

# Iowa DNR News

CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**May 6, 2025**

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## Peak camping season kicks off this month

Iowa state parks and forest staff are busy preparing for the summer camping season, turning on water, sprucing up campgrounds and freshening up bathroom, cabin, lodge and shelter facilities. With more than 759,000 campers and more than 13.5 million visitor days last year, state parks are anticipating another busy season.

### Recently renovated and 100 percent reservable sites

More state parks are offering real-time availability and ability to make online reservations for 100 percent of their campground sites. In 2025, Backbone, Geode, Lake Macbride, Palisades-Kepler and Rock Creek state parks transitioned to 100-percent reservable at [iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com](http://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com)

Additionally, several state parks are showcasing new or renovated amenities:

- Red Haw – campground renovation and playground scheduled to be completed by July 1, 2025
- Viking Lake – new campground playground
- Wildcat Den – shelter and sidewalk renovations
- Lake Manawa – concession building remodel
- McIntosh Woods – fish cleaning station replacement
- Fort Atkinson – restoration of historic buildings
- Big Creek – accessible fishing pier

### Current construction and renovation projects

Several state parks also are busy with new construction projects during the 2025 season. Projects include:

- Clear Lake – lodge/shower buildings/beach restroom renovations are being designed and will go out for bid this year. The campground is undergoing

renovations and is closed to reservations, with a portion re-opening in June 2025.

- Lake Kemoah – lake restoration, lodge window and pedestrian bridge replacement
- Lake Ahquabi – lodge and shelter renovations
- Lewis and Clark – visitor center repairs and renovations
- Brushy Creek – campground renovations. A closure is in place for the entire recreation season, but walk-ins are being accepted now in the South and Beach campgrounds until a timeline on construction is available. The North campground will remain closed all year.
- Ledges – new shower building and shelter renovation
- Pine Lake – boat ramp repairs
- Lake MacBride – kayak launch and accessible parking

**To learn more about Iowa state parks, go to [iowadnr.gov/stateparks](https://iowadnr.gov/stateparks) or make a reservation at <https://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com/>**

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## **Adding Iowa native plants to landscaping benefits native bees and butterflies**

Gardening fever has broken out across the state with homeowners digging, planting, weeding and mulching to avoid missing out on spring rains. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is encouraging homeowners to include pollinator friendly native plants as part of the landscape.

Native Iowa plants are the most beneficial for pollinators and can be designed to look nice, said Stephanie Shepherd, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Diversity Program.

"We prefer native plants over plants that have been genetically modified as the modified versions may or may not produce the same levels of pollen or nectar as the natives," she said. "Native plants also bloom at the right times, just when our native pollinators are relying on them."

Part of the design plan should include a mix of plants that bloom during different seasons in order to maximize opportunities for pollinators. Consider a mix of plants like golden alexanders, large flowering beard tongue, or foxglove beard tongue that bloom in spring; butterfly milkweed, which is also a host plant for monarchs, pale purple coneflower and wild bergamot, aka bee balm, that bloom in summer; and prairie blazing star, New England aster and the goldenrods that bloom late summer and fall.

For more information on pollinators, lists of plants and tips for planting a backyard prairie and more, go to <https://www.iowadnr.gov/pollinators>. Plantings this spring can be supporting bees and butterflies later this summer during National Pollinator Week, June 16-22.

"If the thought of what to plant is too much, then plan to limit the number of different kinds of plants to 6 to 9; 2-3 early spring blooming, 2-3 summer blooming and 2-3 late summer/fall blooming," she said. Including native grasses like prairie dropseed, little bluestem, and side-oats gramma are useful as host plants for butterflies and moths.

And don't overlook redbud trees or serviceberry shrubs, in the spring blooming category if there's space, Shepherd said.

These pollinator plants are likely to attract monarchs, and common eastern and brown-belted bumble bees. Most bees aren't aggressive; just foraging and want to be left alone," Shepherd said.

