



# Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## April is Citizen Science Month

Beth Lane

April is Citizen Science Month, and is celebrated by renewing the effort to involve the public in scientific research projects. But why should we care?

Citizen Science is a collaboration between public and scientific professionals to collect and analyze data for research projects. It has pseudonyms such as: community science, crowd science, crowd-sourced science, civic science, participatory monitoring, or volunteer monitoring. Citizen scientists are not always professional scientists! In fact they can be any age, from any walk of life, with any amount of experience. All that is really needed to be a citizen scientist is curiosity and interest.

The term 'citizen science' was coined in the 1990s and added to the dictionary in 2014. The Citizen Science Association was founded in 2013. However, the practice of citizen science work started long before. In the late 1800s, Welles Cook established the first organized group, American Ornithologist Union (now North American Bird Phenology Program), to track bird migratory patterns. The longest running citizen science project started in 1900: The National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count.



Benjamin Franklin would have been considered a citizen scientist because of his natural curiosity and tendency to track scientific events such as weather. In fact, many other historical individuals such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John James Audubon, William and Caroline Herschel, Charles Darwin, and Henry David Thoreau were considered citizen scientists.

Citizen science projects are important for several reasons:

- Creates awareness on scientific topics
- Helps scientists collect and enumerate large amounts of data, and find new scientific trends
- Has different viewpoints look at problems to find the best solutions

- Creates a sense of community by offering engaging involvement opportunities to participate in
- Encourages volunteer opportunities making individuals feel a sense of inclusion on worldwide issues

Many of the projects are worldwide efforts that can have large impacts, such as: water quality, climate change, species conservation, and Alzheimer's research studies.

The projects range in scope, from conservation, astronomy, and public and medical health. Projects can be participated in from the comfort of your home, or in the field. Many use as little equipment as a smart phone or computer.

There are lots of opportunities available for you to participate in, some which occur right here at our sites. These include Nestbox Monitoring, BioBlitzes and iNaturalist species reporting, and Feederwatch. There are many websites to find participation opportunities on citizen science projects or create your own, including these top ones: [citizenscience.gov](http://citizenscience.gov), [citizenscience.org](http://citizenscience.org), [scistarter.org](http://scistarter.org), [citsci.org](http://citsci.org) and [zooniverse.org](http://zooniverse.org).

We encourage you to find a project that interests you and get involved!



# Can You Hear Spring? I Say: YES.

Darryl Coates

**Ahhh... Spring!** The earth tilts its axis towards the sun, the days become longer, temperatures begin to rise, and signs of spring begin popping up all over. It is the time for Illinois to take off the blankets of white and put down the fresh carpets of green for the summer. Animals become extra active. Those creatures that migrate return while those that hibernate re-emerge. The return of songbirds is one of the most common and welcomed signs of spring. Robins, bluebirds and wrens bring music after the quietness of winter which is often only punctuated with the caws of crows and harsh slurring of the blue jays. You may also hear the cardinal sing birdie, birdie, birdie or the black-capped chickadee repetitively call chickadee, dee, dee. But when spring arrives at Friends Creek, there's a whole symphony of not only songbirds, but other "park residents" which make their debut as the ice begins to melt.



You might see some of the returning residents, but you will definitely hear them as they begin their search for a mate. Birds returning to their breeding areas are generally songbirds. The very call of the meadowlark announces "spring of the year". A call often not identified is the peenting of the American woodcock. But the mating calls one might not give much attention to are those of frogs and toads emerging from their hibernation. They, too, are looking for mates.



The wetland areas along Friends Creek have their own spring heralds which don't blow horns, but do bellow. Moist soils of the site come alive with spring peepers. You likely won't see one of these tiny frogs but you can hear their chorus as they sing for mates. Undoubtedly the loudest of all the mating calls in Friends Creeks is the collective resounding of Spring Peepers. According to one study, a person standing just two feet away from one spring peeper will hear a sound of about 90 decibels. That's like standing 25



feet from a motorcycle! If you're standing a bit farther away, an entire "army" of peepers can be as loud as 65 decibels, the level of sound of conversation in a bar room. If you want the chorus to stop, clap your hands or make a loud noise. Just like that, you will have complete silence - until they remember they are still looking for mates and start back up again. Spring peepers, like all amphibians, need water to lay their eggs, so the fact that they select water for breeding has the bonus of amplifying their call because the surface of that water is reflective.

