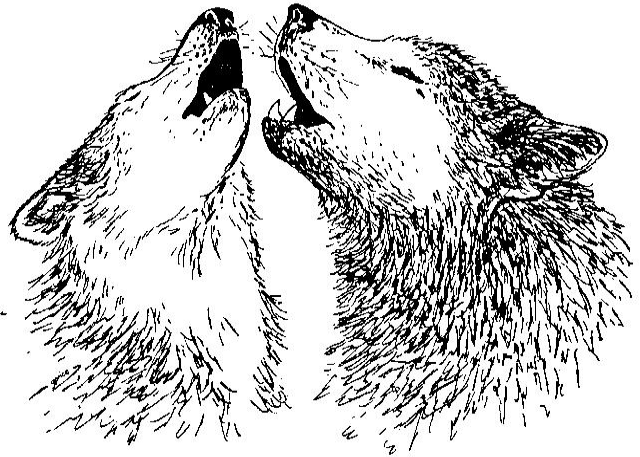


# Osborne Oracle



*Fall 2021*

*Clayton County Conservation*

*Vol. 44 No.2*

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*“You guys been busy?” by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist & Resource Manager*

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2021 has seen a lot of new developments from all of us here at the Clayton County Conservation Board. Part of our job in ensuring quality, accessible outdoor recreation and education opportunities means constant adaptation and a never-ending pursuit of improvement.

Early in the year we finally checked off a huge item on our to-do list with the completion and opening of the Motor Mill Trail. This multi-use trail runs from Turkey River Park to Motor Mill, separating pedestrian and bicycle traffic from the highway and offering recreationists a new way to enjoy Clayton County.

We also paved the previously soft-surface trails through the Osborne Pioneer Village, and the wildlife exhibit. Our goal was to improve the ability of strollers and mobility aids to navigate these areas, and based on the positive feedback received so far, it looks like we made the right choice!

Both the pioneer village and wildlife exhibit got another facelift with some new interpretive signage, including a wonderful panel on the Osborne Creamery (across hwy 13 from Osborne Park) developed in partnership with the Clayton County Historic Preservation Commission.

We’ve also got some exciting developments on the habitat front, thanks to several grant programs allowing us to partner with the Iowa DNR for projects improving fish and wildlife diversity on county lands.

The Volga riverfront along the Osborne nature trail will soon have an extension added to last year’s floodplain bench, stone toe protection, and boulder cluster installation. The design held up well in the most recent flood, helping to mitigate silt deposition and scouring out holes for fish to hide and anglers to find them.

Joy Springs county park will see an even more extensive improvement, with bank hides and root wads installed along the banks to provide cover, along with stone toe protection and cross vanes to concentrate the stream’s flow, creating structure and deep holes to hold more fish.

In November, a crew from the Conservation Corps of Iowa will go to work at the Becker West Wildlife Area to build on last year’s efforts to restore degraded oak woodlands and savanna. Here’s hoping the weather cooperates!

Down at Motor Mill, renovations have begun on the stable to turn it into a useable structure for community events. The beautiful, 19th-century building will provide an amazing setting for weddings, family reunions, or retreats along the banks of the Turkey River.

Meanwhile, we’ve also been at work securing funds for renovations of the inn at Motor Mill to help flood proof the structure and convert it to a genuine overnight facility! A rural heritage revitalization grant from the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs has brought in \$125,000 of the estimated \$450,000 cost, and generous donations during July’s online fundraising campaign brought us \$6,000 closer. You can help make this dream a reality! Visit <https://motormill.org/donations/> to help contribute.

Last but certainly not least, we successfully applied for funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to begin work on a new campground at Osborne Park! Coupled with the extensive recreational opportunities already present at Osborne, this campground will allow all kinds of users to enjoy the park to its fullest extent.

The work never stops, but don’t worry, we like it that way.

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## *Osborne Heritage Days is Back! by Abbey Harkrader, Naturalist*

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After a rough year in 2020, we are happy to announce the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Osborne Heritage Days will be back on October 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. There will be many of your old favorites, as well as many new faces.



Did you miss the fry bread and the buffalo stew? The kettle corn and smoked turkey legs? We can't wait to have them back either, along with the farmer's market, yummy baked goods and some of your favorite demonstrators.

