

# Nature News

POLK COUNTY CONSERVATION • 2016 NATURE PROGRAMS AND NEWS

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## Bald Eagle Recovery in Iowa

by Joe Boyles, PCC Naturalist

As little as 30 years ago, bald eagles were a rare sight to see here in Iowa. But our national symbol of freedom is making a dramatic comeback. These magnificent birds are a prime example of the resiliency of wildlife species to rebound from the brink of extinction if given a chance.

Citizens began to realize that eagles were disappearing from the landscape of North America at an alarming rate as early as the 1930's. Eagle numbers were declining due to: habitat loss, decline of prey because of overhunting, direct shooting, and the widespread use of DDT, an insecticide which caused eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that cracked before the chicks could hatch.

In 1940, The Bald Eagle Protection Act was enacted to provide complete protection for these raptors from injury, disturbance of any kind, and even makes it illegal to possess any parts of an eagle, egg, or nest without proper federal permits.

By the 1960's eagle numbers had plummeted to less than 4,000 individuals in the lower 48 states and wildlife officials thought they may go extinct. In 1973, the US Congress passed legislation to create the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA not only protects plant and animal species from direct persecution by humans, but protects the habitats these species rely on.

Bald eagles have recovered to a point today where they have been completely removed from the Endangered Species List. Hooray for conservation! With continued protection from the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the International Migratory Bird Treaty Act, bald eagles are thriving and are no longer an uncommon site in Iowa. As recently as 2014, there have been over 200 active nest sites recorded in Iowa, with several thousand eagles seen state-



Photo: Eric Williamson

wide during the winter months. Eagles will migrate southward as far as necessary to find food sources in the winter. Dams on the larger rivers provide open water below their spillways when all other water bodies are frozen, and stunned fish coming out of those spillways are a great food source for wintering eagles.

However, bald eagles are opportunistic hunters and scavengers. Road kill, gut piles from deer hunters, or animals wounded and not found by hunters are all on their menu. Recent research has clearly shown that gut piles and dead animals shot with lead ammunition can pose a serious threat to scavengers including eagles. Anglers using lead weighted lures can pose the same threat. Even minute amounts of lead fragments ingested while eating these food sources can be enough to poison and kill eagles. With other non-toxic ammunition and lure options available today, we strongly encourage hunters and anglers to use lead-free alternatives.

This winter, load up the family and go for a drive to look for eagles. Below Saylorville Dam, and the bridges near downtown Des Moines, particularly SE 6th St. Bridge, are great places to start your search. Viewing from your car is a great way to see these majestic birds and provide hours of free entertainment.



## *Message from the Director: Jump In, the Water is Fine!*

I grew up “in the water”. I was in the creek (pronounced “crick” in my vernacular) catching crawfish, trying to build a dam with rocks and sticks, and letting the cool water flow over my skinny little frame on a hot summer day.

Times have changed, but not that much. There is a lot of publicity concerning poor water quality, and while problems exist, most of our public waters, most of the time, are safe and accessible. Let’s look at some of the water quality challenges in the news.

Nitrate. Nitrate is a form of nitrogen. Nitrogen is everywhere. It makes up 78% of the atmosphere. It is an important part of DNA, and within every cell of your body. It cycles through our ecosystems - always has, always will. It is not a “poison” in the classic sense of the word. High nitrate levels in streams and rivers is of very little danger to swimming, paddling, or splashing in those joyous places.

This isn’t to minimize the problem, our nitrogen cycle is broken, and has massive effects on our economy, natural systems, and public health. Too much nitrate in drinking water can have negative effects on the human body. Too much nitrate in natural aquatic cycles have bad ecological effects, such as algae blooms and hypoxic zones.

Bacteria. Public beaches are monitored, and if there is a public health risk, those beaches are closed. The danger is real. Streams and rivers can also have bacteria problems, but those are actually rare. As long as you aren’t “drinking” river water, and wash your hands before eating, the risk is low.

Sediment. This causes water to look dirty. We have huge problems with erosion from agricultural lands / construction sites and stream bank sloughing because of human caused changes to the landscape. But this doesn’t pose a human health risk. You might be surprised that most of our streams are quite clear most of the year.

Garbage. Always a problem, but rarely dangerous. Pop cans, Styrofoam containers, and old tires are an eyesore, but generally rare and not dangerous.

So get in there! Go “river walking”. Paddle a river. Turn over some rocks in a stream to see what critters live beneath. Jump in, the water is (usually) fine! - Richard Leopold



*In July PCC staff reviewed proper water monitoring methods at Paw Creek in Jester Park*



*Water Wonders camper playing in Camp Creek at Thomas Mitchell Park*



## The Latest

### Regular Polk County Water & Land Legacy Updates

#### LAND PROTECTION

- As part of the Easter Lake restoration project, a 258-acre piece of ground northeast of the park was purchased for the purpose of disposal of dredge material coming from the lake. This site was a former gravel mining operation that includes 140 acres of water and almost one mile of shoreline. Average water depth is about 20 feet. The dredge material that will be piped to this site in 2016 will provide a good fertile bottom to these sand pits. In the coming years, this former industrial site will be transformed into a beautiful park that will host a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, including wonderful wildlife observation.
- PCC is currently working with Metro Waste Authority on a management strategy for two parcels of land along Camp Creek that are south of SE 6th Ave.

#### TRAILS

- **Great Western Trail Extension:** Opened November 2015! This new one-mile gravel surfaced extension joins the Great Western and Bill Riley Trails along the old rail line which is above flood levels. Polk County Conservation, while partnering with Des Moines Park and Recreation and Water Works Park, has cooperated to bridge this long standing gap in the Metro trail system.
- **Mally's Park Connection to the Chichaqua Valley Trail (CVT):** Opened November 2015! The CVT Extension has proven to be a very popular addition to the Central Iowa Trail System trail since it was opened in April of this year. Mally's Park which is adjacent to the trail in Berwick, had water and restrooms along with limited parking. The parking has now been expanded and an accessible ramp now joins the park to the trail. This ramp allows trail users to access park amenities without traveling on a county roadway into Berwick.