Toads, like frogs, also need water to lay their 'roe', or eggs. They also hang around areas of water as they call out for mates. The difference between toads and frogs, however, is that toads live on land while frogs live in water. Toads common to Friends Creek are the Fowler's toad and the American toad. When you hear the sound of a crying baby or waaaaaaaa, you are hearing a Fowler's toad. The American toad has a long trill that can last up to 45 seconds. If you hear a deep reverberating "rummmf," you can bet it's an American bullfrog. Another species found in Friends Creek is the cricket frog, whose call sounds just like the metal clickers you had as a kid. And last but not least is the gray tree frog, which has a trill like the American toad but its trill is short and staccato like.

We invite you to any or all Macon County Conservation District sites to come and hear the sounds of spring.



## Briefs

### SUMMER CAMPS

Enjoying fresh air, exploring nature, and learning about the world around



us are hallmarks of summer camps at Rock Springs Conservation Area. You and your children or grandchildren are invited to join us for a summer of fun and learning. This year's camp season runs from June 5 to August 4. During those weeks, you'll find many activities to choose from:



- **Mini Camp:** Ages 1-5 explore Rock Springs Conservation Area with their adult buddies in these 1 hour-long camps. \$8/child each camp.
- **Earth Adventures:** Ages 6-12 hike, swim, canoe, and discover the world around them in this full-day, week-long nature camp with optional Before and After Child Care. \$140/camper each week.
- **Adventure Club:** Ages 5-12 join in on Earth Adventures nature camp on Tuesday mornings. \$20/camper each day.
- **NEW! History Camp:** Ages 6-12 become history explorers in this half-day camp on Wednesday mornings. \$20/camper each day.
- **X-treme Camp:** Ages 10-15 gear up for adventurous fun, including caving. \$35/camper for in-county camp days, \$60/camper for out-of-county camp days.

Online registration opens April 3. Find more information at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).

### CAMPGROUND AND PAVILIONS OPENING

The campground at Friends Creek Conservation Area opens for the season on April 28. The campground welcomes RV and tent camping. It includes flush toilets, showers, and a dump station.



Daily fees are \$25 for 30 amp service, and \$30 for 50 amp service. A large group campsite is also available for \$25 per night for up to 25 people, and \$1 per night for each additional person up to 60 people.

For more information, visit [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).

All campground reservations are taken online.

The picnic pavilions at Rock Springs, Friends Creek, Fort Daniel, and Griswold are also open for the season. Reserve a pavilion for \$35/day to host your own outdoor event at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).

### Take Your Pick

Below you'll find activities offered at multiple times or locations. Register online before the last full weekday prior to the program. Programs held at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise noted:

#### YOGA IN THE PINES

Sundays, March 26, April 23, and May 21, 3pm

Join yoga instructor Michelle Huttes for an intermediate level, slow vinyasa yoga flow in the Pine Forest. In case of poor weather, we will meet inside the Nature Center. Free. Register online by March 24, April 21, and May 19. Min/Max: 1/30.



# Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online by noon at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://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

Offices & Nature Center Closed

Sunday, April 9, Easter

### NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, April 7, Good Friday

Monday, May 29, Memorial Day

## Open Houses

### BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturday, May 6, 1-4pm

See what going to school was like in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at the historic one-room schoolhouse located at Friends Creek Conservation Area. 13734 Friends Creek Park Rd., Cisco, IL. Free.

### GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

Sundays, March 26, April 30, and May 28, 2-4pm

Tour the restored home of Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby. Encounter the lives of its family members and explore their late 1800s lifestyle. \$2/person. Members are free. 421 W. William Street, Decatur, IL.



