



# The Heron

*Newsletter of Clinton County Conservation  
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## Clinton County Conservation Welcomes New Park Supervisors

*In May, our two newest employees started their careers with Clinton County Conservation. The new hires signaled a changing of the guard in our parks. Kyle Redmond takes the position vacated by Brad Taylor, who accepted a position with Scott County Conservation last winter. Dillon Peyton is filling the role that Chip Brown occupied for the last 18 years. Chip moved on to a position with Cedar County Conservation last summer. Join us in welcoming both of our new Park Supervisors, Kyle & Dillon.*

### *Kyle Redmond, Park Supervisor, East District*

Hi, my name is Kyle Redmond, I am the new Park Supervisor for the East District. My main headquarters is at Rock Creek Marina & Campground. I grew up in the Long Grove area, graduating from North Scott High School. I developed my love for the outdoors through boy scouts, where I became an Eagle Scout.

I graduated from the University of Dubuque with a Bachelor of Science Degree, majoring in Environmental Science. After my time at Dubuque I spent time in New Mexico as a game warden trainee. After deciding that was not for me, I worked at Nahant Marsh as an AmeriCorps Naturalist. The past two years, I worked for Webster County as a Natural Resource/Trail Technician maintaining 60 miles of hard and soft trails.

I recently moved back to the area with my wife, Kelsey, my two dogs, Millie and Winnie and two cats, Leo and Theo. Shortly after moving back we had our first child, a beautiful baby girl. My hobbies include hunting, fishing, hiking, kayaking, wood working and biking.

My favorite part of the job is being able to be outside. I also enjoy being able to be a part of improving multiple recreational opportunities for the people of Clinton County.

### *Dillon Peyton, Park Supervisor, West District*

In our West District, we welcomed our new Park Supervisor, Dillon Peyton.

Dillon comes to us from northern Linn County where he grew up near the Wapsipinicon River. He has a passion for the outdoors that fits well with his new position. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, fishing and hunting. On the career side of things, he just finished his Applied Associate of Science Degree in Parks and Natural Resources from Kirkwood Community College after his 5 years serving in the United States Marine Corps. He made the move to Eden Valley Refuge with his dog named Pup.

With a love for Iowa's natural resources he plans to continue his education part time and complete his bachelor's degree as well. Some of his main goals are to keep the parks maintained and refresh some things, as well as adding some habitat and features to the parks. Stay tuned and see what he has in store for us!

Dillon oversees operations at Eden Valley Refuge, Sherman Park and Walnut Grove Park. So next time you see him out and about make sure to say hello!



# Living Outdoors Series ~ The Sunshine Vitamin “D”

by Jessica Steines, Interpretive Naturalist, skin cancer advocate

When I was diagnosed with squamous skin cancer, the dermatologist mentioned the use of sunblock like they always do and the lengths that she goes to avoid the sun completely. Like wearing gloves and a neck gator when she is driving because of her fair Scandinavian skin. I politely listened and took note of her very nice complexion. I thought to myself and should have asked her up-front, “what about vitamin D?” As I knew that “D” is important because I have been interested in health and wellness since my teenage years: so important that I even wondered about my dermatologist’s underlying health and how I was going to get enough of the sun vitamin even when I was completely covered with sunscreen and clothing most of the time. Then I asked how my underlying health was as my immune system couldn’t kill these mutated skin cells. So, as any good research starts, I asked myself the 5 W’s (and H) on the big “D”. **What** it really is, **Who** needs it, **Why** is it important (its actually more than important, its essential), **Where** we get it, **When** do we get it and **How** much do we need?



Vitamin D is also known as the sun vitamin or what I’m going to call, “D”. Guess what, it really isn’t a vitamin, it is a prohormone! Since I do not want to bore you, I am going to be very simple about it...by absorbing sunlight through our skin, a chemical reaction occurs, making a substance that then goes to our kidney to convert to another kind of substance that our liver makes into an active hormone. People have “D” receptors in nearly every cell of their body and it affects many different processes.