#### PARKS

##### Easter Lake Park

- Restoration plans for Easter Lake have been approved and are moving forward. The lake began a 4 feet lowering process in late October in order to replace the spillway gate valve. This drop in water level will also allow staff and contractors a great opportunity to document and prioritize future shoreline restoration areas and propose less expensive methods to improve shoreline erosion issues. Winter snowmelt and spring rains will fill the lake back up in 2016.
- Plans to conduct a Feasibility Study for the Easter Lake Lodge are in place in order to gauge public interest and potential funding opportunities. This study will take place over the winter months.

##### Brown's Woods

- More than 250 neighbors, scouts, birders, and park enthusiasts attended the Grand Re-Opening of Brown's Woods on Wednesday, October 7th. Attendees enjoyed free food and drinks, guided nature hikes, geocaching, woodland restoration volunteer demonstrations, and birding education. New trail wayfinding signage offering easier navigation will be in place by the spring.



*Brown's Woods Grand Re-Opening: Mike Smith (PCC Board Member), Rich Leopold (PCC Director), Ron Eckoff (PCC Volunteer), Angela Connolly (Polk County Supervisor), Tom Hadden (West Des Moines City Manager)*

##### Jester Park

- Polk County Conservation, in conjunction with the Great Outdoors Foundation, is gearing up for a Jester Park Nature Center public capital campaign that will be launched in our next newsletter. We are hopeful that all of our friends will consider making a gift to this fabulous project.

##### Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

- The Board is expected to approve the master plan for Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt at the December meeting. This plan will help guide investments for Chichaqua's future but it should not be confused with an ecological/management plan. The development of a management plan is the top recommendation of this plan as ecological restoration has been and will continue to be the driving force at Chichaqua – far into the future. The full version of this plan can be viewed on our website under Parks & Trails/Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt.

##### Fort Des Moines Park

- Proposed improvements at Fort Des Moines Park include new shelters, flush restrooms, peninsula trail/boardwalk/shade structures, improved trail system and bridges, boat ramp, fishing access, and an outdoor classroom. Major construction work is in full swing and will continue through much of 2016. The two shelters in the park cannot be reserved until after Memorial Day weekend. Until then, they are free of charge on a first come first serve basis.



## New Face at Polk County Conservation

### Shawn Warren

Shawn Warren began his employment as a Natural Resources Technician in July. Shawn comes to us from the City of Des Moines Forestry Department and has 12 years in the tree and turf industry. He has significant experience in climbing, horticulture and is an ISA Certified Arborist. Shawn lives in Van Meter with his wife and two children. He enjoys competing in climbing competitions and spending time outdoors with his family.



## Rental Skis and Snowshoes Available

Interested in trying cross-country skiing or snowshoeing this winter? If so, consider renting a pair from Polk County Conservation. Cross-country skis are sized mainly for adults. Snowshoes are sized for adults and children, with a weight range of 40-250 pounds. Equipment can be reserved in advance by calling (515) 323-5339. Equipment must be picked up and dropped off at Jester Park during normal office hours, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Cross-country ski rental (includes skis, boots, poles): **\$8/day**

Snowshoe rental (snowshoes only): **\$7/day**



## Park Packs

### Nature-Themed Backpacks - Free two-week checkout

These backpacks come with a field guide and a variety of activities and fun facts to assist in the discovery of a specific nature topic. Themes include: Birds, Trees, Insects, Animals of Iowa, Geology, Life in a Pond, Wildflowers & Plants, Animals of the Night, Geocaching, and Outdoor Skills.

For more information, contact Lori at (515) 323-5380 or email: [lori.foresman-kirpes@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:lori.foresman-kirpes@polkcountyiowa.gov)

## Thanks for the Park Pack Feedback!

"We really appreciate the new worlds these Park Packs open up for our young kids, as they learn to do things like look for signs of animals on a hike. Thank you for putting these together!" The Helmkamp Family

"My 4-year old loved the books, especially *I Took a Walk*. The furs were a big hit too. She is learning so much about animals, habitats, nests/babies, and predators. It is really early in the season, but we'll check this out again when we camp. Thank you so much for this great resource!" The Calverts

### Polk County Conservation Board Members:

- Jim Cataldo, *Des Moines*
- Connie Johnson, *Ankeny*
- Tom Levis, *West Des Moines*
- Lance Northway, *Runnells*
- Mike Smith, *Des Moines*

### Polk County Conservation Director:

Rich Leopold

## Jester Park Golf Course Recognized for Environmental Excellence

Jester Park Golf Course has retained its designation as a “Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary” through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, an Audubon International program.

To reach certification, a course must demonstrate they are maintaining a high degree of environmental quality in a number of areas including: Environmental Planning, Wildlife & Habitat Management, Outreach and Education, Chemical Use Reduction and Safety, Water Conservation, and Water Quality Management.

“Jester Park Golf Course has shown a strong commitment to its environmental program. They are to be commended for their efforts to provide a sanctuary for wildlife on the golf course property,” said Tara Pepperman, Director of Cooperative Sanctuary Programs at Audubon International.

Jester Park Golf Course is one of six courses in Iowa and 914 courses in the world to hold the honor. The golf course was designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary in 2002. After designation, courses go through a recertification process every three years.

