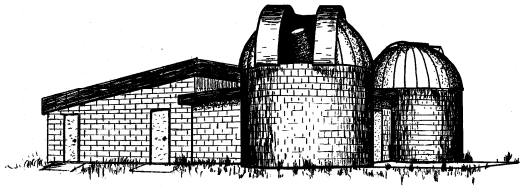


The Jasper County Jewel



Jasper County Conservation Board Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2017

50th Anniversary of Ashton Park

We are celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Ashton Wildwood Park this year! Ashton Park is a timbered area north of Mingo along Indian Creek, which had always been viewed by area residents as “the way the land used to be”. The 113-acre park is characterized by its old growth, predominately oak timber, and an undulating topography created by an ancient glacier. The area is virtually a “museum remnant” of the way much of Iowa used to be and we can’t agree more that Ashton is truly a “jewel” of Jasper County!

In 1967, the Jasper County Conservation Board hired Dennis Black, an Outdoor Recreation Planner employed by Harold Hoskins and Associates, Inc., of Lincoln, Nebraska, to plan the development of Ashton Park. The plans included the construction of roads, parking areas, shelter houses, latrines, trails, campground and a ball field. Black was later hired by the conservation board as their first Director in February, 1970.



Above: From springtime wildflowers to fall colors, the oak woodland at Ashton Park is a county jewel to explore year-round.

The Jasper County Conservation Board was approached by the Des Moines Astronomical Society (DMAS) in 1981 regarding the prospect of

constructing an observatory for viewing astronomical phenomenon at Ashton Park. It was the feeling of the Society that Ashton was an excellent location, easily accessible, free of “light pollution,” and an existing public area that would serve well for the intended purpose. The Ashton Observatory had its open house in October 1983, and began hosting free public programs on Saturday evenings, April-October. The observatory quickly gained the attention of several thousand visitors shortly thereafter when Haley’s Comet passed Earth. Viewing attendance continued to increase, creating a demand for more space. The building was expanded with a large classroom in 2001. DMAS continues to offer programming and opportunities for people all over central Iowa and beyond. You can visit their website at www.dmastronomy.com and follow them on Facebook.



Other improvements have been made to Ashton Park over the years, including the installation of a playground in the camping area in 2013 and a modern showerhouse and restroom building in 2016. Hundreds of area boy scouts utilize the park every year for group camping, and some have even chosen to do their Eagle Scout projects there, including creating an orienteering course throughout the park and the construction of a stage area with benches for programs.

Jasper County has a full-time Park Officer, Jerry Ratliff, who resides at Ashton Park with his family. Jerry oversees park maintenance and pa-

Ashton Park, continued on page 5....

2 Conservation News

Happy Birthday, Chichaqua Trail!

Friends of the Chichaqua Valley Trail

Guess who's turning 30? The Chichaqua Valley Trail! In 1962 the last passenger trains operated through Bondurant, with rail service permanently abandoned in 1984. In 1987, the first 20 mile section of the Chichaqua Valley Trail opened on the old railroad right-of-way between Baxter to just east of Bondurant at 88th Street, and the rest is history! We are celebrating our 30th anniversary in 2017. Events are quickly getting added to the calendar for another great year on the trail.

Pedal CVT: June 10 the Chichaqua Valley Cyclists will host Pedal CVT. This event will include a 5K run at 8:00 am in Bondurant, and a bike ride at 9:30 am. The bike ride will include Bondurant, Altoona, Mitchellville, Mingo, Ira, Valeria, and Baxter. Check out bikeiowa.com for more information.

Pedaler's Jamboree: August 26-27 we will be hosting the Iowa Pedaler's Jamboree on the Chichaqua Valley Trail between Baxter and Bondurant. We hope you can join us for two fun days of music, food and riding. We have already ordered up two beautiful summer days. Stay tuned for more information to come at pedalersjamboreeiowa.com.

Community Events: This summer make sure you check out these annual community events along the trail: Bondurant Summerfest in June, Jazz in July at the Bondurant Depot Trailhead on July 7, Mingo Days in June, and Baxter Fun Days in early July.

Now more than ever we encourage you to make a day of it on the Chichaqua Valley Trail. For years, the trail extended 20 miles between Baxter and Bondurant. In 2015, thanks to Polk County Conservation and the City of Bondurant, the trail was extended 6 miles from Bondurant to Berwick, and 1.5 miles from Bondurant to 88th Street. This allows the CVT to connect to the Gay Lea Wilson Trail and the rest of the Des Moines metro and central Iowa trail system. Trail counts show many more cyclists using the trail now.

