

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT:

DANDELIONS

As summer winds down, dandelion seeds float through the air—spreading next year's bright yellow blooms and maybe a few wishes along the way. Whether you see them as weeds or wildflowers, dandelions are far more than meets the eye. These hardy plants are not only early food for pollinators but also surprisingly useful for us humans, too.

#### A Whole-Plant Powerhouse

THREE RIVERS

What's amazing is that every part of the dandelion is edible and beneficial:

- Leaves are loaded with vitamins A, C, and K, along with iron, calcium, magnesium, and potassium.
   Their bitterness comes from compounds that stimulate digestion and bile production—great for your liver and gut health.
- Roots are traditionally used to support liver detoxification and regulate blood sugar. They can be roasted to make a coffee alternative or boiled for tea.
- Flowers contain antioxidants like polyphenols that help reduce inflammation and support the immune system. They can also be turned into wine, infused oil, or even batter-fried as a treat.

Many people use dandelions to help manage cholesterol, support skin health, reduce water retention, and possibly even aid in cancer prevention (research is still ongoing, but the early findings are promising).

#### Not Just a Lawn Pest 🥍

Dandelions are actually part of the daisy family, and they play an important ecological role. They're among the first flowers to bloom in spring, giving bees and other pollinators a vital early-season food source when little else is flowering. Their deep taproots also help break up compacted soil and cycle nutrients back to the surface—nature's little soil engineers!

#### From Yard to Kitchen

From Yard to Kitchen Sure, dandelions can taste bitter, but that's part of their magic—and there are plenty of ways to enjoy them:

- · Toss young leaves into salads or sautés.
- Steep the roots or leaves into a digestive tea.
- Infuse the blossoms into syrups, vinegars, or salves

Try your hand at dandelion wine, jelly, or even cookies!

#### A Wild Ally Worth Keeping

Dandelions often get plucked or sprayed in the pursuit of a perfect lawn, but they're one of the most accessible, nutrient-dense, and ecologically valuable plants around. They ask for nothing, grow almost anywhere, and give so much back to both nature and our health.

So next time you spot a dandelion, consider picking it—for tea, for bees, or just for fun. Your body and the planet might thank you.

\*Please take caution in where you choose to pick dandelions, insecticides and weedkillers are extremely harmful to you and your environment.\*

**FALL 2025** 



# THANK YOU!

## Thank you!

Without the help of our amazing sponsors, donors, and volunteers we wouldn't be able to provide the programs and events that we do! If you or your business are interested in becoming a sponsor, donor, or volunteer please email hannahh@warrencountyia.org

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## **Volunteer Opportunities for 2025**



**Geocache Adventure:** Contribute to our geocaching adventure by adopting a geocache! By adopting a geocache, you take responsibility for regularly restocking and ensuring it remains in excellent condition.

**Halloween Hike:** Halloween hike is a family hike, where characters are placed along the trail. Participants will have the opportunity to interact and learn about each living thing. They will also have a snack and do a craft. As a volunteer you would have the chance to play one of these fun characters, lead a hike, help in the craft room or help with snacks. Help us make this a fun filled experience for our local families!







**Farm to table (Decorations):** Are you skilled at arranging decor? We are seeking assistance in decorating for our upcoming farm-to-table event. Join us in creating a beautiful atmosphere that showcases the elegance of farm-fresh ingredients.







# MEET-A-MEMBER



#### **Colton Schwenke**

#### **Conservation Maintenance Technician**

My name is Colton Schwenke, and I'm the newest member of the Warren County Conservation Board as of this July. I am a full-time maintenance technician. Over the years, I have worked in various roles in the construction industry and environmental consulting.

Additionally, I have my Associate of Arts from Kirkwood and a bachelor's degree from Iowa State. I wanted to get involved in the conservation field to be a part of something that I care about. I look forward to becoming more involved with making our parks better every day!



When I am not at work, I enjoy working out/running almost daily, being with family and friends, or participating in one of my many hobbies (mainly riding motorcycles). I also like to take time to try to learn new skills by doing various "DIY" tasks around the house or studying via YouTube.

Since starting, I have assisted with the Medora Fence project, culvert replacement at Grant Nature Land, and various other maintenance duties throughout all the parks.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to be a part of Warren County Conservation.

If you see me around, feel free to say hello!

#### **Colton's Nature Favorites:**

Plant: Big Bluestem



Animal: White-tailed Deer



WCCB Park:
Rolling Thunder Prairie

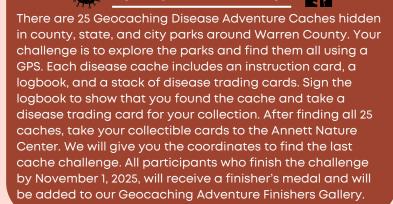




# **EVENTS**

### October

## Geocaching Disease Adventure Begins April 1 | Warren County



## Farm to Table Dinner October 3 | Middleswart Lodge

Join Warren County Conservation for a delicious evening celebrating local agriculture at our 4th Annual Farm to Table Dinner. This year's fundraiser will be held on Friday, October 3rd from 6pm to 9pm at the Middleswart Lodge located just south of Indianola.

