

# “Looking OUT THE BACK DOOR...”

## The Sac County Conservation Board’s Quarterly Newsletter

Winter 2012

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



### Frigid Feathered Fighters

Winters may seem desolate without much animal activity. Although many of our creatures are safely tucked away underground sleeping or far away in a warmer climate, there are quite a few animals moving around during the cold winter days. One of the best groups of animals to watch are the birds! Resident winter birds have built in layering. Just as we layer with a warm wooly under layer and then top that with a windbreaker or waterproof layer, birds have this system already done for them. A bird has different types of feathers, the down feathers are the fluffy like feathers which grow closest to the body. Just as these feathers keep a down jacket warm by creating pockets of insulating air they do the same for a bird. The colder it gets the more fluffy the bird will look as it moves feathers to produce a thicker layer of insulating air between the feathers and the skin. The outer layer is the contour feathers, these feathers work to shed water and resist the wind. Birds like bluebirds and wrens will conserve body heat by clustering, meaning they huddle close together to save energy by sharing body heat. A good feeder and the correct feed can have your yard a flurry of movements as birds fly in for seed and back up to the protection of nearby trees and bushes. The birds that stay in Iowa over the winter are mostly those who eat dormant insects and seeds. These birds have a super charged metabolism which burns through calories to keep their bodies warm. Some birds like the nuthatches and woodpeckers will store food for later by lodging the seeds into tree bark crevices, however there caches may be raided by other birds such as brown creepers. When we experience the most brutal assault of winter,

birds do have a few tricks to survive these times. One thing they can do to stave off the cold is to shiver. This is a function that we are familiar with as well. Shivering for both birds and people burns a few extra calories while creating a little extra warmth for a short period of time. Another amazing adaptation birds use during the harshest times is that they can go into a state of hypothermia and come out of it when conditions have improved. When they go into this state their core body temperature drops, heart and body functions slow down conserving oxygen and energy. The only problem with going into this suspended animation state is that it impedes with their ability to rapidly escape danger as it takes time for them to regain muscle control. There are many important things you can do for the winter birds, like having cover; such as a bird house, evergreen trees, bushes, or native tall grass plantings in your yard. Although most of the time birds are not sustained by feeders, maintaining them during the harder times of the winter is very helpful to their survival. One of the most overlooked but very important things you can do, is keeping a heated water source open. Birds use water to maintain their feathers which is important to feather health and their insulating value as well as, all birds must drink water. No matter what you do this winter, watching the birds with their amazing adaptations to winter is always an enjoyable experience.

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## New Talent at the Conservation Board



My name is Kacie Partridge, I am a senior at East Sac County High School. I am participating in a program through the school called "School-to-Careers". This program allows me to job shadow an interested occupation in the district. I chose to job shadow Rene Stroud, at the Sac County Conservation Center. I have a strong interest in pursuing a degree in the conservation field. After working with Rene during the summer on a 4-H project, I knew that she would be the perfect candidate to help me get the experience I needed to help me reach my decision. I travel from Lake View to the conservation center every day and work with Rene for a little over an hour. I help her with her everyday jobs such as feeding the animals, and I also help prepare and present programs to younger kids at school. Next year I plan to attend Iowa State University with an undecided major.

## **Looking into the fact files!** *Red-bellied Woodpecker*



*(Melanerpes carolinus)*

- Red on males head extend all of the way to the bill while on females the red ends at the crown.
- Being woodpeckers they have X shaped feet which allow them to hold onto the bark of trees in any position.
- Stiff tails act like a rest to prop the bird up while holding on to the tree.
- Woodpeckers have extremely long tongues which end with a point to help them to harpoon insects hidden in trees.
- Named after reddish patch on upper part of the stomach.
- Nest in cavities usually excavated by the male, it takes him 7-14 days to prepare a new nest .
- In the spring, males find mates by establishing territories and by drumming loudly. They may pick a loud tree or your tin shed.
- They will store food in the crevices of trees.
- Eating insects in the spring they live off of seeds throughout the winter.

## Thank You

A big thanks goes out to all of you who helped at the Halloween Night Hike~ We cannot have a great program without all of you!

