfill.

That includes a lot of wasted food—556,313 tons, to be exact. Wasted food accounted for 20 percent of landfilled materials in the 2017 Iowa Statewide Waste Characterization Study, a 50 percent increase from the last study in 2011. The study, conducted about every six years, looks at what types of trash, recyclables and compostables Iowans send to the landfill.

For the study, materials received at 15 Iowa landfills and solid waste transfer stations were sorted into 61 categories within nine separate material types, with distinctions made between residential trash and industrial and commercial waste.

The second most landfilled item, plastic film, wrap and bags, increased by 15 percent over findings from 2011. However, the amount of landfilled corrugated cardboard dropped by about 50 percent since the last study.

The study also looked at the economic impact of increased diversion of recyclable paper, plastic, metal and glass commonly collected through curbside and drop-off recycling programs. Based on regional market prices at the time of the study (October 2017), the value of the common recyclable paper and containers Iowans are landfilling is more than \$60 million.

"Should these materials be diverted, processed and sold to manufacturers for the production of new products, it's estimated nearly 6,000 jobs could be created," says Tom Anderson with the DNR's Land Quality Bureau.

Findings from the reports are used to identify initiatives and programs to not only reduce waste creation, but also reduce waste headed to landfills. Funding for the study comes from a portion of the solid waste tonnage fee through the Solid Waste Alternatives Program.

See the report at *www.iowadnr.gov/FABA* under Studies & Reports or contact the DNR's *Tom Anderson at 515-725-8323* or *tom.anderson@dnr.iowa.gov*.



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mag trash are E beca Susta follow beau throy place statio repre back amou cans aren' facult beaut Solar powered trash can compactors pay for themselves within a year by reduced labor for waste collection staff. The compactors hold five times as much waste as traditional cans and can be checked online to see if they are full.

> IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY.

LIVE GREEN!

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ISU Lives Green with Solar Trash Compactors

KIMA STAT

BY HALEY KNUDSEN

Take a stroll around Iowa State University's campus and see towering architecture complemented with magnificent landscapes. However, one thing you won't see is trash. Tucked throughout these defining campus treasures are Bigbelly solar trash compactors.

"They are a unique technology, but they are valuable because they are effective," says Merry Rankin, Director of Sustainability at Iowa State.

The initial installment of the compactors in 2009 was followed by a plethora of benefits. They keep campus beautiful by providing those on campus with easy access to throw away trash. Then in 2012, there was an initiative to place the solar compactors in the residence hall areas.

The university has taken on the task of wrapping the black stations with colorful images depicting ISU mascot Cy. These represent the many ways students can get involved, relating back to the student who is encouraged to throw away trash.

"I think this raises awareness and has decreased the amount of litter around campus," Rankin says.

Staff was surprised when the bee presence near trash cans greatly diminished. By having self-contained units, bees aren't attracted to open food. This is beneficial to students, faculty and guests with bee allergies.

Although Bigbellys increase safety and keep campus beautiful, the most beneficial aspect of the solar compactors

is the financial savings.

In 2016, student government had an outdoor enhancement initiative to replace 45 traditional trash cans with solar compactors, totaling 127 units campus-wide.

Within a year, the \$4,000 trash compactors pay for themselves. This happens through savings in time and resources with crews who are responsible for trash can maintenance. Otherwise, crews have to tediously check to see how full trash cans are on a regular basis.

"The savings are the reason why the trash compactors have grown so much," says Rankin.

BigBelly solar trash compactors work by using energy generated from solar panels on top of the self-contained unit and compacting trash so it doesn't have to be frequently disposed. They can hold five times more trash than regular cans because of this.

The university can check online through a cloudconnected system to see if trash cans are full and send crews out accordingly. The university collects approximately 60 tons of trash annually, according to Les Lawson, manager of Campus Services.

The compactors serve as an advertisement to show people that campus should be kept clean.

"It's been great to let students know about keeping campus beautiful and the Live Green! initiative," she says.

Admiration & Legacy

Find a volunteer project or post your own event at *www.iowodnr.gov/volunteer* or call *515-725-8261*.



PARKING LOT HELPS REDUCE EROSION AND FLASH FLOODING IN SQUAW CREEK WHILE FILTERING POLLUTANTS -- CITY OF AMES

Spring rains are inevitable, as are puddled parking lots. What do you do? Make the pavement porous.

The Ames City Hall parking lot is the latest permeable paver project in the city. Permeable pavers allow rainwater to seep into the ground faster to reduce flash flooding and erosion. In 2010 a water main broke under the flooded Squaw Creek, forcing hundreds to evacuate their homes and the whole city to lose drinking water for a day. The parking lot at city hall needed replaced, and an opportunity was presented.