Indulge in a specially curated 4-course menu featuring fresh, seasonal ingredients prepared by award-winning Chef Aaron Holt, of Doolittle Farms. Check out this year's menu: Starter: Grazing Table of local cheeses, charcuterie, fruit, jam, honey, pickled veg, and toast/crackers

- ~Squash and tomato bisque / Iowa pork pancetta / pickled radish / marinated tomatoes / spiced apple cider reduction ~Chicken and Apple sausage / herbed polenta cake / basil pesto cream / crispy root vegetable chips / micro-greens. ~Sous vide Iowa beef / caramelized shallot whipped potatoes / garden harvest veggies / Iowa gravy / pea
- ~Chocolate mousse / mulberry coulis / pretzel crumble / edible flowers

tendrils

Guests will enjoy live music while taking in the beautiful prairie scenery surrounding the Middleswart Lodge. Non-alcoholic beverages and glassware will be provided, and guests are welcome to bring their own wine or beer to enjoy with their meal. Proceeds from this event will benefit the development of a Nature Playscape at the Annett Nature Center, and Environmental Education programs.

Seating is configured to mostly 6 person tables, with very limited 8 person seating available. If you are not registering an entire table you may be sat with yet-to-be-made acquaintances! Please indicate if you are planning to sit with other registrants and food allergies at time of registration. Seating is limited!

Early bird tickets are \$100.00 per person until September 2nd. Standard tickets purchased on or after September 3rd are \$110.00 per person.

Reserve your tickets now by visiting mycountyparks.com

## Homeschool Wednesday: LIZARDS OF IOWA October 15 | Annett Nature Center

Did you know that there are lizards in Iowa? Well, SURPRISE! lowa is home to 5 different species of Lizards. In this program, you'll discover the incredible diversity of lizard species, and even get an up-close look at a real lizard. Learn about their unique adaptations, from their amazing camouflage skills to their ability to shed tails as a defense mechanism. We'll explore their habitats, behaviors, and the vital role they play in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Whether you're a reptile enthusiast or just curious about these cool creatures, this program will offer a closer look at what makes lizards truly remarkable!

Registration opens September 15th, 2025.

## Extended Hours October 16 | Annett Nature Center

Take advantage of our extended hours on the 3rd Thursday of each month to visit the Annett Nature Center! There may be new things to check out, an activity, or a chance to visit after school and work that might be harder during our regular office hours! No registration required!

Hours: 8am - 6:30pm

## Halloween Hike October 20 | Annett Nature Center

Head on out to the Annett Nature Center for our annual Halloween Hike. This non-scary hike is educational and fun for the whole family. You will be guided along the trail to meet different characters. After the hike you can make a craft and enjoy some treats. The cost is \$5 per person and those under 3 are free.

\*\*Registration is required. Registration is open and on our website, under the events tab.

\*\*Hikes leave the nature center at 6:30, 6:40, 6:50, 7:00, 7:10, 7:20, and 7:30. \*\*Please arrive at the Annett Nature Center 5-10 minutes early to get checked in. The hikes leave the nature center at the scheduled times. In order to maintain the schedule throughout the entire night, we will not hold hikes. If you arrive late for your scheduled time, we will do our best to get you into the next open time, however that may be at the end of the night. We do have a maximum number of hikers per group time to avoid overcrowding, and to make sure everyone can hear at each stop on the trail.\*









# **EVENTS**

## November

## Homeschool Wednesday: HABITATS November 12 | Annett Nature Center

Put your detective skills to the test in this hands-on program! During this program, you'll use clues and critical thinking to identify different habitats, from dense forests to wide-open prairies. Solve the puzzle by learning about the plants, animals, and unique features that make each habitat special. Can you tell a forest from a prairie just by the clues around you? Get ready for a fun challenge that will sharpen your observation skills and deepen your understanding of the diverse ecosystems that support life on Earth. The target age for this program is 1st and up.

Registration opens October 12th, 2025







## Extended Hours November 13 | Annett Nature Center

Take advantage of our extended hours on the 3rd Thursday of each month to visit the Annett Nature Center! There may be new things to check out, an activity, or a chance to visit after school and work that might be harder during our regular office hours! No registration required!

Hours: 8am - 6:30pm

## December

#### **Candy Cane Hike**

#### December 13 | Middleswart Lodge

Tis the season to bust out your favorite ugly sweater and candy cane stripes!

Come hike the trails at the Middleswart Lodge to find the candy canes hidden along the trail. Do you have the eyes to find them all? If so, enter your guess in the candy cane box for your chance to win a candy cane-themed goodie bag.

The winner will be drawn at noon, and you do not have to be present to win. Staff will have candy canes, hot chocolate, coffee, or hot cider for you to enjoy after your hike, while supplies last. Feel free to come and go as you please.