New faces will include special guest Darrin

Crow's captivating storytelling and the beloved Andregg Family Band. Gary Froiland's One-Man-Band will be back for his second time to entertain us with his amazing talent and humor. We are also happy to welcome Rocking 5K BBQ at the food stand who will bring back smoked turkey legs and more BBQ goodness. We will also have ice cream from the Burger Barn in Elkader!

We will also welcome back the pioneer church service, pumpkin contests, the auction, and the Iowa Championship Buffalo Chip Throwing Contest! "Thomas" the kiddie train will also be back and many other special events and demonstrations. Special events are as follows:

### Saturday:

- 10am-4pm** – Exhibits, buildings, welcome center open & wine tasting
- 10:30** – Storytelling in Old Schoolhouse with Darrin Crow
- 11:00 am** – Butter Shake Contest and apple cider tasting
- 11:30 am** – Gary Froiland's One-Man-Band
- 12:30 pm** – Storytelling in Old Schoolhouse with Darrin Crow

- 1:00 pm** – Gary Froiland's One-Man-Band
- 2:00 pm** – Storytelling in Old Schoolhouse with Darrin Crow
- Sunday:**
- 10am-4pm** – Exhibits, buildings, welcome center open & wine tasting
- 11am** – Pioneer Church Service
- 11am-1pm** – KCTN "Great Pumpkin" and "Decorated Pumpkin" contests
- 12:30 pm** – Andregg Family Band
- 2pm** – KCTN Pumpkin Contests winners announced by 2:00 PM
- 2pm** – Fundraising Auction
- 3pm** – Iowa Championship Buffalo Chip Throwing Contest

Heritage Days recreates some of the crafts, skills and life-styles of the early pioneers. Visitors get to experience what life was like long ago during this glimpse of the past. Over 30 demonstrations are featured, including spinning, basketry, soap making, printing press, woodcrafts, candle making and many others. The farmer's market will feature pumpkins, honey, preserves, maple syrup, sorghum, horseradish and much more.

Come travel back in time during this family fun event on Saturday and Sunday, October 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. each day in the Pioneer Village of Osborne Park. All demonstrations and events at Heritage Days are free. Don't miss it!



*Buffalo Stew served up hot & fresh*

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## *Taking a Chance by Hayden Arians, Seasonal Naturalist*

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Having a summer at Clayton County Conservation has done many things for my growth. If there was one thing, I would pick out for what has been the most important part of being a summer naturalist at Osborne, it would be to take a chance.

My name is Hayden Arians, I am a summer naturalist for the summer of 2021. I am currently a junior at Iowa State University studying to get a double major in Animal Ecology and Biology along with a minor in Speech and Communication.

My future plans are to follow Animal Rehabilitation, Wildlife Care, or Wildlife Biology. Last year was my first year at Iowa State and while it was a strange year it showed me the importance of putting myself out there and getting out of my comfort zone.



*Kiddos meeting Ed the box turtle*

While looking at what I need to do before I graduate in May of 2023, I saw a requirement that stood out to me. "All NREM students are required to obtain 400 hours of practical (paid or volunteer) career-related experience approved by an academic advisor, prior to graduation."

I believe that it is great to get out there and find if the job is what is calling my name, but 400 hours seemed like a lot to me. I had two summers to get this done and tried researching and making phone calls along with sending emails.

I came across Clayton County Conservation while browsing and I thought the Naturalist position sounded just right for me. I wanted to be outside, work with animals, and see and experience different programs. I applied quickly and landed an interview, then the day I thought I was not going to get the internship, I got

a call telling me that I got the job. After that, the opportunity was there, and I took a chance.

However, in this situation I was not alone in taking a chance. Clayton County Conservation took a chance on me. I have learned more than I ever thought possible in eleven weeks.

Abbey Harkrader helped teach me the importance of conservation and different programs. She taught me the ropes but also taught me how to create and develop my own programs. Kenny Slocum taught me different types of forests and how they develop over time.

Jenna Pollock taught me the importance of personal relations with visitors. Lastly, Molly Scherf taught me how to work with a large range of kids varying in age and skills.

Without these people, my growth would not have been as significant as it has been.

For anyone thinking about going into Natural Resources I have nothing more to say other than take a chance on someone and they might just take that chance on you allowing you to grow as much as I have in this past summer.

Some of the great things Clayton County Conservation has to offer are some amazing educational programs and camps. Being a summer naturalist, I had the opportunity to

help organize and lead overnight camps with young people ranging from 6th grade to sophomore.