The most known and important job of “D” is that it helps absorb and distribute calcium throughout the body, making strong bones in children and keeping strong bones in adults. Recently, a growing amount of evidence suggests this vitamin is essential in fighting infections, including the common cold. Along with playing a part in fatigue and muscle weakness, low “D” has been correlated to developing long-term illnesses (diabetes, multiple sclerosis, etc), cancer, cardiovascular disease, obesity and even mental illnesses. What is alarming is that we as a society are becoming more sedentary with an inside lifestyle. Add a little fear of the sun because of skin cancer and we as a society, are becoming more and more “D” deficient, all the while these terrible diagnoses are increasing!

When skin is exposed to intense sun, the body is stimulated into producing more melanin (skin pigment), resulting in inflammation to protect the skin against adverse UV radiation, producing a tan or burn. Fair skinned people like myself, may have less melanin and a different type of melanin than darker complected people. Darker complected people have more melanin and therefore do not burn as easily, but the additional melanin, also does not allow them to absorb as much “D.” As a result they need to be exposed to longer times in the sun to obtain the same amount of “D.” This can cause issues because here in Iowa, as we do not get enough

UVB rays to produce “D” October through March. UVB rays have a hard time getting through the atmosphere. Therefore you do not start to absorb “D” until the angle of the sun is at least 50° or more above the horizon which is usually between 10 AM - 4 PM through the summer months. To determine if the sun is at 50° or better, your shadow must be shorter than you. You can also install an app on your phone (I use dminder) to determine how much sun is needed to obtain daily “D.” The app uses what amount of skin is exposed and the cloud cover. It has been estimated, you only need 15 minutes of exposure in the middle of the day during the summer. Though UVB does not penetrate cloud cover, pollution, glass or sunscreen while UVA does, so you need to protect your skin to decrease damage to your skin, even in the winter.

During the winter you have to rely on your diet to get you through. Hopefully you like fatty fish because “D” is found in salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel, sardines and halibut. Eggs are also a good source, especially if the chickens were pasture raised with lots of sun and had a good diet. As we have all heard, you are what you eat! Mushrooms (especially wild) are also a good way to obtain “D” even though it isn’t the more absorbable animal derived D3. Many foods; like milk, cereal and orange juice are commercially fortified in many of the foods people eat to reduce vitamin deficiencies. Then there are supplements.

Supplements are to supplement your already good diet. So if the food you are eating is not healthy, start there first. As supplements can be tricky with dubious ingredients, questionable absorption along with inaccurate dosages. If you google vitamin D intake, it shows anywhere from 400-4000 IU’s being recommended. Remember, supplements depend on your diet, sun exposure and melanin. So it is always best to get blood work done and communicate with a knowledgeable person to get your blood levels to an ideal level, which again is confusing. With 20 ng/mL being minimum, 30-50 ng/mL is recommended, with some even suggesting 80-100 ng/mL.

So where does that leave us? To try our best. Eat healthy at least 80% of the time. Cover or apply Environmental Health Group (EWG) approved sunscreen to commonly exposed skin. Download your “dminder” app and expose your lighter skin to the sun in the middle of day for however long the app suggests. If you have chronic health conditions or you just don’t feel right, consider getting your “D” measured and work with someone to see if supplements could help you out.

Keep living outdoors, it is what living things are made to do.





## Bringing Back the Shade at Rock Creek

by Jill Schmidt, Interpretive Naturalist

The dead and dying trees at Rock Creek Marina & Campground have been a constant topic of interest for the past couple of years. Due to extensive flooding and the infamous *Derecho*, park staff have had to remove hundreds of trees throughout the campground. If you had driven through the park in March, you would have questioned if the campground would have been able to be open to the public this summer, but after many hours of chainsaw work and stump grinding, the campground is looking good, a little sunny...but good.

With more work to be done, the Conservation Staff and the Clinton County Conservation Foundation are partnering up to replenish the tree life throughout the park through the Derecho Community Forest Grant Program provided by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. According to the IDNR, the Derecho Community Forestry Grant Program provides reimbursable grants ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 to be used for the purchase and planting of trees suitable to Iowa on publicly owned lands. Qualifying public planting lands include, but are not limited to, street right-of-way's, parks, school grounds, courthouse lawns, public buildings, fairgrounds, cemeteries, libraries and trails. Award recipients are required to provide a dollar-for-dollar cash match

for purchase of trees and materials from Iowa businesses. The grant has been submitted by the Conservation Department and we will receive word on September 1<sup>st</sup> if awarded.

