

# “Looking OUT THE BACK DOOR...”

## The Sac County Conservation Board’s Quarterly Newsletter

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**Our Mission: “To initiate an awareness and foster stewardship of nature’s rewards.”**

### A Winter Walk

Winter is a great time to visit the woods! Whether you walk, snowshoe or cross country ski there are many discoveries to find. Its a lot of fun to go nest hunting, as the bare trees now



show off the once hidden nests. Visit Hagge or any of the woodlands in the county and you will find a plethora of nests. The biggest and most easily found are the homes and resting spots made by squirrels called drays. A squirrel can make two types, a summer and a winter drays. The summer dray is a messy platform which is used for sunning. Squirrels build winter drays when there is a lot of competition for suitable trees to den in. They will weave leaves and sticks tightly into a large round nests which can reach 12-19 inches in diameter. They are so tightly woven that they are waterproof. The interior is lined with warm materials like grasses, inner bark, leaves, feathers or fur and moss.

As you walk look for bird nests in bushes and up in the trees. One of the larger nests you may happen upon belongs to the Red-Tailed Hawk. This nest will be high in tall trees and are normally found at 35-90 feet in the air. They are flat shallow saucer shaped nests made of sticks. They have a diameter of 28-30 inches and are 4-6 inches deep. These nests are often reused and added to each year.

One of the most iconic nests is the American Robin. These nests are found in bushes, tree forks, limbs or any ledge. Their nests are deep cups made with mud, grasses and weeds, cloth or string and lined with fine grass. The female works the pieces into the soft wet mud and she forms the deep cupped nest by pressing their body into the nest. There are many round cup shaped nests that you may encounter at



photos from wikipedia



photo from wikipedia

Hagge. One nest you may run into is the Grey Catbird. These birds like the cover of dense thickets, vines and low trees. The nest is virtually invisible during the summer months due to all the leaf cover. They are found at 3-10 feet in the air and have a large bulky foundation of twigs, vines, leaves and often human objects like paper, strips of cloth or plastic. Inside they are lined with rootlets and they have a deep cup. Another large nest belongs to the ...

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## Traveling Exhibit

The Sac County Conservation Board invites everyone to come see the Tallgrass Prairie Traveling Exhibit. It is up for the holidays. It will be in the center until January 1st. We have special Saturday hours from 9am-12pm to give you and your family time to come see the display. Check out the programs page for special events. This display was made possible by a REAP Grant. It goes through the



fundamentals of prairie habitat in fun and creative ways. Please fill out a survey when you visit!

Other new attractions include the full mount bison standing in the center and the newly opened gift shop.

Nature themed books and gifts will make unique gifts for Christmas!



## Looking into the fact files!



### *Grey Squirrel*

*(Sciurus carolinensis)*

- They are in the rodent family which means they have four teeth that never stop growing. They must wear down their teeth by gnawing.
- In order to get needed calcium they will chew on bones and antlers.
- Grey Squirrels are normally grey however they can be black (often seen in Odebolt) or white (albinos)
- They winter in holes in the trees or in drays.
- Squirrels eat a variety of nuts, seeds, mushrooms, flowers, berries and will even eat insects, caterpillars, eggs as well as young birds. When tree sap is found it is a tasty treat.
- They prepare for winter by caching the nuts which are later found by smell.
- They have two breeding seasons.
- In general they give birth to three pups.
- Their name in Latin means "Shadow Tail" meaning they are always in the shadow of their tail.
- In winter, nests are shared for warmth.
- They prefer woodland habitats but can be found in back yards and open parks.

## Thank You

- -MGM plumbing for use of trailer.
- -To the volunteers that are working to keep the Conservation Center open this holiday season.
- -Thank you to all those who volunteered their time and monetary donations during the 50th Celebration. The county businesses and organizations who made donations for our 50th.
- -A big thank you goes out to those who stepped up and helped while Rene was gone on maternity leave.
- -The Eagle Scouts for the wonderful discovery garden.
- -All the wonderful summer staff who helped keep things running.



# Upcoming Programs



## **December 22nd - Christmas Bird Count 9am – 12pm**

Are you or someone you know an avid bird watcher? We are calling all bird lovers. If you love to watch your or go for a walk or drive, we need your help. Please record the birds you see and mileage you walk or drive. We can send you a species check list if you would prefer. The annual bird count helps to give us a snapshot of the bird population. We ask that on Monday you call or mail us your species list, where you were, how long you were looking and how far you traveled.

Phone: 712-662-4530 Address: 2970 280<sup>th</sup> Street, Sac City, Iowa.