## Connect with Us

Follow us on social media!  
[MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org)



## Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Games

Join us for the national pastime: base ball! Cheer for your home team, the Rock Springs Ground Squirrels, in a game of vintage base ball played with authentic 1858 rules. To see their complete schedule, go to [Facebook.com/GroundSquirrels](https://www.facebook.com/GroundSquirrels)

Saturday, March 18, 12pm

Swansea, IL – Away game  
Goodwill Match at the  
Belleville/Swansea Moose  
Lodge 1221



Saturday, April 15, 12pm

Swansea, IL – Away game  
against the Belleville Stags at the  
Belleville/Swansea Moose Lodge 1221

Saturday, May 6, Time TBA

Bishop Hill, IL – Away game against the McLean  
County Prairie Chickens and the Chicago  
Salmon at the Bishop Hill baseball diamond

## MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

Nina Bendsen, President

David Castor, Vice President

Mark Allen, Secretary

Gussie Reed, Treasurer

Karen Schneller, Second Vice President

Jerry Culp, Executive Director

Alysia Callison, Director of Program Services

Pam Smith, Director of Finance & H.R.

## Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708  
[mccd@MaconCountyConservation.org](mailto:mccd@MaconCountyConservation.org)  
[MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org)

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.  
Register online by noon at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org), unless otherwise noted.

## Meetings

### MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm  
March 15, April 19, & May 17

### DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

At Rock Springs Nature Center  
Sunday, March 19, 2pm  
Sunday, April 16, 2pm  
Saturday, May 20, 8am

### ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am

## Music

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

### DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm  
March 4 & 18  
April 1, 15 & 29  
May 13 & 27



### ACOUSTIC MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 1-4pm  
March 12 & May 14

## Art

### NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Katherine Unruh, March & April

Encounter animals and wild landscapes captured in the form of paintings and drawings by this local artist.

Celestino Ruffini, May & June

Artist Celestino Ruffini uses many mediums to capture the beauty of nature, including coal, paint, pen, and wood.

### SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Jane Koenig, March & April

View the beauty of nature just outside your backdoor as captured by local photographer Jane P. Koenig.

Danny Pratt, May & June

Enjoy photography of wildlife and landscapes from local photographer Danny Pratt.



## 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. \$8/child. Online registration required. Min/Max: 4/12.

### WEATHER OR NOT: WIND

Wednesday, March 8, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, March 9, 9:30-10:30am

Explore the unseen force of wind through our senses and fun activities.

### WEATHER OR NOT: RAIN

Tuesday, March 21, 9:30-10:30am  
Wednesday, March 22, 9:30-10:30am

Discover how rain is important to both plants and animals.

### WEATHER OR NOT: RAINBOWS

Tuesday, April 11, 9:30-10:30am  
Wednesday, April 12, 9:30-10:30am

Study rainbows and learn how to create your own.

### WEATHER OR NOT: SUN

Wednesday, April 26, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, April 27, 9:30-10:30am

Observe what the sun does for us and our planet Earth.

# Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## March

### WOMEN IN CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Saturday, March 11, 2pm

For Women's History Month, learn about some of the women who have shaped the fields of conservation and forestry, and how you can help continue their legacies. Free. No registration required.



### LINCOLN: THE RIVER MAN

Decatur Public Library

Saturday, March 18, 2pm

Learn how Abraham Lincoln's life was connected to rivers including working on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, traveling on the Sangamon River, and even his legal cases involving rivers. The Conservation District and Friends of Lincoln Trail Homestead State Park will co-sponsor this program by guest speaker Don Chamberlain. Free. No registration required.

### PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: STINKY SKUNKS

Sunday, March 19, 2pm

Why are skunks so stinky and what makes them special? Learn about these curious mammals, make a skunk puppet, and go outside to see where they live. Free. Register online by March 17. Min/Max: 5/30.



### POKÉMON ECOLOGY SERIES: BEHAVIORS

Saturday, March 25, 2pm

With over 900 in-game species, the world of Pokémon is diverse and vast, and many of those monsters have real-world counterparts. Join us as we compare the behaviors of animals in our world to those of these fictional creatures. Free. Register online by March 24. Min/Max: 5/30.

