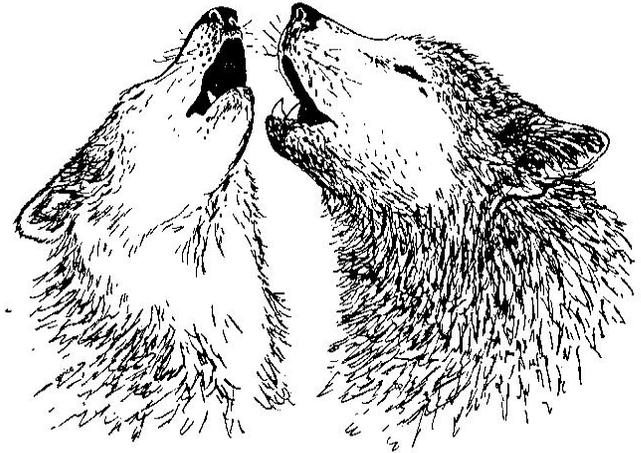


Osborne Oracle



Spring 2023

Clayton County Conservation

Vol. 46 No.1

Same Old, New! by Jenna K. Pollock, Executive Director

“Hey! How are you doing?” A common enough question that I often find myself answering in a pretty blase fashion, “Same old, same old.” More often than not in our department, the “same old, same old,” tends to be quite a flurry of activity to ensure we’re carrying out our mission.

In 2023, the “same old, same old,” will include a revival of some old things made new, like the Inn at Motor Mill and the Osborne Campground.

Planning for the Inn Revival began in earnest in 2019 when the Motor Mill Foundation identified compatible uses for the historic property, including the potential



Before & after of doorway being cut for the gift shop

to allow guests to overnight in the structure as it was originally intended. In 2021, Clayton County was awarded an Iowa’s Rural Heritage Revitalization Grant from the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs for restoration of the Inn at Motor Mill. The Conservation Board hosted an online capital campaign to raise additional private dollars.

In the fall of 2021, an Upper Mississippi Gaming Corporation Grant was awarded to the project for

\$125,000, and in January of 2023 the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs awarded the Iowa Great Places grant to the Inn project for \$325,000.

The challenges faced at Motor by the founders of the grist mill site still remain 150 years later. The landscape surrounding the Inn, while stunning, provides challenges.



Area cleared for the future campground

Wi-Fi will be offered to guests staying at the Inn and visiting the Motor Mill Historic Site to improve communication, something the Motor ancestors struggled with as well in their efforts to get a post office and railroad connected to the site.

Historic preservation of the intact historical elements of the Inn are both compelling and challenging. Modern contractors balk at the idea of restoring plaster when they’d prefer methods used in modern construction like sheetrock and mudding. Same old, same old.

The Osborne Campground was a popular community attraction located along the Volga River up until 2004.

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Same Old, New! ...continued from page 1

Subsequent flood events lead to the closure of the campground, as well as the closure of the buffalo and elk exhibit.

Since the campground was closed, community members having been asking the Conservation Board to reopen it. The 2008 Master Plan included proposals for relocating the campground outside of the floodplain on higher elevations within Osborne Park, a 300-acre park located south of Elkader.

The most recent public feedback surveys completed in 2018 ranked the campground the highest priority by public opinion. When the Conservation Board started evaluating how to deal with the pine plantation that had reached maturity, a staff member proposed relocating the Osborne Campground to the pine plantation.

In 2019, the Conservation Board identified a LAW-CON (Land and Water Conservation Fund) Grant as an opportunity to remove the pines and set the stage for development of a campground. That grant was awarded later that year in the amount of \$125,000.

In 2020, the Conservation Board also secured an Upper Mississippi Gaming Corporation Grant for \$149,600 for the first phase (earthwork package). Funds from private donors in the amount of \$75,000 and a \$200,000 allocation of American Rescue Plan

Act funding are helping to make the “same old, new” for the Osborne Campground.

This time around the campground will be located out of the floodplain. There’s an added twist of making this the first electric and water hook-up campground managed by the Conservation Board.

Of the seven campgrounds they currently operate, all of them offer primitive campsites. In addition, there will be modern restrooms, showering facilities, and a sanitary station.