*This chimney swift tower was constructed by Eagle Scout, Justin Rolf from Polk City and installed on the Jester Park Golf Course in September 2015. Chimney swifts are small birds that utilize cavities like chimneys for nesting and roosting. The tower is insulated to reduce temperature fluctuations and has a rough interior surface the swifts can cling to and build their nests. Chimney swifts are beneficial birds to have around a golf course because they eat a lot of insects!*

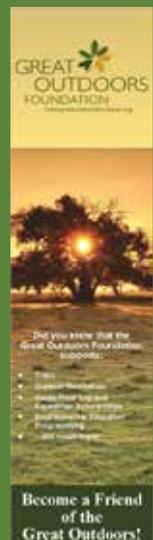


## Thank you to the Great Outdoors Foundation

Polk County Conservation would like to extend a special thank you to the Great Outdoors Foundation Board for committing money for the following projects in 2015:

- Polk County Conservation Book Worms Program Sponsor
- Greater Des Moines Area Pocket Trails Map
- School Bus Field Trip Scholarships
- At-Risk Horse Camp Scholarships
- Friend of Polk County’s Water and Land Legacy
- Guide by Cell Audio Tour Program
- Firewood to stock the campgrounds
- Education Trailer

Polk County Conservation is proud to partner with the Great Outdoors Foundation in support of quality outdoor recreation, environmental education, and natural resource protection projects and services. Without their support, many of these valuable projects would not be possible. To learn more about the Great Outdoors Foundation and to become a “Friend”, go to [www.greatoutdoorsfoundation.org](http://www.greatoutdoorsfoundation.org).



Each year Polk County naturalists select a variety of programs we feel the public will enjoy. Our programs have been designed with you in mind, so they are both educational and fun.

- Program and event information is available by visiting: [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org) or by calling our administrative office at: (515) 323-5300, Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- Fees and registration are not required unless otherwise noted.
- Many programs are family-oriented and are designed so all ages can participate.
- Outdoor programs will be canceled if there is lightning or other extreme weather conditions such as wind, cold, or rain. Check our social media sites for the latest information.
- Programs are developed for beginners. No prior experience is required unless noted.
- Youth and adult groups such as church, scouts, and 4-H are always welcome.
- No refunds will be given after the registration deadline.

## PROGRAMS

### Ice Fishing Clinic

**Saturday, January 9 from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
**Thomas Mitchell Park, meet at pond parking lot**

Come and learn the basics of ice fishing and get some hands-on experience. Anyone over the age of 16 will need a valid fishing license. Bait and poles will be provided. Bring something to sit on and dress warmly.

### Owl Prowl

**Friday, January 22 from 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.**  
**Yellow Banks Park, tent camping area**

Bundle up and join a naturalist for a campfire program to learn about owls. After a brief discussion about these flying predators of the night, we will go for a hike and learn how to call three different species of owls.

### Snowshoe Hike

**Saturday, January 23 from 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.**  
**Thomas Mitchell Park, meet at pond parking lot**

Learn how easy and fun snowshoeing can be while experiencing the great outdoors. Wear warm waterproof boots. Class will be canceled without snow. Pre-registration required; deadline is January 20. Minimum age 6. Fee: \$5 (includes snowshoes).

Program Information & Registration:  
[www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org) or (515) 323-5300

### Shoes and Soup

**Saturday, January 23 from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.**  
**Chichaqua Longhouse**



Come out to the park to snowshoe by the light of the full moon. We'll start with brief snowshoeing tutorial followed by a naturalist led snowshoe hike with time to explore on your own. Complete the evening with a warm bowl of soup! Registration for 10 and older - \$10, 5-9 year olds - \$8. Registration fee includes snowshoes and soup. Registration deadline is January 20.

### Book Worms

**Thursday, January 28 from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**  
**Cafe Diem, 2005 S Ankeny Blvd. Suite 800, Ankeny**

Join our book club with Naturalist Heidi Anderson for an engaging discussion once a month. This month we'll be discussing *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold. The first five registered will receive a free book. Pre-registration required; deadline is January 25. Fee: \$5, includes coffee and cookies. Sponsored by the Great Outdoors Foundation.

### Cross-Country Ski Basics

**Saturday, January 30 from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
**Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge, WDM**

Learn the basics of cross-country skiing and practice your skills on the trails. Proper clothing, equipment, and skiing techniques will be discussed before we head outside. Class will be canceled without snow. Pre-registration required; deadline is January 28. Minimum age 12. Fee: \$10 (includes skis, boots, and poles).

### Hog Wild

**Tuesday, February 2 from 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.**  
**Jester Park Lodge**

Iowa is known for its hogs, but there is more than one kind of "hog" in Iowa. Come get "hog wild" with a Polk County Conservation naturalist as we discuss the ground hog.

### Fossils of Iowa

**Saturday, February 6 from 10:30 - 11:30 a.m.**  
**Jester Park Lodge**

Did dinosaurs or woolly mammoths ever live in Iowa? Come find out what kinds of ancient life used to live here by examining some real fossils.

### Tricky Tracks

**Saturday, February 6 from 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.**  
**Jester Park Lodge**

Have you seen all of the animals that live in the woods or in your neighborhood? Come to this program and learn how to identify the signs that animals leave behind.

## Ice Fishing Clinic

**Saturday, February 6 from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.**  
**Easter Lake Park, Shelter #2**

See the description for the January 9th Ice Fishing Clinic. Anyone over the age of 16 will need a valid fishing license.

## Snowshoe Hike

**Saturday, February 13 from 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.**  
**Jester Park, Shelter #5**

See the description for the January 23rd Snowshoe Hike. Class will be canceled without snow. Pre-registration required, deadline is February 10. Minimum age 6. Fee: \$5 (includes snowshoes.)

## Indoor Kayaking

**Saturday, February 13 from 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.**  
**Urbandale Public Pool, 7201 Aurora Ave., Urbandale**

Got a case of cabin fever? Let's go kayaking on a cold winter day! Learn the basics of recreational kayaking from a PCC naturalist in the comfort of a heated indoor pool. Participants will learn about types of kayaks, equipment, techniques, self rescues, and have a chance to practice skills on the water. Dress to get wet and bring a towel and a dry change of clothes. All equipment is provided. Pre-registration required; deadline is January 28. Minimum age 18. Fee: \$20.

