



# The Jasper County Jewel

Jasper County Conservation Board Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2021

## Pileated Woodpeckers at Ashton

By Katie Cantu, Naturalist

It could be said that we still live in prehistoric times when you look at some of the life forms in existence today. While visiting a zoo or viewing a documentary on TV and seeing an ostrich, rhinoceros or alligator, it's not hard to imagine times past.

One inhabitant of the forested lands of Iowa has a prehistoric appearance. Classified as a rare permanent resident of Iowa, the pileated woodpecker is Iowa's largest woodpecker, comparable in size to a crow. The bird is mainly black with white striping along the head and neck, and white underwings that flash during flight. Pileated woodpeckers have a red crest that covers the pileum, or the top of their heads. Its bill could be compared to a three-inch long wood chisel.

My first encounter with this species was many years ago while hiking in northern Wisconsin. What initially caught my eye was the size of the bird. Being my first time to actually see one, it looked out of place, almost prehistoric. The behavior of the bird was just as fascinating as it looks. The bird made a very loud rasping call as it flew, unlike any other sound I have heard in the woods. It is quite the sight to spot "Woody Woodpecker" swooping through the timber!

One clue that may lead you to discover a pileated woodpecker is the mess it leaves at the base of a tree. While either looking for insects in dead wood or excavating a nest or roost cavity, these birds leave large piles of woodchips at the base of the tree on which they were working.

Pileated woodpeckers like mature wooded areas, with a large number of standing dead trees. Their territories can be up to 200 acres in size and their range covers the Eastern and Northern U.S. They are somewhat limited in Iowa, occurring in the most hilly and heavily wooded areas in the eastern part of the state. They are also seen along the Des Moines and Iowa Rivers and their

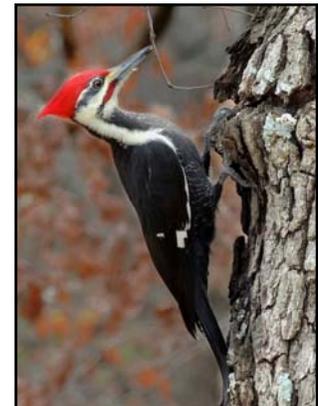
tributaries throughout central and northern Iowa, and sometimes along the South Skunk River. We have been hearing and watching pileated woodpeckers at Ashton Wildwood Park for several years. Its very exciting to see these rare birds!

It's no accident pileated woodpeckers can be found inhabiting bottomland woods along rivers and streams. They feed primarily on carpenter ants that live in the central portions of large trees. It takes many years for a forest to have trees old enough to support a pair of these birds. County-maintained natural areas alongside private forest areas and waterways provide enough suitable habitat for this species to survive.

Like most woodpeckers, their long tongue is used to probe insects out of holes. The tip of the tongue is rigid with backward pointing barbs. When coated with sticky saliva, it is a potent tool for gathering insects. Other foods they eat include acorns, wild grapes, and poison ivy and dogwood berries.

Ashton Park's oak trees have been suffering from oak wilt, a fungus which inhibits the movement of water and nutrients in a tree, leaving many of the mature oaks dead but still standing. This actually creates the perfect habitat for birds like woodpeckers. Possibly one good thing to emerge from the destruction of the derecho wind storm last August are the number of "snags," or dead trees that provide crucial habitat.

So the next time you take a leisurely walk, try taking a step back in time to search these birds out and view the prehistoric looking pileated woodpeckers that inhabit Iowa, and right here in Jasper County.



# 2 Conservation News

## New Restrooms at Ashton Park

Miraculously, depending on how you look at it, the old pit-toilet restrooms at Ashton Wildwood Park were spared from falling trees during last August's derecho storm. How they were missed is beyond us, but they still really needed to be replaced.

Thanks to a Jasper Community Foundation grant, a Jasper Conservation Connection donation and our camping revenue, we are happy to announce there are now two new solar-powered restrooms at Ashton Park, one in the campground and the other at the trailhead/group camping area. They are still pit-toilets, but what a major improvement!

Our park ranger at Ashton is trying to get grass established around the new buildings this spring, so please take caution and be courteous of the new little shoots trying to grow. Certain campsites might be closed this spring due to the new seeding.

Also, for those venturing into the woods, be aware there are still broken tree limbs hanging from up above, left there by the derecho storm. Our staff was unable to get to every tree that sustained damage, so please use caution when walking off the trails.



