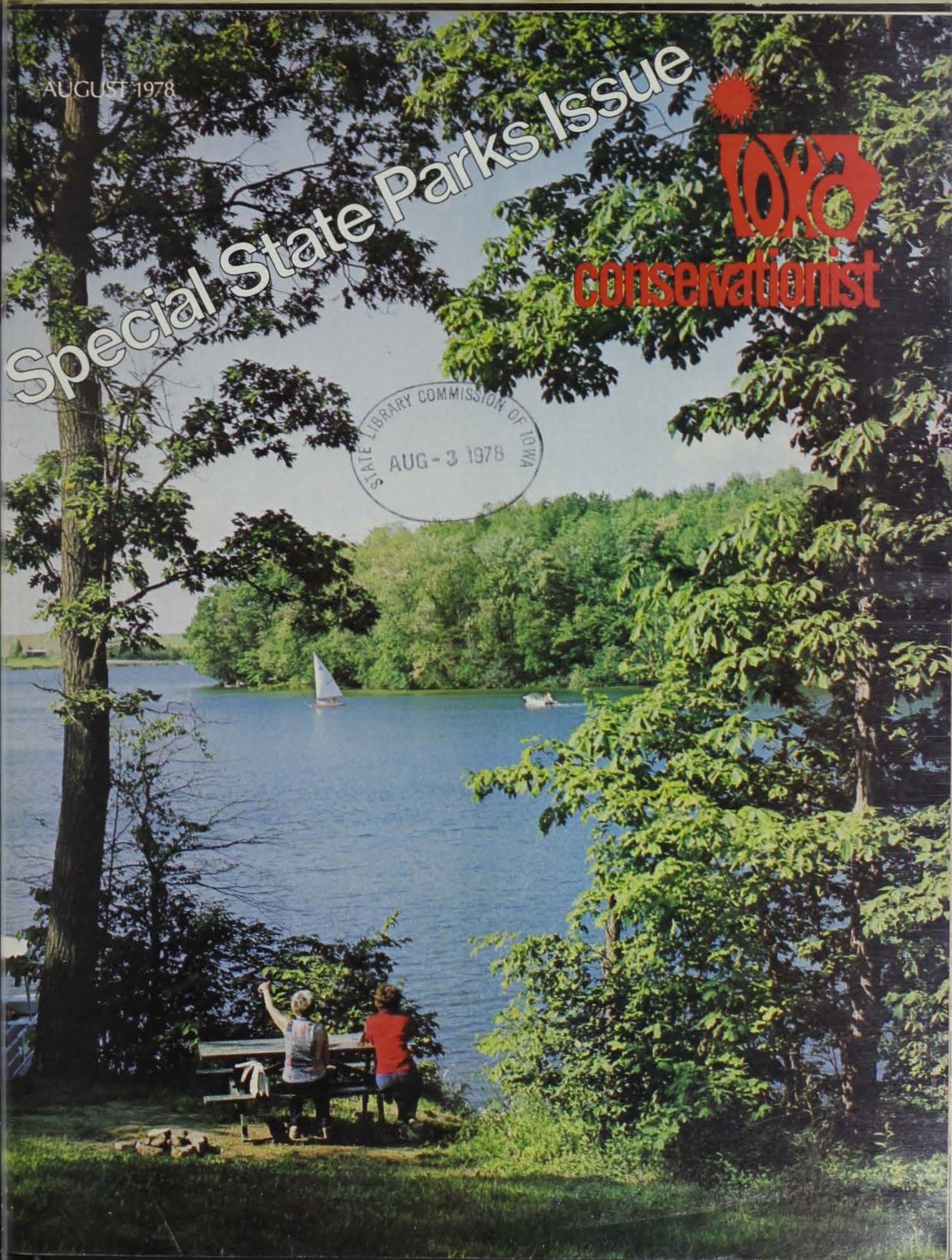


AUGUST 1978

# Special State Parks Issue

  
**IOWA**  
**conservationist**







## conservationist

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Cover Photo of Lake Macbride by Ron Johnson

*All persons are entitled to full and equal enjoyment of the recreational opportunities, privileges and advantages available in Iowa's great outdoors.*

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# Early twentieth century dream: **Lake Macbride** Reality to present

BY ROBERT MIDDENDORF  
FISHERIES BIOLOGIST

**T**ODAY Macbride State Park and Lake is one of Iowa's most popular state owned recreation centers. Located in Johnson County west of the town of Solon it provides opportunity for varied year-round outdoor activities for close to one million persons annually.

## *Events Leading to Development*

In the early twentieth century confusion existed on how to correlate recreational facilities provided by the state with conservation of soil, surface water and woodlands. From this confusion came the idea of preparing a comprehensive statewide conservation plan. The Iowa General Assembly in 1931 adopted a resolution which was approved by Governor Dan Turner. It instructed the then named State Board of Conservation and State Fish and Game Commission to collaborate on preparation of a twenty-five year conservation plan for development of parks and lakes.

Johnson County civic groups, State University of Iowa personnel and other individuals had long dreamed of having a lake in the county. Of particular interest was the beautiful rugged, heavily wooded valleys of Mill and Jordan Creeks west of Solon. In 1932 this area was recommended for inclusion in the state's lake development plan. Instrumental in securing this action was Jay "Ding" Darling, Iowa's foremost conservationist and cartoonist. A plan of construction was then developed by the State Board of Conservation and consulting engineer, Jacob Crane.

In 1933 the Iowa City Chamber of Commerce asked the state to sponsor the plan for immediate conversion of the area into a state park and lake. Permission was given to proceed and a committee of members was appointed to take charge of the project. Options were secured on 800 acres of land at an average price of \$45 per acre. The enormous amount of footwork and travel necessary in obtaining the options was handled by Mr. A. A. Welt. Money for eventual payment was achieved through sale of 132 lots for cottage sites, located on a 40 acre peninsula near the junctions of Mill and Jordan Creeks. All lands purchased, with exception of cottage sites, were turned over to the state title free for development of a park.

## *Historical Interests*

Mill Creek received its name from a water mill constructed by Anthony Sells in 1839. It is believed to have been the first inland mill in Iowa and pioneers for miles around brought in their grain to be ground into flour and grist. It operated on the site until the close of the Civil War. Then a flood washed out the dam and damaged the mill. It was not rebuilt. At the time of park land purchase it was being used as a barn for hay storage.

About this same time, during the mid 1800's, a kiln was converting the area's vast stores of maple trees into charcoal. This charcoal was used by the Sinclair Company of Cedar Rapids for processing smoked meats.

On a lot in the cottage area was found a sink hole which many years earlier had been a cave. It was known as "Horse Thief Cave" as in pioneer days horses stolen from surrounding areas were found in the cave by search parties.