The Inn Restoration and Osborne Campground are the two main development projects for the Conservation Board in 2023 as grant deadlines and contractual agreements close at the end of the year. The Inn is slated for completion in late June 2023 with an open house planned for July 2023.

The Osborne Campground will see construction in 2023 but is slated to open to the public for the spring 2025 camping season. While these projects take additional coordination of resources, the “same old, same old” continues as staff continue to offer educational programs, top-notch park maintenance, and unparalleled customer service.

We hope to see you around the parks this year!

NEED A CAMPFIRE?

We've got you.



Starting in the 2023 camping season, the Clayton County Conservation Board will begin selling firewood harvested from routine trail and forest clean-ups to campers at CCCB campground firewood kiosks.

Transporting firewood long distances introduces devastating forest pests. All CCCB firewood comes from within Clayton County parks, and sales will help fund future habitat improvement projects across the county.

Leave the wood at home! We've got plenty.

Clayton County Conservation Board's Upcoming Events & Programs

Motor Motor 5K/10K Trail Runs

Saturday, March 18th

Motor Mill Historic Site

Registrations required

Shake off that winter malaise with a run through rugged hills, woods, and prairies surrounding the Motor Mill Historic Site! Proceeds will go towards the Osborne Campground, slated to open in summer 2025.

IDNR Frog & Toad Call Monitoring Workshop

Tuesday, April 4th 6:30-9:30 PM

Osborne Nature Center

Registrations Required

Join the DNR's Stephanie Shepherd to learn how to ID 16 frogs and toads based on sound to become a volunteer wildlife monitor helping the DNR monitor amphibians across the state providing valuable citizen science.

Pasque Flower Hike

Friday, April 21st, 5:00-6:30 PM

Motor Mill Historic Site

Take a guided off-trail hike to an oft-unseen corner of Motor Mill Park to see a high-quality remnant "goat prairie," a unique habitat of the driftless region.

Motor Mill Open Weekends

Saturdays & Sundays May 27th-Sept. 3rd

Motor Mill Historic Site

Noon-5:00 PM

September 16th-17th Noon-5:00 PM

September 30th—October 1st Noon-5:00 PM

October 14th-15th Noon-5:00 PM

Savanna Saunter

Friday, May 12th, 5:00-7:00 PM

Bloody Run County Park

Join a naturalist for a walk along Well's Hollow trail to see the restored savannas and bluff prairie at Bloody Run County Park. The wildflowers and neotropical migrant birds make this one of the most beautiful natural areas in the county.

Endangered Species Day: The Lorax at Osborne Pond

Friday, May 19th, 7:00-8:30 PM

Osborne Pond

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act with an evening at the Osborne Pond learning lessons from the Lorax. All ages welcome.

Kid's Fishing Clinic

Saturday, June 3rd

Backbone State Park

Take advantage of free fishing weekend with a day at Backbone Lake! Naturalists will be on site offering demonstrations, and live critters to view between casts.

Turkey River Safari Kickoff

June 10th

Motor Mill Park

Registrations Required

Take a walk on the wild side with the official "kick off" of the ever-popular Turkey River Recreational Corridor Safari!

Bat House Workshop

July/August TBD

Osborne Park

Registrations Required

Learn about these amazing flying mammals then make a bat house to take home.

For more information on any of these programs, call 563-245-1516, or visit www.claytoncountyconservation.org

Osborne Junior Naturalist Camps



Gateway to Adventure

2 days, 1 night - This overnight camp is designed to get your feet wet in the outdoors. Activities include basic camping techniques, canoeing, archery, trout fishing, night hikes, campfire activities, team building, and river tubing.

Expedition - No Boundaries

This overnight camp for 8th-10th graders will push their adventure further. Participants will spend 3 days, 2 nights during this expedition learning paddling, backpacking, and other techniques to enjoy nature and the outdoors.

Register Now for Summer 2023

O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

“Iowa: Then and Now” Looking for an excuse to get out of the house, meet friends, and enjoy a good meal while exploring our area? Join us the 3rd Thursday of each month March through November.

March 16th—Lions, Wolves, and Bears, Oh My!

Join us at the Osborne Nature Center for the first O.W.L.S. event of the season and learn about the history of Iowa’s largest predators!

Bring a dish to share for a potluck meal after the program.