If accepted, several tree species such as Burr Oak, Swamp White Oak, River Birch and Kentucky Coffee, will be added to the park with the help of the Conservation Foundation to meet that match. In order to support this cause, the Clinton County Conservation Foundation is holding a "Hog Wild Raffle" to help earn funds to replenish the tree life at Rock Creek. If you are interested in helping out this cause, raffle tickets can be purchased at the Eco Tourism Center or via *Venmo @ClintonCounty-ConservationFoun* or via *PayPal @ClintonCCF*. Winners receive a Big Frig cooler full of custom processed pork. If the raffle doesn't interest you but you want to help with this project, we plan on planting these trees the last week in October and would appreciate any volunteer help! If interested in helping please call the office at 563-847-7202 with your information and we will reach out to you with the details.



## Building Better Birders Workshops Reach Over 1,300 Participants

Jason L. Monson, *Quad City Audubon Society* ~ Kelly J. McKay, *Bio Eco Research & Monitoring Center*  
Mark A. Roberts, *Clinton County Conservation* ~ Brian P. Ritter, *Nahant Marsh Education Center*

In 2020, Kelly McKay, Mark Roberts and Brian Ritter began presenting *Building Better Birders and Citizen Scientists Workshops* throughout Iowa. These workshops are free and open to the public, and are funded through a grant from the Iowa Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP). The workshops are tailored to meet the needs of the individual host counties. Offered programming ranges from bird identification and research presentations, to bird hikes and owl prowls, as well as other presentations provided by the counties themselves. Through August 2021, 79 workshops have been conducted in 26 counties across Iowa.

Within the REAP-CEP grant proposal, we established two goals involving public participation. First, we hoped to reach 900 total participants during the 100 scheduled workshops. This represents the average number of participants encountered during the "Rock Creek Park Beginning Birding Cruises," as well as the "Nahant Marsh Beginning Birding Tours," which were the precursors to this workshop series. Furthermore, we were hopeful that during each workshop, participants would take part in at least three programming sessions. Therefore, our second goal was to have contact with 2,700 cumulative participants. To date, the workshops have exceeded expectations, impressive considering the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions enacted last year. With 21 workshops remaining through February 2022, we have reached 1,304 total participants (exceeding our first goal by 404), and have recorded 2,136 cumulative

attendees (on pace for achieving our second goal)!

One of the project's missions is to encourage public participation in citizen science programs. Data collected during the various bird hike and owl prowl workshop sessions are being reported to the Iowa Ornithologists' Union in seasonal field note reports. During the first 79 workshops, 790 workshop attendees have taken part in citizen science through their participation in one or more of the 83 bird hikes and 15 owl prowls conducted. At this point, participants have identified 216 bird species! Additionally, the *Building Better Birders and Citizen Scientists Workshops* have to date conducted 74 bird identification and 20 avian research, as well as 18 miscellaneous presentations.

With 21 workshops remaining, it's not too late to catch a bird ID presentation or go on a hike for owls or other birds. There really is something for everyone. Past workshops have provided bird identification presentations to help participants identify a wide variety of birds. Workshop attendees have enjoyed live bird presentations and taken part in sessions involving building bird houses or bird feeders.

*The following are upcoming local workshops:*

September 9<sup>th</sup>, 6-8 pm. *Swiss Valley Nature Center, Peosta, IA. Dubuque County Conservation at 563-556-6745.*

October 22nd, 6:30-7:30 pm. *Central Park, Center Junction, IA. Jones County Conservation at 563-487-3541.*

November 6<sup>th</sup>, 8-10 am. *Central Park, Center Junction, IA. Jones County Conservation at 563-487-3541.*

# In the Autumn, In the Parks

*Note on Blue Heron Cruises. Sign-up for each cruise will begin one week before each trip. Check the forecast, gather your friends and sign-up! 563-259-1876. Note: The Blue Heron does not go out if winds are 20+ MPH, lightning is (or is forecasted) within 10 miles or the river stage is 17+ feet (Camanche River Gauge). We reserve the right to cancel cruises if a 10 person reservation minimum is not met.*

## September Events

**2<sup>nd</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Thursday evenings there will be naturalist-guided Mississippi River cruises aboard the Blue Heron pontoon. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve a free spot one week in advance for all Sunset Cruises.