The State Revolving Fund is a partnership between the DNR and the lowa Finance Authority that provides funding to water quality projects and needed infrastructure, including wastewater loans.

"When cities apply for wastewater loans, they're eligible to apply for a water resource restoration sponsored project," says Lee Wagner, DNR project manager for the SRF. He says it must address local water quality concerns within a watershed where the wastewater treatment plant is located. In the end, the SRF provided \$374,000 for the project, while the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship provided \$100,000 through their Water Quality Initiative. The City of Ames covered the rest of the costs amounting to over \$500,000, and a high school class provided the labor to plant the lot with pollinator-friendly native species. There are four bioretention cells located in the parking lot that can treat over 147,000 gallons of stormwater per rain event. Bioretention cells are depressed grassy areas often covered in native plant species that capture and filter stormwater pollution runoff and minimize local flooding. They are useful in areas where soil doesn't adequately drain. On asphalt, water pools and runs to the nearest storm drain, picking up debris along the way. The pavers allow water to naturally seep back into the groundwater. It is estimated the new system will remove 1,863 pounds of suspended solids per year from Squaw Creek.

JASPER COUNTY LAKE TO UNDERGO EXTENSIVE RENOVATION

Mariposa Lake is the most highly used county-owned recreation area in Jasper County. Over 17,000 people visit annually to fish, camp, picnic and hike. After waiting nearly 20 years for its shot at being restored, now is its time to shine

"You're going to have a brand new lake," says Keri Van Zante. Director of the Jasper County Conservation Board, who adds this is a chance to make the entire park a destination.

During restoration, tons of sediment will be removed to deepen the lake, and added fish habitat will improve the fishery. Root balls, rock piles and a fishing jetty are slated to be put in place to provide hiding spots for fish and popular spots for anglers.

Camping and hiking options will be added, as well as a boat ramp. Historically, boats were not allowed on Mariposa Lake, but after the renovations when the lake is deepened, they will be.

The restoration project will cost about \$2 million, but only \$120,000 will need to be covered by Jasper County. The rest was funded mainly through a DNR lake restoration grant, fish habitat funding and a Resource Enhancement and Protection grant. Jasper County Pheasants Forever contributed \$500 towards the signs and the Jasper County Soil and Water Conservation District contributed \$200.

REAP grants enhance and protect lowa's natural and cultural resources. In this case, the grant will fund new signage around the lake to educate students and visitors about the renovation process and its impact.

Pictures and a fun activity or call to action are included to help visitors visualize the renovation process and what the area might have looked like before it was a lake.

The signs will cover water quality, sediment treatment, woodlands, native vegetation, fish habitat and pollinators. They will all be related to water quality, a required part of curriculum for Jasper County 6th and 7th graders. Over 500 students go to Mariposa Lake for field trips every year.

Can the pavers hold up to an lowa winter?

"Much like a concrete mix, they've been made for our climate specifically and can handle our winters," says Tracy Warner, municipal engineer for Ames.

Plowing is no problem, but salt and definitely sand causes issues and can't be used, and the lot must be vacuumed out once or twice a year to ensure water can flow.

Pavers are removable, making it easier and far less costly to repair structures underneath compared to breaking and re-laying concrete or asphalt.

For more on SRF projects, visit *iowasrf.com* or contact Lee Wagner at (515)725-0992, *lee.wagner@dnr.iowa.gov*



MARIPOSA LAKE PHOTO BY JASPER COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD; AMES CITY HALL PARKING LOT, CELE

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Flora & Fauna

The Nest Invading Brown-headed Cowbird (Molothrus ater)

The parenting skills of a cowbird frees up plenty of "me time" for the adults. They are one of about 100 bird species that let others raise their young by secretly laying an egg in plain sight.

YOUR HOUSE IS MY HOUSE

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Instead of building a nest, cowbirds locate a nest of a different bird species, roll an existing egg out of that nest and lay another in its place. This brood parasite behavior likely developed because the birds were historically nomadic, following bison herds for the insects they'd stir up. By leaving their eggs behind for others to raise, adult cowbirds had freedom to follow their food. They are not picky about who fosters their young, laying eggs in nests of more than 220 other bird species. Usually they choose a species slightly smaller than themselves, such as redwing blackbirds or robins. A female may lay over 30 eggs in a breeding season.