Homeowners who have bumble bees visiting their flowers can help the Iowa DNR with data collection by contributing to Iowa's Bumble Bee Atlas.

The Bumble Bee Atlas is a volunteer community science project with a goal of learning more about bumble bees in Iowa, particularly what species are here, where they are in the state and what kind of habitat and flowers they like.

Anyone interested in participating will need to complete an online training and optional hands on field training to practice catching and handling bumble bees. The Iowa DNR has Bumble Bee Atlas video online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BTk70i96uw>.

More information is available online at <https://www.bumblebeeatlas.org/pages/iowa>

**Media Contact:** Stephanie Shepherd, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-230-6599.

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## Leave wildlife babies where they belong --- In the wild

It's as predictable as May flowers - from border to border, the Wildlife Baby Season has arrived in Iowa. From now until at least mid-June, DNR field offices across the state will be inundated with hundreds of phone calls and scores of deliveries regarding "orphaned wildlife."

Most calls begin with something like, "We were walking in the park when . . .," or "I looked out my window and saw. . ." In nearly every instance, the scenario ends with something [or several somethings] being rescued from their mother.

During a typical season, the species people call about will range all the way from baby robins and squirrels to spindly-legged white-tailed fawns. At this time of the year it is not at all uncommon for biologists to discover that complete litters of baby raccoons, foxes, or even skunks have mysteriously appeared on their doorsteps.

Why this happens is no real mystery. From fuzzy yellow ducklings to tiny baby bunnies, nothing appears more cute and cuddly than a wildlife baby. But in reality, most of the wildlife reported to DNR field offices are not really orphaned at all. And

while the people who attempt to "rescue" these babies have the best of intentions, they are in fact dooming the very creatures they intend to help.

The babies of most wildlife species leave their nests or dens well in advance of being able to care for themselves. Although broods or litters may become widely scattered during this fledgling period, they still remain under the direct care and feeding of their parents.

For many songbirds, the transition to independence comes quickly and may take as little as four or five days. For other species such as Canada geese, kestrels, or great horned owls, the young and parents may stay in contact for weeks -- even months.

At the beginning of the fledgling period, young birds appear clumsy, dull-witted, and vulnerable. The reason for this is because they really are clumsy, dull-witted, and vulnerable. But as the education process continues, the survivors smarten up fast, while slow learners quickly fade from the scene. Most birds have less than a 20 percent chance of surviving their first year. While this seems unfortunate or cruel, this is a normal occurrence in nature. In the real out-of-doors, it's just the way things are.

Most mammals employ a slightly different strategy when it comes to caring for their adolescents. Since most mammals are largely nocturnal, the mother usually finds a safe daytime hideout for her young while she sleeps or looks for food. Consequently, it is perfectly normal for the young to be alone or unattended during the daylight hours.

Nevertheless, whenever a newborn fawn or a nest full of baby cottontails or raccoons is discovered by a human, it quite often is assumed that the animals are orphaned. The youngster's fate is usually sealed when it is promptly "rescued from the wild."

Many wildlife babies die soon after capture from the stress of being handled, talked to, and placed into the unfamiliar surroundings of a slick sided cardboard box. Should the animal have the misfortune of surviving this trauma, they often succumb more slowly to starvation from improper nourishment, pneumonia, or other human caused sicknesses.

Whether they are adults or young, all species of wildlife have highly specific needs for survival. "Rescuing a baby from its mother" not only shows bad judgment, it also is illegal.

Observing wildlife in its natural habitat is always a unique privilege. Taking a good photo or two provides an even more lasting memory. But once you've done that, let well enough alone. Leave wildlife babies where they belong -- in the wild.

A list of wildlife rehabilitators is available online at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/programs-services/wildlife-rehabilitation>.