Reservations are required for both program and lunch

Call with questions on cost or time



Osborne Nature Center

Phone: 563-245-1516

www.ClaytonCountyConservation.org

Monarch Magic - by Anna Lofaro, Seasonal Naturalist

Monarchs serve as a symbol of summer to most people. For me they are reminiscent of memories from when I was young, running around with a net trying to catch the beautiful insects. Many remember the clouds of monarchs that would fly in around June, coming back from their winter shelter or have memories like mine.

To others monarchs are symbolic of rebirth, their exit from the cocoon as a completely different thing gives many something to connect to in times of change. Each year when monarchs migrate to the north and declare it is summer, they are easily recognized by their vibrant orange color with markings of black. Monarchs are important for many because of their beauty and symbolism, but they actually play a significant role in our environment.

Monarchs act as pollinators in our system. In their search for nectar from wildflowers the monarchs pollinate many plants to ensure that flowers continue to produce. Pollinators of all types are important to human life as a majority of the food we eat depend on the acts of pollinators.

Monarch butterflies are unlike any other insect because of their incredible migration. Monarch butterflies spend their winters in southern warmer climate down in Michoacán, Mexico. There they hibernate in the fir forests until it is time for them to begin their migration to the north.

Once they reach their summer ground the adult monarchs begin to reproduce and lay their eggs on the sole food for the larvae, the milkweed plant. Monarchs continue to grow and reproduce until the last generation of larvae turns to butterflies and begin their journey back south to begin the migration cycle all over again. To make this long journey to winter in the south the last generation of larvae actually delay their reproductive maturity in order to make this long trip there and back.

This special two-way migration that monarchs make is unmatched by all other insect lifecycles. The migration that these monarchs make can be up to 3,000 miles each direction and can take months.

Recently the International Union for Conservation of Nature has put the migratory monarch on their list of endangered species due to the severe loss of population. This does not change the official rating from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services- which has not declared them as threatened or endangered- but it does bring attention to the issues that the species is facing. In the past 30 years populations of these migratory monarchs have declined 90% due to climate change and negative human interaction. Although recently due to conservation efforts of individuals and organizations the monarch population has gone up slightly, which shows that there is still hope.

Logging and deforestation has greatly impacted the winter habitat of the migratory monarch. Deforestation to make room for urban developments and agricultural land has destroyed substantial sections of land in the south that used to lay home to these butterflies. It also plays a huge role in impacting their journey to the south as agriculture has taken away many of the plants monarchs used to feed on. Monarchs travel 50-100 miles a day on their migration, with all this travel it is crucial they find flowering plants to feed on along the way.

Insecticide and herbicide for agriculture or personal use is another factor that is effecting populations of monarchs. Herbicides can take away important plants-like milkweeds- that monarchs depend upon for survival. Due to herbicide use milkweed plants have reduced significantly in the past 30 years. Insecticides when applied to plants are absorbed the into the plant and harm any butterflies that feed off that plant for the whole season.



Climate change also plays a significant role on the populations of these monarch butterflies. Temperature extremes in winter can trigger butterflies to migrate early before the milkweed is available for their breeding.

Without available milkweed the populations have nowhere to lay eggs and the generation that has migrated up will die before a new generation is able to be born. Severe weather, as is the case of drought can kill monarch butterflies or the milkweed that is necessary for them. Monarchs are especially susceptible to damage from droughts while on their migration, as it makes it significantly harder to find any nectar or water to sustain them.

So, with all this news of a decline in population you might be wondering what you can do to help the population of monarchs. First is the easiest, spread the word. This news of monarchs being put onto some red lists for endangered species is important but so is word of mouth.

Next is to plant and support important plants for monarchs. This includes not only milkweed plants but also plants that provide nectar for adult monarchs to eat. These plants should be native flowering plants such as coneflowers, sunflowers, and wild bergamot. It is also important to plant late blooming plants to ensure that monarchs have enough to sustain them on their migration back.

One more way to help is to cut out or reduce use of insecticide or herbicide. Even a small reduction to use can greatly help the populations of monarchs when you think that dozens of monarchs could be feeding off of one plant or plants in one garden.