## *Reality of Park and Lake Construction*

Construction of original lake and park facilities stretched from November, 1933 into 1938. Much of the labor force was provided by federal programs to create jobs during the great depression. The State Conservation Board aided in park development and fifty thousand dollars was furnished by federal emergency funds for construction of a dam.

To house the labor force, a C.C.C. base camp for over 100 men was built in Solon, where they did their own camp housekeeping, cooking and repair of equipment. Included in their park development work was dam and spillway construction, clearing and making miles of foot trails around the park, working on a beach and assembling several hundred rock and brush fish shelters in the lake bed. They also built a custodian's home, lodge, beach, bath house and a stone piered bridge over Mill Creek, all out of native blocks of sandstone from Stone City. A W.P.A. program was utilized to cut, clear and burn trees in the lake bottom during the winters of 1933 and 1934.

Professor Floyd Nagler of the University of Iowa College of Engineering and a consultant for federal construction projects determined the type of earthen dam to be built. State and federal engineers agreed on a dam site location below the junction of Mill and Jordan Creeks at a natural gorge. When completed in the summer of 1935 it was 600 feet long and would impound nearly 200 acres of water at a maximum depth of 28 feet.

To select a park name a contest was held and over 600 entries from the surrounding area were submitted. The winning name was announced at park dedication ceremonies on Memorial Day, May 30, 1934. It was dedicated as Lake Macbride State Park in honor of the late Thomas Huston Macbride, President Emeritus of the University of Iowa, a noted botanist and educator of the area 40 years earlier.

Support facilities for the park were completed in 1937 and on June 15 it was officially opened to the public. Thousands of people came that day to "enjoy recreational pursuits at Iowa's most beautiful lake and park" as described in newspaper accounts.

Culmination of a dream to have a lake came true on June 15, 1938 with the last major event. Official opening to fishing took place at 5 o'clock in the morning. Hundreds of fishermen arrived early, waiting for park entrance gates to open, and cars were backed up for over a mile to get in.

In 1948 the Conservation Commission opened a furniture and woodworking shop adjacent to the custodian's residence. This shop turned out picnic tables, furniture, upholstered chairs and signs for all state parks in Iowa.





## Reconstruction and Expansion

Anticipating construction of a U.S. Corps of Engineers (Coralville Reservoir) flood control impoundment on the Iowa River north of Iowa City, a master plan to protect Lake Macbride from flooding and keep it as a separate entity was approved by the Conservation Commission in 1947. Then during the 1950's the Corps of Engineers purchased the additional lands necessary to implement this plan.

A first step leading to remedial work was taken with the lake drain being cranked open on October 17, 1956 and resulting drainage was completed in ten days. Fisheries personnel rescued game fish, then transported and restocked them in other lakes throughout Iowa.

Dam construction for a new and enlarged lake began almost immediately and was completed in November of 1957. A new spillway was blasted from a solid rock bluff and dam height was raised 28 feet by adding to the top and sides of the old dam. Timber was cleared from land which would be inundated by increased lake size. Then in December of 1957 the valve for impounding water was closed. Water overflowed the spillway for the first time in January, 1960, thereby creating Iowa's largest state owned artificial lake at 950 acres.

Increasing lake level 28 feet forced a major relocation program of nearly all facilities. Changes included relocating piece by piece the original bath house to a higher location 500 yards east where the new beach was set; a parking lot and boat ramp put in near the old beach location; a road built to a new north park main entrance, along with other road changes being necessitated due to flooding of existing areas. Footpaths were rebuilt and relocated around the lake corresponding with lake level. A park custodian's residence was built at the new main entrance area and the original one was maintained for the manager of the cabinet and sign shop.

Homes in the private cottage area which would be below lake water level were purchased and owners were permitted to repurchase them for movement to higher locations. A waste water treatment plant was built along with sewage lines, septic tanks and filter beds.

A Moose Club, long popular with local residents, was torn down for lack of a suitable relocation site.

On September 2, 1959 the Conservation Commission accepted from the Corps of Engineers, by license, 1118 acres of land purchased for park reconstruction. All remedial work for redevelopment, paid for by the Corps, was officially completed in January, 1960. The climax for a second Lake Macbride came in May, 1960 when fishing and the new beach were opened to the public for the first time.

## Post Reconstruction

In the years following reconstruction popularity of Macbride for outdoor recreation has increased year after year.

Problems have arisen, but the Conservation Commission has continued to expand on development of land, facilities and maintenance capabilities as funds are available.

To meet the demand of increased usage new access roads, parking lots, picnic areas, shelters and latrines have been built. Primitive and modern camping areas on the north and south park areas have been improved and expanded. A new boat storage and launching ramp for the ever increasing sailboat enthusiasts was constructed. At various locations around the lake earthen jetties were installed for fishermen use, and windbreak protection of shoreline and periodic placement of riprap for shoreline protection have been undertaken. Recently snowmobile trails have been laid out and marked throughout a vast portion of the park.

In 1963 a road was built to the north end of the dam. At a site overlooking the dam and Coralville Reservoir a fisheries management station was built and staffed to serve fishing waters in east central Iowa. Fishing is one of the major attractions of Lake Macbride, with over 60,000 angler day trips annually. Each year maintenance stockings of walleye and channel catfish are introduced to perpetuate populations of those species. Other species available for catch are bluegill, largemouth bass, bullhead and crappies which are taken in large numbers. □

*The author wishes to thank the Cottage Reserve Corporation for permission to use material from their book, "A History of Lake Macbride State Park". Also to those people who allowed me access to their collections of long time newspaper accounts of Macbride, thanks are extended.*





# STORM LAKE

## It's a Natural!

BY LANNIE MILLER  
FISHERIES BIOLOGIST

WHEN SOMEONE mentions Iowa's natural lakes, most people immediately think of the "Great Lakes" in Dickinson County. One of the natural lakes in Iowa that is often overlooked for fishing, camping, and water sports is Storm Lake, located in Buena Vista County. Storm Lake has 2,830 surface acres of water with a maximum depth of 14 feet. The lake has a variety of physical features which includes three islands, submerged rock piles, rock

fishing jetties and sand beaches. Storm Lake also boasts of four access areas for boaters and fishermen with a total of seven concrete boat ramps which provide easy access to the lake on even the busiest weekends.

Fishing at Storm Lake is like sitting down to a smorgasbord meal. Anglers are offered a variety of species on which to test their skills, the two most sought after species being walleye and channel catfish. Walleye fishing usually peaks shortly after the ice goes out, tapers off during the hotter months and peaks again in the fall.

Leadheads, either plain or tipped with a minnow or night crawler, are a common choice by anglers for catching Storm Lake walleye. Some walleye anglers use large minnows or chubs fished near or on the bottom with good results.

