



Conservation Conversation

A Newsletter of the Butler County Conservation Board

Spring 2018

Education Program Celebrates 30 Years!

The Butler County Conservation Board began providing environmental education and outdoor recreation programming in 1988 and the doors to Heery Woods Nature Center opened in January of 1989. In the thirty years since, our education staff has presented nearly 4,900 programs for more than 144,000 participants. In the 29 years since it opened Heery Woods Nature Center has hosted more than 26,000 visitors from the general public and more than 30,000 additional visitors as part of a school group. Together these two resources have provided educational opportunities for more than 170,000 participants.

Program audiences have included preschool through college students, teachers, special interest groups, youth groups, senior citizens and care centers, conservation professionals, and the general public. Having provided programs for such a wide variety of audiences, it is likely that nearly every student to attend an elementary or middle school in Butler County as well as many local residents have attended a program provided by the Butler County Conservation Board at some time in the last 30 years.

The education programs offered by the conservation board include both direct and passive forms of interpretation. In the direct form, programs are presented by the naturalist, naturalist interns, special speakers, or volunteers. In the passive form, park

or nature center visitors interact with exhibits or signage to learn.

Like all programs our program has had to evolve as trends in education and the way the general public learn change. In the early years, most of our school programs were presented as field trip experiences. Nearly 90 percent of our programs were based at a local park with most using the area around Heery Woods Nature Center as the program base. In the late 1990's with schools facing rising gas prices and limited budgets, we needed to change our programs to continue to help meet their educational needs.

Today, our program is more balanced program and includes a variety of in-class programs and field trip experiences for students at all grade levels.



In our early days our passive interpretation was limited to the exhibits at Heery Woods Nature Center or two self-guided trails or black and white signage of a few things near Heery Woods Nature Center. Exhibits at the Nature Center were hands-on, but signage was made with simple printed material glued to colored card stock. Technology was limited to electronic quiz boards some of which are still in use today.

While some exhibits in the nature center have been in place for a while and are still in use, many others have been replaced to keep them interesting for repeat visitors and although we still believe in a hands-on approach to our exhibits, we have worked to update signage with full color photos, professional printed and mounted signage, and in some cases include technology such as our interactive iPad based bird identification stations and our interactive parks guide. While the self-guided trails near the Nature Center are still in place, both are due for an update

which may include permanent color signage or a downloadable form of the booklet in place of the hard copy booklets that are available in the Nature Center.



Often times people think of the educational programs we present as being only about animals or science, but we look at our programs as being a supplement to many facets of the groups we serve. In-class offerings include programs that supplement science, social studies, math, language arts and physical education curriculums, while field trip experiences provide activities that enhance classroom learning and promote healthy living and lifelong outdoor recreation skills.



While our goal is to develop and present new and innovative programs for use here in Butler County, many of our programs and ideas have had a far reaching impact on programs across the state and nation. In 1990, we created what was likely the first Nature Center Collection Policy in the State of Iowa. Presentations on developing a collection policy were given to the Iowa Association of Naturalists and the National Association for Interpretation. Over the past thirty years, we have presented additional programs to these two organizations as well as the Iowa Association of County Conservation Board Employees on a variety of topics. These presentations included audiences from Iowa and the Midwest and have helped others developing similar policies and programs. In the schools, we were one of the first counties to build and use atl-atl's, a native american spear thrower, as part of an archaeology based program and offer atl-atl throwing programs to students to learn basic mechanical advantages of simple machines. Today many CCB programs have similar programs that are used in archaeology and Native American skills programs.

One of the ways that has had perhaps the most impact on the natural resource field is to provide a stepping stone for other natural resource professionals to begin their journey in the natural resource

field. Over the last 30 years, we have had fourteen interns work with the education program at Heery Woods Nature Center. Today, eight of them are still working in the natural resource or education field. These former interns serve as a biology teachers, a special needs para-educator, four are working as Naturalists, Education Coordinators, or as a Conservation Projects Manager with Conservation Boards in Iowa, one is an Outdoor Education Specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and one is a Watershed Project Manager for the Anoka County, MN Soil and Water Conservation District. Together these teachers and natural resource professionals continue to spread the impact of environmental education and outdoor recreation programming to others far beyond Butler County.