To the Ridgeview and OABCIG high school student who submitted scripts.

Thank you to all who helped and volunteered for the Hunter Education Program.

Marlin Pellersels for the many years and great learning opportunities we have had at his pond.

Judy Wilson for use of the pond during fishing club.

Secondary Roads for all the wonderful work that they do.

Kacie Partridge for her hard work!

Jim Wallace for all his help with fishing club.



# Upcoming Programs

## December 17th –Fishing Club Meeting

Meet at the Sac County Conservation Center at 12:30-1:30. We will learn about different ways to cook fish and take a look at different types of poles.



## December 17th - Christmas Bird Count 9am– 12pm

Are you or someone you know an avid bird watcher? We are calling all bird lovers. If you love to watch your feeders please call 712-662-4530 to sign up. We will send you a species check list and require that you fill it out for any birds seen on the 17th only then send it back to us. We will compile the data and send it to the Audubon Society. The annual bird count helps to give scientists a snapshot of the bird population.

## December 28th– Winter Camp!

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

K-2nd grades will run from 9-11:30 am

3rd-4th grades will run from 1:30-4:00 pm

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



## January 14th -Fishing Club Meeting

Club will be meeting at the Conservation Board at 11:30 am and carpooling to the Fort Dodge Swan pond where we will learn about trout stocking and ice fishing then go trout fishing. To join fishing club or for more information call 712-662-4530

## January 28th– Knee High Naturalist –Camouflage

This program is for kids aged 2-4 years old with an adult. At these programs kids get to explore what camouflage is and why it is important to animals. This program is free and will be held at the Sac County Conservation Center classroom from 10-11:30 am. Sign up for this program by calling 712-662-4530.



## January 28th– Cross Country Skiing

Ever thought about learning to cross country ski? Meet at the Hagge Park Classroom at 1 pm where we will be talking about the basics of ski travel and trying out a course at Hagge Park. Skis will be provided at this free program. Please call 712-662-4530 to sign up.

## February 11th – Ice Fishing Clinic

This free program will start at the Lake View Public Library at 9 am where DNR Fisheries Biologist Ben Wallace will explain the basics of how to go ice fishing . Then parents will help to transport children to nearby Arrowhead Lake where kids will get a chance to go ice fishing till noon. Call 712-662-4530 to sign up.



## February 11th- I Love Animals

This program is for all the animal lovers out there! Come see many different kinds of live animals like snakes, turtles, a kestrel and so much more. This program will be held at Hagge Park from 3-4 pm. Sign up for this program by calling 712-662-4530.



## Kid's Korner

Watching the birds during the winter is good fun! You can make a bird feeder out of just about anything! Milk cartons, pop or water bottles work very well however you can use old peanut butter jars or even an old plate. Look at your recycling and come up with a feeder of your own. All feeders need to have the following things:

1. A place for the bird to land (some don't need it like woodpeckers)
2. A place to hold seed where it won't get wet (preferred)
3. A hole or access to seed.

Below are some examples. You will want parent supervision when cutting or hot gluing. Don't forget to decorate it with paint or permanent markers.



**The Pop/Water Bottle Feeder**

Good for thistle seeds and birds like finches. Wash and dry out bottle. Cut hole for pencils/sticks –at least one on the bottom you can do one half way up as well. This will be the perch. Insert pencil or stick. Cut U shaped hole or small hole above perch. Tie string or wire under lid ridge then fill with seed and hang.



**Platform feeder**

This type of feeder is good for any of the ground eating bird such as the junco's. Use black oil sunflower seeds in the jar. To create it, clean out a plastic jar and find a platform this needs to be flat and weather resistant like a piece of wood, plate, or pie tin. Now glue or nail plastic jar to platform. Put holes for seed at least an inch or two up from the platform. Put this in a tree by attaching a string or on an old stump, or attached to the porch.



**Milk Carton Bird Feeder**

This is a good general feeder for chickadees, cardinals and more. To make this feeder clean out an old milk carton. Cut holes for the seed and for the perch. Paint entire carton and spray with polyurethane. If you like add a roof by overlapping pieces of painted plastic or popsicle sticks. Insert a wire or string for hanging. Insert the perch and add seed then hang in a tree near a window with a good view.