Channel catfish start feeding when the water temperature reaches about 60-65° F. and will continue feeding until late fall. Crayfish, fish entrails, live or dead minnows, night crawlers or prepared baits are all good baits for catching a stringer of catfish in Storm Lake. Fishing the

windswept points in the evening hours has put many a catfish in the skillet for the knowledgeable fisherman. Other species of fish that are taken at Storm Lake include bullheads, crappie, white bass and northern pike.

Some popular fishing spots on Storm Lake are the rock jetties near the lake patrol station and Chautauqua Park, the new marina area on the southwest side of the lake, the islands and Frank Starr Park.

The next time someone suggests fishing one of Iowa's natural lakes, think of Storm Lake . . . It's a natural!

□





# Ahquabi

BY AL GANDY

PARK RANGER

**A**HQUABI STATE PARK consists of 774 acres of wooded hills and valleys centrally located in the state 17 miles south of Des Moines, or 5 miles south of Indianola off Highway 65-69 in Warren County. The area is abundant with stately white oak trees, some estimated between four and five hundred years old. Other trees native to Iowa range throughout the park.

Nestled in a valley is a 130-acre man-made lake. Construction of this lake began in 1934 by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) and it was known locally as "Oak Lake" until its inauguration in 1935. Then the area was named "Lake Ahquabi" and it was officially opened and dedicated May 29, 1936. The lake was opened to recreational fishing in 1937. The name "Ahquabi" is of Indian origin and means "resting place". The

"a's" are pronounced long as in arm, the final "i" as in fatigue, the accent on the second syllable — Ah-qua'-bi. The Sauk and Fox Indians spent regular winters trapping this region and camped in what is now the park.

The lake is stocked with walleye, largemouth bass, channel cat, crappie, bluegill, bullhead and redear sunfish. Many fishermen and women have known the joy and thrill of outsmarting "old mister whiskers," the channel cat. Many have tipped the scale in the 15- to 20-pound range. The younger folk, however, may be just as pleased and proud of their string of panfish. Also not to be overlooked, is the anticipation of the bass fisherman easing in and around lily pads, reeds, and shoreline. Waiting for the strike of a lunker bass can be quite exciting. The lake is restricted to six horsepower motors and a boat ramp and bait shop are located on the lake. Swimming is permitted only at the supervised beach, where lifeguards are on duty from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Picnic areas are located conveniently on the north and south sides of the lake. There are also three open shelters accessible to the public at no charge. These are operated on first arrival basis. No reservations taken.

An enclosed stone lodge sits on a hilltop overlooking the lake and is available for daily rental during the summer months by reservation through the park ranger. Rental hours are 10:00 a.m.



State Parks Profile Series



to 10:00 p.m. This rustic building with tables, benches, fireplace and kitchenette is popular for family reunions. Weddings have also been performed here among nature's surroundings.

There are 16 miles of wooded, rocky foot trails, where wildlife may be observed by the quiet, patient hiker. It is not unusual to see deer, of which there are many in the park. They have been known to come within yards of the quiet camera bug. Other wildlife consists of fox, squirrel, rabbit, coyote, raccoon, opossum, beaver, mink, muskrat, skunk, and woodchuck.

Ahquabi is a great area for birdwatching from the small species up to the largest. Here one might witness the breathtaking dive and plunge into the lake by an osprey, seeking a fish that was sighted from far above. Or perhaps the mourning dove going through a fake injury by floundering and flapping her wings to lure your attention away from her nesting site.

In the winter, there is something for everyone at Ahquabi, including ice fishing, snowmobiling on the 16 miles of marked trails, cross country skiing, ice skating, or a fast plummeting ride on sled or toboggan down the large hill and out on to the frozen lake. Many an afternoon, the peals of laughter and squeals of delight from all ages can be heard cutting the crisp winter air as they go zooming down the hill. With a day of these activities, a steaming cup of chocolate is welcomed around the campfire. All too soon the sun has dropped, the day fast coming to an end and a tired but happy group is loading equipment for the homeward trip.

When spring begins to burst forth, the activity picks up. Plants and wildflowers begin making an appearance. Trees are budding and soon display a coat of green. A redbud tree in full bloom in May is a sight you will long remember. Mushroom hunters arrive and head for their secret spots, in hopes that no one else has found their treasure of tasty treats.

Newborn animals are testing their wobbly legs and exploring their new world. You may come across one of these young animals or birds that live in the area, perhaps a fawn or nest of rabbits. Do not touch, handle or disturb in any way. They are not lost or abandoned. Mother is a short distance away, soon to return and care for her young.

Spring disappears and summer arrives. With it comes another group of people who enjoy swimming, boating, fishing, picnicking, hiking, and camping. Picture a sizzling steak, hot dog or burger, along with the smell of charcoal, as you watch the sunset with its brilliant array of color over the lake. You are just plain relaxing under a shade tree or perhaps basking in the sun. This is Ahquabi.

A modern camp area on the north side features 166 campsites, of which 36 have electrical hookups. Several sights are on the lakefront. Two modern shower houses, a sewer dump station, water hydrants, fire rings, picnic tables, and firewood are available in the camp area. No reservations are taken for camping, it's a first come-first serve basis. Check-in personnel are on duty at the camp area entrance for registration from 6:00 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. A night watchman is in the area, he locks the park gates at 10:30 p.m. No entry is allowed until 4:00 a.m. He also assists in the event of an emergency and helps maintain quiet after 10:30 p.m. for the benefit of all campers.

The National Hot Air Balloon Races are held annually in August in Indianola. Dates of the races are available through the Indianola Junior Chamber of Commerce. What a colorful and spectacular sight, seeing large numbers of bright colored balloons (no two identical) drifting leisurely across the countryside. Often they are low enough that you can wave and call out to the balloonist.

When summer fades away, there is a cool nip in the air. Before we know it, "Old Jack Frost" has paid a visit. The green leaves have changed their color to brilliant shades of red, yellow, orange, and brown. We are awestruck as we stroll through the autumn splendor. Mother Nature has again outdone herself.

Have you taken advantage of what your state parks offer? There are 51 state-owned and operated parks in Iowa. Each is interesting and enjoyable during all four of the seasons.