## Indoor Archery

**Thursday, February 18 from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.**  
**Jester Park**

This class will focus on form and safety, giving students basics that will get them safely shooting, and offer a general feel for archery. The class will cover eye dominance, archery safety rules, range rules, equipment, and proper shooting techniques using a compound bow. The class is suitable for those with no experience, or those that may have shot before and need a refresher. Pre-registration required; deadline is February 12. Ages 12 and up. Fee: \$5.

## Cross Country Skiing

**Saturday, February 20 from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
**Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, Longhouse**

See the description for the January 30 class. Class will be canceled without snow. Pre-registration required, deadline is February 17. Minimum age 12. Fee: \$10.

## Ice Fishing Clinic

**Saturday, February 20 from 12:00 - 3:00 p.m.**  
**Jester Park, Shelter #5**

See the description for the January 9th clinic. Anyone over the age of 16 will need a valid fishing license.

## Book Worms

**Thursday, February 25 from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**  
**Cafe Diem, 2005 S Ankeny Blvd. Suite 800, Ankeny**

Join our book club with Naturalist Heidi Anderson for an engaging discussion once a month. This month we'll be discussing *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Colbert. Pre-registration required; deadline is February 22.

## Bald Eagle Watch

**Sunday, February 28 from 12:00 - 4:00 p.m.**  
**Saylorville Lake and Jester Park Lodge**

Stop by the Saylorville Visitors Center to learn about our national symbol, the bald eagle. Then venture out to different areas around the lake to observe them in their natural setting. The Jester Park Lodge will be hosting a live eagle used for education. Hourly programs starting at 1:00 p.m. will give you a close look at this amazing species. Refreshments will be served at outdoor locations.

## Edible Landscape Design

**Tuesday, March 1 from 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.**  
**Jester Park Lodge**

Beth Waage, certified in Permaculture Landscape Design, will be discussing ways to include edible, as well as sustainable landscaping to your yard. Permaculture is a concept which minimizes the time put into your garden by mimicking patterns in nature, while maximizing the output! This program will include plenty of time for questions, as well as a short design exercise. Come prepared to think about how you can alter your landscape for the better! Pre-registration required; deadline is February 23. Fee: \$5.

## Indoor Kayaking

**Saturday, March 5 from 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.**  
**Urbandale Public Pool, 7201 Aurora Ave., Urbandale**

See the description for the February 13 class. Pre-registration required, deadline is February 18. Minimum age 18. Fee: \$20.

## Rain Barrel Workshop

**Saturday, March 12 from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.**  
**Jester Park Shop**

A short discussion about ways to collect and use runoff water will be held before participants construct their own 55-gallon rain barrel. All materials and tools will be provided. Make sure you are able to transport your barrel back to your home after the workshop. Pre-registration required; deadline is March 9. Fee: \$50.

## Survivor Day Camp

**Wednesday, March 16 from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**  
**Jester Park Equestrian Center**

Campers will have fun learning and staying active. Activities will include archery, geocaching, and survival skills. Students will make their own lunch over a fire they help build. Activities will take place both indoors and out. Pre-registration required; deadline is March 9. Ages 10-12 years. Fee: \$30.

## Wild Night Life & Hike

**Thursday, March 17 from 7:30 - 9:30 p.m.**  
**Jester Park, Camp Area 5**

Join PCC naturalists for a campfire program about the wild night life in Jester Park. A short hike will follow as we search for some of these nocturnal animals. Afterward enjoy eating s'mores around the campfire. Pre-registration required; deadline is March 14. Fee: \$5.

## Amazing Iowa Reptiles

**Friday, March 18 from 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.**  
**East Side Library, 2559 Hubbell Ave., Des Moines**

Come and learn about Iowa's reptiles. We'll discuss the fears and myths that surround these scaly creatures people love to hate.

## Indoor Archery

**Thursday, March 24 from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.**  
**Jester Park**

See description for the February 18th Indoor Archery class. Pre-registration required; deadline is March 21. Fee: \$5.

## Book Worms

**Thursday, March 31 from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**  
**Cafe Diem, 2005 S Ankeny Blvd. Suite 800, Ankeny**

Join our book club with Naturalist Heidi Anderson for an engaging discussion once a month. This month we'll be discussing *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson. Pre-registration required; deadline is March 28.

## Stargazing

**Saturday, April 9 from 8:30 - 10:00 p.m.**  
**Yellow Banks Park, Shelter #1**

Turn your eyes to the sky to view the spring constellations. Local astronomers will provide telescopes. This program is co-sponsored by the Blank Park Zoo.

## Rain Barrel Workshop

**Saturday, April 16 from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.**  
**Easter Lake Park Shop**

See description for the March 12th Rain Barrel Workshop. Pre-registration required; deadline is April 13. Fee: \$50.

## Wild Night Life & Hike

**Friday, April 22 from 8:30 - 10:00 p.m.**  
**Jester Park, Camp Area 5**

See description for March 17th Wild Night Life and Hike. Pre-registration required; deadline is April 20. Fee: \$5.

## Earth Day Geocache Hunt

**Saturday, April 23 from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.**  
**Jester Park, Shelter #5**



Join a naturalist to learn how to use a GPS, then go search the woods to find the Lorax and his treasures hidden in the park. Be sure to keep an eye out for the truffula trees along the way that are worth special prizes. Space is limited, so register early. Pre-registration required; deadline is April 15. Fee: \$5 per collector (any child ages 3-14).

## Spring Wildflower Hike

**Saturday, April 30 from 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.**  
**Thomas Mitchell Park, meet in pond parking lot**

Enjoy a beautiful spring day as we hike through the woods to view and identify the dazzling display of spring wildflowers.

## PCC Advisory Committee Member Applications Now Being Accepted

The Polk County Conservation Advisory Committee was established in 2007. Approximately 25 members serve on the committee for two year terms with a goal of providing professional feedback to Polk County Conservation staff and board members on various planning and programming issues. The Committee meets four times per year. Members are asked to offer their ideas and professional expertise on discussion items, gather public perception on various topics, and conduct external research in order to accomplish committee goals.