**2<sup>nd</sup> ~ Star Walk ~ 7 PM ~ Eden Valley Refuge ~** We'll meet at the nature center and hike to the Tower for a view of the late summer sky. Call 563-357-0759 to register.



**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Building Better Birders Eco Cruises ~ 6:30 & 9 AM ~ Rock Creek ~** World-class birder, Kelly McKay, will lead this free class for people wanting to improve their birding. Call 563-259-1876 to sign up for one or both! Sign up is open now for Birding Cruises.

**9<sup>th</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek**



**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Creating an Angler ~ 5:30 PM ~ Malone Park ~** Providing new experiences in nature for children helps build an appreciation for the outdoors at a young age that they may carry on throughout their life. We have worms, poles and tackle...let's just catch the fish! Experience and licenses are not required for 16+ unless you plan on fishing. We will teach you how to en-

courage your angler even if you're not an angler yourself. This is a free event and open to the public.

**15<sup>th</sup> ~ Building Better Birders Eco Cruises ~ 6:30 & 9 AM ~ Rock Creek ~** Call 563-259-1876 to sign up! Sign up is open now for Birding Cruises.

**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**16<sup>th</sup> ~ After Dark Backwater Cruise ~ 7:30 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** This will be a slow cruise along the backwaters to hear the night sounds and sights of the Mississippi. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve a free spot one week in advance.



**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Corn Moon Hike ~ 7:30 PM ~ Sherman Park ~** This moon is named for the anticipated corn harvest. We'll walk in its light if the sky is clear and produce our own if it's cloudy. Meet at the north trail head 2740 160th Ave., Calamus, Iowa. Call Chuck at 563-357-0759 to register.

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Enabled Hunting Starts ~ Ringneck Marsh ~** Call Mark at 563-847-7202 for information on this opportunity for people with disabilities. 12 hunting slots available.

**21<sup>st</sup> ~ Moonlight & Music Cruise ~ 7:30 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** We'll launch and head out to quiet waters for an hour or so of home spun acoustical music. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve your seat. Sign-up is open now.



**23<sup>rd</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek**

**28<sup>th</sup> ~ Creating an Angler ~ 5:30 PM ~ Malone Park ~** Providing new experiences in nature for children helps build an appreciation for the outdoors at a young age that they may carry on throughout their life. We have worms, poles and tackle...let's just catch the fish! Experience and licenses are not required for 16+ unless you plan on fishing. We will teach you how to encourage your angler even if you're not an angler yourself. This is a free event and open to the public.

**28<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of Rock Creek Meeting ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** A once a month meeting with volunteers that help out around the park. We would love you to join!



**30<sup>th</sup> ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek**

## October Events

**2<sup>nd</sup> Halloween in the Parks ~ Eden Valley, Walnut Grove & Sherman Parks ~** Decorate your campsite for the weekend and then costumed kids are invited to trick or treat from 5-6 PM through the campground. We ask our campers to please pass out candy.



**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Fourth Annual Hawk Watch ~ 8 AM-4 PM ~ Eagle Point Park, Clinton ~** Join our Hawk Watchers as we attempt to count every migrating bird of prey passing by the North-end Mississippi Overlook at Eagle Point. Special guest, Biologist Kelly McKay is spearheading the watch. We will have scopes set up and binoculars to lend.

**6<sup>th</sup> ~ Building Better Birders Eco Cruises ~ 7 & 9 AM ~ Rock Creek ~** Call 563-259-1876 to sign up! Sign up is open now for Birding Cruises.

**6<sup>th</sup> ~ Star Walk ~ 6:30 PM ~ McAndrews Wildlife Area ~** Meet at the parking lot and shuttle to the open hilltops. Call 563-357-0759 for more info and registration.



**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Fall Color Eco Cruise ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek**



Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> ~ Halloween Weekend at Rock Creek!



Adults must accompany children during activities. All activities originate at the Eco Tourism Center.

### Friday the 8<sup>th</sup>

~ **Decorate Your Campsite** ~ Get into the holiday spirit by decorating your campsite for Halloween. We will be awarding prizes for the most creative Halloween campsites.