You can now ride on trails and separated sidewalks all the way between Baxter and downtown Des Moines. A long wooden bridge crosses the Skunk River and features pullouts where trail users can pause to admire the river valley. Rest stops and picnic tables are found in Baxter, Ira, Mingo, Bondurant and Berwick. Stop midway in Bondurant at one of their great establishments that cater to bikers. Make a day of it!

The Friends of the Chichaqua Valley Trail continue to work with partners at the Jasper County and Polk County Conservation Departments as well as the communities along the trail to make improvements to the trail, and facilitate tourism and economic development. We will be improving wayfinding and mileage signs along the trail. Baxter Hometown Pride is planning bike camping facilities in Baxter at Geise Park. You can visit us on our website at www.chichaquavalleytrail.org, email us at chichaquavalleytrail@gmail.com, and follow us on Facebook.



The banner features the Chichaqua Valley Trail logo on the left, which includes a skunk and the text "The Skunk River Valley Route" and "www.chichaquavalleytrail.org". To the right is a large "30" with "TH" above it and "ANNIVERSARY" in a green banner across the zero. Below the "30" is a list of towns: "BERWICK • BONDURANT • VALERIA • MINGO • IRA • BAXTER". On the far left is the Polk County Conservation logo, and on the far right is the Jasper County Conservation logo. The banner has a colorful background with green, blue, and yellow sections.

The Chichaqua Valley Trail celebrates its 30 year anniversary in 2017! Mark your calendars for the Pedaler's Jamboree on August 26-27. More details to come!

Evening Prairie Burn

Friday, April 7, 7:00 PM

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve

Fire is a very important management tool for Iowa's tallgrass prairies. Learn about the history and use of fire in prairies and witness this spectacular event as the sun sets. Please meet at the parking lot at the east entrance of the preserve. Old clothing and shoes are appropriate and cameras may be desirable.

In case of rain or strong winds, the burn will be cancelled. Please call the JCCB office or check our Facebook page for updated information.

Programs at Ashton Observatory

The Ashton Observatory telescopes will be open for public programs at 8:00 PM Saturday evenings, April-October. There will be talks given in the observatory, including two programs about the 2017 solar eclipse on May 20 and August 5, followed by observing through the telescopes. For more detailed information, go to the DMAS website at www.dmastronomy.com.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Seniors (OWLS)

Wednesdays, 10:00–11:00 AM

**Jasper County Armory/Annex Building
1030 W. 2nd St. S., Newton**

April 12– Newton City Parks

Nathan Unsworth, Newton Parks Administrative Supervisor, will discuss the many new programs and projects that are happening in the area.

May 10– Wagaman Mill and Museum

After viewing an educational video about the historic water-powered mill, Lynnville Historical Society members Garnet Gertsma and Walt Van Maanen will answer questions and talk about things to see at the museum.

June 14– People for Pollinators

The People for Pollinators program has already given out thousands of prairie plants to help beneficial insects such as bees and butterflies in pollinator gardens and has over 30,000 prairie plugs started for this year. Patrick Bryant of the Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge will share how these plants are grown and distributed all over central Iowa.

Signs of Spring Family Fun Hike

Saturday, May 6, 9:00-10:00 AM

Ashton Wildwood Park

Celebrate the return of spring on a walk at Ashton! A naturalist led hike will take you on the hunt for spring wildflowers. Discover wildlife under logs and among the treetops.

Wear comfortable walking shoes and bring along binoculars or a camera if you have them. The group will meet at the group camping area. This program is for all ages! The hike will be cancelled in the event of rain. For more information, please call the JCCB office.



Rendezvous with the Chichaqua

Free Skinners

Saturday, May 13, 9:00 AM-5:00 PM

Sunday, May 14, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM

Ashton Wildwood Park

See early 1800's lifestyles of the mountain men on the frontier at this free public event. Catch craftsmen and artists at work demonstrating skills from the 18th and 19th centuries, including blacksmithing, basket weaving, scrimshaw, leather working, and more. Many craftsmen offer their handmade items for sale or trade.

Also witness mountain men contests using primitive skills: bow shoots, tomahawk and knife throws, cooking contests and a cannon ball toss. Don't miss the Candy Man with his Candy Cannon, several times each day!