Polk County Conservation is now accepting membership applications to be a part of this advisory committee. New members will begin their term in January of 2016. If you are interested in serving on the Advisory Committee, please contact Kami Rankin at (515) 323-5363 or [kami.rankin@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:kami.rankin@polkcountyiowa.gov).

## Eco Bus Trips...Going Wild!

Because it is rare...because only 2.8% of land in Iowa is publicly owned...we are going to tour it...rediscover it...reconnect with it...Iowa's beauty and wildness. Step on board with Polk County Conservation Eco-bus trips. For the past 20 years we have offered citizens the opportunity to experience the beauty of Iowa and Iowan hospitality throughout the state. Bring a friend or come on your own and make new friends. Bring a sense of adventure and desire to reconnect with Iowa's natural resources. Eco-bus trips take place from April to October. The trips will be posted on PCC website beginning in February. Eco-bus trip on-line registration opens Saturday, March 5 at 8:00 a.m. For more information contact, Lori Foresman-Kirpes, Eco-trip Group travel planner at (515) 323-5380.

On-line Trip registration will open  
on **Saturday, March 5 at 8:00 a.m.**

## Save the Date Trip

**Thursday, April 28**

Step-on board for an eco-bus trip. The trip will include, great food, great company and a few laughs and good reason to get out and explore after a long winter! More details to come! Fee: TBD.

## Orange City Tulip Festival Overnight

**May 18 & 19**

**Orange City, Iowa**

Journey to Northwest Iowa with Polk County Conservation on a two day adventure. Enjoy the annual Tulip Festival in Orange City, tour the Wells Blue Bunny Ice Cream plant in LeMars. Other stops include the Lewis & Clark Keel Boat exhibit at Onawa and the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center in Sioux City. More details will be posted on our website in February. 7:15 a.m. departure and 7:00 p.m. return. Fee: TBD Double & single occupancy rates.



## Buffalo National River Kayak Trip

**May 21 - 25**

**Harrison, Arkansas**

Join Polk County Conservation naturalists on this five day adventure to Arkansas. Established in 1972, Buffalo National River flows freely for 135 miles and is one of the few remaining undammed rivers in the lower 48 states. Once you arrive, prepare to journey from running rapids to quiet pools while surrounded by massive bluffs as you cruise through the Ozark Mountains. We'll camp three nights along the river and paddle different sections of the river all three of the paddling days.

- Fee: \$400; includes transportation (15 passenger van), lodging, meals (except while traveling), most equipment, and fees.
- Deadline is April 22
- Departure from Jester Park at 7:00 a.m.
- Minimum age is 21 and limited to 10 participants who must have prior paddling experience and be in good physical condition.
- Participants need to provide tent, sleeping bags, personal items, cash for souvenirs and meals while traveling.



*Kayakers paddling down the Buffalo River*

## Staying connected with PCC is easier now than ever!

PCC is embracing social media to help us stay connected with you! Like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter or Pinterest, and subscribe to our YouTube channel and blog page. We also email a monthly e-newsletter with timely program information and park news.



## Water Wonders Camp

June 13 - 16

9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Ages: 8-9 years

Come and get your feet wet as we discover all we can about water. We'll compare ponds, rivers, lakes, and wetlands plus the animals that live in them. Daily field trips will take us to various Polk County parks.

- Fee: \$125
- Registration deadline is May 27
- Limited to 12 campers
- Meeting location: Jester Park, Shelter by Lodge



*Water Wonders camper with her bug jar and net*

## Junior Naturalist Camp

June 20 - 23 and June 27 - 30

9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Ages: 10-11 years

Do you know a child who loves the outdoors? Campers will spend the week fishing, canoeing, hiking, geocaching and more while exploring the outdoors. Campers will also learn how to use a compass, build a fire, and cook a snack over a fire. On the last day of camp, campers will become official Iowa Junior Naturalists and receive a badge and certificate. Daily field trips will take us to various Polk County parks.

- Fee: \$125
- Registration deadline is June 3
- Limited to 12 campers
- Meeting location: Jester Park, Shelter by Lodge



*Jr. Naturalist campers learning how to canoe*

## Discovery Camp

July 5 - 8

9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Ages: 6-7 years

This camp is all about animals! Learn about the basic animal groups: insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals. There will be plenty of games, live animals, snacks, and more!

- Fee: \$60
- Registration deadline is June 17
- Limited to 12 campers
- Meeting location: Jester Park, Shelter #5



*Discovery campers on a scavenger hunt*

**Camp Details:** These day camps are designed to encourage hands-on learning through outdoor explorations, activities, games, crafts, and more. Camps will be led by naturalists. These camps fill up fast, so register early!

Camp Registration opens on **February 27 at 8:00 a.m.** on [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org)

You will not be able to register before this date!

Due to popularity of our camps, your child may only attend each camp one time.

## Many thanks to you!

Thank you to our many volunteers who help with a wide range of on-going tasks. Volunteer projects include: trail clearing and park maintenance projects, park and shoreline clean-ups, harvesting prairie seeds, invasive species removal, planting/mulching trees, cleaning out fire rings, stream clean-ups, office tasks and special events. Also thanks to those who help at the Jester Park Equestrian Center. These projects include assisting therapeutic riding program, helping with pony rides, cleaning stalls and helping with special events and camps. If any of these activities sound like something you would like to take part in, please contact Pat Spain, Volunteer Coordinator at (515) 323-5280, or [pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov).



*Volunteers collecting goldenrod, rattlesnake master and round-headed bush clover seed. Pictured (L to R) is Aaron Wilson-Crumb, David Shkiriyak and Pierre Blosse.*

## Stewards, Nest Box Monitors and Adopt-A-Park Sponsors Needed!

Do you have a favorite park, trail or natural area? Do you enjoy watching birds or want to be more involved? We will train, equip and prepare you to: remove invasive species, pick up litter, monitoring trails, restore natural areas and collecting prairie seed (to name a few). For more information on how to get involved, contact Pat Spain.