~ **Open Archery Range ~ 5 PM** ~ We are opening our Archery Range in the basement of the Eco Center for public use. The event will include both safety and practical instruction. Participants must use our equipment and will be under the watchful eye of a range master. Children (9+) must be accompanied by an adult.

~ **Frightening Family Movie Night ~ 7-9 PM** ~ Come in your pj's and bring your favorite blanket for a Halloween family-friendly movie on the patio. Concessions will be available for some favorite movie treats. *Cash only please*, plan accordingly.

### Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup>

~ **Creatures of the Night ~ 10:30 AM** ~ Furry or slimy, many animals make their appearance at night! Meet some of these mysterious animals and learn what makes them so amazing!

~ **Spooktacular Crafts ~ 1 PM** ~ Creepy crawly crafts will be provided for people of all ages under the deck.

~ **Pumpkin Carving ~ 2 PM** ~ Come carve your pumpkin at the Eco Center! We will supply the carving tools, stencils and a place to make a mess! Bring your own pumpkin!

~ **Trick-or-Treat! ~ 5-6 PM** ~ We invite all our camper ghouls and goblins to trick-or-treat the campground. We ask our campers to please pass out candy.

~ **Lighted Hayrack Ride ~ 6 PM** ~ Join us aboard our hayrack as we drive through the campground looking at the decorated campsites. Adults must accompany children.



9<sup>th</sup> ~ **Fall Foliage Float ~ 9 AM** ~ **Maquoketa River Millertown Access** ~ This is a 5.75 mile trip through a deep river valley passing small beaches and the Buzzard Ridge Wildlife Area. If time allows we'll stretch our legs and enjoy the sites both on and off the water. Call Chuck at 563-357-0759 for information and registration.

9<sup>th</sup> ~ **40<sup>th</sup> Annual Bluegrass & Old-time Music Gathering ~ Noon-7 PM** ~ **Eden Valley** ~ The stage shows begin at noon in the main campground. Once you attend, you will never want to miss it again! Call Mary McAndrew 563-343-7002 for information. FREE!



9<sup>th</sup> ~ **Eden Valley Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM**

9<sup>th</sup> ~ **Wagon Rides 4:30-6 PM** ~ **Eden Valley** ~ Our staff will be offering rides around the campground on our big wagon! Meet at the Nature Center or get on anywhere along the route. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

12<sup>th</sup> ~ **Creating an Angler ~ 5:30 PM** ~ **Malone Park** ~ Providing new experiences in nature for children helps build an appreciation for the outdoors at a young age that they may carry on throughout their life. We have worms, poles and tackle...let's just catch the fish! Experience and licenses are not required for 16+ unless you plan on fishing. We will teach you how to encourage your angler even if you're not an angler yourself. This is a free event and open to the public.

12<sup>th</sup> ~ **Music in the Loft~ 6:30 PM** ~ **Soaring Eagle Nature Center** ~ We are back at the newly renovated barn. We'll begin on the main floor to accommodate all then break and head upstairs. Call 563-259-1876 to sign-up.



14<sup>th</sup> ~ **Fall Color Eco Cruise ~ 5 PM** ~ **Rock Creek**

14<sup>th</sup> ~ **Painting Class with "Fresh Paint" ~ 6 PM** ~ \$35 ~ **Eden Valley** ~ This 2-hour event includes step-by-step painting instructions on canvas. Nature's Halloween is the theme. Space is limited, register, [www.mycountyparks.com/County/Clinton](http://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Clinton). Clinton & Jackson County Conservation are co-sponsoring this fun event.

16<sup>th</sup> ~ **Clinton County Chapter of Pheasants Forever Banquet ~ 5 PM** ~ **Millennium Ballroom, Goose Lake** ~ Clinton County's P.F. chapter will be hosting their annual fundraising banquet to raise money to provide local wildlife habitat as well as youth outdoor skills. Call Brad Taylor at 563-221-1214 for tickets.



20<sup>th</sup> ~ **Hunters Moon Hike ~ 6:30 PM** ~ **Eden Valley Refuge** ~ Experience the sites and sounds of the night on a tailor made hike to suit our participants. Call 563-357-0759 for more info and registration.

21<sup>st</sup> ~ **Fall Color Cruise, Finale! ~ 5 PM** ~ **Rock Creek**

**23<sup>rd</sup> ~ Fall Fest ~ 4 PM ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~** Free family fun for all including wagon rides, hot dog roast and more.

