



Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Let Them Be Wild

Ashton Nunn

We understand more than most that baby animals are downright adorable, but is it ever a good idea to take an animal from the wild to keep as a pet? The answer to that would be, no. No matter how cute a wild animal is, removing them from their home in the wild to bring in and attempt to keep them as a domestic animal is never advisable for many reasons.

- **Wild animals can be dangerous.** Wild animals are just that: *wild*. They have natural instincts that they have developed to protect themselves, and it is not uncommon for them to bite, scratch, or attack their owners, other pets, and children.
- **They can carry a multitude of diseases.** Wild animals can carry what are known as “zoonotic diseases”. These are illnesses that can be transferred from animals to people, such as salmonella, rabies, and psittacosis. They can also carry parasites that can transfer to other pets and humans as well.
- **Wild animals are not suited for captivity.** No matter how much they may seem like they can adapt from living outdoors to in your home, the simple fact is they have evolved to live in their natural habitats which provide them with the open space, resources, and stimulation that they need. Captive environments, especially those of a typical home, cannot replicate these environments and the animals often suffer from boredom, malnutrition, and stress. They could also develop behavioral problems such as aggression or self-injury.
- **Keeping wild animals as pets is illegal.** According to the Illinois Wildlife Code, the keeping of wild, native animals is against the law without a special permit. Wildlife rehabilitators that are licensed by the state of Illinois are allowed to keep wildlife in captivity, with the goal of rehabilitation and release.



Most people who are unlicensed to rehabilitate wild animals, but still have them in a captive setting, are not setting out to break the law. They are often well-meaning people or those who have their hearts in the right place and may just be unaware of the laws regarding captive wildlife.

It's hard to see an animal in distress, and many people want to try and help. The best way to do this is to look up licensed wildlife rehabilitation organizations near you.

Rock Springs Nature Center and the Macon County Conservation District are not licensed wildlife rehabilitators. This is outside the scope of our work, but we are lucky to live in an area with exceptional wildlife rehabilitators not too far away.

Organizations like the Illinois Raptor Center or the University of Illinois Wildlife Medical Center are just a couple of options nearby with the appropriate licenses and permits, and they both do excellent work for the wildlife of Central Illinois. Reaching out to them for advice before removing an animal from the wild is the best course of action. Let's all do our part to keep wildlife wild.





Oglesby's Piece of the Prairie

Brent Wielt

In August 1852, Richard J. Oglesby, after returning from the California Gold Rush, purchased 160 acres of land in Macon County from the government. When the county's townships were formed in 1860, his land became part of Wilson Township later renamed Mt. Zion Township. It was just one of several pieces of property, including other farmland and town lots in Decatur, St. Louis, and Chicago, that he bought and sold throughout his life.

In the nineteenth century, some Americans chose to invest in land rather than hold their wealth in other ways. Decatur didn't even have a bank in 1852. Before the Civil War, unreliable paper money and the sometimes unstable banks that issued it might collapse at any time. Before the start of depositor's insurance from the FDIC, land was typically a solid investment in a state dependent on agriculture. Oglesby correctly believed Macon County farmland would be a good bet for the future. He didn't have long to wait to be proven right.

By 1854, the Illinois Central Railroad and the Great Western Railroad both arrived, connecting Decatur to other Illinois towns. They brought in new farmers, laborers, and merchants and spurred the birth of several new local businesses. By 1860, Oglesby saw Macon County's population triple in only 10 years! While we don't know yet if he held this land very long, the majority of local land values increased in this era. Located just south of today's Route 36 near Casner and Long Creek, his property was prairie according to surveyor's maps. This piece of prairie helped Oglesby as a young lawyer, Mexican War veteran, and former 49'er have more personal financial security, a vested interest in the local economy, and tie him even closer to Macon County's future growth.

Take Your Pick

Below you'll find activities offered at multiple times or locations. Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon at MaconCountyConservation.org, unless otherwise noted.

TRIP TO STARVED ROCK FOR EAGLE VIEWING

Saturdays, January 20, 27, & February 3, 9am-4pm

Take a trip to this popular state park to look for wintering eagles, check out the visitor's center, and visit the lock and dam museum.



Bring a lunch or purchase one from the restaurant at Starved Rock. Be prepared to go outside. \$30/person. Register online by January 19, 26, and February 2. Min/Max: 5/10.

MAPLE SYRUP PROGRAMS

Saturday, February 17, 11am, 12pm, & 1pm

Discover how sap becomes syrup, why spring is the best time of year to harvest sap, and



how people used sap throughout history. Registrants will get to sample real maple syrup. Free. Register online by February 16. Min/Max: 5/30.



Briefs

CALLING ALL YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHERS!

Students living in Macon County are invited to participate in a county-wide **Nature Photography Contest!**

Students in grades K-12 are encouraged to submit a photograph showcasing their talent to be displayed in our upcoming exhibit, *Nature in Focus*.