Whether you use a homemade bird feeder or a store bought one watching the birds as they flit around is a great way to spend a morning. Don't forget to bring an Identification Book and a pair of binoculars!



## Winter Bird Checklist

Putting out feeders and watching the birds as they travel to and fro is a fun way to keep the cold days of winter a little more exciting. A glimpse of beautiful winter scenes, such as a red cardinal sitting on a pine that is heavy laden with snow make the winter a bit jollier. Try to keep a list near the window where your feeders are located or use the one provided. Here is a list of some birds to look for during the holiday season. If you need to hone in your identification skills come to the SCCB Center and checkout a book.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Cardinal
- \_\_\_\_\_ Black-capped Chickadee
- \_\_\_\_\_ Junco
- \_\_\_\_\_ Goldfinch
- \_\_\_\_\_ Purple Finch
- \_\_\_\_\_ House Finch
- \_\_\_\_\_ Red-breasted Nuthatch
- \_\_\_\_\_ White-breasted Nuthatch
- \_\_\_\_\_ Downy Woodpecker
- \_\_\_\_\_ Red-bellied Woodpecker

Don't forget to get outside, you can borrow snow hoes, cross country skis or go ice fishing. Here is an outdoor list of birds.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Bald Eagles
- \_\_\_\_\_ Canada Geese
- \_\_\_\_\_ Red Tail Hawk
- \_\_\_\_\_ Blue Jay
- \_\_\_\_\_ Saw-whet Owl
- \_\_\_\_\_ Brown Creeper
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pine Siskin
- \_\_\_\_\_ Barred Owl
- \_\_\_\_\_ Wild Turkey
- \_\_\_\_\_ Field Sparrow

Of course this list is just a small sample of the wonderful wildlife awaiting you either at your local parks or out your own window. No matter where you are birding, a good pair of binoculars, identification book and maybe even a camera are great things to have on hand.

## Upcoming Displays and

This winter the Sac County Conservation Board staff will be working on the final design details for three new displays. The displays will be installed by this upcoming spring. They are the introductory display which talks about Sac County and shows the SCCB parks. The next display is a crawl-thru log that shows the animals that call a dead log home, as well as, the importance of these animals in nutrient cycling. These displays were purchased with assistance from the Sac County Endowment Grant. The third display is the children's center. This will be a busy area for children where they can learn about animal habitats, sounds and much more. This area will focus on stimulating the senses to assist with learning. This display was purchased with funding provided by the Gilbert and Barbra Renze Grant Foundation. We are very excited to be able to provide these new displays to the public come spring.

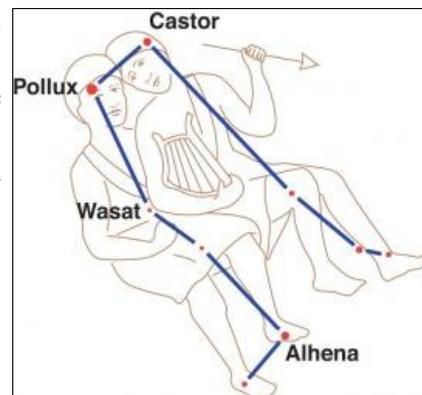
## Eyes To The Skies

- December 5th– New Moon
- December 13th-14th– Geminids Meteor Shower– This will be a good shower producing on average up to 60 multi colored meteors an hour yet some are predicating up to 160 in dark areas. The moon will set early leaving a nice dark sky. Look to the east after midnight. This shower will come from the constellation Gemini.
- December 21st- Full Moon and Full Lunar Eclipse– The moon will be high and a really great show can be seen after midnight. During an eclipse, the moon passes into the shadow of the Earth. As the indirect light passes though the Earths atmosphere it filters out the blue light creating the shade of red to reflect from the moon.
- December 21st– Winter Solstice
- January 3rd-4th - Quadrantids Meteor Shower– This shower also produces a nice show with up to 40 meteors per hour. This shower may be seen between 1-4th of January. Look for this shower after midnight radiating from the constellation Bootes.
- January 4th– New Moon
- January 19th– Full Moon– This moon is known by a few names such as the Moon After Yule, Old Moon or Wolf Moon. The name Wolf Moon came as hungry wolves start howling as they were hunting.
- February 3rd– New Moon
- February 18th– Full Moon– This is known as the Full Snow Moon as it's often the time when heavy snows fall. This is also called the Full Hunger Moon as with snow on the ground hunting is difficult.