**24<sup>th</sup> ~ Building Better Birders Field Eco Cruise ~ 7 & 9 AM ~ Rock Creek ~** Call 563-259-1876 to sign up! Sign up is open now for Birding Cruises.

**26<sup>th</sup> ~ Friends of Rock Creek Meeting ~ 6PM ~ Rock Creek ~** A once a month meeting with volunteers that help out around the park. We would love you to join!

## November Events

**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Building Better Birders Eco Cruise ~ 7 & 9 AM ~ Rock Creek ~** Call 563-259-1876 to sign up! Sign-up is open now for Birding Cruises.

**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Bald Eagle Eco Cruise ~ 1 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** This will be the public's last opportunity this year to take a Mississippi Eco Cruise on the Blue Heron Pontoon Boat. The American bald eagles will start to congregate along the Mississippi for the winter and we hope to see several of the birds during the cruise. Call 563-259-1876 to register. Sign up is open now for the Eagle Cruise.



**9<sup>th</sup> ~ Open Range ~ Archery ~ 5 & 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** We are opening our Archery Range in the basement of the Eco Center for public use. The event will include both safety and practical instruction. Participants must use our equipment and will be under the watchful eye of a range master. Children (9+) must be accompanied by an adult. Call 563-847-7202 to sign up for either 1-hour session.

**9<sup>th</sup> ~ Music in the Loft~ 6:30 PM ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~** Were back at the newly renovated barn. We'll begin on the main floor to accommodate all then break and head upstairs. Call 563-259-1876 to sign up.

**18<sup>th</sup> ~ Beaver Moon Hike ~ 6:30 PM ~ Lost Nation Wildlife Area ~** Experience the sites and sounds of the night on a tailor made hike to suit our participants. Call 563-357-0759 for more info and registration.

**19<sup>th</sup> ~ Turkey Talk ~ 10:30 AM ~ Discovery Center ~** We're talking all about turkeys before the big day! Join us for a story, real hands-on turkey artifacts and a craft!

**23<sup>rd</sup> ~ Friends of Rock Creek Meeting ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** A once a month meeting with volunteers that help out around the park. We would love you to join!

**23<sup>rd</sup> ~ Open Range ~ Air Rifles ~ 5 & 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** We are opening our Air Rifle Range in the basement of the Eco Center for public use. The event will include both safety and practical instruction. Participants must use our equipment, under the watchful eye of a range master. Children (9+) must be accompanied by an adult. Call 563-847-7202 to sign up for either 1-hour session.

## December Events

**3<sup>rd</sup> ~ Happening Hawk ~ 10:30 AM ~ Discovery Center ~** Come to see the live red-tailed hawk, listen to a story and make a happening hawk craft!

**7<sup>th</sup> ~ Open Range ~ Archery ~ 5 & 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~** Call 563-847-7202 to sign up for either session.

**8<sup>th</sup> ~ Star Walk ~ 6:30 PM ~ Lost Nation Wildlife Area ~** Experience the sites and sounds of the night on a tailor made hike to suit our participants. Call 563-357-0759 for more info and registration.

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ Music in the Loft~ 6:30 PM ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~** Were back at the newly renovated barn. We'll begin on the main floor to accommodate all then break and head upstairs. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve your seat.

**14<sup>th</sup> ~ January 5<sup>th</sup> ~ Christmas Bird Count Season! ~** Become a better birder and a citizen scientist. There are 13 counts centered within a 2-hour drive of us including three within Clinton County! Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 or email at [kellyjmckay@aol.com](mailto:kellyjmckay@aol.com)

**16<sup>th</sup> ~ Cold Moon Hike ~ 6:30 PM ~ Eden Valley Refuge ~** Experience the sites and sounds of the night on a tailor made hike to suit our participants. Call 563-357-0759 for more info and registration.

## January Events (Sneak-a-Peek)

**8<sup>th</sup> ~ Eagle Watch ~ 9 AM - 2 PM ~ Clinton Community College ~** Stop by our booth and say "Hi" to the critters and our naturalists and take part in all the great sessions.

**11<sup>th</sup> ~ Music in the Loft~ 6:30 PM ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center ~** Were back at the newly renovated barn. We'll begin on the main floor to accommodate all then break and head upstairs. Call 563-259-1876 to sign-up.

