

Conservation Corner

By Corinne Peterson
Pocahontas County Naturalist



December 27, 2017

*Make new friends, but keep the old.
One is silver, the other gold.*

Throughout 2017 we have been getting to know our friends, both new and old, in the world of nature. Here's a quick recap of some of the silver and gold we have mined during the past year right here in Wild Iowa.

We started off the year with the Walkingsticks, those strange stick insects that look just like a stick. We also took a closer look at the Rusty-Patched Bumblebees, now officially in danger of becoming extinct, the plentiful Painted Lady Butterflies, Monarch migration, and spider webs.



We met three mammals this year, the White-Tailed Jack Rabbits, American Minks, and Muskrats, along with one reptile, the Glass Lizard.

We flew after many bird friends, including Snow Geese, Yellow-Headed Blackbirds, Northern Bobwhites, American White Pelicans, American Coots, and Mourning Doves. Last week Mitchell CCB Naturalist Chelsea shared this fun story. "I was doing a "winter birds" program last Wednesday at a care facility. When I got to Mourning Doves, I commented on their distinctive sound. One of the women in the group told me that the Mourning Dove says "The Red Cow is Dead" in German, and so they are "mourning" the loss of the cow. If you say "The Red Cow is Dead" in German, *Die rote Kuh ist tot*, slowly and sadly, it mimics the cadence and sound of the coo of the mourning dove."

We met many plant friends over the year, including Sycamore, Honey Locust, Shagbark Hickory and Basswood Trees as well as the native plants Bloodroot, Blue Flag Iris, and Cup Plant along with Sweet Peas and Potatoes, both Columbian Exchange plants. A few invasive species also hitched a ride – Thistles, Cockleburs, and Burdocks.

We journeyed to the skies to meet some celestial friends: the Northern Lights, recent additions to the International Cloud Atlas, newly discovered exoplanets, record-setting Iowan Astronaut Peggy Whitson, and the Saturn spacecraft *Cassini*. We capped off the summer with the Great American Eclipse.

We also stopped in on School Days, Fall Fest, Day Camp, and a field trip to the Omaha Zoo. We toured the Washed Ashore™ Exhibit at Reimen Gardens, the Top 5 Scenic Drives in the U.S.A., Hawk Watches, Yellow Smoke Park and Hagge Park along the Boyer and Raccoon Rivers, Badger Creek Lake Watershed, and the Woodland Mounds Preserve in Warren County. Closer to home, we stopped by Sunken Grove, Cooper's Cove, Varina Wetland Complex, and the Wiegert Farmstead & Prairie.

Along the way we shared a few legends and introduced our new park ranger, James Conway. We closed the year with the four themes of Advent – hope, peace, joy, and love – and a closer look at feathers, peace lilies, magpies, and the Legend of Evergreens.

As we turn the calendar to a new year of friendships and adventures, I'd like to thank our faithful miners who join us each week. See you in 2018!