Don't delay! Plan a trip today. Make it a point to visit these areas on a weekday and miss the hustle and bustle of the weekend crowd. It will be a gratifying and memorable experience and one you will want to repeat. □

*Photos by the Author*





# Mini-Touring Southern Iowa

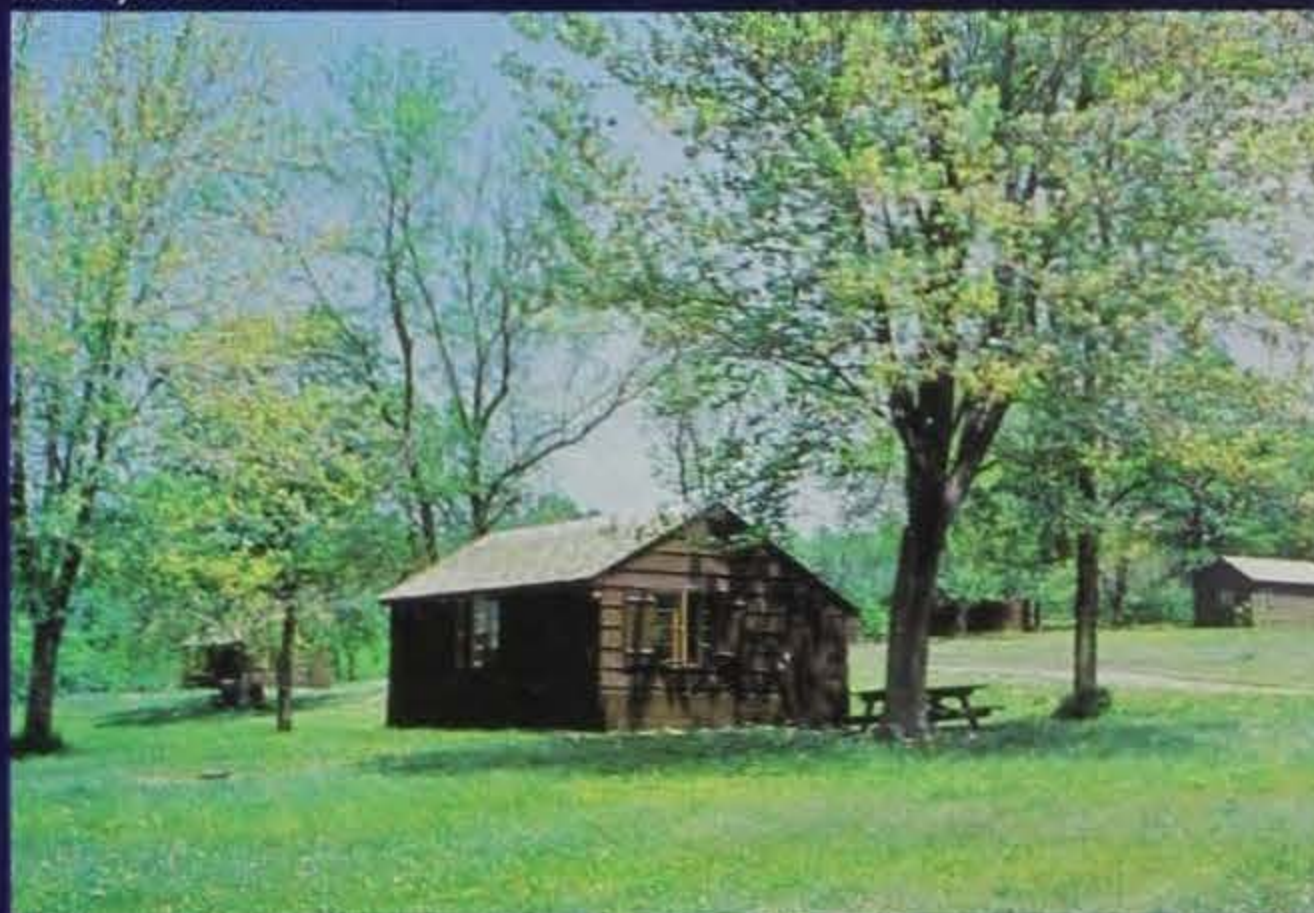
**H**AVE YOU EVER TRIED a family mini-tour vacation to Iowa's State Parks? There are 51 state parks that offer camping facilities and seven have overnight cabin rentals available. The cost of this type of vacation can be very economical and there are plenty of fun-filled activities to try. You may want to plan your trip to coincide with some special event in a certain locale such as the Tulip Festival in Pella or the Nordic Fest at Decorah. This will add even more to an already fun-packed itinerary.

The following is a trip your family may want to try in southern Iowa. Let's begin our tour in northwest Davis County at Lake Wapello State Park. This beautiful 1,168-acre park, heavily wooded by predominantly white and bur oak is located six miles west of Drakesville. Drakesville hosts two gala events during the summer that attract big crowds for a quaint little town with a population of only 160 residents. The Davis County Old Soldiers and Settlers Reunion is held in late July and the Country and Old Time Music Festival is an annual event that is scheduled for September 15-17 this year. Approximately 15,000 onlookers gather in the town park annually for the three-day event to hear the various groups from around the country perform this authentic form of American music.

Lake Wapello State Park is also an ideal choice for a family outing. Facilities include 128 modern campsites, 12 modern cabins, a 287-acre lake, supervised swimming beach, hiking trails, and a concession where rental of paddleboats, canoes, fishing boats, and outboard motors is available. Camping rates are \$3 per

night and an additional \$1 for an electrical hookup. Cabins which accommodate a family of four comfortably are rented for \$15 per day. The weekly rate is \$75.

*Photo by Ron Johnson*



Reservations can be secured by contacting the park ranger — Lake Wapello State Park, Rural Route #1, Drakesville, Iowa 52552, Telephone 515/722-3371. Six of the cabins were recently built and the remaining six have been refurbished and are in tip-top condition. The cabins are within easy walking distance to the sandy beach.

Despite its modest size, Lake Wapello and trophy largemouth bass are synonymous. Some of the top bass anglers in the Midwest try their expertise here because of its reputation for producing lunker-sized fish. Wapello also is well-known for its fine crappie, bluegill, and channel catfish angling. Boat motors up to six h.p. are permitted.

Our next stop will be Honey Creek State Park. An interesting and scenic route is to take Iowa Highway 273 from the Lake Wapello Park entrance and travel towards Drakesville until you come to the junction of Davis County