This was great to see the importance of learning skills such as paddling, backpacking, cooking food over fires, and planning different activities. I finally understood how much the younger ages look up and need to be able to see that working in

Natural Resources is a great opportunity and an experience like no other.



*Exploring life in the Osborne Pond*



*Junior Naturalist campers at the Big Springs Trout Hatchery*

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## *A Soft Spot for Singletrack by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist & Resource Manager*

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“That’s one of the coolest trails I’ve ever hiked in Iowa.”

High praise from Brian Gibbs, current naturalist for Fayette County conservation and former Clayton County naturalist. He’s got no small measure of authority on the subject. Brian has written for Iowa Outdoors about hiking adventures all across the state, plying the woods of Shimek Forest and the rugged ridgetops of the Loess Hills. But in this instance, he’s describing the Well’s Hollow trail at Bloody Run Park just outside of Marquette. He goes on.

“You just don’t find many genuine singletrack trails around here.”

I’m glad he noticed. It’s one of the first things I noticed when I first moved back to Iowa.

“Singletrack,” in trail terminology, refers to those dirt paths 12-26 inches wide, i.e. just wide enough for a single person to make tracks.

I fell in love with singletrack before I even knew the term. Our cross country coach in high school used to “treat” us to a day at Sylvan Island, a tiny oasis on the Mississippi surrounded by the most industrialized portion of the Quad Cities.

Despite graffiti covering old foundations, austere manufacturing buildings spoiling every viewshed, and no real “destination” to run to, those days brought us all to a state of childlike exuberance, a celebration of adventure rather than athleticism.

That’s not to say we spent the rest of our practice time on concrete. We had the good fortune to have a multitude of bike trails reachable from school, and of course the actual cross country course consisted of a wide enough grass lane to lead runners with a gator or ATV.

But there’s something special about singletrack trails. They just feel different, more intimate. Runners call narrow, rock-and-root laden trails “technical,” but “mindful” feels like the more appropriate phrasing. When you’re forced to consider every step, you examine everything around your footfall just a little more closely.

More commonly in Iowa, if we have an unsurfaced trail, it’s a “doubletrack,” i.e. wide enough to accommodate an all-terrain vehicle. While doubletrack does make maintenance easier (supposedly), it comes at the cost of some of the intimacy and connectivity sought by those going for a walk in the woods – not to mention, nothing takes one out of a “forest bathing” mindset faster than engine noise.

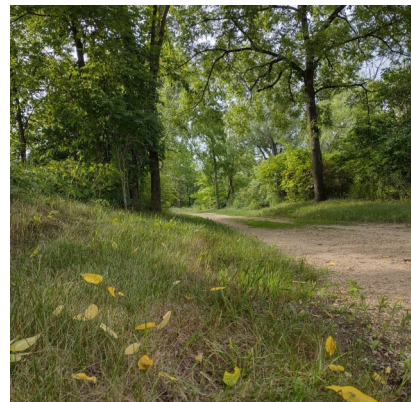
Moreover, a trail through the woods has one important feature in common with the trees around it – the bigger it is, the higher the dollar figure associated with it, increasing exponentially.

The common and convenient conversion rate when planning a paved trail is a million dollars a mile. That cost includes all the mobilization, bedding material, and asphalt or concrete poured on top. These are like 36” diameter Black Walnuts. Like the walnut tree to the forest owner, a well-built multi-use trail brings immense value to the community – and everybody wants them.

Soft surface trails offer a lot less cost up front. They may have the same tread width, but require less thickness to support a layer of chipped lime that managers can replace more easily than broken concrete. A good oak might serve as the forestry analogy here. Plenty of value, but not *quite* top dollar.

Then we have unsurfaced doubletrack. These might include a mowed path through a prairie, or a benched logging road through a forest. Like a pine tree, these trails don’t bring a high price individually but they’re fairly easy to come by and certainly have a lot of utility.

And finally, the singletrack. I think of this as firewood. Limited, certainly, in application, but incredibly valuable when you need it. Like firewood, communities can accumulate singletrack with little more than hand tools and elbow grease. We even had the opportunity to partner with the city of McGregor for a small trail through some of their public forest for the tidy sum of \$0 using volunteer labor. Like firewood, singletrack is easily replaced. Putting singletrack into a woodland is like taking firewood out; minimal impact to the surrounding landscape compared to the harvest of standing timber.