## April

### EARLY SPRING WILDFLOWER HIKE

Sand Creek Conservation Area

Sunday, March 26, 2pm

Bring the family to Sand Creek Conservation Area to explore nature and hunt for early spring wildflowers. Free. Register online by March 24. Min/Max: 5/30.



### PHENOLOGY OF MACON COUNTY: APRIL

Saturday, April 1, 2pm

Discover the impact that seasons and climate have on wildlife and the ecosystem through your own eyes in this exploration of phenology. Journal, draw, or take notes about any observations you see while we take a walk and make observations along the way. Dress for the weather and be prepared to go outside. \$5/person. Register online by March 31. Min/Max: 5/20.

### POKÉMON ECOLOGY SERIES: ADAPTATIONS

Saturday, April 15, 2pm

How do Pokémon adapt to the environment around them? Some can harness electricity, some use water to defend themselves, and some can even manipulate the Earth itself. Amazingly, real life animals in our world can do some of these very same things! Learn all about it in this month's Pokémon Ecology program. Free. Register online by April 14. Min/Max: 5/30.

### PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: DASHING DEER

Sunday, April 16, 2pm

Where do deer sleep and what do they like to eat? Learn this and more as we discover the life of our state mammal through discussion, a craft, and outdoor exploration. Free. Register online by April 14. Min/Max: 5/30.



Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.  
Register online by noon at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org), unless otherwise noted.

## TRIP TO MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Saturday, April 29, 9am-5pm

Explore 79 acres of magnificent horticultural displays full of plant species from tropical to temperate zones. Venture through indoor conservatories, formal gardens, and international gardens. Lunch is on your own. \$45/person covers admission and transportation. Register online by April 27. Min/Max: 5/12.



## PAINT WITH ME: EN PLEIN AIR

Sunday, April 30, 2pm

Breathe in the outdoors and create your very own piece of artwork as you join a naturalist for a step-by-step painting tutorial. This program is best suited for beginner adults. All supplies will be provided. \$10/person. Register online by April 27. Min/Max: 5/12.

May

## PHENOLOGY OF MACON COUNTY: MAY

Griswold Conservation Area

Saturday, May 6, 2pm

Become a citizen scientist and record your observations as we draw, write, scribble, and talk about nature in our amazing county. We will meet at Griswold Conservation Area to see what's new at one of the highest spots in the county. \$5/person. Register online by May 5. Min/Max: 5/20.

## FOREST BATHING AND MEDITATION WORKSHOP

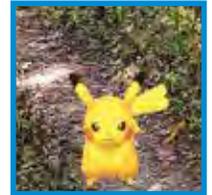
Sunday, May 7, 2-3:30pm

Begin with a peaceful and mindful meditation in the Pine Forest, then take a walk on the Discovery Trail to discover forest bathing. We will use our senses to explore nature, and move slowly while we observe and reflect. \$5/person. Register online by May 5. Min/Max: 5/20.

## POKÉMON ECOLOGY SERIES: DIVERGENT EVOLUTION

Saturday, May 13, 2pm

Have you ever wondered why some animals look similar even though they live on opposite sides of the world? Animals fill certain niches in their environment and Pokémon are no different. We will take examples from the different regions of the Pokémon world to compare and find out what role they fit in their ecosystem. Free.



Register online by May 12. Min/Max: 5/30.

## BEFORE THE CARDS AND CUBS: EARLY BASEBALL'S GROWTH IN ILLINOIS

Sunday, May 21, 2pm

After the Civil War, baseball saw a dramatic rise and spread throughout Illinois. Learn about the early years before professional baseball as local amateur clubs brought the game to towns across our state including Decatur. Guest speaker Dr. Bob Sampson is the author of a new book on the early days of baseball in Illinois. Free. No registration required.

## PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: SPRING FLOWERS

Sunday, May 21, 2pm

Why do we start to see flowers in the spring? Learn about the changing seasons, paint a paper plate flower, and go outside to see what's blooming. Free. Register online by May 20. Min/Max: 5/30.