LEAVE A LEGACY

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
of Greater Dubuque

"To know even one other life has
breathed easier because you lived.
This is to have succeeded."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Osborne Partners for Education Endowment Fund was started by Susi Nehls and Roy Blair in memory of Susi's father, Dr. Joe Hickey. Dr. Hickey's research led to the legislation that protected birds of prey like the bald eagle. Dr. Hickey's passion for teaching others about the natural world was sparked early by adults who introduced him to the wonders of nature.

<https://www.dbqfoundation.org/donors/giving-center/osborne-partners-education-endowment>

Where Have All the Whippoorwills gone? By Abbey Harkrader, Naturalist

Or the roughed grouse, red headed woodpeckers, bobolinks or even the bob whites? According to Cornell University the bird population has dropped a staggering nearly 3 billion birds since 1970 in the US and Canada. Grassland birds show the most devastating decline of 53%.

Many, like myself, fondly remember a time going to sleep listening to the haunting lullaby of the Whip-poor-will at night while on a summer vacation or even in our own backyard. Often heard, but seldom seen, the distinctive 3-note rhythmic sound calling their own name was as much a symbol of summer as fireworks on the 4th of July.

Why has the Whip-poor-will population declined 69% over the last several decades along with many other bird species? The answer is habitat. When a species is struggling these days, habitat is usually at the core of the problem. Their habitat does not contain everything they need anymore.

The whip-poor-will is a forest bird that requires habitat adjacent to large clearings boasting a plentiful supply of flying insects.



Above and below: Motor in the early 20th century. Lack of disturbance has allowed trees to fill in formerly open areas.



photos of the bluffs along the Mississippi and Turkey Rivers.

You can also find the clues in the vegetation when you find small prairie remnants or old “Wolf” Oak Trees spreading wider than their neighbors. The forests themselves are different, too. Forests with various stages of successional growth and a large diversity of tree species have given way to forests dominated by basswood and maples with very little age class difference. There are no longer huge 200-year-old trees falling that would open critical clearings needed by birds like grouse and whip-poor-wills.

Forestry is a tricky thing. What type of forest management you do depends on what you wish to accomplish. Believe it or not,

logging and timber harvest are great tools that can benefit many species of wildlife when good forestry practices and wildlife management are also considered.

For example, recently I learned that Clayton County had a long history of clear-cutting timber for pulp mills throughout the county. This was replaced by the logging companies you see today who prefer trees for veneer and lumber. Some argue they intentionally set out to change the logging practices for more sustainable methods.

At first I was shocked when I learned this, but now realize that one unforeseen consequence to this change may have been the loss of the timber clearings needed by some species.

Agriculture has changed as well over the last 50 years. Increased use of pesticide is one easy to identify cause of insect decline, especially aerial spraying, but there is much more to it than that. Fence rows, CRP, and pastures have all seen so much change from the patchwork farms of our past.

Lack of enough habitat has a huge impact on the insects needed by many birds. The few suitable open habitats left are still often lacking the diversity of insects needed to sustain the many insectivores that need them. People can make a difference though. It is heartening to see so many turning to pollinator plantings in recent years.

A patchwork landscape means more diversity. Diversity of plants leads to diversity of insects, this in turn leads to diversity of birds and other vertebrates. Each piece of the puzzle affects the next. Habitat is the answer, and diversity is the key. Now ask yourself, how can I add diversity to my little corner of Iowa?



“The note of the whip-poor-will borne over the fields is the voice with which the woods and moonlight woo me.” - Henry David Thoreau



Aerial photo from 1950 of oak openings straddling the turkey river.



Above: the same area in 1970
Below: The same area in 2018



Images courtesy of the IDNR Historic Aerial Imagery project

Off the Beaten Path by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist/Resource Manager

We have the good fortune here in Clayton County to have so many iconic spots for outdoor recreation. From Pike's Peak state park and Effigy Mounds National Monument, to the Turkey River Water Trail and the Motor Mill Historic Site.

These places garner widespread appreciation throughout the state and driftless area generally, welcoming tens of thousands of visitors each year from all over the world.

We also have an abundance of more under-the-radar spots well-known and loved by locals, only occasionally on the radar of out-of-towners like the Pony Hollow trail, the nature center and wildlife exhibit here at Osborne, and Joy Springs trout stream.