NIGHTMARE NEST

Sometimes nest-owners recognize the large, spotted cowbird egg and desert the nest. Some remove the cowbird egg, destroy it or eject the invading fledgling after it hatches. These behaviors generally increase the success of the nest-owner's offspring, but not always. Cowbirds check on their deposited egg, and if found missing or destroyed, engage in "mafia behavior" destroying the remaining eggs, fledglings or the nest. The owners are forced to rebuild or build a new nest, and these replacement nests have a very high rate of re-parasitization by cowbirds.

BIG BIRD GETS THE MEAL

If the cowbird egg is not rejected, it generally hatches sooner and the fledgling develops faster than the host's offspring. This decreases the other chicks' chances of getting enough food to survive. However, cowbird chicks cannot survive on a vegetarian diet. Thus, species like berry-eating cedar waxwings (see the 2016 May/June issue) may kill the invading offspring due to the diet. The alcohol from the fermenting fruit is too toxic for the cowbird chick's digestive system to process, and when that chick dies the host parents are free to feed their own babies. Studies estimate only 3 percent of cowbird eggs result in adults.

FACE IN THE CROWD

Cowbirds travel with groups of blackbirds, starlings and grackles, and are commonly seen in yards or at feeders. Although they don't usually winter in Iowa, many cowbirds return for the breeding season in March or April.



Hog Heaven Smoked Carp

Those experienced with catching monster-sized carp know these powerful fish can make thrilling, reel-stripping runs—not only down to the line-backing, but clear to the arbor knot. But many people don't cat them. With one bite of this recipe, you'll wonder how so many have missed this treat.

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As for its much maligned status, "I have no idea why," says chef Paul Murray of tastymeat.net, who lists carp on his top eight meats to smoke. "Carp meat is firm, medium-fatty, medium-white and has a wonderful sweet taste, with what I can only describe as floral overtones," he says, adding that brining removes any fishy tasting oils—even from darker meat along the lateral lines.

And this recipe takes flavor even further, infusing the soul essence of smoked pork to these hog-heavy fish as if they were wrapped in an invisible blanket of bacon. The savory, succulent result will have you stalking carp on your next fishing foray. used for the brine as a rub for the pork. Place dry-rubbed pork in the refrigerator for same duration as the fish.

- Remove fish from brine and pat dry with paper towels.
- Smoke the pork roast and fish for 4 to 6 hours on low heat of 180°, using presoaked hickory or apple wood chips. Place fish on the bottom rack underneath the roast so pork drippings fall onto the fish.

Start the pork roast at the same time as the carp. This is a dry smoke process, so no need for a water pan in the smoker. The pork drippings impart wonderful flavor to the fish.

- Smoke until carp reaches an internal temperature of 145' to 180'.
- Debone the carp and serve alone hot or chilled, add to your favorite dip. eat on a cracker or serve as a sandwich.



DNR Staff Approved!

DNR Deputy Director Bruce Trautman provided this recipe. He brings his smoked fish to the office where it is a hit with staff.

One 10-pound fileted or whole carpgutted, scaled and head and tail removed but with skin on 1 gallon of water 2 cups salt 2 cups brown sugar 1/4 cups Cajun seasoning One 10-pound pork roast Hickory or apple wood chips

 In a large pot, combine the brine mixture of water, salt, brown sugar and Cajun seasoning. Stir to dissolve. Add the fish and brine the carp for 12 to 24 hours in the refrigerator. Use your favorite dry rub seasoning or the same dry ingredients for the succulent recipe featured here. (For a canned amur recipe, see lowo Outdoors July/ August 2012.)



Notes From the Field

BY JEFF SWEARNGIN



THE CALL YOU NEVER WANT TO GET

To encompass all bureaus within the DNR, an executive decision is revamping Warden's Diary. Beginning this issue, "Notes From the Field" will replace Warden's Diary to highlight experiences from various DNR staff while afield fulfilling the DNR mission and serving lowans. Erika Billerbeck, who commonly wrote Warden's Diary, still serves as a conservation officer. Jeff Swearngin, Chief of the DNR Law Enforcement Bureau, has contributed the first edition of "Notes From the Field."

will probably never forget the afternoon of Nov. 11, 2017. I had just settled into my tree stand on my property in Davis County for an archery hunt. I have not shot a deer for a number of years, but look forward to the camaraderie of hunting with my family and friends. I look forward to the sights and smells of the fall timber, the way my heart still pounds when I see a deer even though I always let them pass these days. I tell myself I may shoot one this year, but I know I probably won't. That part drives my grandson crazy. Oh to be young again. As chief of the DNR's Law Enforcement Bureau, I always have my phone with me. As I settled in for my afternoon hunt, I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket. I pulled it free and saw it was one of my district supervisors. As a gray squirrel scolded me from a branch above my head, I answered and was told, "We just had an officer involved in a shooting."

another in the 1950s when some commercial fishermen rammed an officer's canoe and fled the scene, and once in the late 1960s when an officer wounded a suspect. As a law enforcement officer, the thought of having to use a weapon in the defense of yourself or another never leaves

I nearly dropped the phone.