## **After School Specials-Precious Prairie**

During these after school programs kids will come to the center and will learn about the animals, plants and people that call the prairie home. These free programs are for kids in 1st-4th grade. We will play games, see artifacts and much more. Programs will be held at the Conservation Center and will run from 4:00-5:00. Programs will run on December 14th and December 21st. Please sign your child up today!



## **December 31st– Winter Camp!**

During winter camp, kids will learn about the nature of winter, play games and go on a hike. Please call 712-662-4530 to sign up for this program.

PK-1st grades will run from 9-11:00 am

3rd-4th grades will run from 1:00-3:00 pm

Camp will be hosted in the classroom of the Sac County Conservation Center.

## **January 12th- The Stars**

The new digital portable planetarium will be up at the Wall Lake Elementary Gymnasium. Our program will be about the winter sky and other interesting astronomical events. This is a free all ages program. Starlab can fit up to 60 people, so please reserve your spot now. The program will run from 2-3 or 3-4 pm



## **January 19th– Ice Fishing Clinic**

This free program will run from 9am-noon. During this clinic, kids in 1st-7th grade will learn about ice fishing gear, safety and much more. The program will start in the Lake View Library where DNR Biologist, Ben Wallace will present. Then we will travel to the pits where holes have been dug and fishing will commence. Please stay with your child during this program. Fishing poles can be provided. Sign up by calling 662-7131.

## **Snowshoe Building Workshop**

Make your own snowshoes! This adult workshop will run when it works for those interested. It will take 4-5 hours to lace snowshoes. Snowshoe kits are purchased. Cost of snowshoe kits are \$135. If you are interested in making a pair of snowshoes for yourself or a loved one, please call 712-662-4530.



If the snow flies, look for cross country skiing clinics

## Kid's Korner

Want to bring in the birds this winter? Try putting out a bird popsicle wreath.

You will need: an old pie tin that has no holes or tray or jello mold, a cup with rocks or sand and seeds, nuts and/or fruit.

**Step 1:** Arrange seeds, nuts and/or fruit and anything else to make the wreath pretty. **Step 2:** Add water and drape a string over the edge, to leave the ends in making sure to leave the ends in the water.

**Step 3:** Put the whole thing in the freezer or outside over night until it has frozen solid.

**Step 4:** Hang it on a branch outside your window.



Images / instructions from EEK!



Or use the kitchen and make this very cool feeder wreath that everyone will enjoy!

You will need: A piece of corrugated cardboard (thick box), a packet of clear gelatin (found at any grocery store), 2 quarts of bird seed (I recommend something with sunflower seeds in it), Wire and Decorations.

**Step 1:** Cut out a wreath shape on the cardboard. This recipe calls for a wreath that is 10 inches across with a center hole that is 4 inches wide.

**Step 2:** Mix the gelatin according to the instructions on the package.

**Step 3:** Stir in the bird seed, let it cool.

**Step 4:** Once cool enough, try to make a ball by squeezing it in your hands. If it is too loose add more bird seed.

**Step 5:** Insert the wire into the back of the cardboard and wrap it to form a loop for hanging or leave long strands of wire for hanging on a railing.

**Step 6:** It is time to get Messy!! Smooch and mold the mixture onto the cardboard backing. It should stick but if it doesn't add wire around the whole thing to keep it in place.

**Step 7:** Add any decorations like bows onto the wreath.

**Step 8:** Hang and enjoy the birds!!



Directions and photo taken from a home for wild birds

(Continued, page 1) ...Blue Jay.



They form bulky 7-8 inch diameter nests from thorny twigs, bark, mosses, rootlets, leaves and strings in the crotches and outer branches of trees.

They can be anywhere from 5-50 ft high and are found in both evergreens and deciduous trees.

A unique little bird that nests in Iowa's woodlands is the Red-Eyed Vireo, these birds make a nest that is around 5-10 feet off the ground. It has a deep cup and is about 3 inches in diameter. It will be suspended between two branches that form a Y. It is made of grasses, bark strips, rootlets, paper, vines and decorated with lichens. It is bound to the branches with spider webbing.

The easiest hanging nest to find are



those of the Northern (Baltimore)

Audubon Society Photo



Oriole. This nest can be found in Hagge Park and even in your neighborhood. They are normally around 25-30 feet above the ground and prefer elms, willows,

maples and apple trees but they may venture into other trees as well. The large sack is made of woven plant fibers, hair, string or yarn. Inside the sack is soft material like hair, wool, fine grasses, ect. The sack can range from 3.5-8 inches deep.