Entries can be submitted into one of three categories based on subject matter:

- Landscapes
- Wildlife
- Humans and Nature

Macon County Conservation District staff will carefully consider all entries and choose a first, second, and third place winner in each category. First place winners in each category will receive a \$50 gift card to Shutterfly, and all photographers will have their photos displayed in our exhibit hall at Rock Springs Nature Center from May through August.

Entries are due by Friday, April 19, 2024.

Submissions should be saved as a JPEG and sent via email to Alysia Callison at ACallison@MaconCountyConservation.org.

In your email, please include: the artist's name, age, school (or homeschool), and the contact information of their parent or guardian so we can properly credit the artist and inform those who win the contest.



Winners will be notified on or around Monday, May 6, 2024. For more information, contact Alysia Callison at (217) 423-7708 or ACallison@MaconCountyConservation.org.



Homeschool Programs

Homeschool children ages 5-15 can join a naturalist and explore nature and history topics through discussion, hands-on activities, crafts, and games. Homeschool students will spend time indoors and outdoors, investigating concepts and engaging with nature. \$15/child. Register online by date specified.

GLACIERS AND THEIR FORMATION

Wednesday, December 13, 10am-12pm

Learn about the important impact glaciers made on the landscape of Illinois, and discover how they work through hands-on activities. Register online by December 11.



ICE AGE ANIMALS

Wednesday, January 10, 10am-12pm

Discover some of the creatures that lived in Illinois before us, including mammoths, ground sloths, and giant beavers. Students will have an opportunity to view a real mammoth tooth found on Conservation District property. Register online by January 8.

BIRDS OF PREY

Wednesday, February 14, 10am-12pm

Listen to raptor calls, dissect an owl pellet, and venture outside to see if you can spot any birds of prey. Register online by February 12.



Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon at MaconCountyConservation.org, unless otherwise noted.



Macon County Conservation District

Hours

OFFICES OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

NATURE CENTER OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

Saturday, 9am-5pm

Sunday, 1-5pm

TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

Holidays & Closings

OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Sunday, December 24, Christmas Eve

Monday, December 25, Christmas Day

Monday, January 1, New Year's Day

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, December 22, Christmas Eve (observed)

Monday, January 15, MLK Day

Monday, February 19, Presidents' Day



Special Events

CHRISTMAS TEA

Sunday, December 3, 1-4pm

Stop by the Governor Oglesby Mansion to enjoy a traditional Christmas afternoon tea. Experience this historic Victorian home all decked out for the holidays. Refreshments will be served. \$2/person. No reservations necessary. Located at 421 W. William Street in Decatur, IL.

GEMINID METEOR SHOWER

Thursday, December 14, 9-11pm

Friends Creek Conservation Area

Join us at Friends Creek Conservation Area to view the strongest meteor shower of the year. These meteors originate near the constellation Gemini and are usually bright and colorful. We will have hot chocolate available. Wear warm clothing and bring a lawn chair and blanket if you like. Free. Register online by December 13. Min/Max: 5/50.



Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm

December 20, January 17, and February 21

DECATUR AREA AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook.

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am



Connect with Us

Follow us on social media!
MaconCountyConservation.org





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Music

The following programs are free and open to the public at Rock Springs Nature Center.

DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm

December 9

January 6 & 20

February 3 & 17



ACOUSTIC MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 2-4pm

December 10, January 14, & February 11

Art

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Decatur Camera Club

November & December

Enjoy a wide variety of photography, including scenes of trees, birds, landscapes, and more from talented local photographers.



Glacier's Edge Master Naturalists

The Glacier's Edge Master Naturalists (Extension Unit 17 - DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt) will share their love of nature through artwork and photography.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Barn Colony Artists

November & December

Discover works in watercolor, pastels, oil, and mixed media depicting subjects from nature to portraits by talented artists in our community.

Conservation Finds

Enjoy a collection of nature photography taken on District property, from talented District staff.

Mini Camps

Children ages 1 through 5 will explore nature with an adult companion through crafts, activities, songs, and stories. These camps are a great stepping stone for little ones to spend time with other children and have the comfort of a loved one nearby. Fee is \$8/child. Register online by noon the day before camp. Min/Max: 4/12.

JINGLE BELLS

Tuesday, December 19, 9:30am

Wednesday, December 20, 9:30am

Explore winter pastimes and traditions involving mittens and snow through hands-on activities and songs. Dress for a short excursion outside.



I CAN SENSE: WEATHER

Tuesday, January 9, 9:30am

Thursday, January 11, 9:30am

Learn about hot and cold weather while exploring your senses in nature.

I CAN SENSE: TEXTURE

Tuesday, February 6, 9:30am

Thursday, February 8, 9:30am

Feel and discover some of the many different textures in nature.