*Above: Pony Hollow Trail  
Below: Osborne Prairie Trail*



*Well's Hollow Trail, springtime*

*Continued on page 5...*

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## *A Soft Spot for Singletrack (continued)*

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Healthy forest management in Iowa requires a mix of everything to accommodate all the plant and animal species we want out there – multiple species, mature trees, a regeneration layer, and downed vegetation to support the decomposers.

Likewise, a healthy recreational ecosystem requires multiple trail types to meet the needs of a diverse user base. Paved trails for the avid road cyclists, soft trails for equestrians, and singletrack for those seeking a deeper communion with their public lands.

That brings us back to Brian's commentary on the Well's Hollow trail. Brian is an avid nature lover, but the first note he had wasn't on the flowers or birds gracing the oak savannas, it was on the tread of the trail itself. It makes me wonder if we're missing something. Many of the country's great trails are predominately singletrack, from the Appalachian trail to the Ice Age trail to the Pacific Crest trail.

Iowa has no such long trails. Issues of public land abundance and connectivity are major barriers, though both the Ice Age Trail and Appalachian Trail have stretches through easements on private lands.

But I see no reason for the paucity of singletrack, or at least soft trails. We have plenty of wildlife areas with no formalized access. I understand some of the reasons for keeping these areas trail-free. DNR wildlife areas for instance are precluded from any development that would interfere with hunting and certainly, running a dozer through to plow a lane would do just that.

But would singletrack? Well's Hollow is scarcely more than an improved deer trail, and we didn't have to drop any trees to make it (clearing downed trees is a different story, but I digress).

So why don't we have more?

I think at least in part, the issue is perception. Iowa has for so long focused its recreational composition on bike trails, or at least ATV/UTV accessible trails, when the word "trail" comes up, people automatically see heavy equipment, torn up woods, and a big price tag. It doesn't have to be that way.

Trail building can be simple, empowering, and an amazing way to give back to your community by making more accessible our shared public lands. Anyone can get involved.

Our Becker West wildlife area has one such example. A neighboring landowner Robert Kies, who's in-laws generously entrusted the CCCB with the property in a life estate, took an interest in the forestry work we did last year in the woods he'd explored since he was young.



*Kies family at work*

He told me there used to be an old tractor road running along a beautiful ravine bisecting the property's north and south sides. The "road" had become overgrown with thorny brush, but he asked if he could keep open a small portion where he and his family like to walk. I wondered what my boss might think about opening up the whole thing.

After all, increased access, *so long as it comes without undue impact*, helps us steward the site, too. I ran it up the flagpole and got thumbs up, and Robert went to work. As he put it, "I'm walking out there anyway, just a matter of whether I can clear stuff along the way."

Fast forward a month or so, and voila. Almost two miles of quiet, beautiful hiking on a primitive, immersive trail through prairie, dense woodland, and oak savanna. No bid, no bills, just hard work.

Be like Robert. Take pride in your public land. Start a conversation with the land managers about what you can do to make it better. Or, at the very least, get out in it. You never know when or how inspiration might strike.



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### Clayton County Parks Primitive Trails

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**Osborne Park:** CCCB headquarters has a lot more than the wildlife exhibit! Trails on both sides of the Volga river offer more than 6 miles of adventure. Start at the Osborne Pond and head east; you might be surprised where you end up...

**Motor Mill:** The Grau Memorial Savanna Trail provides the centerpiece for over 4 miles of trails surrounding the historic site. The south unit (open to bow hunting in season) singletrack offers exceptional solitude and diversity, with everything from native birch trees to oak uplands and restored prairie.

**Bloody Run County Park:** The 1.3 mile Well's Hollow trail, with over 270' of elevation gain/loss, offers a stout hike on singletrack through the restored remnant oak savannas overlooking Bloody Run Creek.

**Becker West:** From the main parking lot, intrepid explorers can meander east past a small frog pond before descending into riparian forest popping out in a small loop through the restored oak woodland on the properties west side and back again. CAUTION: this property is open to hunting in season.