Don't forget to check out our awesome vendors at the Fall Nature Market inside the Middleswart Lodge and warm up by the fire when you go inside to drop off your guesses! Registration is not required but encouraged.

Registration opens October 13th, 2025.

## Fall Nature Market December 13 | Middleswart Lodge

Warren County Conservation Board is hosting our second local nature and craft related vendor fair. We want to support local merchants in our beautiful park setting. Vendors will have all sorts of items to get you ready for the upcoming holiday season.

Each vendor was selected based on how well their products fit into the following categories: nature-themed, hand crafted, up cycled or repurposed, lowa based, photography, artwork, items locally grown or created, and items inspired by nature. Unique items are preferred, and similar vendors will not be doubled.

\*Vendor Fees will support a nature playscape at the Annett Nature Center.

Free To Enter!









## Extended Hours December 18 | Annett Nature Center

Take advantage of our extended hours on the 3rd Thursday of each month to visit the Annett Nature Center! There may be new things to check out, an activity, or a chance to visit after school and work that might be harder during our regular office hours! No registration required!













# WCCB UPDATES

#### **OUR ENTRANCE JUST GOT AN UPGRADE!**



We are absolutely THRILLED to announce that we have been selected as a 2025 grant recipient by the Warren County Philanthropic Partnership! This incredible award of \$3,419.09 will allow us to replace our front doors with an automatic door, making our nature center even more accessible and welcoming for everyone.

A big THANK YOU to the Warren County Philanthropic Partnership for their generous support and for investing in our community. This upgrade will make a real difference!

DON'T EGG-NORE THIS VISITOR

We had an unexpected visitor at the Annett Nature Center last week! A Swallow-tailed Kite! This striking bird was seen during the week of August 19th, exciting birders and staff alike.

#### Why is this special?

Swallow-tailed kites are normally found in the southeastern United States, with their northernmost range reaching South Carolina. Spotting one in Iowa is extremely rare!

#### Why might it be here?

There are a few possible explanations:

- Food sources If their current range isn't providing enough insects or small prey, they may expand their search farther for food.
- Migration mix-ups As long-distance migrants, they can sometimes veer off course and end up well outside their expected path.
- Weather events This is the most likely reason. Severe
  weather systems can push birds far beyond their normal
  range. For example, on August 16th, Hurricane Erin was
  offshore, causing flooding and damage from Florida up
  through parts of New England. Events like this can displace
  birds and carry them northward.





Photo Credit: Kris Bossard



# WCCB UPDATES

# 🖳 Saying Goodbye 🥞



Unfortunately, the inevitable day we knew was coming has finally arrived. Marsi, the opossum passed away. We know the impact she had on our community, the students she visited, visitors to the Annett Nature Center, as well as our social media followers from around the state, country and even world! She could not have been a better ambassador animal.

Marsi came to us in June of 2023 after being found on the side of the road hit by a car. Dr. Melinda Austin, wildlife veterinarian and Ahimsa Wildlife Medicine and Rehabilitation licensed rehabilitator, determined that she had babies in her pouch and was able to perform surgery to save her and the babies. Marsi had an eye and her tail removed that were too damaged for repair, which also deemed her non-releasable. That is when she came to live with us as an ambassador animal to teach about her species, Virginia opossums, as well as marsupials and mammals in general. All of Marsi's babies survived and were successfully released into the wild.

We know that opossums only live for 1 to 2 years in the wild and only 2 to 4 in captivity. While she came to us as an adult, we only had an estimation of how old she was, but she was at least 3 and 1/2 years old this year. We did our best to explain this short lifespan at every program and every time we talked to people about Marsi because we knew she wouldn't be here for a long time. However, the short time she did spend with us we made sure was a good, happy life.

The last couple of weeks Marsi had been napping a little bit harder and longer than normal, and not coming out quite as quickly for food. However, she was still eating, drinking and moving around well. She really enjoyed her good hard naps in the oddest poses and several times over the past 2 years we would have to rouse her from her naps to make sure that she was indeed still breathing. Marsi passed in her sleep, which I think would be the way an opossum would want to go.

We appreciate all the love, donations, comments, likes, shares, and shifts in attitude towards opossums (and the trash gang in general) that you all have given Marsi.

If you would like to help prevent other animals like Marsi and our screech owl from getting injured or killed by cars, the main way to do that is to help reduce or stop the attraction to the roads. Animals are attracted to the roadways due to food items and scraps as well as food covered litter that are thrown out of vehicles. Animals have learned that the roadways are a buffet and therefore scavenge along the roads which leads to them being hit. The best thing you can do is keep any food items with you, including banana peels and apple cores, even though they will decompose, until you get to a proper waste receptacle.







# FALL 2025

#### **Warren County Conservation Board**

The Warren County Conservation Board manages over 2,700 acres of land for the benefit of its citizens. Visitors can enjoy a variety of outdoor activities on areas being conserved for this generation and generations to come.





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wccb@warrenccb.org

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> RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED www.warrenccb.org 6919-196 (919) 100ianola, IA 50125-8852 15565 118th Avenue Board Warren County Conservation