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## Iowa DNR Encourages Trail Safety and Courtesy as Spring Recreation Season Begins

# SHARE THE TRAIL



## PLEASE RESPECT EVERYONE ON THE TRAIL:

- Communicate your presence
- Slow down and keep safe distances
- Stay on the trail
- Keep pets on leashes
- Carry out your trash

Des Moines, Iowa – With warmer weather drawing outdoor enthusiasts to Iowa state parks, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reminds hikers, cyclists, and equestrians to prioritize safety and courtesy through its “Share the Trail” initiative. Sixteen state parks and forests now feature updated signage with essential trail etiquette guidelines to promote cooperative use of multi-use trails.

### Key Trail Etiquette Reminders:

- **Yield respectfully:** Hikers and cyclists yield to horses; cyclists also yield to hikers.
- **Communicate clearly:** Cyclists should announce passes with “on your left,” while both bikers and hikers should greet equestrians with a friendly “hello” to avoid startling horses.
- **Give space:** Allow horses ample room and wait for them to pass completely before proceeding.
- **Protect natural spaces:** Stay on designated trails, pack out trash, and avoid disturbing wildlife or trail surfaces.



“Trails are shared spaces where awareness and kindness go a long way,” said Sherry Arntzen, DNR Parks, Forests and Preserves Bureau Chief. “By following

these simple guidelines, visitors ensure safer, more enjoyable experiences for everyone.”

**Parks and Forests with Share the Trail Signs:** Backbone State Park | Brushy Creek State Recreation Area | Elk Rock State Park | Fort Defiance State Park | Nine Eagles State Park | Lake of Three Fires State Park | Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area | Pilot Knob State Park | Rock Creek State Park | Shimek State Forest | Stephens State Forest | Stone State Park | Volga River State Recreation Area | Walnut Woods State Park | Waubonsie State Park | Yellow River State Forest

**Additional Resources:**

- Watch the [“Share the Trail” video](#) and explore trail information at: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/things-do/hiking-biking>
- Check equestrian trail status on the DNR’s Closure and Alerts web page.

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## May 10th 2025 is World Migratory Bird Day!

**Shared Spaces; Creating Bird-friendly Cities and Communities**





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Since 1993, World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) has educated the public about the importance of migratory bird conservation. Over 100 species of birds that nest in the Midwest, and many more that fly through during migration, are considered Neotropical migrants, meaning they breed in North America and spend the winter in Mexico, Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. WMBD is a chance to celebrate our shared migratory birds across countries and continents. The WMBD theme this year, “Shared spaces; creating bird-friendly cities and communities”, fits perfectly with the Wildlife Diversity Program’s 2025 goal of supporting wildlife where you live. Here are five things you can do for wildlife at home, that will help support migratory birds!

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*Landscaping with native plants can be beneficial to birds*

**1. PLANT NATIVE PLANTS:** Birds rely on plants for food, directly eating the berries and seeds produced by plants as well as the insects that live on and eat the plants. Native plants, those that are historically and naturally found in Iowa, provide more nutrients and higher quality calories for birds. Incorporate native grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees in your landscaping to support birds!

Learn more about native Iowa plants for birds [here](#).

Pro Tip: Oak trees support a higher number and diversity of caterpillars than any

other type of tree. Many birds feed their young a caterpillar-rich diet to help them grow, so planting just one oak can really make a difference for birds in your yard!

2. **ADD WATER:** Birds use water for drinking and bathing, two activities which keep them healthy. Consider adding a shallow bird bath (1-2 inches deep) or even a small waterway or pond to provide this resource. Perks of adding water? You may see more variety in the types of birds that visit.

3. **USE THE RIGHT LIGHTING:** 80% of North American birds migrate at night and research shows that lights can interrupt migration, and even harm or kill birds. Make your lighting more bird-friendly by using shielded lighting, turning off unnecessary lights, using only as much light as needed, using timers, dimmers, and motion sensors, and using warm colored light (3000K and below). To learn more, visit [darksky.org](https://darksky.org).

4. **REDUCE HAZARDS TO WILDLIFE:** Migrating birds face many hazards, especially when they pass through and use human-dominated spaces. Consider ways to reduce these hazards where you live. Reduce your pesticide use, especially rodenticides, which can kill birds. Keep your [cats inside](#) or on a leash so birds don't get hurt. Reduce window collisions by making your windows visible to birds. Learn more at [stopbirdcollisions.org](https://stopbirdcollisions.org).