**13<sup>th</sup> ~ Wolf Moon Hike ~ 6:30 PM ~ Eden Valley Refuge ~** Experience the sites and sounds of the night on a tailor made hike to suit our participants. Call 563-357-0759 for more info and registration.

**22<sup>nd</sup> ~ Creekside Jam ~ 2 PM ~ Eden Valley Nature Center ~** Snuggle into some home spun music and enjoy the winter landscape at Eden Valley Refuge.

**27<sup>th</sup> ~ Star Walk ~ 6:30 PM ~ Sherman Park ~** We'll meet at the nature center and hike to the Tower for a good view of the late summer sky. Call 563-357-0759 for details and registration.



  
**Audubon**  
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT





# Picture Yourself on a Boat on a River....

by Mark Roberts, Interpretive Naturalist, lyrics from the Beatles classic, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds"

In earlier issues of *The Heron*, I wrote articles looking back into my own history here with Clinton County Conservation. This has led me to make a series of my top eleven greatest hits. Hang in there, we are almost to the end!

**#2. Blue Heron Eco Cruises** ~ In the late 1990s, a few years after we acquired Rock Creek Marina & Campground, a new thought began rattling around my head. The idea was to acquire a vehicle to take field trip students out on the main channel and backwaters of the Mississippi River. The idea kind of came to me in phases.

First, I kept noticing that during field trips to the new park, students were not latching on to the concept that we were studying the Mississippi River. Since all you can see are shallow, narrow sloughs around the park, the fact that we were on the 4th largest river on earth was just an abstract concept. The backwaters look more like a farm pond rather than a small part of a complex river system.

Second, I chanced upon a solution while vacationing with my family on Florida's Gulf Coast. Madeira Beach is home to *Dolphin Watching Cruise and Eco Tours*, we took the Sunset Cruise! The vessel used is an over-sized pontoon called "The Big Blue Boat!" The boat takes passengers around Boca Ciega Bay looking at wildlife from dolphins to pelicans. If this sounds familiar, it should, it serves as the template for our program. I said to my wife, "This is great, why can't we do this on our river?"

That guiding thought kept spinning around my head. What we needed was a school bus for the river. It needed to be big enough to take out an entire class at once, stable enough to handle excited students, tough enough to handle the river sand, logs, currents and waves and fast enough to get out to the channel and back in an hour.

I did my research, came up with preliminary costs and pitched the idea to the then Executive Director, Al Griffiths. Al was always open to new ideas and really liked the idea that our Conservation Department would have this, unique to Iowa, education asset. I then pitched the idea to the Conservation Board and came up against some realities. How could we fund it? Will it be popular? How can we pay for fuel, repairs and new motors? They sent me on a mission to answer these questions and more. That is also when the working title of "Mark's Party Barge" was born.

While I had no problem with the question of it's popularity with schools, the money issues were daunting. The best answer was a *Clinton County Gaming Association* grant (today's *Clinton County Development Association*). This grant, if successful, would fund 75% of the purchase cost of the pontoon, motor, trailer and associated equipment. That left me with 25% to conjure up and I still needed the answers to the upkeep and fuel questions.

To fund the latter two issues I came up with the idea of offering Sunset Cruises to the public on Thursday evenings for \$5 per passenger. We also would offer private group cruises for \$125 a pop. Basically, charging for these cruises would supply enough cash to cover the rest of the oper-



*The Original Blue Heron Eco Cruiser, 20 Years Ago.* ating costs (fuel, maintenance and a new motor every three years), so field trips could cruise with no cost to schools.

The last big hurdle was getting the 25% cost share. I wrote letters to every group I could imagine and made many follow-up phone calls. The result was I found seven organizations that were willing to pledge money to fund the dream.

- ◆ *Clinton County Whitetails Unlimited*
- ◆ *Quad City Audubon Society*
- ◆ *Friends of the Wapsi Center*
- ◆ *Grand Mound Sportsman's Club*
- ◆ *Clinton Izaak Walton League*
- ◆ *Clinton County Pheasants Forever*
- ◆ *Clinton County Conservation Foundation*

The Conservation Board agreed to fund the remainder if the grant proved successful. Well, we hit on the grant and we were off to the races! The next several months were busy ordering the boat, a 30-passenger tri-toon Odyssey with a 150 hp engine, PFDs, depth finder, dock and all the safety equipment we would need onboard. We also custom built our own bench seats and installed them on the boat.