## Volunteer Spotlight

We would like to shine the spotlight on one of our newest PCC Trail Ambassadors, Tom O'Donnell. Tom is an avid cyclist who feels at home on his recumbent tricycle making use of many of the paved trails in the Des Moines Metro and surrounding area! Giving back to his community is Tom's forte, which is evident through his many years as a soccer referee, volunteering for various non-profits and now including our Trail Ambassador program. Not long after officially signing up, Tom and members of his family assisted a badly injured bicyclist, getting the person and their bike off the trail to where paramedics could tend to injuries.

Tom is willing to offer advice to beginners and way finding directions to any in need and offer any assistance that he is able. If you happen to see him on the trails--give him a wave and tell him thanks for all he does!

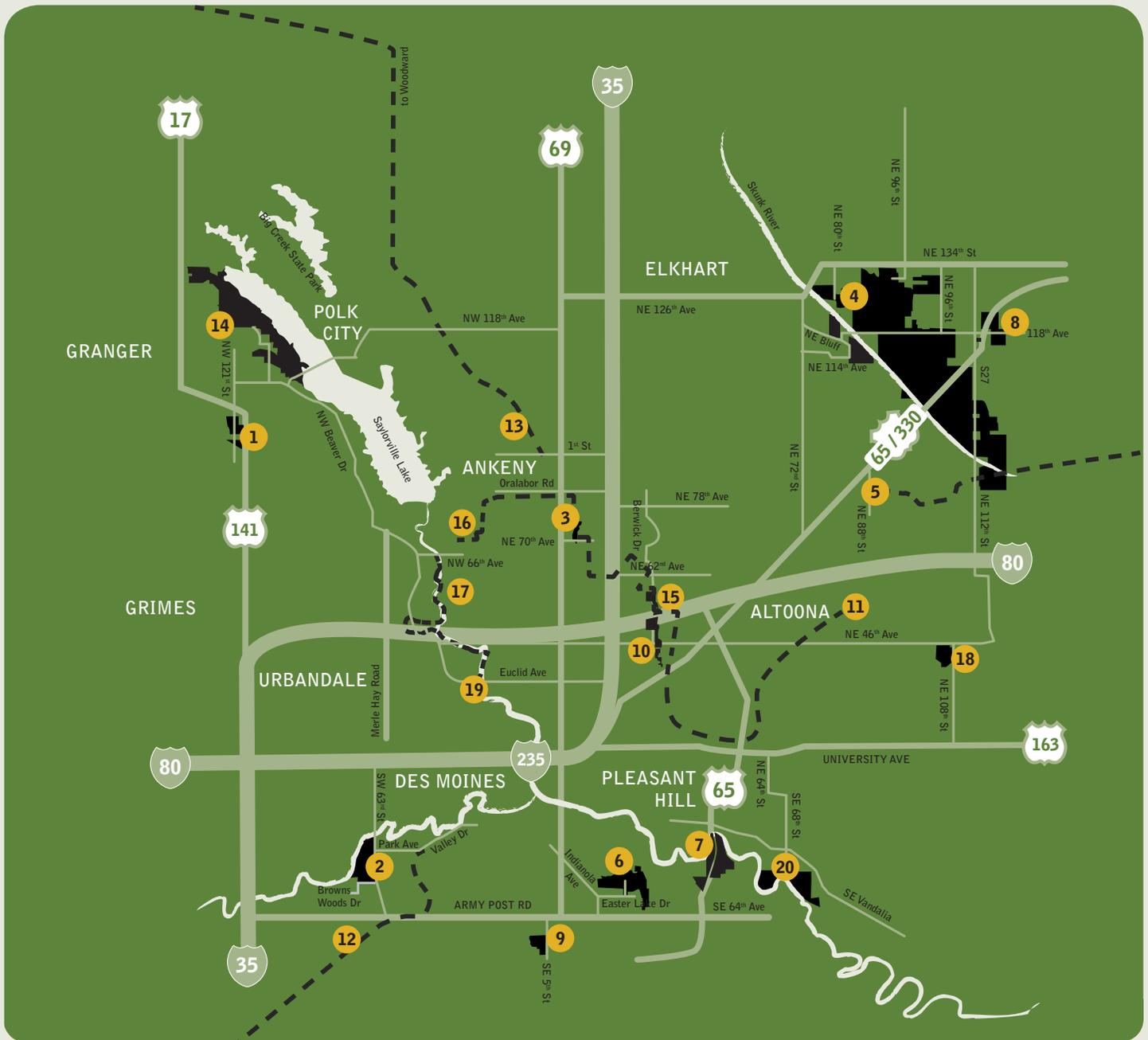


*Trail Ambassador Tom O'Donnell*

### UPCOMING VOLUNTEER WORKDAYS & EVENTS:

- January 16 - Brown's Woods Restoration Workday: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- February 6 - Carney Marsh Restoration: 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
- March 5 - Carney Marsh Restoration: 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
- March 13 - Volunteer Appreciation Banquet at Jester Park Lodge: 5:00 - 7:30 p.m.
- April 2 - Carney Marsh Restoration: 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
- April 22 - City of Des Moines Trash Bash (various locations)
- April 30 - Arbor Day Century Trees Project at Easter Lake Park: 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

For more information or to volunteer, please contact: Pat Spain at (515) 323-5280 or [pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov)



1. Beaver Creek Greenbelt
2. Brown's Woods
3. Carney Marsh
4. Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
5. Chichaqua Valley Trail
6. Easter Lake Park
7. Eagle Roost Wildlife Area
8. Engeldinger Marsh
9. Fort Des Moines Park
10. Four Mile Creek Greenbelt