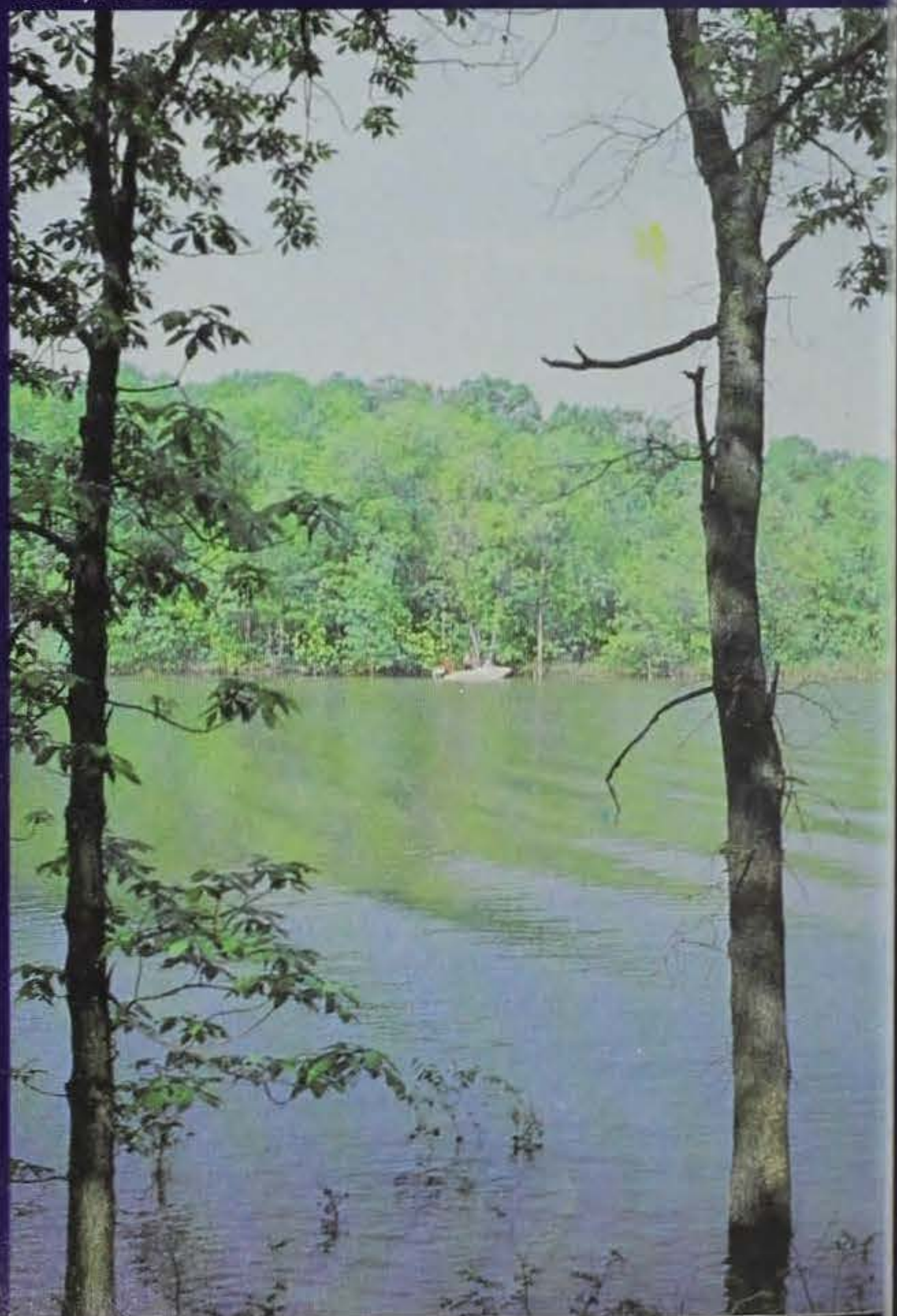
Road J3T. This recently paved road will take you through the old coal mining communities of Paris, Unionville, and on to Moravia. From here, go west

on Appanoose County Road J-18 until you reach the Honey Creek directional sign where you will turn south. The total mileage from Lake Wapello is about 35 miles.

Honey Creek State Park is located on Iowa's largest body of water, 11,000-acre



*Photo by Ron Johnson*





# Iowa Parks

BY SONNY SATRE

County Road  
reach the  
directional sign  
turn south. The  
from Lake  
out 35 miles.  
k State Park is  
wo's largest  
11,000-acre

Rathbun Reservoir. If water-related activity is your cup of tea, you'll love Rathbun. Recreational boating and water skiing are popular activities here. Excellent boating facilities include 11 concrete boat ramps conveniently located



around the lake. There are two marinas for your boating needs — one at Buck Creek East which is located on the northeast section of the lake, and the South Fork marina, located on the southwest. Rathbun is also a top-notch haven for fishermen. Crappie and channel catfish provide the bulk of the action. Good catches of walleye and largemouth bass are also common. For the trophy angler, there are some line-snapping muskies to challenge your tackle. There are several bait and tackle shops located in the lake area.

While vacationing at Honey Creek, one facility you should plan to visit is the recently completed Rathbun Fish Hatchery located just below the dam area. Commission personnel are on hand to conduct tours for the public, explain the hatchery operations, and answer any other questions you might have. The six million dollar facility is acclaimed as one of the most modern warm-water hatcheries in the United

States. Fish species hatched here include channel catfish and walleye. Other species of fish raised are largemouth bass and northern pike/muskellunge hybrids.

Honey Creek State Park, which encompasses about 800 acres, in itself offers plenty of recreation opportunities. There are 134 modern campground sites. Other facilities include a six-lane concrete boat ramp for easy access to the lake, hiking trails, and shady picnic grounds including three shelters. More development is planned for the park in the near future (see July 1978 Iowa Conservationist for Master Development Plan for Honey Creek).

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also provides

campgrounds at five locations around the lake — Buck Creek East and West, Rolling Cove Area, South Fork Area, Bridgeview Area and the Island View Area.

Last but not least for this mini-vacation tour, a 30-mile journey will take us to a favorite for many in south-central Iowa, Red Haw State Park. Red Haw is located two miles east of Chariton just off U. S. Highway 34. Trees such as red haw (its namesake), oak, ash, maple, and pine are found throughout the park as well as encircling a pretty