While it's fun to sit back and look at how much of an impact we have had over the last thirty years, it may be even more fun to start looking to the future. As an organization, the Butler County Conservation Board is committed to continuing to provide high-quality educational opportunities to the schools and people of Butler County and to those in many of our surrounding communities. To help in this, we continue to look for ways to expand program offerings and passive interpretation.

One way is to begin to plan for an expansion to the Nature Center. The addition would provide a 32x60 classroom, a basement storage area for program equipment and supplies, and an additional area for exhibits. While this addition is still in the planning stage, we hope to begin work on the project in the near future.

Upcoming Programs 2018

June 19-23, Butler County Fair, Fairgrounds, Allison

Visit us in the historic log cabin at the Butler County Fair. Check out our wishing well, identify wild-life skins and skulls, check out our animal displays, try your skill at cutting with one and two person crosscut saws, or learn about dutch oven cooking with a dutch oven cooking demonstration Wednes-

Upcoming Programs 2018

June 19-23, Butler County Fair, Fairgrounds
Allison

June 30, Out Of This World! Program, Camp
Comfort Shelter House, 8:30 p.m.

July 7, Nature Art, Heery Woods Lodge, 1:00
p.m.

July 19, Basic Kayak Instruction, Sportsman
Park, 5:30 p.m.

July 29, BCCB Environmental Education
30th Anniversary Celebration, Heery Woods
Nature Center, 1:30 p.m.

August 18, Canoe and Kayak Float, Ren-
ning's Landing to Shell Rock Park, 9:30 a.m.

August 25, Monarch Tagging, Shell Rock
Recreation Area, 11: a.m.

September 8, Dutch Oven Gathering and
Cooking Basics, Shell Rock Recreation Area,
10:30 a.m.

October 6, Fall Change of Colors Hike,
Heery Woods North Side Shelter #1, 10:30
a.m.

October Date TBA, Annual Halloween
Hikes, Heery Woods Nature Center, 6:00
p.m.

day through Friday.



June 30, Out Of This World! Program, Camp Comfort Shelter House, 8:30 p.m.

Join Naturalist Intern Katie Cantin for “Out of this World!”, a program all about the final frontier: space! This program will be located at Camp Comfort. Join Katy on Saturday, June 30th from 8:30 pm to 9:15 pm to learn more about the planets in our solar system and some cool facts about them, the differences between asteroids, comets, meteorites,



and discover more about the Milky Way, Super Novas, and constellations and how to find them in the night sky. Participants will be able to check out constellations and will hopefully be able to see a

planet (or two!).

July 7, Nature Art, Heery Woods Lodge, 11:00 a.m.

Looking for something for the kids to do during the week of the 4th of July? Head on out to Heery Woods Nature Center for “Nature Art”, a program for all ages to come create and decorate their own works of art using things found in nature. This program will be located at Heery Woods Nature Center. Join Katy on Saturday, July 7th from 11 am to 12:30 pm to flaunt your artistic side to create a new masterpiece. Some crafts will include creating nature faces, leaf people, wind catchers and nature wands: all out of things you would find outside! All participants will be able to take their crafts they make home to keep or share.

July 19, Basic Kayak Instruction, Sportsman Park, 5:30 p.m.

Join Naturalist Steve Martin for a Basic Kayak Instruction program at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 19 at Sportsman Park. During the program participants will learn how



to safely enter and exit their kayak, basic paddling techniques, steering skills, and discuss what to do if you flip your kayak.

July 29, BCCB Environmental Education 30th Anniversary Celebration, Heery Woods Nature Center, 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Come help us celebrate 30 years of Environmental and Outdoor Recreation Education!

Join the Butler County Conservation Board and the Friends of Heery Woods Nature Center for

a Celebration of 30-years of Environmental Education and Outdoor Recreation programming through Heery Woods Nature Center. The Celebration will include speakers, the story of The Lorax, hikes led by former interns who are now conservation professionals, music by the Double J Wranglers, a visit from a special character from Heery Woods past. Hotdogs, chips, and bars will be available at the end of the program.