Our woodlands are home to many Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks in the summer months. Their nests are found in the forks of shrubs and deciduous trees. Flimsy, thin bottomed nests are



Photo from US FWS

built with twigs, they are typically found at 10-15 feet above the ground. Cardinals are easy to spot, with bright red bodies against the white snow.

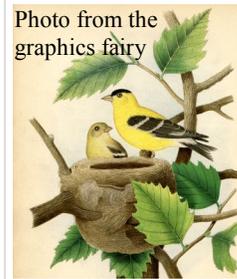


photo -wikipedia

However, their nests are trickier. They are often in dense shrubbery or small trees, thickets and briar tangles. The cup shaped nest is usually below 10 feet and built loosely with vines, twigs, weeds, rootlets, grass and bark strips, sometimes a leaf will also be present. The nest is lined with fine grasses and hair.

The last bird is our state bird, the Goldfinch. This nest is found in the open areas of the park. These cup nests are found around 4-14 feet up

Photo from the graphics fairy



and are made of plant fibers and thistle and cattail down. Now that you know a few nests to look come out and enjoy a winter's walk.

## Eyes To The Skies

- December 3rd– Jupiter in Opposition– This planet will be illuminated by the sun and will be on it's closest approach to Earth.
- December 13th– New Moon
- December 13-14th– Geminid Meteor Shower– **Get up early or stay up late because this should be a good show!!** This is one of the better meteor showers producing up to 60 multi colored meteors per hour. With the new moon this should be a good show. Although it will peak on the dates given they will be visible Dec. 6-19th. Best viewing will be to the east after midnight.
- December 21st– Winter Solstice– The south pole has tilted towards the sun making it the first day of winter
- December 28th– Full Moon
- January 3-4th– Quadrantid Meteor Shower– This shower can be visible from the 1st to the 5th. At its peak it will produce up to 40 meteors per hour out of the constellation Bootes.
- January 11th– New Moon
- January 27th– Full Moon
- February 10th– New Moon
- February 25th– Full Moon



## Winter Visitors

When many people think of migration they think of the spring, yet there are birds that come south to over winter in Iowa. These hardy birds are often on the search for food. Last year there was an unprecedented incursion of the very rare Snowy Owls. It seems that this event will happen again. It is believed that the incursion last year happened because the owls and their food source the lemmings had a bumper year but when winter started the lemming population crashed. So with a lack of food the owls were forced to go further and further south to find food. It looks like the incursion will be smaller this year. Look for these birds sitting on the ground or up on hay bales, fence posts and utility poles.

Due to the dry conditions in the boreal forest, seed production in conifer trees is expected to be very low this year. This will force unique birds to our feeders. Fill your feeders with good food such as sunflower seeds, peanuts, suet and nyger thistle seeds. If you see any of the birds on this page please let us know when and where by calling 662-4530.



Female



Snowy Owl Rare  
Male



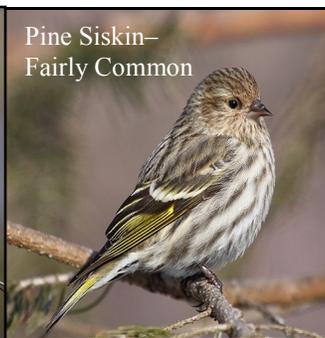
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
Fairly common



Purple Finch  
Fairly common



Male



Pine Siskin—  
Fairly Common



Common Redpoll  
Unusual Female



Male  
Common  
Redpoll



Red Crossbill  
Unusual  
Female



White-winged Crossbill  
aka—Two-barred Crossbill  
Unusual Male



Female  
White-winged  
Crossbill



Male  
Red  
Crossbill



Evening Grosbeak  
Rare  
Male



Evening Grosbeak  
Female



### Sac County Conservation Board

#### Board Members

Barb Bloom-Odebolt— Chairperson  
 Andy Meredith-Lake View-Vice  
 Chair person  
 Kenny Bentsen—Sac City—Secretary  
 Dean Stock—Lake View—Member  
 Rich Feilmeier—Early—Member

#### Staff

Chris Bass—Executive Director  
 Sandi Huster—Secretary  
 Rene Stroud—Naturalist

#### Meetings

Regular board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM at the Hagge Park office. These meetings are open to the public.

Hagge Park Office Phone: (712) 662-4530  
 Email: saccocon@frontiernet.net

The Sac County Conservation Board in the provisions of services and facilities to the public 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 Sac County Conservation Board Office or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240