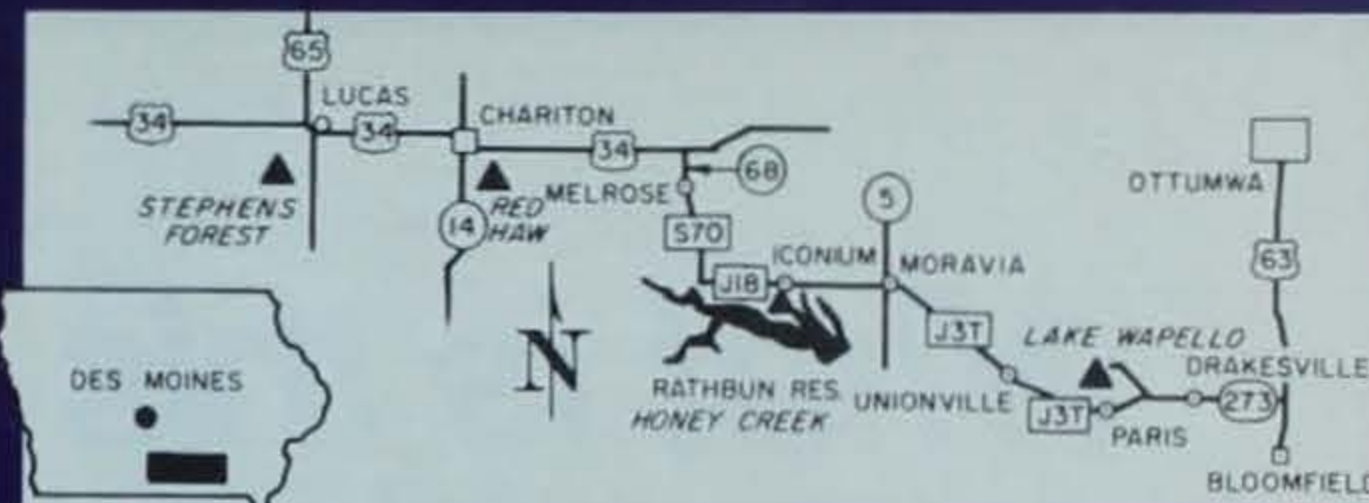


Photo by Ron Johnson



76-acre lake. With this picturesque setting, you cannot help but enjoy your stay here.

Facilities available in this serene 420-acre area include 80 shady campsites with modern facilities nearby, a supervised swimming beach, a bait and boat rental concession, and foot trails to explore.

Anglers in your group will find the water quality of the lake unusually clear for a man-made lake. The lake is renown for its excellent panfishing, especially for big bluegills. Other species providing rod-bending action include crappie, largemouth bass, and catfish. Only electric trolling motors are allowed on the lake as it is under 100 acres in size.

For the hikers and bicyclists in your family, there is a 14½ mile cinder and gravel surfaced trail running from Chariton to the Wayne County line. The trail is the abandoned Burlington & Northern Railroad line that the Lucas County Conservation Board converted into one of

Continued on Page 13



# What is this **GREAT** thing?

\* GREAT — Great River Environmental Action Team

THE CENTRAL FOCUS of the GREAT studies is to identify and resolve conflicts resulting from separate legislative actions of Congress which mandated that the Upper Mississippi River be managed in the national interest for commercial navigation and as a fish and wildlife refuge.

GREAT was formed because of increasing concern by conservationists and the general public over natural resource destruction resulting from the Corps of Engineers' channel maintenance activities, dredging and disposal, channel control structures, etc.

The "team" consists of multi-disciplinary representatives from the States of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Missouri in *equal partnership* with federal agencies including the Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation and other water resource oriented agencies. The Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission and the Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee serve as ex officio members. Special interest groups, including the Sierra Club and American Waterway Operators Association serve as advisors. Of special interest is the active involvement of the public throughout the entire effort.

The Iowa Conservation Commission has taken an active and leadership role in this effort. Personnel from the Fisheries, Wildlife, Waters, Parks, Forestry and Planning Sections are involved at all levels. We are working cooperatively to in-

crease overall understanding of this vast resource and to manage it in the best interest for Iowans and the nation.

Studies underway include: inventories of baseline data for fish, wildlife, recreation and water quality; side channel modification predictive models; mathematical models for predicting river hydraulics; market areas and beneficial uses for the dredged material; flood plain delineations; sediment and erosion control measures; long range recreation planning; providing for recreational use of dredged material; modifications of structures for better fishing habitat; creation of wildlife habitat; water levels manipulation for fish and wildlife management; dredging pilot studies; aesthetic management methods and more.

But what has GREAT done besides study? A lot. One of the original thrusts of GREAT was for early *action* programs. Communications have been opened and streamlined between management agencies and between agencies and the public. A GREATER understanding of the river has developed by all concerned. Coordinated channel maintenance activities insure environmental protection while providing for a reliable navigation channel. Backwater areas cut off from fresh oxygenated water have been re-opened. Sediment-carrying side channels have been modified. Recreational access channels to the main channel have been re-opened. Long range recreational needs have been identified. Reduced depth and width dredging has lowered dredging requirements and

associated environmental degradation. Dredged material has been put to productive uses including fill material, highway sanding, soil additives, recreation area development, etc. Some of the highly erosive areas along the shore and islands have been stabilized with riprap. New types of dredging equipment have been field tested.

The GREAT effort is well recognized and supported by Congress. Special appropriations have been given to undertake and continue the program to date. The states and agencies in addition make large contributions of staff, equipment, and expenses. Pending Locks and Dam #26 legislation has recognized the value of GREAT and its comprehensive coordinated planning and management approach. Other river/lake basins are also looking to the GREAT approach — New England Intercoastal Waterway, Great Lakes, Missouri River and others.

If you're a recreationist who uses the Mississippi River in the next few years, you will probably encounter biologists, engineers, planners, scientists, etc. collecting data and/or interviewing people. Please help out by participating where you can.

If you are interested in becoming involved or would like more information, contact: Wendy Thur, Public Participation Coordinator, GREAT II, 317 North Cody, LeClaire, Iowa 52753.

What is this GREAT thing? It is a good way to go about the business of studying and managing a tremendous natural resource — the Upper Mississippi River. □





g?

BY MARK C. ACKELSON  
MISSISSIPPI RIVER COORDINATOR





# PEREGRINE FALCON

(*Falco peregrinus*)



BY DEAN M. ROOSA

STATE ECOLOGIST

Photo by Michael L. Smith

**M**ANY PEOPLE, when asked to name their favorite bird, quickly respond "Peregrine Falcon". This is because the bird probably epitomizes all that is wild and free and because man has had a close relationship with this bird for over 2000 years. Prior to the invention of gunpowder, this bird was used for hunting. Falconry later became a popular sport in the Middle Ages among Europe's nobility and this bird could be flown only by royalty. Its bold, deep wingbeats and its thrilling dive or 'stoop,' clocked at over 200 miles per hour, make it an exciting bird to see fly. Its long, pointed wings, its malar stripe or 'mustache' and its large feet adapted for striking prey make it an exciting bird to see at close range. Wild and free would also characterize its nesting sites. Called 'eryies', the nests are made on sheer cliffs as found along sea coasts, in the mountains and in northeast Iowa.

The characteristics which separate falcons from all other species of birds are the notched beak for separating the vertebrae of prey and the baffles in the nostrils which can nearly close and prevent wind damage when in a high-speed dive.

Once quite common and widespread around the world, the numbers of this highly specialized bird suffered a catastrophic decline after the widespread use of chlorinated hydrocarbons and nearly disappeared as a breeding bird over vast areas, including the United States

east of the Mississippi River. It formerly nested, and may still nest, in the sheer cliffs of northeast Iowa, but the most recent report was from the mid-sixties. It still migrates through Iowa, especially along the Mississippi River. Three subspecies inhabit North America; two are endangered. They are all very

similar in appearance; crow-sized, or up to 20 inches in length, approximately 40 inches in wingspan and the female larger than the male.

