

The Prairie Country Quarterly

Summer, 2026

A NEWSLETTER OF THE WINNEBAGO COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD



Meet our Newest Addition--Daisy!

In June, the Hanson Nature Center acquired a new resident! She is a striped skunk named Daisy and she has become very popular!

Her actual name is Daisy Fleabane, although we typically use her "middle" name only when we're scolding her 😊. Her name was chosen by a poll of our Facebook followers who chose Daisy Fleabane over two other wildflower names. She was obtained from a breeder, so she was not orphaned or taken from the wild. She was born on April 24th and we acquired her in June, after she had been weaned from her mother.

In the wild, skunks are omnivorous, meaning they will eat just about anything. And Daisy is no exception! We feed her a variety of foods, including cat and dog food, vegetables, berries, a vitamin supplement, and eggs. She loves eggs! In fact, about the only thing we've found that she doesn't like are lima beans. (Can you blame her?)

As for the obvious question, we had her scent glands removed, so she can't spray. But, she still likes to stomp her little feet when she's startled or scared, and act like she's going to spray. Although she can't spray, she does have a musky odor, much like other similar animals such as ferrets.

Currently, Daisy is living in a pen on the main floor of the nature center, but that is only temporary. We're building her a much larger and nicer enclosure in our basement classroom. That should be completed sometime within the next couple months.

Daisy's role at the nature center will be as an ambassador animal, helping people to learn about and appreciate Iowa wildlife species, including misunderstood animals that may have bad reputations. After all, skunks are nocturnal, so people rarely see them. About the only time people have any experience with skunks is when their dog gets sprayed. Hopefully, by seeing a skunk up close, people will learn to appreciate them, and other misunderstood animals, a little bit more!



In the wild, skunks only live a few years. As with most animals, predation, disease, and accidents take their toll. But, in captivity, with good care, skunks can live over 10 years. So, Daisy should be around a long time to greet visitors to the Hanson Nature Center. We encourage everyone to come meet her and say hi!



Winnebago County Conservation Board

Hanson
Nature Center
41600 Highway 69
Leland, IA 50453
641-567-3390

www.winnebagocountyia.gov/conservation

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Be Sure to Check Out These Upcoming Programs!

MONARCH TAGGING

***THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3RD
HANSON NATURE CENTER 6:00-7:00 PM***

Join us for a short program about the amazing migration of the Monarch butterfly. Then, help us tag Monarchs for research! You can bring your own Monarchs to tag, tag some of ours, or borrow a net and go catch some to tag!



HUNTER EDUCATION CLASS

***SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH
HANSON NATURE CENTER 8:00 AM-12:00 PM***

Hunter Education is a mandatory program that anyone born after January 1st, 1972, must complete before they can purchase an Iowa hunting license.

To attend this field day, you must first complete the online course. Once you've completed the course, print off the voucher and bring it with you when you attend the field day. Scan the qr code for more information or to register for the field day. Registration will end on Tuesday, Sept. 15th.



When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.



Wendell Berry, 1934-2026

Pumpkins & Prairies

2026 Fall Fest

**The Corner Pumpkin Patch &
The Hanson Nature Center**

Hayrack rides, pumpkin picking, crafts, games,
face painting, food, vendors, and more!

**Saturday, Oct. 17th
11:00 AM-3:00 PM**

Free Admission

41600 Hwy 69 & 17925 Hwy 9
Leland, IA



WCCB News

MOTUS TOWER DETECTS FIRST BIRDS

Shortly after we erected our Motus tower this spring, it detected its first birds! The first bird was a Harris' Sparrow that flew past the nature center in the early morning hours of May 12th. Since Motus towers are stationed throughout the country (and around the world), we were able to determine where that bird came from and where it was headed. As it turns out, that first bird, which was tagged in southeast Kansas, made quite a journey and was detected at six different towers that same night:

Pammel State Park (Madison County)--9:45 PM (May 11th)

Blank Park Zoo, Des Moines--10:00 PM (May 11th)

Ada Hayden Prairie (Howard County)--11:00 PM (May 11th)

Calkins Nature Area (Hardin County)--11:30 PM (May 11th)

Mae's Way Tower, Hanson Nature Center--12:15 AM

St. Cloud State University (MN)--2:30 AM.



Harris' Sparrow



Swainson's Thrush

That means, that night, that little sparrow flew from Madison County, IA, to St. Cloud, MN, in less than five hours! And, two days later, it was in Grand Forks, ND. Another Harris' Sparrow, that was tagged in central Oklahoma, was detected by our tower two days later. And, 8 days later, on May 22nd, a Swainson's Thrush flew past our tower about 10:00 PM.

Motus towers help scientists learn more about birds, their migration paths, and their habitat use, among many other things. We are anxious to see what birds our tower will detect this fall! We are grateful to the Helgeson family of Lake Mills for donating their daughter Mae's memorial money for this tower. Thanks to her dedication to birding, scientists are now able to learn more about the birds she loved so much!

WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR WETLAND?



many people believe, we did not drain the wetland. In fact, we'd love to have it back!

There has been some misunderstanding about what happened to the wetland that is located north of the nature center along Highway 69. Unfortunately, it has dried up considerably since we opened the nature center two years ago and some people think that we drained it on purpose. But, nothing could be further from the truth!

Actually, there was a beaver dam under the road that had been holding the water back and creating the wetland. Last year, we had an 8" rainfall that washed the beaver dam out, releasing much of the water in the wetland. So, contrary to what

Despite that, the area does still hold some water. And there are also other wetlands at the center, as well. As a result, this year, we had broods of wood ducks, mergansers, and mallards that were all raised here at the center. And, countless other wetland birds such as herons, geese, swans, and shorebirds, are routinely observed. We even had a sandhill crane that stopped over briefly!

We would love to restore the wetland someday. Unfortunately, we're finding that there are a lot of legal and bureaucratic hoops that we'd need to jump through to do that. But, in the meantime, rest assured that, although it may look different, the wetland is still attracting a lot of birds and other wildlife!



Summer Programs

This summer, we had a lot of fun here at the WCCB! First, in June, we worked with NIACC to hold our annual Critter Camp! The participating kids were able to enjoy lots of fun activities at the Hanson Nature Center, as well as at Thorpe Park and Pilot Knob State Park. Each morning for a week, they were able to learn about different critters, including insects, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and pond critters. And, they also got to go fishing at Thorpe Park!

Then, in August, we worked with NIACC again to host our second annual Hanson Nature Center Overnight Camp-in! Those kids got to enjoy cooking hot dogs and s'mores over a fire, learning about the center's resident animals, taking a night hike through the prairie, and making "toad abodes" to help out our local toad population. In the evening, they played flashlight tag, then settled into their sleeping bags to watch a movie, complete with homemade popcorn.

Also in August, about 60 people attended a program from the Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines. They enjoyed learning about what animals eat, as well as seeing a huge Cane Toad from the Amazon, as well as an adorable Chinchilla, who proceeded to entertain us with her dustbaths!

We're currently planning out more programs for this fall and winter, so be sure to keep watching the newspaper and our Facebook page to learn more about when those will be!



Did you know these Monarch Butterfly facts?

- ▶ A female Monarch will lay up to 400 eggs, but only one per milkweed plant. So, she needs to fly to 400 plants to lay all her eggs!
- ▶ From the time it hatches out of its egg, until it forms its chrysalis, a Monarch caterpillar will increase in size by 4,000 times.
- ▶ The Monarch butterflies you are seeing right now, will be in Mexico in a couple months!
- ▶ Only one generation of Monarchs migrates to Mexico, but it takes up to three generations to make the trip back in the spring.
- ▶ Monarchs drink so much nectar, and use wind currents so well, that they actually gain weight as they migrate!
- ▶ Monarchs are able to find the same overwintering area in Mexico each year, although they've never been there before and they'll never be there again.

What an amazing little insect!





We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to the following people for their donations over the past few months! We are very appreciative of their support. All cash donations go towards developing and enhancing our nature center exhibits.

In Memory of Mitchell Price
Karen Monson
In Memory of Nancy Hanson
Kathy Iverson, Sue Myli, Sue Kemp
In Memory of Wayne Miller
Steve and Kathy Iverson
Robert and Kristne Schwartz
In Memory of Janice Smith
Steve and Kathy Iverson
In Memory of Vern Peterson
Lynn and Julie Hagenson, Ron and Linda Haugen
St. James Catholic Church/Archangels Catholic Cluster

Thank You!

Friends of Winnebago County Conservation Foundation, Inc.

Membership Form—Please fill out and return with payment to: FWCCF, 41600 Highway 69, Leland, IA, 50453.
Checks should be made payable to the "Friends of Winnebago County Conservation Foundation, Inc."

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

Donor Level—Please Check One:

Thank you...We truly appreciate your support!!

Individual Membership (\$25/year) _____

Family Membership (\$50/year) _____

Small Business Membership (\$100/year) _____

Large Business/Corporation Membership (\$250/year) _____



If you'd like to become a member of our **Friends of Winnebago County Conservation Foundation**, you can fill out the form above and send it to us. Annual dues all go towards WCCB projects, many of which are now Hanson Nature Center projects. For more information about becoming a Friends member, you can go to the Foundation page of our web site.

Even if you don't want to become a member, you can still contribute to our foundation. And, since our foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, your contributions are all tax-deductible and will be recognized in this newsletter, as well as at the nature center. If you would like more information about how you can make a simple donation to the center, please check out our Hanson Nature Center page or use this qr code to donate. Thank you, in advance, for your support! It is truly appreciated!