## CANOE BIG CREEK

Friday, May 26, 1-3pm

Paddle a canoe down a local waterway. All equipment provided. Bring a drink and clothes that could get wet. Must have at least one adult per canoe. Meet at Cannon Park on S. Baltimore Ave. \$20/canoe.



Register online by May 25. Min/Max: 4/13 canoes.

Macon County  
Conservation District  
3939 Nearing Lane  
Decatur, IL 62521



NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Decatur, IL 62521  
PERMIT NO. 232

Return Service Requested



## Festival of Spring & River Cleanup

Saturday, April 22  
Rock Springs Nature Center

Cleanup: 10am - 12pm  
Festival: 12pm - 4pm  
Admission is FREE  
More information inside



Macon County  
Conservation District

Macon County  
Conservation District



For trail conditions, visit [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).



The Prairie Islander is a free quarterly publication. Call or email for additional copies. "Go Green" by reading it online at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).

# Special Events



## SANGAMON RIVER CLEANUP

Saturday, April 22, 10am-12pm

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Help clear trash from the banks of the Sangamon River to make it a safer and more beautiful place for wildlife and people. Dress to get dirty and bring your own gloves. Bags will be provided. Come by yourself or bring the whole family. Organized groups should call 217-423-7708 in advance. Co-sponsored by the Community Environmental Council. Register and meet at the Rock Springs Information Shelter.



## FESTIVAL OF SPRING

Saturday, April 22, 12-4pm

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Celebrate Earth Day and welcome spring with an afternoon of outdoor family activities. Enjoy wagon rides, canoeing, a scavenger hunt, a live bird show from the Illinois Raptor Center, tours of Homestead Prairie Farm, and learn what other organizations are doing in our community to protect water and wildlife. Co-sponsored by Decatur Audubon Society. Canoeing \$3/person. All other activities are free. No registration required. Visit our website for more information.



## ROCK SPRINGS RAMBLE 5K RUN/WALK

Saturday, May 20, 8am

The Macon County Conservation Foundation will host their third annual Rock Springs Ramble this year. This race features a 5K, a 1-mile Fun Run/Walk, and a Kid's Fun Run. It will begin and end at the main parking lot at Rock Springs Conservation Area and utilize portions of the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail. Registration is \$35/adult and \$10/child. In addition to being a great opportunity to exercise and explore nature, participants will receive plenty of swag, including top finisher prizes. Door 4 Brewing Co. will also be onsite with a bloody mary and mimosa bar. All event proceeds will benefit Macon County's natural areas and wildlife. Register at [RunSignup.com/RockSpringsRamble](https://RunSignup.com/RockSpringsRamble)



Macon County Conservation District

3939 Nearing Lane | Decatur, IL 62521 | 217-423-7708

[MaconCountyConservation.org](https://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.



## EXPLORING THE STARS

Wednesday, March 8, 5:30-7pm

Homeschool children will learn how to use a telescope, and use it to discover some of the wonders of the night sky. We will meet whether it's cloudy or clear. Register online by March 6.



## WILDLIFE IDENTIFICATION

Wednesday, April 12, 10am-12pm

Learn about a variety of plant and animal species and how to identify them, then go outside to put your knowledge to the test. Register online by April 10.



## OUTDOOR SKILLS

Wednesday, May 10, 10am-12pm

Discover a variety of outdoor skills, including knot-tying, archery, fire-starting, and more. Different age groups may do different activities for safety. Register online by May 8.

## Scouts

The Macon County Conservation District offers badge workshops for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other scouting organizations. Workshops typically last 2-3 hours and cover a variety of nature- and wilderness-related badges. Cost is \$9/scout for a two-hour workshop and \$12/scout for three hours. Contact us at 217-423-7708 to schedule a workshop for your troop.

Macon County Conservation District  
3939 Nearing Lane | Decatur, IL 62521 | 217-423-7708  
MaconCountyConservation.org