11. Gay Lea Wilson Trail
12. Great Western Trail
13. High Trestle Trail
14. Jester Park
15. Mally's Weh Weh Neh Kee Park
16. Oralabor Gateway Trail
17. Sycamore Trail
18. Thomas Mitchell Park
19. Trestle to Trestle Trail
20. Yellow Banks Park

# BE A FRIEND OF THE GREAT OUTDOORS FOUNDATION

*Pledge your support today for high quality, healthy living for Greater Polk County through expanded open space, restored landscapes, and greater recreation and outdoor education opportunities.*

## FRIENDS ENJOY:

- Having your name published in the Great Outdoors Foundation Annual Report
- Receiving all current *Great Outdoors Foundation* and *Polk County Conservation* news and information
- Participating in special programs, tours and events designed exclusively for our Friends
- An invitation to the Annual *Friends Celebration* Banquet

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ CITY, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

DAYTIME PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ CELL PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

## FRIENDS LEVELS:

\_\_\_ **KIDS:** \$25 *Receive a Birthday Card, Name recognition at our Friends Celebration*

\_\_\_ **SENIOR CITIZENS:** \$50  
(over age 55) *Invitation to our Friends Celebration and name recognition at the event*

\_\_\_ **INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY:** \$100 *Invitation to our Friends Celebration and name recognition at the event*

### CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS:

\_\_\_ **BRONZE:** \$500 *2 complimentary tickets to the Friends Celebration  
Name recognition at all events*

\_\_\_ **SILVER:** \$1,000 *4 complimentary tickets to the Friends Celebration  
Name recognition at all events*

\_\_\_ **GOLD:** \$2,500 *6 complimentary tickets to the Friends Celebration  
Name recognition at all events*

\_\_\_ **PLATINUM:** \$5,000 and up *8 complimentary tickets to the Friends Celebration  
Name recognition at all events*



DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY (*pre-registration required)	LOCATION
January 5	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - Iowa's Hidden Treasures	Jester Park Lodge
January 9	10:00 a.m.	Ice Fishing Clinic	Thomas Mitchell Park
January 16	10:00 a.m.	Brown's Woods Restoration Work Day	Brown's Woods
January 22	6:00 p.m.	Owl Prowl	Yellow Banks Park
January 23	10:00 a.m.	Pleasure Driving Clinic*	Jester Park Equestrian Center
January 23	1:00 p.m.	Snowshoe Hike*	Thomas Mitchell Park
January 23	5:30 p.m.	Shoes and Soup*	Chichaqua Longhouse
January 28	7:00 p.m.	Book Worms*	Cafe Diem, Ankeny
January 30	10:00 a.m.	Cross-Country Ski Basics*	Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge
January 30	11:00 a.m.	Let it Snow Family Event	Jester Park Equestrian Center
February 2	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - Iowa's Bluebirds	Jester Park Lodge
February 2	6:30 p.m.	Hog Wild	Jester Park Lodge
February 6	10:30 a.m.	Fossils of Iowa	Jester Park Lodge
February 6	11:00 a.m.	Carney Marsh Work Day	Carney Marsh
February 6	1:00 p.m.	Tricky Tracks	Jester Park Lodge
February 6	1:00 p.m.	Ice Fishing Clinic	Easter Lake Park
February 13	10:00 a.m.	Snowshoe Hike*	Jester Park
February 13	5:00 p.m.	Indoor Kayaking*	Urbandale Public Pool
February 18	6:00 p.m.	Indoor Archery*	Jester Park
February 20	10:00 a.m.	Cross-County Ski Basics*	Chichaqua Longhouse
February 20	12:00 p.m.	Ice Fishing Clinic	Jester Park
February 25	7:00 p.m.	Book Worms*	Cafe Diem, Ankeny
February 28	12:00 p.m.	Bald Eagle Watch	Jester Park Lodge & Saylorville Lake
March 1	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - The Iowa Grotto	Jester Park Lodge
March 1	6:30 p.m.	Edible Landscape Design*	Jester Park Lodge
March 5	11:00 a.m.	Carney Marsh Work Day	Carney Marsh
March 5	5:00 p.m.	Indoor Kayaking*	Urbandale Public Pool
March 12	10:00 a.m.	Rain Barrel Workshop*	Jester Park
March 13	5:00 p.m.	Volunteer Appreciation Banquet*	Jester Park Lodge
March 15	10:00 a.m.	Spring Break Equestrian Day Camp*	Jester Park Equestrian Center
March 16	9:00 a.m.	Survivor Day Camp*	Jester Park
March 17	10:00 a.m.	Spring Break Equestrian Day Camp*	Jester Park Equestrian Center
March 17	7:30 p.m.	Wild Night Life & Hike*	Jester Park
March 18	10:00 a.m.	Spring Break Equestrian Day Camp*	Jester Park Equestrian Center
March 18	1:00 p.m.	Amazing Iowa Reptiles	East Side Library
March 19	3:00 p.m.	Horse Owner Seminar*	Jester Park Equestrian Center
March 24	6:00 p.m.	Indoor Archery*	Jester Park
March 26	1:00 p.m.	Spring Open House & Easter Egg Hunt	Jester Park Equestrian Center
March 31	7:00 p.m.	Book Worms*	Cafe Diem, Ankeny
April 2	11:00 a.m.	Carney Marsh Work Day	Carney Marsh
April 5	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - Unconditional Surrender	Jester Park Lodge
April 9	8:30 p.m.	Stargazing	Yellow Banks Park
April 16	10:00 a.m.	Rain Barrel Workshop*	Easter Lake Park
April 22	TBD	Earth Day Trash Bash	Various locations
April 22	8:30 p.m.	Wild Night Life & Hike*	Jester Park
April 23	1:00 p.m.	Earth Day Geocache Hunt*	Jester Park
April 28	TBD	Save the Date Eco Bus Tour*	TBD
April 30	9:00 a.m.	Arbor Day Century Trees Project	Easter Lake Park
April 30	1:00 p.m.	Spring Wildflower Hike	Thomas Mitchell Park

**Jester Park Administration Office**  
**11407 NW Jester Park Dr.**  
**Granger, Iowa 50109**  
**515-323-5300**  
[pccb\\_info@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:pccb_info@polkcountyiowa.gov)  
[www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org)

## JESTER PARK EQUESTRIAN CENTER CALENDAR: (More events listed on-line)

## Winter Sleigh Rides

**December thru April, when the snow falls**

Sleigh Rides for groups up to 6 people. \$10/per person for a 45-minute ride thru the snow-covered trails of the Jester Park. By reservation when the snow lands.