In my years as a field officer, I had to draw my weapon a few times, but fortunately, other than at the range or to dispatch a wounded animal, I never had to fire it. In the 125-year-plus history of conservation officers in Iowa, this was the first officer-involved fatal shooting. Looking through the records, there are only a handful of times where a weapon was fired at a suspect. Among the notables was back in 1899 when an officer was charged with carrying a revolver while arresting a poacher (In the very early years conservation officers had no police powers and couldn't carry guns. That law was eventually changed), your mind, My wife always tells me that she tries to put that thought out of her mind when I leave the house every morning. Unfortunately, the reality of today's world is not lost on DNR conservation officers. We all hear the news of gun violence. That November day, the violence hit home.

After a situation like this, there are always questions about the duties of a conservation officer. DNR officers are peace officers, fully certified through the State of Iowa. All are graduates of the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy, just like local police officers and county sheriff's deputies. They can enforce any state law in Iowa, from a traffic violation to a domestic assault case. Yet their primary duty is enforcement of laws related to hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, commercial fishing, ATVs and snowmobiles. They also inspect taxidermists, game breeders, wildlife rehabbers and bait dealers. They investigate outdoor recreation accidents. If a hunter falls from a tree stand, someone gets shot in the field or two boats collide on a waterway, a conservation officer leads the investigation. They carry credentials as a Deputy Federal Game Warden that allows them to go out of state to cite an offender.

But the job isn't all about law enforcement. Outdoor education and communication are a huge part of the job. They teach hunter safety education courses in their Not

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counties each year. They also take part in mentored hunting activities for youths, outdoor skills workshops, fishing clinics, Youth Hunter Education Challenge. Scholastic Clay Trap Program and National Archery in the Schools Program. They talk to civic groups, give programs at local Izaak Walton Leagues, speak on local radio programs, appear on television news shows and write articles for local newspapers. They have to be fiexible and willing to change their schedules to accommodate all the demands on their time. An officer may be out checking hunting licenses in the morning, get called to a hunting accident midday and have a boating accident that evening. Their jobs are like the Iowa weather-always changing.

. . . .

Officers typically cover a one- or two-county territory. That does not mean they never leave their territory. Being state peace officers, they can go anywhere in the state to assist some project that may be occurring or help cover a vacancy. If you have ever attended the Winter Games at the Iowa Great Lakes, you have probably seen a number of officers from across the state

In their home territories, officers often work alone, with back-up many miles away. To combat this, many form close working relationships with local police or sheriff's departments. It's not uncommon for a conservation officer to call on one of these other officers to assist with a situation. And conservation officers are also called to back-up city or county officers.

many others, checking hunting and fishing licenses and meeting with a trapper to tag otters. But the day changed drastically. The individual raised his gun, and my officer was forced to fire in self defense.

Following this incident, questions arose as to why conservation officers have rifles, and why do they have guns at all? Unfortunately, those that break lawsespecially in the hunting world-are carrying weapons. An FBI study found conservation officers are nine times more likely to face injury or death than "traditional" police officers, and seven times more likely to be assaulted with a knife or firearm. A Wildlife Institute study found 82 percent of all conservation officers will be assaulted at least once in a 30-year career.

My officers patrol remote areas, alone and at all hours of the day and night. These officers are highly trained in firearms and defensive tactics and recertify several times annually, both day and night, in all weather conditions. They also take many other types of training throughout the course of a year. Unfortunately, the world of Andy Griffith in Mayberry no longer exists, if it ever did. That is why DNR conservation officers are fully armed.

Most interactions with sportsmen and women are positive. After all, these people are spending a day at the lake, trying to shoot a duck or taking a youngster out for their first fishing trip. Iowa conservation officers are passionate about protecting the natural resources of this great state. We are all hopeful that another incident like the one that took place last November never comes our way again, but if that call for assistance comes, our officers will answer if.

That was precisely what occurred on that fateful November morning. A small-town police department contacted one of my officers asking to assist with a wanted individual with a gun. The officer started the day like



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