Happenings

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December

CONSERVATION SUCCESSES

Sunday, December 3, 2pm

Celebrate Wildlife Conservation Day and learn about the many conservation successes in the state of Illinois, including river otters, bobcats, bald eagles, and even the turkey. Free.

Register online by December 1. Min/Max: 5/30.



FLUDDLES DOCUMENTARY FILM SHOWING

Saturday, December 9, 2pm

Fluddles are intermittent wetlands also known as field ponds or duck ponds. Join the Decatur Area Audubon Society and Chicago filmmaker Bob Dolgan for a showing of the new documentary, *Fluddles*. The film chronicles the agricultural wetlands of Illinois which provide habitat and forage for a diversity of waterfowl and species such as pheasants, cranes, plovers, and more. The goal of the film is to raise awareness, explain the importance, and encourage the expansion of these wetlands. Refreshments will be provided. Free. No registration required. Co-sponsored by Decatur Area Audubon Society and Macon County Conservation District.

WINTER RACCOON CANDY CANE HUNT

Saturday, December 16, 10am

The Winter Raccoon has been up to some mischief! Learn some fun raccoon facts with a naturalist, then go on a hike to find some of the goodies the Winter Raccoon has hidden throughout the forest. Free. Register online by December 15. Min/Max: 5/30.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: HOLIDAY FOR THE BIRDS

Sunday, December 17, 2pm

Young children are invited to learn about our overwintering birds, make a bird feeder to take home, and make a simple pinecone bird feeder to hang outside of the Nature Center. Free. Register online by December 15. Min/Max: 5/20.

January

TRIVIA NIGHT

Saturday, January 6, 6-8pm

Gather your friends and join Nature Center staff for a fun night of trivia! There will be six rounds of 10 questions, in categories including local flora and fauna, local history, and more. The winning team will get a trophy and a prize! Tables of 6 are available for \$60 each, and Door 4 Brewing Co. will have drinks available for purchase. All proceeds support educational programming at the Macon County Conservation District. Register online by January 3.

NATURE EXPLORATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: MERLIN AND EBIRD

Saturday, January 13, 2pm

The 21st century has ushered in many technological advancements, and the field of nature exploration is no exception! Discover two popular apps for bird identification – Merlin and eBird – then go outside and put them to the test. \$3/person. Register online by January 12. Min/Max: 5/30.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: SILLY SQUIRRELS

Sunday, January 21, 2pm

Celebrate Squirrel Appreciation Day by learning all about these nutty mammals. Make a fuzzy squirrel puppet, read a story, and go outside to search for some. Free. Register online by January 19. Min/Max: 5/20.



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February

STARTING A LIFE LIST: BIRDS

Sunday, February 4, 2pm

A 'life list' is a list of all species that someone has observed in the wild. Bird watchers and other wildlife observers keep these lists as a sort of lifelong challenge, with an ultimate goal of seeing as many species as possible firsthand. Join a naturalist to start your own life list and see how many species of birds you can find at Rock Springs, then take your list with you and keep it growing! \$3/person. Register online by February 2. Min/Max: 5/20.

MORE THAN A COLOR: THE MARGINALIZATION OF AFRICAN BEAUTY THROUGH HISTORY

Saturday, February 10, 2pm

Guest speaker Karen Anderson will speak about the women of color in 1760 French America who figured out how to legally free themselves from slavery only to be bound by government laws, women like Sarah Baartman who had to choose between being a circus oddity or a slave, and how women like Sarah Breedlove and Ann Malone changed the way women of African descent saw themselves—how these women redefined beauty. Anderson will also reflect on a recent development: our society has started to see women of color as beautiful. Free. No registration required.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: SHAPES IN NATURE

Sunday, February 18, 2pm

Discover the many different shapes you can find in nature. Read a story, make a forest diagram, and go outside to see what you can find. Free. Register online by February 16. Min/Max: 5/20.

FULL MOON HIKE

Griswold Conservation Area

Saturday, February 24, 8pm

Take a short walk around Griswold Conservation Area in Blue Mound to view the landscape illuminated by our only natural satellite. Then, hike to the top of the mound to see the view from the observation deck. Dress for the weather. \$5/person. Register online by February 23. Min/Max: 5/30.



ALL ABOUT INVASIVES

Sunday, February 25, 2pm

What is an invasive species, and what's the big deal about them? Learn about some of these plants and animals, how they got here, and what we're doing to combat them. Free. Register online by February 23. Min/Max: 5/30.

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

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SAVE THE DATE!
FOR THE 2024 ROCK SPRINGS RAMBLE!

SATURDAY, MAY 18, 2024

conservation

For trail conditions, visit MaconCountyConservation.org.



The Prairie Islander is a free quarterly publication. Call or email for additional copies.
"Go Green" by reading it online or subscribing to our email newsletter at MaconCountyConservation.org.

Macon County
Conservation District