## Pleasure Driving Clinic

**Saturday, January 23 from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**

Interested in what horses have to offer in the area of driving? Come out and join us for a beginner-friendly clinic on the basics of pleasure driving. Learn how to properly harness and ground drive, as well as take a spin in our driving cart with experienced instructors. Cost: \$20/per person. Registration required by January 15.

## Let It Snow Family Event

**Saturday, January 30 from 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

Bring the family out for a fun day of winter activities. Weather permitting, we will offer sleigh rides, and "Snow Wars" outside. We will also bake "horse cookies", demonstrations on horse safety and education, and a winter horse obstacle course. Cost: \$10/per person over the age of 5.

## Sweetheart Sleigh Rides

**February 12-15, by reservation**

Celebrate Valentine's Day with a romantic sleigh ride. \$30/ Couple, up to 4 people per sleigh. Completing the ride is a romantic package with hot chocolate, candy, and a flower for your sweetheart. Come outdoors and feel the love at the JPEC this Valentine's Day!

## "Tiny Tots" Spring Session

**January 30-March 13**

**Saturday or Sunday between 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**

"Tiny Tots" is designed to prepare riders ages 5 – 8 years of age to transition from those hand-led pony rides to more progressive riding lessons. Over weekly lessons for 6 weeks-riders will develop confidence, hand/eye coordination and balance as they play games on horseback in structured classes taught by patient, experienced instructors. 2:1 instructor ratio and assistants for each student. Registration required. Each class is one hour long. Cost: \$40/class or \$200/full session.

## Horse Owner Seminar

**Sunday, March 20 from 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.**

Own a horse? Want to? Come out to JPEC for an educational seminar on horse care, health, and upkeep. Talk to knowledgeable industry spokespeople on topics such as:

horse training, what to feed your horse for your activity level, veterinary care, farrier needs, and how to transition from a horse enthusiast to a educated horse owner. Already own a horse- then come out and hear about some of the new and exciting trends in horse ownership and care. Cost: \$10/ per person.

## Spring Break Camps

**March 15, 17, and 18 from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**

Spring break is here! Are your kids going stir crazy in the house? Bring them out for some horsey fun over the Spring Break holiday. Camps will include safety training, horsemanship skills, a riding lesson, a wagon ride, and a nature hike. Camps are by reservation and are \$60/session.

## Spring Open House and Easter Egg Hunt

**Saturday, March 26 from 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.**

Bring the family out to explore what Jester Park Equestrian Center is all about! Featuring driving demonstrations, lesson demos, horse grooming sessions, and much more. Refreshments provided and a free event for the family. We will also host an Easter Egg Hunt at 2:00 p.m.

## Spring Wagon Rides

**April 15 - May 31, by reservation**

Celebrate the changing of the seasons with a horse-drawn wagon ride on Saylorville Lake. Come outdoors and enjoy nature at the Jester Park Equestrian Center. Rides are one hour and \$10/per person for groups up to 35.

## "Tiny Tots" Spring Session 2

**April 16 - May 22**

**Saturday or Sunday between 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**

See description for January 30 Spring Session. Registration required. Cost: \$40/class or \$200/full session.



Jester Park  
Equestrian Center  
11171 NW 103 Court  
Granger, IA 50109  
(515) 999-2818

[www.jesterparkec.com](http://www.jesterparkec.com)



Polk County Conservation  
11407 NW Jester Park Dr.  
Granger, IA 50109

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## OWLS

### (Older, Wiser, Livelier, Seniors)

Looking for an excuse to get out of the house, make some new friends, enjoy a good meal, and learn about the exciting world of nature? Then join us! These programs are held the first Tuesday of each month. The nature program will start at 11:00 a.m. at the Jester Park Lodge. An optional luncheon follows the program at noon in which pre-registration is required. Call 515-323-5300 to register. The cost of the catered lunch from The Radish is \$10.

Lunch registration is due the Friday before the program.

### Iowa's Hidden Treasures

**Tuesday, January 5**

Dan Kaercher, retired founding editor-in-chief of Midwest Living magazine and Iowa Public Television host, spent years traveling in almost every one of Iowa's 99 counties in search of close-to-home attractions and getaways to share with his loyal readers and viewers. You'll be amazed to learn what surprises you don't know await right in your own backyard. Program Sponsored by Humanities of Iowa.

### Iowa's Bluebirds

**Tuesday, February 2**

David Johnson and Rodgers Shell are two Polk County Bluebird Trail Ambassadors. David will share information and beautiful pictures of bluebirds including how to attract them and discuss their important role in the environment. Nest box plans will be available as well as information on how to become a bluebird trail monitor.

### The Iowa Grotto

**Tuesday, March 1**

So, Iowa has caves? Really? Yes we do and The Iowa Grotto is an affiliate of the National Speleological Society. They are dedicated to the conservation of Iowa caves and karst and such. They locate and map caves, are involved with cave research, and do restoration work in Iowa caves.

### Unconditional Surrender: A Visit with Ulysses S. Grant

**Tuesday, April 5**

A one-man show written and performed by Peter J. Grady. Ulysses S. Grant comes to life in this informative, humorous, and touching portrayal. Meet the victorious General whose strategy and tenacity won the Civil War, the President who struggled to rebuild his country after the war, and the husband and father whose final efforts were devoted to the financial support of his wife and family.