August 18, Canoe and Kayak Float, Renning's Landing to Shell Rock Park, 9:30 a.m.

Join Naturalist Steve Martin for a relaxing float down the Shell Rock River from Renning's Landing to the Shell Rock Recreation Area. The program will include a short kayak and canoe safety program followed by a float down the river. Participants should bring extra water and a snack. A hat, sunglasses, and sunblock are recommended. A limited number of kayaks will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis.



August 25, Monarch Tagging, Shell Rock Recreation Area, 11: a.m.



Have you ever wanted to see a monarch butterfly up close? This is the program for you! Sponsored by the Butler County Conservation Board, "Monarchs: Take Flight" is a program all about monarchs. This program will be located at the Shell Rock Recreational Area is located at

22562 West Main Street,
Shell Rock, Iowa 50670. Join Katy on Saturday, August 25th from 11 am to 11:45 am to learn more about monarch life cycles, their long migration, and we will be tagging and releasing monarchs as they make their way back down to Mexico to overwinter

September 8, Dutch Oven Gathering and Cooking Basics, Shell Rock Recreation Area, 10:30 a.m.

The First Annual Dutch Oven Gathering and Dutch Oven Basics Program is a program that is sure to have something for those wanting to learn about cooking with dutch ovens or those with years of experience. The program will include the basics of dutch ovens, cast iron care, restoring cast iron cookware, and give participants a chance to try to their hand at dutch oven cooking. While the food is cooking participants can visit with others in the group and learn more about the art of Dutch Oven Cooking.



October 6, Fall Change of Colors Hike, Heery Woods North Side Shelter #1, 10:30 a.m.

Join Naturalist Steve Martin for a fall hike through Heery Woods State Park for the Fall Change of Colors Hike at Heery Woods State Park. During the hike you can learn what makes leaves change from green to brilliant shade of yellow, gold, purple, and red and maybe locate a few landmarks from the days when the park was still a farm. After the hike you can enjoy a apple cider, roast marshmallows over a fire, and maybe even make a s'more or two. Participants should dress for the weather and wear sturdy hiking shoes. The hike will take approximately

30 to 45 minutes and cover both paved and unpaved ground



October Date TBA, Annual Halloween Hikes, Heery Woods Nature Center, 6:00 - 7:15 p.m.

While this year's Annual Halloween Hike theme has yet to be determined, it always provides a howling good time! Participants hike along the trails near Heery Woods Nature Center where 5 different characters wait to tell their story and help people learn about the natural world. Keep your eyes and ears open for this program.



Thirty Years By the Numbers

In our lead article, we gave the total number of groups and participants that have taken part in our but how does that number break down?

Pre-school groups
96 programs, 1782 participants

K-6 Students
1879 Programs, 62,422 participants

7-8 Students
560 programs, 15,213 participants

9-12 Students
133 programs, 3,786 participants

Teachers
171 programs, 938 participants

College Students
28 programs, 334 participants

Special Interest Groups
159 programs, 3,484 participants

Youth Groups
396 programs, 9,735 participants

Senior Citizens and Care Centers
949 programs, 18,367 participants

Professional Presentations
70 Programs, 1,059 participants

Public Programs
510 programs, 29,474 participants

General Public Nature Center Visitors
26,586

School Group Nature Center Visitors
30,711

Species Spotlight - White-tailed Jackrabbit

Twice in the last year, I have had people ask, "Where have all our Jackrabbits gone?" One of them even asked where they could get Jackrabbits to raise and release on their property!

Growing up in southeast Iowa, we didn't have Jackrabbits, just cottontail rabbits. I first learned about the White-tailed Jackrabbit when I went to college and then learned that jackrabbits aren't really rabbits, but are really hares. Differences between the two include hares being larger (a full grown jackrabbit may weigh between 6 and 10 pounds), with longer ears and legs, and in the case of new-borns, rabbits are born hairless with their eyes closed and hares are born fully furred with their eyes open. Either way, the White-tailed Jackrabbit is a pretty neat animal.

Unlike cottontail rabbits that maintain their gray-brown fur year around, jackrabbits sport a gray-brown coat in the summer but in the winter the gray-brown coat is shed and replaced with a nice white coat everywhere except the tips of the ears which have black tips. These changes in their coat

helps to camouflage them from predators.