4 Upcoming Events/Programs

Pedal the Prairie

Saturday, May 20, 9:00 AM-1:00PM
Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge

Join us for a spring bike ride along the Prairie Parkway Bike Trail! Ride among wildflowers and toss prairie seed bombs along the trail. Enjoy a variety of exhibits, meet live animals, and participate in games and other activities or enjoy a hike along one of our trails. Exhibits and activities are scheduled from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Visitor Center. The Prairie Parkway Ride (10 miles) and Family Fun Ride (1.5 miles) both start at 9:00. The Visitor Center will be open until 4:00 p.m. while the trails and wildlife drive will remain open until sunset. To register go to "Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge" on Facebook and click "Coming".



Operation ReLeaf Tree Program

Operation ReLeaf is back again in Newton! Operation ReLeaf is a program to help Alliant Energy customers save energy in their homes using trees to provide shade during the summer and windbreaks during the winter.

This spring, Alliant Energy customers have the opportunity to purchase up to two 5' to 8' landscape trees for just \$25.00 each. Trees will be sold on a first come, first served basis through a pre-order form enclosed in your Alliant Energy bill or available on their website (see below).

Trees available for purchase will be Northern Pecan, Ginkgo "Princeton Sentry", Honeylocust "Skyline", Quaking Aspen, Bur Oak, Swamp White Oak, Edible Cherry "Meteor", Magnolia "Leonard Messell", White Pine and Dawn Redwood.

Alliant Energy customers who reserve their trees will be required to pick them up on **Thursday, May 25th** at Woodland Park between **5:00 and 6:30 p.m.** in Newton. If any trees are not picked up at that time, they will be considered a donation to the City of Newton.

Strategically placed trees can be as effective as many other energy saving home improvements. Trees help reduce your heating and cooling costs. They provide shade in the hotter months and windbreak during the winter.

*To reserve your tree(s) visit
www.alliantenergy.com/releaf*

Hook, Line and Sinker Fishing Derby

Saturday, June 3, 9:00 AM-1:30 PM
Mariposa Park

Mark your calendar for the tenth annual Hook, Line and Sinker Fishing Derby. The event will be held at Mariposa and will include educational presentations about fish ID, lure making, cleaning fish, and terminal tackle 101. After a provided lunch, the group will have the afternoon to go fishing and door prizes will be given out.

The fishing derby is free and registered participants will receive a t-shirt and lunch. You do not need to purchase a license to go fishing that day, as it is the Iowa DNR's Free Fishing Weekend.

More information and pre-registration forms will come later this spring. Continue to check our website, www.jaspercountyconservation.com for more details.

Watch For the Solar Eclipse

Keep August 21, 2017, marked on your calendar! For the first time in 38 years, there will be a total solar eclipse here in the U.S. Although we frequently have partial solar eclipses, the last total solar eclipse in the U.S. was on February 26, 1979. Back then, totality was only visible in northwestern states, but this year the path of totality will stretch across the country, so many more people will have a chance to enjoy it!

Of course, the path of totality will be rather narrow, so it won't get dark where most of us will be. But, if you're willing to drive a short distance, you should be treated to a once-in-a-lifetime show! The total eclipse will be visible as close as Lincoln, NE; Kansas City, MO; and St. Louis, MO, so a one-day drive can get you a front-row seat! Everyone outside the path of totality will still be treated to a partial solar eclipse.

A solar eclipse happens when the moon passes between the sun and the Earth, blocking out the sun, and casting a shadow on Earth. Where the moon completely covers the sun, we see a total eclipse; where it only covers part of the sun, we see a partial eclipse. Total solar eclipses are actually relatively rare. In fact, the next total solar eclipses in the U.S. won't be until 2024 and 2044.

If you'd like more info about the eclipse this August, visit NASA's 2017 Eclipse website: eclipse2017.nasa.gov. Even if you don't plan to see the eclipse, this page has some fascinating information. Be sure to check it out!

Ashton Park, continued from page 1:

trols the area. He has worked for Jasper County for 16 years. Jerry is happy to answer any questions visitors have about the area and can be reached at (641) 521-2697.

The park's 1/2 mile hiking trail takes visitors up and down beautiful wooded hills, and in spring-time the show of wildflowers can't be topped. A free public walk to see and learn more about wildflowers and other signs of spring with a naturalist is scheduled for Saturday, May 6.

Jasper County's naturalists are preparing for the spring field trip season, which each year includes field trips for all county 5th grade classes at Ashton Park to learn about Iowa's woodlands, wildlife, and the history of the area. On May 13-14, a large group of buckskinners will have their rendezvous in the large open circle at Ashton, demonstrating 18th and 19th century mountain men skills such as outdoor cooking, hatchet throwing, and leather working. A blacksmith shop and candy cannon will be highlights. This free event is open to the public.