With the exception of some fishing areas and water trail accesses, few spots ever get "crowded," at least not Pike's Peak on memorial-day crowded. But there are certainly the typical haunts. Virtually every student takes at least one hike along the Osborne Nature Trail.

The Grau Memorial Savanna trail at Motor Mill sees a decent amount of foot traffic, and the equestrian trails in the south unit see a lot of hoof traffic as well. It's usually still pretty easy to find solitude in these places, but they're definitely well known.

One of the best things about my job is the chance to truly ply every nook and cranny of our properties, seeking out (or more often, stumbling across) some amazingly nifty little spots. Some require a slightly more adventurous spirit, but others practically hide in plain sight.

As winter turns to spring, I know we're all itching to see some blooms, hear some birdsong, and let the gentle hum of



Whorled milkweed on pasque flower ridge

River has no trail to get there, requiring a short scramble up loose rock and dirt.

The thin-soiled ridge, with little pockets resembling the much-more-crowded backbone trail at Backbone state park, offers incredible views and a tiny remnant prairie boasting an array of fascinating flora throughout the growing season.

Next up, here at Osborne is what I call **the land between the targets**. It's an old field between the two archery ranges that has lain fallow for decades. Now, I'm a plant nerd

pollinators replace the road noise that seems to travel so much further in the winter. What better way to fend off late-stage cabin fever than by planning some visits to our hidden treasures?

First on the list, what I call **pasque flower ridge** at the **Motor Mill Historic Site**. This rocky promontory overlooking the Turkey



Baby shagbark at the land between the targets

and prairie enthusiast, so at first glance this degraded pasture would not seem like my cup of tea.

But despite the brome that long ago replaced the prairie, despite the cedars that are slowly turning the grassland into forest, I still love this site. In high summer, this field is absolutely alive with grassland birds.

The mellifluous notes of meadowlarks fly away on the wind, and this spot has even had sightings of ruffed grouse and Henslow's sparrow, an endangered species here in Iowa.

Speaking of "degraded" communities, our newest property, the **Pleasant Ridge Wildlife Area** has one of my favorite spots to visit in the early fall.



View from the orchard

An old apple orchard, right off of pumpkin ridge road, is hidden behind a developing thicket of prickly ash and blackberry. But punch through the thorny stuff, and you'll be treated to some of the most amazingly delicious feral apples you'll ever eat, relics from some likely long-gone variety that has persisted since the site's homestead days.

Nature is rapidly reclaiming this once-tamed parcel. Each year the forest creeps a little further into the grassy opening. Tiny walnut and ash trees, at shin height, have finally pierced the interior, the children of 20' tall "young adults" positioned along the edges and the grandchildren of the stately, 100' tall mature trees in the forest's interior.

Soon those little seedlings will mature, and their shade will extinguish the grasses, making room for woodland wildflowers. In the shade, the apple trees may persist for decades more, but their days of fruit production are growing short. It's a study in impermanence, the fleeting nature of *any* experience with wild Iowa.

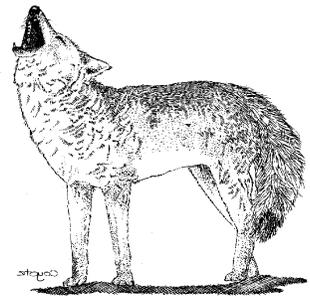
A flower may bloom one year and not the next. A bumper crop of acorns sees the forest teeming with wildlife one year, while a "bust" the following year may render the woods eerily quiet in late fall.

Such is the magic of appreciating Iowa's wild spaces. It is the land of small delights, hidden treasures, and ephemeral experience. Exploring the hinterlands yields rewards meant only for you.

If I blew up anyone's secret spot, I apologize, but I promise there's plenty of secrets to go around. The more you look, the more you find. So as they say, go the extra mile—it's never crowded.

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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Nick Moser.....Operations/Maintenance

Website: www.claytoncountyconservation.org
Facebook: [Clayton County Conservation](#)
Instagram: [@ClaytonCountyConservation](#)

**Osborne Nature Center &
Gift shop Hours**

Monday-Saturday

8:00am - 4:00pm

Sunday

Noon-4:00pm



Native Wildlife Exhibit Hours
Everyday (starting April 1): 8 am-dusk

Clayton County Conservation Board meetings are the second Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public. See website for details, locations, and past meeting minutes.

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.