Above: A new handicap-accessible restroom near the picnic shelter at Ashton Park. There is also a new restroom located in the campground.

Below: When hiking off the trails in county parks such as Ashton, please be cautious of the many trees with broken tops and limbs hanging down.



## Ashton Observatory Remodel

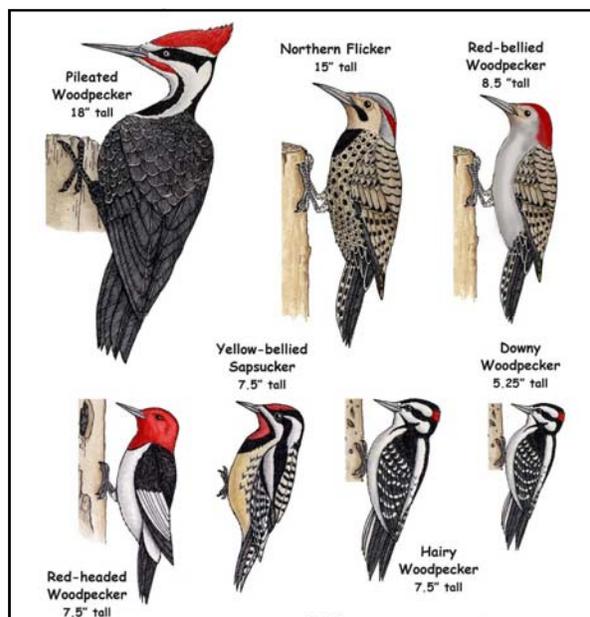
Last August the derecho storm ripped part of Ashton Observatory's roof off, resulting in quite a bit of water damage inside. Luckily, the domes and telescopes were unharmed, but the large classroom had to be gutted and completely re-done.

The work included new sheetrock, ceiling tiles, carpet, and furniture. A large TV screen will replace the old projector and screen for programs.

At this time, the Des Moines Astronomical Society (DMAS) is not planning open houses but look forward to an end in the Covid-19 pandemic and hosting groups in the newly remodeled classroom again. More information can be found on the DMAS website at [www.dmastronomy.com](http://www.dmastronomy.com).



Above: Ashton Observatory's classroom remodel is still in progress but looking very nice!



Above: A comparison of the various woodpecker species in Jasper County. All of these birds can be spotted at Ashton Wildwood Park.

## 120 Hours Outside Challenge

Whether you like to ride a bike, paddle a kayak, or simply enjoy a walk down one of our many nature trails, we'd like to challenge you to spend 120 hours of your time outdoors in 2021. This breaks down to only 2 hours a week!

To keep track of your hours, print off the 120 Hours Outside in 2021 chart on our website, [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com), and mark off your time each week. You are also welcome to make your own chart to keep track of hours. Once you've reached 120 hours, send your chart to our office at the Jasper County Armory/Annex Building in Newton and you will receive a prize!

It has been proven over and over again that spending time outdoors not only helps you physically, but also mentally, improving your entire well-being. Something as easy as a walk outside and taking in nature around you can be extremely good for your health!

Need a place to start? Try your luck finding our 120 Hours Outside "leaf" which is hidden in Jasper County Conservation areas. Follow the clues we share on our Facebook page. Once you've found the leaf, take a selfie with it and share the photo with us for online bragging rights. The leaf will be hidden again with new clues the following week. So far this year our leaf has traveled to seven different areas. If you find the leaf first, you will also be entered in a drawing for a fun conservation gift basket!



Above: The white, laminated "leaf" is traveling around JCCB areas. Look for clues to its location on Jasper County Conservation's Facebook page and be entered in a prize drawing if you find it first!

## Wagaman Mill and Museum Tours

Wagaman Mill in Lynnville will be open from 1:00-4:00 PM each Sunday afternoon between Memorial Day weekend and the end of September. For more information regarding Wagaman Mill, please call (641) 792-9780.

## Program Email List

Jasper County Conservation staff are creating monthly, educational videos that are exclusively available by email! To get on the list, simply send an email to [jread@jasperia.org](mailto:jread@jasperia.org) or call the office at (641) 792-9780. Each month you will receive an exclusive link featuring a new program and will have up to a month to watch it until it becomes public. This is available only to those on our mailing list!

Here's a sneak-peak at topics coming up: Prairie Fire, Wildflowers, and Conscious Coffee.