Keep watch for more events at Ashton Wildwood Park, as we continue to plan more in celebration of this Jasper County Jewel!

Nature Center Area Update

Jasper County Conservation was the recent recipient of three grants for the Nature Center Area. This 40 acre area is located south of Newton adjacent to the sheriff's office. The Jasper Community Foundation awarded a \$10,000 grant to help restore the dilapidated shelter house that is located at the north end of the area. This work was completed last summer/fall and the shelter is now open for use.

A \$6,000 grant was given to JCCB by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation through the Iowa Butterfly Flyway Program. This will allow a pollinator prairie restoration to be completed on 19 acres of the property!

And finally, a \$26,000 Fish Habitat Grant was received to develop a new 1.5 acre pond on the area! The project will be let for bid this spring and construction will begin later this summer. Please plan to visit and enjoy this wonderful area. Stay tuned for more exciting plans to be announced in the future!

Beyer's Bridge Damage

Beyer's Bridge is a river access located south of Reasnor on the South Skunk River. Recently, JCCB was alerted to damage caused to the Beyer's Bridge area by some fun loving individuals who thought that they should drive their truck over our parking barriers, through the timber, and into the neighboring farm field to find the perfect spot for their campfire and late night festivities. No doubt it was a fun time had by all present, but now we are left with a huge mess, an erosion issue, and the need to spend extra money for the cleanup.

Our mission is to preserve and protect the land, water quality, and wildlife habitat while providing recreational opportunities and enjoyment that does not disrupt the environment. Off-roading in wildlife areas or fragile river bottoms does not match up with our efforts. The Beyer's Bridge area is a river access. It is not a 4 wheeling area, it is not a campground, it is not a dump, and it is not a shooting range. All of those activities are strictly prohibited.

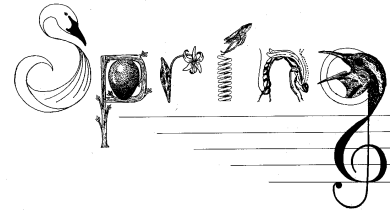
The amount of garbage that we remove, including ammo casings, furniture, beer cans, and anything that can be burned, is unbelievable and completely disrespectful to all who want to use the area properly. It needs to stop. Please help us to stop this and other illegal activity at our conservation areas so we can get back to our rewarding, nurturing, and good for the soul work!



Above: The damage and erosion caused by illegally driving through the Beyer's Bridge River Access along the South Skunk River.

Jasper County Conservation Board
1030 W. 2nd St. S.
Newton, IA 50208

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Permit No. 636



Jasper County Conservation Board

M - F 8:00 - 5:00 (641) 792-9780
email: conservation@co.jasper.ia.us
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Greg Oldsen.....Naturalist
Dennis Cooling.....Park Officer
Jerry Ratliff.....Park Officer
Kent Dunsbergen.....Maintenance Technician
Rob Graham.....Maintenance Technician
Janet Rinehart.....Office Manager

A Big Thank You To....

Jeni Van Gilst-Wickliff for donating a digital camera and our volunteers who helped with the Naturalist Club after-school programs: Denise Christian, Bob and Connie Van Ersevelde, Clark Weaver, Andy and Pam Stone, and Norm Van Klompenburg.

Shelter House Reservation

Shelter houses located in Jasper County parks can be reserved for \$25 per day. Shelters are located at Ashton Wildwood Park, Mariposa Recreation Area, Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve, Reimer Refuge, Wagaman Mill, and the Chichaqua Valley Recreation Trail. Call (641) 792-9780 to make your reservation.

Jasper County Conservation Board's programs are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identification, age and handicap. If anyone believes they have been subjected to discrimination, they may file a complaint with the Jasper County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, Washington, D.C. 29240

Summer Camps: The Wild is Waiting!

JCCB is offering many different programs for kids of all ages this summer with a generous donation from Newton Noon Kiwanis.

Participants are asked to register by filling out a permission form for the programs they will attend with payment for each session. Registration begins Monday, March 27. Many of the camps have limited space. The first 100 children to register will get a summer camp t-shirt.

Registration forms are at the JCCB office or at www.jaspercountyconservation.com.

This year's camps are sponsored by:



Wildlife Explorers

for kids ages 8-12 years old

June 5, 6 and 7*, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM

*Wednesday special time 7:00 AM-12:00 PM

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve

Fee: \$5.00 per session; lunch provided, limit 20 kids

Over three days our group will explore the things that fly, swim, trot and slither in Iowa's great outdoors. On Wednesday we will join licensed bird bander Bob Van Ersvelde to net local bird species. Transportation will be provided from Krumm Preserve to the netting location.