Over the years we eliminated charges for the public cruises and had to quit private cruises all together due to Coast Guard regulations, but the program has endured and thrived. We bought a bigger, better custom boat in 2010 from Clark Boats in Bellevue that sported two 115 hp Mercury engines, again with a grant from the *Clinton County Development Association*. The Conservation Foundation is purchasing two new engines this winter for the Blue Heron. Please support their efforts, see page 3:)

In September, 2002 we took out our first official Blue Heron Eco Cruise. It was during a statewide Conservation Board Conference we were hosting. Since that first cruise we have averaged over 200 trips per each of 20 years! We have taken over 92,000 passengers on over 4,000 cruises!

You can enjoy the previous articles in this series at "The Heron" newsletters via [www.clintoncounty-ia.gov](http://www.clintoncounty-ia.gov).

- #3. Staff & Program Growth Through the Years**
- #4. Nature Gallery & Archery Range**
- #5. Voyageur Canoes**
- #5a. Building Better Birders Grant**
- #6. Disc Golf Courses**
- #7. Prairies for Schools & Pheasants Forever**
- #8. Hunter Safety Camp**
- #9. Eden Valley Nature Center Reinvention**
- #10. Nature Center Partnerships**
- #11. River Clean-ups**

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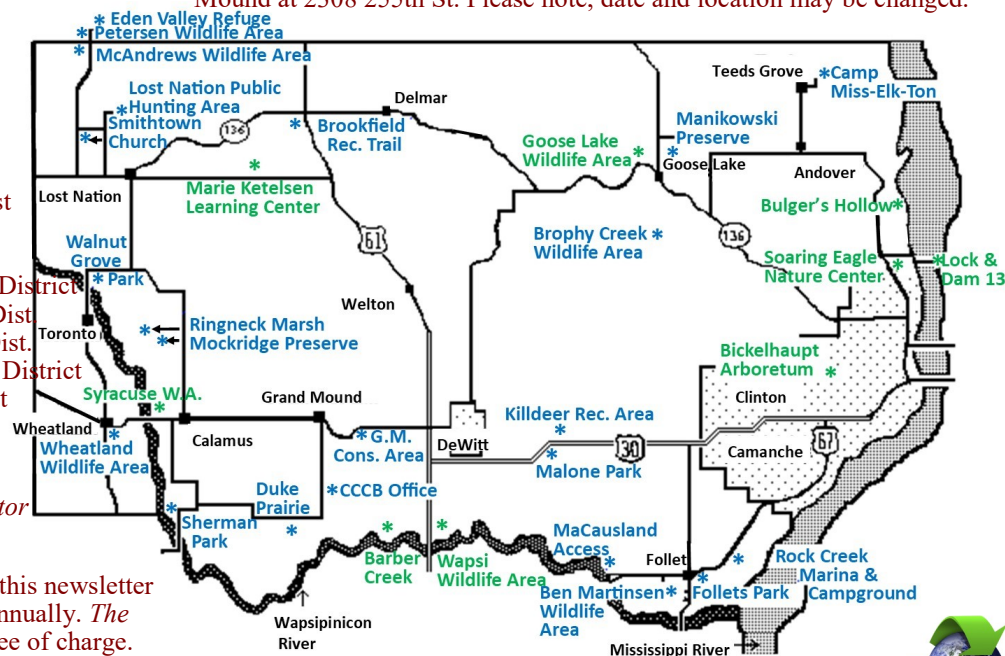
*Mark Roberts, Autumn Newsletter Editor*

**MAILING LIST**

Clinton County residents may receive this newsletter at home, free. Others are charged \$5 annually. *The Heron* is on our website or emailed, free of charge.

**BOARD MEETINGS**

The Clinton County Conservation Board meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome. The Board regularly meets the third Tuesday the month, at 6 PM, in the Conservation Office, located 1 mile south of Grand Mound at 2308 255th St. Please note, date and location may be changed.



The Clinton County Conservation Board in the provision 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 subject to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Clinton C.C.B. or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