Because its numbers dropped so rapidly throughout the world, it was placed on the federal endangered species list. In 1977, it was placed on the Iowa endangered species list. At one time, it was feared the bird might become extinct; this resulted in a program of captive breeding, centered at Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York. Biologists and falconers worked to learn the secrets which would help in the production of fertile eggs from captive birds. Success has been achieved and, after years of frustration, captive-bred birds are now being raised. In 1977, over 100 young peregrines were produced. Utilizing special techniques learned from the study of raptors, workers release these birds into the wild. In 1977, a landmark was reached when a captive-raised pair released several years ago nested and raised young in the wild. This important breakthrough may herald the beginning of a recovery period in which the Peregrine will once again grace the skies of Iowa. □



BY REX EMERSON

LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPERVISOR

## Warden's diary

TODAY I took a pound of coffee to the old man who lives down by the river. Maybe that will pay for some of the coffee I drink at his place. I think he puts an entire pound of coffee in the pot and just keeps adding water each day until it no longer colors the water.

When I got there he was mowing the yard. He said, "I have heard about dumb animals, but I ain't never heard of one that sowed grass seed in the spring and fertilized it so he could mow grass all summer!"

August means different things to different people. For some it is back to school. It's also State Fair time, and for some reason that is when the deer poaching starts. Actually, deer poaching started at State Fair time several years ago when almost all of the game wardens were sent to Des Moines to work at our fish and wildlife exhibit. Now we have only two or three officers working at the State Fair exhibit. The rest of them are out there to surprise some of the deer poachers.

To the fisherman, the hot month of August is a good time to go fishing at night when it is a little cooler. Under the cover of darkness some of them get a little careless about fishing legally. Those were the ones that we worked on last night.

Usually two officers will work together to boat the

river at night. This makes it easier, as one runs the motor while the other checks the fisherman. It's also safer for the officers, in case problems should arise. Sometimes we have to change the routine of our patrols to keep ahead of the violators. That is what we tried last night. Four of us put two boats into the Des Moines River about an hour after dark. The half moon was partly covered at times with thin clouds. We each wore a life preserver, and were ready to go. The first boat headed down river at about half throttle. They were going to check every fisherman they could find. The other officer and I headed up river to check fishermen in that direction for about one hour, and then we headed back down river. So, about an hour to an hour and a half after the first officers had checked the fishermen, they were surprised to be checked again by two more officers coming from the same direction. We hadn't tried this before, but it worked even better than we had thought it might.

About a quarter of a mile from our starting point we saw the light of a gas lantern on the bank. We pulled in to the bank, turned on our spotlight, and could see two people. Each person was holding a rod and reel with lines in the water. It turned out to be a man and wife, but

she didn't have a license. The other officers had checked his license and after they went on their way, the lady decided it would be safe to fish without a license.

On down the river we shut off the motor and drifted for a short time. We were talking about life preservers and how dangerous it really is not to have one when boating. That reminded me of an incident that happened last year on the Cedar River. One of our officers who can't swim too well had his life preserver lying on the bottom of the boat, like many people do. Suddenly they hit a log and he fell out. Fortunately he didn't panic. He held his breath and remembered that when you feel the bottom you should give a big push upward. This is what he did with all the strength he had. What he didn't know was that the water was only four feet deep. The other officer accompanying him reported that he came out of the water like a rocket headed for the moon. He wears his life preserver now when he gets into a boat.

We started the motor again as we rounded a bend in the river and could see a boat working the bank. They were pulling into the bank and then out into the river, and then back to the bank at another spot. We pulled right up beside them just as they were taking a fish off an untagged bank pole. When we introduced ourselves to them it was evidently a bit of a shock.

One of the two men in the boat jumped to his feet and pointing down the river in the direction the other officers had gone stammered, "But, you guys - But you - -". He quickly pointed up the river and said, "But how did you? Oh no - -" and he sat down.

It seemed like about half the people we checked were wrong. About 3:00 a.m. we found the other officers sacked out on a sand bar. We drank the rest of our lukewarm coffee and joined them until sunrise, when we started the long trip back to the cars. A life preserver makes a pretty good pillow when you're tired. Don't get caught without one. □

## TOURING IOWA PARKS

Continued from Page 9

the finest bicycling and hiking trails in the state. The trail begins in the southwest sector of Chariton, just south of U. S. Highway 34 Chariton Business district route. For further details, contact the Lucas County Conservation Board in Chariton, Telephone 515/774-4931.

While you're in this region, you should take time to visit Stephens State Forest — Lucas and White Breast Units. It's approximately an 11-mile drive west of Red Haw on U. S. Highway 34. After you pass the junction of U. S. Highway 65, there will be a sign (within a mile west of the town of Lucas) directing visitors to turn left into the Lucas Unit of the forest. To gain entrance to the White Breast Unit, go south two miles on U. S. Highway 65 and two miles west.

An auto tour through the forest is well worthwhile. You may catch a fleeting glimpse of a wild turkey or a white-tailed deer. The breath-taking scenery of this Ozark-like region is hard to visualize unless you see it yourself. The combined acreage of the Lucas and White Breast Units is over 2,500 acres of hilly, lush woodlands and other vegetation.

Primitive camping is permitted in both the Lucas and White Breast Units for which there is no charge. Both areas have some very good hiking trails and the White Breast Unit has some special backpacking trails. Fish ponds are located in each unit and are stocked with largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish. For further information on Stephens State Forest, two brochures are available — *Stephens State Forest* and *Stephens Backpacking Trails* — write to the Iowa Conservation Commission, Wallace Building, Des Moines 50319.

I hope you enjoy your mini-tour through southern Iowa as much as I did. Have a pleasant and safe trip. □





Photo by Ron Johnson

## Slow Motion Boating

BY STEVE MOORE

WATER SAFETY COORDINATOR

DO YOU ENJOY water skiing? Would you rather take a ride in a large outboard or inboard? No. Then consider a trip on one of Iowa's artificial lakes in a small boat or canoe.

Iowa law concerning artificial lakes allows you to have a "slow motion day" on many lakes in Iowa.

Since many of Iowa's artificial lakes are located in State Parks you may wish to rent a boat from the concessionaire there. Boat rentals regulated by the Iowa Conservation Commission are located in many parks offering canoes, row boats, motor boats, and paddle boats for a nominal fee. Rental operators will insure you have all necessary equipment aboard to comply with Iowa law.

Your favorite fishing pole may be an item to keep handy — just in case.

Of course, to you old hands that have been boating for years in your favorite spot a challenge exists in exploring new areas and adding new lakes to your list of favorites.