Junior Naturalists

for kids ages 8-12 years old

Thursday, June 8, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM

Friday, June 9, 7:00-10:00 PM

Ashton Wildwood Park

Fee: \$10.00; must attend both days, limit 15 kids

Campers will explore the woods with a focus on ecosystems, habitat and nature discovery. They will look closely at where animals live and what they need to survive. Friday night the group will enjoy a hotdog picnic and listen to a presentation by the Des Moines Astronomical Society, followed by stargazing and studying the full moon. Families are welcome to stay for Friday's program. Please bring a sack lunch on Thursday.

Youth Photography Camp

for kids ages 10-16 years old

June 14, 15, and 16, 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve

Fee: \$15.00; must attend all 3 days, limit 12 kids

Outdoor photography is a great way to enjoy our parks all year long. Summer offers a wonderful variety of wildflowers, birds, and scenic views that can be captured by young photographers. Digital cameras will be provided along with a copy of your child's photos on a CD. Campers will manipulate their photos during an editing workshop at DMACC and transfer one onto a natural frame. Please bring a sack lunch.



Stroller Strut

for kids ages 4 and under with an adult

Friday, June 16, 9:00-10:00 AM

Maytag Park

You're never too young to enjoy nature! This guided walk is geared toward parents, grandparents, caregivers and their wee ones who'd like to explore the trail, stretch their legs and learn something about the natural area. Other family members are welcome. Please meet at the Kiwanis picnic shelter. There is no charge for this program.



Nature Quest

for kids ages 5-7 years old

Monday and Tuesday, June 19 and 20

9:00-11:00 AM each day

Newton Izaak Walton League

Fee: \$5.00 per session; limit 10 kids

Our quest is to have fun and explore the outdoors with activities including hiking, pond netting and fishing. Parents are welcome to stay and join their child for the activities, but not required.

Summer Camps: The Wild is Waiting!

Archery Camp

for kids ages 10-16 years old
Wednesday, June 21, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM
Quarry Springs Park, Colfax
Fee: \$10:00 per person; limit 15 kids

Join Jasper County Conservation to learn basic shooting techniques and safety on the line. Kids will enjoy learning the sport of archery at Quarry Springs' indoor shooting facility along with an outdoor 3D archery course. All equipment will be provided. Please bring a sack lunch.

Princess Adventures

for girls ages 5-8 years old
Thursday and Friday, June 22 and 23
9:00-11:00 AM each day
Newton Arboretum
Fee: \$5.00 per session; limit 10 girls

Do you know a little girl who loves princesses? Want to encourage her to dress up AND have fun exploring the outdoors at the same time? Girls ages 5-8 are invited to the park in "princess attire" (whatever that means to them). We will learn about a courageous conservation woman from the past, participate in a nature activity, followed by a tea party with a snack.

June 22—Florence Merriam Bailey "Birds Through An Opera Glass"
June 23—Maria Merian's Butterflies



Kids Cooking Class: Wild Edibles

for kids ages 8-16 years old
Friday, June 23, 9:00 AM-1:00 PM
Newton Hy-Vee
Fee: \$20.00; limit 10 kids

Using a variety of local wild edibles, kids will prepare and cook their own meals in Hy-Vee's classroom kitchen. We will explore the historical importance of these foods in Iowa as a connection of humans to the land.

Watersports Wednesday

for kids ages 8-16 years old
Wednesday, July 12, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM
Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve
Fee: \$10.00; limit 20 kids

Spend a day on the water canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding. Slide down the giant slip and slide and take part in a fun relay and water balloon toss. Lunch and equipment will be provided, including life vests. Bring a water bottle and sunscreen.



Trail Ride Thursday

for kids ages 8-16 years old
Thursday, July 20, 9:00 AM-12:00 PM
Chichaqua Valley Trailhead, Baxter
Fee: \$5.00; limit 20 kids

Bring your bikes and join us for a fun group ride down the Chichaqua Valley Trail. We'll watch for wildlife along the way and ride back for a picnic at the trailhead. Lunch is provided. Bring a water bottle and sunscreen.



Attention Nature Campers!

Kids ages 6-12 years old can earn the official Junior Naturalist certificate and 2017 embroidered Bluegill Badge by attending any three JCCB programs and doing two independent activities this summer! Ask for a record book at the JCCB office.