*For park maps, directions, and information visit <https://www.claytoncountyconservation.org/parks>*

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# Clayton County Conservation Board's

## Upcoming Events & Programs

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### **46th Annual Osborne Heritage Days**

*October 9th & 10th, 10 AM-4 PM*

*Osborne Park Elkader, IA*

Heritage Days is back! This year's event will feature live music, wine tasting, cider tasting, storytelling, farmers markets, and of course all of the demonstrators and crafters showing what life was like in Iowa's early settlement era.

### **O.W.L.S. Fossil & Prairie Park Trip**

*Thursday, October 21st, 11:00 AM*

*Meet at Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls will get a chance to explore the fascinating history and prehistory at this unique site in Floyd County. Fossil & prairie park features historic limestone kilns, a fossil quarry, and reconstructed prairie to pique all your natural and historical curiosity.

### **Pony Hollow Trail 15K Run**

*Saturday, November 6th, 9:00 AM start*

*Pony Hollow Trail, Elkader, IA*

Come on out for the third annual Pony Hollow 15K! This flat, fast course meanders along the Turkey River and Robert's Creek, combining the scenery of trail running with the speed of a road race. [Click here](#) for details and registration.

### **O.W.L.S. Driftless Area Education & Visitor Center**

*Thursday, November 18th, 11:00 AM*

*Meet at Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

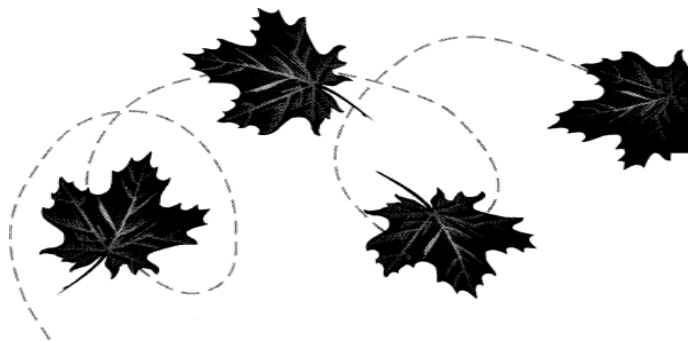
Join the OWLS for a visit to one of Iowa's newest nature centers in Lansing. The center features incredible exhibits on the ecology and geology of the driftless area, the history of commercial fishing on the upper Mississippi, and live animals!

### **Motor Mill Bridge Lighting**

*Saturday, November 20th, 5:00 PM*

*Motor Mill Historic Site, Elkader, IA*

The elves will be hard at work this fall, decorating the historic bridge at Motor Mill with lights to welcome visitors throughout the holiday season. Come on down to see the fruits of their labor this fall, and don't forget to dress for the weather!



### **Holiday Walk: Visitors From the North**

*Thursday, December 2nd, 6:00 PM*

*Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

Many humans head to Florida, Texas, or Arizona to escape the winter. But what about those creatures for whom Iowa is the warm weather retreat? Come and hear their stories right from their lips in this fun, theatrical walk for the whole family.

### **Owl Prowl**

*Friday, January 28th, 5:30 PM*

*Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

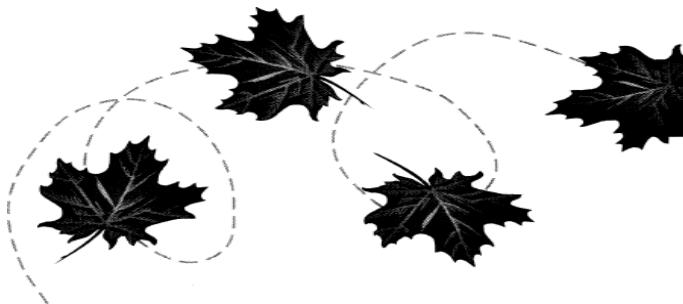
Come out to Osborne Park to learn about these secretive nocturnal animals. Visitors will learn about all the things that make owls so amazing before heading out to the forest to look and listen along Osborne's trails while we try to call owls in. This fun night hike will last about an hour and a half. Remember to bring a flashlight and warm clothes!

### **Winter Prairie Hike**

*Saturday, February 12th, 9:30 AM*

*Motor Mill Park, Elkader, IA*

The prairie in wintertime has a unique beauty, from animal tracks to the skeletons of last year's plants. Take a walk and learn to identify "expired" prairie vegetation on the beautiful restored prairies at the Motor Mill Historic Site.



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## *Whitetail Deer Antlers by Nick Stavroplus, Seasonal Naturalist*

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When growing up in Iowa, seeing a whitetail deer is as common as water in a lake. However, their numbers once dipped as low as 300,000 in the whole United States according to a US Biological Survey record from 1890.