Factors which create stress or impair reaction time, such as the improper use of alcohol and addictive or harmful drugs, are increasingly recognized as an important aspect of water fatalities. Other stressors are the frequently unnoticed, yet decidedly detrimental effects of continued exposure to the sun, wind, vibration, noise, and other environmental factors. These most frequently affect people who are either unaccustomed to them, or in poor physical condition.

The cold water connection, or the both harmful and helpful effects of cold water, is an important part of this total picture.

Prepare yourself and don't let this read as your epitaph. The average fatal boating accident may occur as follows:

One or two older, experienced, weekend fishermen will put their small, low or unpowered and relatively unstable rowboat or canoe into a somewhat isolated and unpopulated lake or pond in late September or early May. They may or may not tell anyone where they are going. They probably cannot swim and may be in less than average physical condition. They will not wear PFDs, although they may carry Coast Guard-approved, floatable seat cushions in their boat. They will be wearing heavy clothing. They will probably have some alcoholic beverages with them. At approximately 4:00 in the afternoon they will stand or suddenly shift their balance in some way. The boat will capsize or tip enough to throw one or both into the cold water. Their actions in the next minute will determine life or death. Unless they have been specially prepared or trained, they will probably panic. If they have been drinking alcoholic beverages, they may be confused and disoriented. They may struggle and attempt to remove their heavy clothing or try to swim to the nearest safety. They will quickly lose heat and ability to function in cold water, especially if their capillaries have been expanded by consumption of alcohol. They may have massive cardiac arrest induced by the shock of cold water, lose consciousness, and rapidly sink to the bottom. It may be hours before anyone realizes they are in difficulty. It may be days before their bodies are found, if ever.

What can be done to prevent this particular type of accident? Understand and appreciate the inherent problems of small boat instability, plus accept the idea that the older we get, the more unstable we become. Tell someone where you are going and exactly when you will be back. Appreciate the fact that increased amounts of alcohol speed instability and disorientation, especially in colder water. In cold weather boating, always wear a PFD, and learn to swim. Note that insulated clothing, minimized movements, clear thinking, and a PFD provide the best possible defenses against cold water.

## LOOKIN' BACK

Ten years ago the



Conservationist took a look at the upcoming deer season. It would be the fourteenth season since deer hunting was once again open

to Iowans. During that time, thanks to dedicated wildlife management, the state's deer herd increased from approximately 10,680 to 22,870.

We also printed a note from a soldier who wanted to make sure he still received his magazine when he arrived for duty overseas. He was headed for Vietnam.

Twenty years ago the



magazine featured a story on that ageless Iowa controversy — mourning dove hunting. The Conservation Commission is

now specifically prohibited from setting a season on these fine gamebirds as a result of recent legislation.

Work was nearing completion on a 286 acre lake marsh in Guthrie County. It would be primarily designed for waterfowl hunting and would have a refuge in the lower end. Its name, of course — Bays Branch.

Thirty years ago the



Conservationist was out hunting snakes — rattlesnakes, no less. The reason was to collect several specimens for the

Commission's State Fair exhibit. Rattlesnakes have been found in nearly all counties in Iowa, although they are not common in most areas. A young officer named Tom Berkley was in charge of the hunt and everything must have worked out okay because Tom is still with us. Berkley is Wildlife Supervisor for the southwest Iowa district.





Photo by Lloyd Grim

# Classroom Corner

BY ROBERT RYE

ADMINISTRATOR, CONSERVATION  
EDUCATION CENTER

EVEN BEFORE a child hears *The Owl and The Pussycat* or reads of Owl's adventures in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, his imagination may be captured by this dignified bird. Since owls are creatures of the night, they are seldom seen. Thus, one has to rely on the imagination for an image. Owl images may be found in many places — figurines, macrame, and other decorations. They seem to lend an aura of friendliness and are a warm topic of conservation.

Their hoots, shrieks, and other distinctive calls often betray their presence in one's vicinity. When seen up close, an owl's eyes are one of the first things noticed. They are unique in comparison with many other animals. People often have the mistaken idea that owls cannot see in the day time. It is true that their sight is keenest at night when

they do their hunting, but they can see at all times.

So efficient is their eyesight that they can capture prey in what we consider total darkness. Compared to humans, owls' eye size to body size is many times greater. The iris, the center part of the eye, can close to a mere pin point in bright light or open wide to pick up reflected dim light hundreds of yards away. This functioning of their eyes can be done independently of each other.

Their eyes are placed in their sockets in an odd manner — being fixed in such a way that the bird cannot look from one place to another by merely rolling its eyeballs. In order to see to the side, it must turn its head in that direction. A good comparison would be the head lights on a standard car versus a moveable spot light attached to a

police car.

An animal that has eyes developed to such an extent as an owl's has very little color vision. In fact, owls are color blind. Both color and light receptors are located in the back of the eye, with the light receptors taking up most of the space.

Another characteristic of owls, which is so common that some authors list it as a call, is beak-snapping. This has been heard by groups at the Center as we watched an owl 100 yards away. The sound is formed by forcing the lower mandible (lower part of the beak) to the tip of the upper, and then clenching the two together. When the lower is suddenly drawn back to its normal position, the beak snaps with a resounding click. Owls appear to use this as a warning when animals are too close.

Owls not only excel in eyesight, but also have excellent hearing. Most of them use hearing when capturing prey. They therefore feed better in dry weather than in wet, when the animals make more noise on the forest floor. The ear openings of some species are so large that they almost cover the wide sides of the head. This distance helps with the direction finding or triangulation of a sound.

Besides the eyes and ears, one other fact sets owls apart from other birds. Their feathers, except those on the face, are made in such a way as to provide almost noiseless flight. The flight feathers have downy edges, which eliminates most of the noise caused by the stiff primary feathers as they cut through the air.

At the Center, owls play a role in the education of many groups. To some, this is watching one fly or sitting and watching one in a tree. The common owls in this area are the Barred and the Great Horned Owl.

The Great Horned Owl nests in early April, and their nesting sites have been studied. Their location, protection provided, and construction are included in the investigations. A survey for owl pellets — regurgitated undigested animal remains — is conducted in the area. These pellets are provided by voluntary actions of the owl's digestive system, so are found by the roosting area. When dissected, the pellets provide evidence of what the diet consists of — normally small mammals.

The greatest interest in owl activities occurs at night. Armed with a tape recording, the group sets out to call owls. The tape is played and provides several series of calls. We wait for a response from the owls. They not only return the call, but also generally move into the area. They have landed in trees directly over our groups.

Nights, much like winter, are a time when most daytime animals like man are not found out and about. Both these times may be used educationally. Some night soon try to see if you can observe an owl scouting or catching a mouse, moth, bird, or just digesting the results of a successful hunt. □



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Iowa State Fair Time.