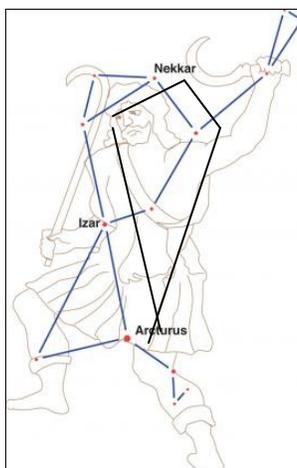


## Dramatic December

If you have seen the eyes to the skies section of the newsletter already than you know that December will be a very exciting time for star gazers. A great meteor shower and a total Lunar Eclipse all in one month! The winter months are the best months for stargazing. This is because cold air in the atmosphere has less distortion than warm air. You The first constellation, Gemini has a nice meteor shower radiating out of it called the Geminids. Castor and Pollux are the two important stars in Gemini as they are the heads of the two brother who look like lines. (see below) This constellation can be found using the Big Dipper. Unlike going to the north star, follow the line along the bottom two stars in the ladle and follow that line into the sky— dipping lightly downward can help. Although Castor is not as bright as Pollux, his star is actually comprised of 6 different orbiting stars. Pollux is the 17th brightest star in the sky and at 35 light years away it is the our closest orange giant star. When it comes to stars the color reveals the approximate age. Blue means new and red is almost dead. Therefore orange Pollux is in the latter years of it's life. There is a star cluster called M35 near the feet of the twins, a star cluster is where many stars have been formed in one space from condensed space dust. Gemini has it's name from the Greek and Roman Mythology. Each twin had a skill, Pollux was a prized boxer while Castor was great with horses. The harp they are holding was magical and when the twins used it they could control the winds. Although twins, these two boys were not born equally Castor was a mortal and Pollux was immortal. However, the two of them were inseparable they went on journeys and into battle together. During one of those battles Castor was wounded, being human he went to Hades— a place where immortals could not go. Pollux was so upset by this he asked to share his immortality with Castor. It was this love for his brother that swayed Zeus to put them into the sky so that they could stay together. The twin brothers, however have been many things to different cultures, for the Navajo it was an image of two arrows. It was known as Tewa or Place of Decision. When people came to a turning point in their life and had to make a decision they would look upon this constellation to guide them. In Egypt, Gemini is two males, Horus the Elder and the Younger. They are both Horus, but in two stages of life. The younger is a boy like character a young warrior. While Horus the Elder has grown and had avenged the murder of his father by his uncle and has grown into a strong leader who became a pharaoh. The next constellation Bootes, has a light meteor shower shortly after the new year. Bootes can be found by following the arch of the Big Dipper upper handle towards the fourth brightest star in our night sky the yellow-orange giant Arcturus who is 20 times the size of our sun. From there look for a triangle or kite shape in the sky (black lines) then look for the sickle or pipe off to the top right and his leg to the bottom. The name Bootes comes from Sumerian language meaning the man who drives the big cart as it looks like he is pushing the Big Dipper (the cart). He is also known as the bear chaser as the Big Dipper was seen as a big bear and it looks as if he is chasing it. Lastly, he is known as a farmer plowing his field with the Big Dipper as the plow. Bootes is one of the oldest known constellation. December seems to be a great month to bundle up and drive or walk away from any light pollution and look up at the stars. There are many star charts available on line, some for free and others to purchase. The conservation board has free make and take



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### Sac County Conservation Board

#### Board Members

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

#### Staff

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

#### Meetings

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

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



The Sac County Conservation Board in the provisions of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age, or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Sac County Conservation Board Office or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240