White-tailed jackrabbit in Edmonton, Alberta. May 30, 2014. Photo by Connormah, Source Wikipedia

Now getting back to the question "Where have all our jackrabbits gone?" The answer to that question with nearly every animal whose population decreases is the same. It's a lack of habitat.

Again, growing up in southeastern Iowa, if you wanted more cottontails, you find brushy areas along field edges, add some nice thick brushpiles, and it's a pretty good bet that you'll have cottontail

rabbits, but Jackrabbit habitat is different.

Jackrabbits prefer treeless, grasslands with short to medium height grasses that aren't too dense. These plant types allow the jackrabbit to see danger approaching and when threatened the more sparse grass allows them to easily use their quickness and speed to escape through the less dense short grasses. Because of this, jackrabbits avoid tall, thick grassland areas.

When the pioneers started moving into the state, the best jackrabbit habitat was found in northwestern Iowa but as the tallgrass prairie was settled and converted into farms, jackrabbits readily expanded their range to include western and central Iowa. The combination of prairie, wetlands, pasture, and hayfields created as part of the settling of the prairie became a great place to find jackrabbits.

Almost exclusively herbivores, jackrabbits prefer to feed on grasses and forbs but will occasionally feed on rowcrops. They have also been known to feed on cut and baled alfalfa and waste grains in the winter and will cause damage to trees and shrubs by girdling them to eat the bark at times in the winter. The strangest thing they eat is their own droppings. Called coprophagy this allows them to gain proteins and b vitamins that are produced during the initial digestion process.

While cottontail rabbits spend their entire life on an area of about 10 acres, Jackrabbits have a home range of 1 to 2 square miles. According to recent research, rowcropping has a great effect on the seasonal movement of jackrabbits. From fall to spring, movement of jackrabbits through this home range is

greater than in the summer. The change is due to the height of the row crops which affects the ability of

the jackrabbit to see and escape danger.

The destruction of the native short and midgrass prairies of northwestern Iowa and changes in farming practices have had the most impact on jackrabbit populations. In the early 1960's winter populations could be as high as 114 jackrabbits per section but most populations were between 5 and 20 per section. During that time the typical farm included livestock and a combination of pasture, hayfields, and cropground.

Today, populations between 5 and 10 jackrabbits per section are considered high and most farms in areas where jackrabbits are found are geared toward a corn-soybean rotation. With no livestock, pasture or hayfields aren't needed, fencerows have been removed and wetlands drained. Research has shown that this shift in farming practices has been detrimental to jackrabbit populations since the 1960's.

While we know a lot about Iowa's jackrabbits, research is still being done on our jackrabbit populations. Research on seasonal movements, locating new populations, genetic diversity and developing new methods to survey population numbers are all projects that are being carried out to help us better understand the jackrabbit populations in Iowa and surrounding states.

In the meantime, we do still have a few jackrabbits around. Although it was several years ago, I did see a few individuals near Waverly and two winters ago driving back from a program in Greene, I spotted a single set of tracks in the snowy ditch north of Packard. Keep your eyes open and let us know if you see a White-tailed Jackrabbit around Butler County.



White-tailed jackrabbit in the snow at Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge (Wyoming) Photo: Tom Koerner/USFWS



Jackrabbit tracks near Greene, Iowa Winter 2016. Shoe Print size 10.5 for comparison.

Become a member of the Friends of Heery Woods Nature Center! Your tax-deductible membership or donation goes to support environmental education and outdoor recreation program opportunities in Butler County.

Name _____

Membership and Donation Categories

Address _____

Memberships:

City _____

Student	\$3
Individual	\$15
Family	\$20
Business/Organization	\$25

State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Please mail this form with your tax-deductible check,
made payable to *Friends of Heery Woods Nature Center*,
28727 Timber Road, Clarksville, IA 50619

Donations:

The Friends of Heery Woods Nature Center is
recognized as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization.

Seedling	\$10-99
Maple	\$100-249
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Oak	\$500-999
Walnut	\$1000+



*All memberships will receive Conservation
Conversation and a certificate of membership.

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