Today there are an estimated 30,000,000 whitetail deer in the US. 400,000-500,000 of those whitetail deer live in Iowa, according to the Iowa DNR.

Iowa provides these deer with a variety of habitats to live in. Specifically, Clayton county provides these deer with a tremendous variety of forested areas, brushy draws, marshes/wetlands and prairies.

Because of this large population, hunters are able to achieve their dreams of getting the biggest buck, with the biggest rack.

In the scouting phase before the time of the big buck, it has become more and more popular with the growing hunting and shed hunting population to find bucks with strange looking antlers.



*Whitetail deer with atypical rack*

What causes this strange development has baffled scientists and hunters for years. These deer do not scare most hunters, but intrigue them with their sharp angles, furrows, and acorn tips of unusual antlers.

Many of these amazing antler traits occur due to broken bones, shredded muscles, or even damaged nerves. These sources do not have to be big to draw scrutiny towards the buck's antler development. Things such as a jab from a sharp stick or a wood tick lodged in the antler velvet can

cause these deformations in the antler's growth.

Whatever the cause may be, most biologists who study deer have yet to answer what exactly causes these deer antlers to have these funky formations. What has been found is that these formations most likely happen due to damage to their "pedicle," or the source of regeneration of antlers.



*One seriously strange stag*

When deer are young, their pedicle tissue is soft and susceptible to getting damaged. Regular bumps, insects, or other environmental factors may contribute, but the robust deer population plays a role too. As the deer numbers continue to expand in Iowa today, the competition for territory and mates becomes more and more intense, with larger and older deer asserting dominance over the new kids in town. These big bucks then cause damage to younger and weaker bucks' pedicles causing the asymmetrical antlers.

In some serious cases, the injury inflicted on young deer pedicles can even cause extra antlers to grow.

Though these new formations create fascinating looking bucks, the damage caused typically leads to infections which eventually will kill the deer.

It is believed that only 10-20% of the United States whitetail deer population experience this in their lifetime. So on your next hunt or daily stroll through Iowa be on the lookout for one of these unique-looking deer!

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### Want More Content?



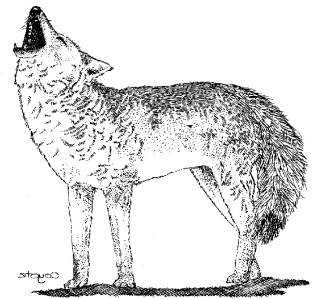
Check out our blog, the Clayton County Conversation! Each month we post informational articles and updates about past events and future programs. See blog posts at <https://www.claytoncountyconservation.org/news>

For more bite-sized content, check us out on [Instagram](#). Don't forget to tag us in pretty photos at one of our parks!



**Clayton County Conservation**  
Osborne Conservation Center  
29862 Osborne Rd, Elkader, IA 52043  
(563) 245-1516

Osborne Public Programs  
listed inside!



The Clayton County Conservation Board does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Clayton County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240

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Daryl Landsgard, St. Olaf.....Vice Chair  
Larry Stone, Elkader.....Secretary  
Marilyn Lenth, Postville.....Member  
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Jay Farmer.....Operations  
Abbey Harkrader.....Naturalist  
Kenny Slocum...Naturalist/Resource Manager  
Molly Scherf.....Office Manager  
Ean Popenhagen.....Administrative Assistant  
Nick Moser.....Operations/Maintenance

#### ***Visit:***

**[www.claytoncountyconservation.org](http://www.claytoncountyconservation.org)**  
**and LIKE us on Facebook!**

## **Osborne Nature Center & Gift shop Hours**

**Monday-Saturday: 8:00am -4:00 PM**

**Sunday: Noon-4:00pm**

**Winter Hours (Starting November 1):**

**Monday-Friday 8:4:30**

**Native Wildlife Exhibit Hours:**

**10-4:30 Every Day**

**Winter Hours (Starting November 1):**

**10-4:30 Monday-Friday**

Clayton County Conservation Board meetings are the  
second Tuesday of every month at 6:00pm in the  
Osborne Center Auditorium.  
Meetings are open to the public.

***The mission of the Clayton County Conservation Board is to promote the health and general welfare of the people and to encourage preservation, conservation, education, and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.***