## Signs of Spring Hike

**Sunday, May 3, 2:00-3:00 PM**

**Ashton Wildwood Park**

Celebrate the return of spring! A naturalist led hike will take you on the hunt for spring wildflowers and the many songbirds who have returned for nesting. Discover wildlife under logs and among the treetops.

Group size is limited! Please call (641) 792-9780 to reserve your spot. Wear comfortable walking shoes and bring along binoculars or a camera if you have them. This program is for all ages.

## Movie Nights at Ashton Park

**Saturdays, May 15, June 19, July 17**

**Ashton Wildwood Park**

Check out the new "big screen" at Ashton Park this summer. We will be featuring family-friendly movies at dusk. Bring your lawn chairs or blankets to sit on and a snack. Movies at the park are free and open to the public.

## Caring For Conservation Concert

### Featuring Slipstream

**Saturday, August 28**

**Ashton Wildwood Park**

Bring the whole family to the park and enjoy some great music, lawn games and a fun activity area for kids. Food will be available for purchase from local food trucks. Drinks will also be available for purchase. Tickets are \$10/adult, \$5/children 12 and under. After August 20, tickets will go up to \$15/adult and \$10/child.

All proceeds will go toward the construction of the Environmental Education Center! Watch our Facebook events page for updates.



# 4 Summer Camps: The Wild is Waiting!

## Summer Camp Registration

JCCB is offering programs for kids of all ages this summer! Camps will look a bit smaller in size this year and all activities will be outdoors. **Each child is limited to 2 camps only.**

Registration begins **Monday, May 3**, through a signup link on JCCB's website at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com) and also posted on JCCB's Facebook page.

A signed waiver and payment for each camp is required for registration. Cash, checks made out to Jasper County Conservation, and credit/debit cards (with usage fee) are accepted by calling our office at (641) 792-9780.

Payment and waivers are due within 14 days of signing up or the child will lose their spot. If a child fails to attend the camp they signed up for, their registration fee will be considered a donation to Jasper County Conservation.

## Wildlife Explorers

for kids ages 8-12 years old

June 15, 16 and 17\*, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM

\*Thursday special time 7:00 AM-12:00 PM

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve

*Fee: \$40.00; limit 12 kids, must attend all 3 days*



Over three days, our group will explore the things that fly, swim, trot and slither in Iowa's great outdoors.

On Thursday, we will join licensed bird bander Bob Van Ervelde to net local bird species. Transportation will be provided from Krumm Preserve to the bird netting location. Please bring sack lunches.

## Junior Naturalists

for kids ages 8-12 years old

Group 1: Wed., June 17, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM

Group 2: Thurs., June 18, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM

Ashton Wildwood Park

*Fee: \$20.00; limit 12 kids per camp*

Campers will explore the woods with a focus on wildlife, habitat and nature discovery. We will go on a creek hike and learn various outdoor survival skills. Please bring a sack lunch to camp.

## Nature Quest

for kids ages 5-7 years old

Group 1: Monday, June 21, 9:00-12:00 PM

Group 2: Tuesday, June 22, 9:00-12:00 PM

Newton Izaak Walton League

*Fee: \$15.00; limit 12 kids per camp*

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

## Junior Botanists

for kids ages 10-14 years old

Wednesday-Friday, July 7, 8, and 9

9:00 AM-1:00 PM each day

Mariposa Park

*Fee: \$50.00; limit 12 kids, must attend all 3 days*

Take a closer look at what makes plants unique, using art, science experiments, and outdoor exploration at Mariposa. Participants will work in the butterfly garden and create a miniature garden to take home. Please bring sack lunches.

## Watersports Camps

for kids ages 8-16 years old

Group 1: Tues., July 27, 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Group 2: Wed., July 28, 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Group 3: Thurs., July 29, 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve

*Fee: \$20.00; limit 15 kids per camp*

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. Equipment will be provided, including life vests. Bring a water bottle, sack lunch and sunscreen.

## 100 Acre Woods Camp

for kids ages 5-7 years old

Group 1: Thursday, July 22, 9:00-12:00 PM

Group 2: Friday, July 23, 9:00-12:00 PM

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve

*Fee: \$15.00; limit 12 kids per camp*

Come explore our "100 Acre Woods" with Winnie the Pooh and all of his friends! We will hunt for heffalumps and woozels and explore pollinators. Please bring a sack lunch for a picnic in the park. Parents/guardians are welcome to stay and enjoy the activities.