*Windows with parachute cord blinds (left) or ultraviolet tape (right) can help prevent bird window collisions.*

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5. **EMBRACE WILDNESS:** Many birds rely on habitat that humans might find “messy”. Things like dead trees are necessary for cavity nesting species like woodpeckers, bluebirds, and wood ducks. Native vines, even species like poison ivy, can provide important fruit during fall migration to help birds keep up their energy reserves. Brush piles are often used for winter cover by sparrows and cardinals. Think about places in your yard that might be able to safely support this wildness that birds need.

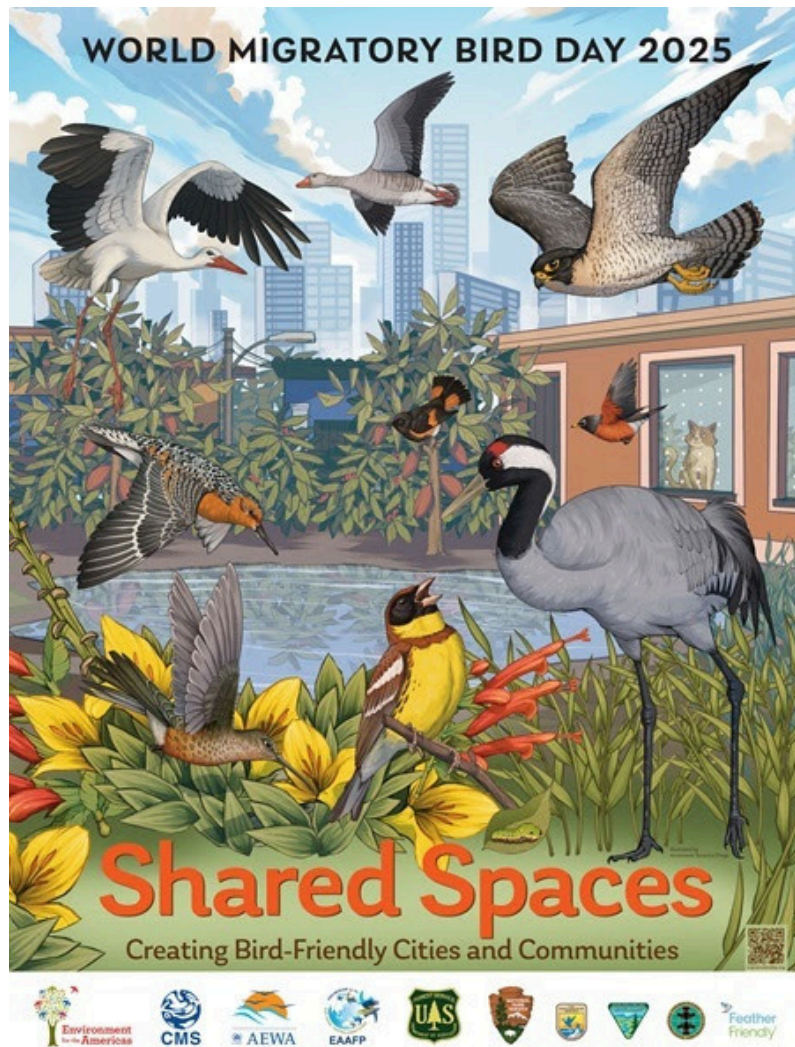
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**If you'd like to learn more about supporting birds in your community, or even work to get your town or county certified as bird friendly, check out the Bird**



Friendly Iowa program [website](#). If you want to learn more about bird watching check out the Iowa DNR's [Story Map](#).

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This year (2025), World Migratory Bird Day takes place in the U.S. and Canada on May 10<sup>th</sup> during the peak of spring migration and is celebrated on October 11<sup>th</sup> in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean during fall migration. Learn more about World Migratory Bird Day and associated events [here](#).