## Summer Camp in a Box

A summer camp box will be available this year for families unable to attend an in-person camp. The theme this year focuses on STEAM activities, including BugBots, solar ovens, kite making and nature journaling.

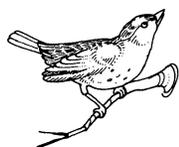
Boxes are \$40 each and can be reserved using the summer camp registration link on JCCB's website at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com) starting May 3rd. The box must be paid for within 14 days of signup or it will be forfeited. JCCB accepts cash, check or credit card (see summer camp registration info on page 4). **Only one box reserved per household, please.**

### **Attention Nature Explorers!**

Kids ages 6-12 years old can earn the official Iowa Junior Naturalist certificate and 2021 embroidered Oak Leaf Badge by attending any three outdoor programs/videos and doing two independent activities this summer! Ask for a record book at the JCCB office.

## Conservation Craft Kits

This year the JCCB office has been providing a monthly DIY craft project or kit for people to reserve and pick up. Some projects have a small fee and others have been free. So far, we've offered fresh evergreen wreath kits, birdseed ornament kits, and paint a mini birdhouse craft.



Coming up this spring, be watching for rain barrel kits and tomato tower kits for your garden! Call our office at (641) 792-9780 for more information.

## Scholarship for Students

The Emerson Hough Chapter of the Izaak Walton League is offering a \$750 scholarship this year for a graduating Jasper County High School student who is majoring in conservation or natural resources.

The scholarship application is due April 1st. Information and applications are available through high school guidance offices, online at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com), or at the Jasper County Conservation office, 1030 W. 2nd St. S., Newton.



## JCCB Items For Sale

Looking for an easy way you can support Jasper County Conservation? We have several items for sale that not only make great gifts, but the money raised goes directly back into our program budget!

Conservation greeting cards are available in packages of 16 (two of each photo) for \$15/package. The cards feature nature photos from around Jasper County and are blank inside.

Yowie face coverings are still available for \$5/each. They can be worn like a mask, scarf, headband or bandana and have the JCCB butterfly logo.

Uncle Jake's Sugar Shack at Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve didn't produce as much maple syrup this season as temperatures warmed up quickly and the sap didn't run for long. Syrup supplies are very limited and jars will be sold for \$15/pint. *Only one pint per household, please!* They will sell out fast, so don't delay!

JCCB t-shirts not only look cool, but show that you support conservation and our projects! We have a heather-blue shirt that says, "I'd Rather Be Exploring Jasper County Parks" and has our conservation logo on the upper back. We are also selling heather-green Uncle Jake's Sugar Shack t-shirts that have the syrup logo on the front. All conservation t-shirts are \$15/shirt.

These items are available for purchase at the JCCB office in the Jasper County Armory/Annex Building in Newton. Thanks for supporting conservation!

## Community Garden Space Available

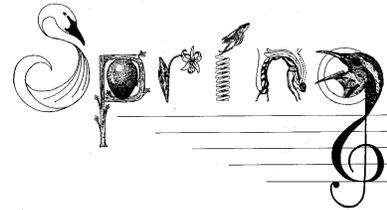
Have you ever wanted to try out your green thumb but haven't had the room to do it? A summer of growing fresh produce to enjoy is easier than you may think!

Thirteen raised beds are available to reserve at the Community Garden, located in Newton east of the Centre for Arts and Artists. A double-sided composting bin is available for use, along with a rain barrel for watering plants. Growers are responsible for weeding and maintaining their raised beds. Produce is reserved to the person(s) maintaining the plot unless that person has given permission to another grower to take produce from their plot. A produce stand will be at the garden site for those who wish to share their extra produce.

Jasper County Conservation is currently taking reservations for raised bed plots. Plots are free and open to all community members. To reserve a garden bed, call JCCB at (641) 792-9780 or email [jread@jasperia.org](mailto:jread@jasperia.org).

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

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**Jasper County Conservation Board**

M - F 8:00 - 5:00 (641) 792-9780  
email: [conservation@co.jasper.ia.us](mailto:conservation@co.jasper.ia.us)  
website: [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com)

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**A Big Thank You To....**

Ina Heidemann for supporting our live animal displays and Bill Yeager for donating mini bird houses for craft kits. Thank you!

**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.

**#ExploreJasperCountyParks**

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