

Nahant News

Spring 2023

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Photo by J. Malake



NAHANT MARSH
EDUCATION CENTER

4220 Wapello Ave. • Davenport, IA 52802
www.nahantmarsh.org • 563.336.3370

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About Nahant Marsh



Nahant Marsh preserve is one of the largest urban wetlands on the Upper Mississippi River. It is comprised of marshy areas; mesic, wet, and sand prairie; and bottomland forest.

The 382-acre preserve is owned by the City of Davenport and the Nahant Marsh Board, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Conservation and restoration efforts on the preserve are directed by the Nahant Board. The educational programming is overseen by Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (EICC).



**WE ARE
REGISTERED!**

NAHANT MARSH
EDUCATION CENTER

Bird # 1940

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APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOODS

by Brian Ritter, *Executive Director*



The arrival of spring often also means the arrival of floods. Intermittent spring flooding is a natural part of the Mississippi River's ebb and flow. However, over the past several decades, the frequency, duration, and intensity of flooding has been increasing on the mighty Mississippi. After the record flood in 2019, we were fortunate to be flood-free during the past few years, but it doesn't appear that we will be spared from flooding this year. Record snowfalls in Minnesota and Wisconsin are now beginning to melt and work their way down the river.

Why is flooding becoming more common? The answer is complex. On average, as our climate changes, winters and springs are becoming wetter in the Upper Midwest. At the same time, we have altered our landscape in the Upper Mississippi River Watershed, especially our wetlands. During the 19th and 20th century, nearly 90% of Iowa and Illinois wetlands were destroyed. This left a landscape that not only drained to the rivers more quickly, but also lost its ability to filter water.

Fortunately, in recent years, people have begun to recognize the multi-faceted value of wetlands. Wetlands are an excellent buffer for extreme weather events, like floods and droughts. They provide free water filtration services and essential habitat for thousands of species of plants and animals. Because of these multiple benefits, people are working to restore wetlands to our landscape.

Several recent examples of wetland restoration projects can be found throughout our region. Nahant Marsh has now grown to 382 acres of protected land and is part of a much larger wetland complex that includes thousands of other acres in the Milan Bottoms, Credit Island, and the lower portion of Nahant. The 6,700-acre Big Marsh complex, located along the Upper Cedar River, was mostly established in response to the devastating 2008 floods and are already helping to reduce flooding for places like Cedar Rapids. On the Lower Cedar River's Land of the Swamp White Oaks, public-private partnerships have protected 40,000 acres. The 4,000-acre Green Island wetland complex at the confluence of the Maquoketa and Mississippi Rivers was expanded in the past decade to help control flooding, and the 6,000-acre Emiquon wetlands along the Illinois River is one of the largest floodplain restorations in the Midwest.

Although the projects mentioned have been a success, they are only a drop in the bucket. Millions of additional wetland acres are still needed in the Upper Midwest and could have tremendous global implications for flood reduction, water quality, and wildlife. Whether it's a backyard rain garden, or a large-scale, landscape-level restoration, every bit will help.

NATURAL RESOURCES UPDATE

by Kinsey Nielsen, *Natural Resource Manager*



Flood season is upon us and the natural resources crew is busy preparing for the forecasted major flooding. We recently finished up invasive species removal in some of our lower ground, replaced tree tubes and stakes from trees that the deer knocked down over the winter, and started planning our spring and summer projects.



Another exciting new happening around the marsh is the start of construction on our new operations building! There will be a lot of activity around the Education Center as crews work to complete the building by the end of the year.



After the flooding passes, we will be ramping up with volunteer projects such as tree and shrub planting, invasive species removal, trail maintenance, and many others!

Be on the lookout for ways to get involved with natural resource projects once the flood waters recede.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

This spring, we'd like to highlight long-time volunteer, Kent! While he has been part of many projects over the years, Kent was especially instrumental in the recent construction of a viewing platform at our new property. Kent has also been volunteering his time and skills to build storage cabinets for the education center and is an active member of the Friends of Nahant Marsh.



BURSTING INTO SPRING

by Amy Loving, *Director of Education*

We have the pleasure of hosting field trips for all of the second grade students in the Moline School District, but it's not just second graders we see, it's high school, middle schools, and schools from all over the QC region. Nahant Marsh is able to provide scholarships to those schools in need thanks to our generous donors and grants from local foundations.

When students burst off the buses, they are noticeably excited to be at the Marsh, and we naturalists have a lot of exciting things to teach them about wetland ecology, turtle research, animal adaptations, migration, outdoor skills, trees and leaves, animal signs, and more. Our classrooms vary as we explore; sometimes it's the vernal pool, the trail in the bottomland forest, or the water's edge using nets and buckets instead of pencils and paper as our learning tools. On occasion, our classrooms are small, hidden underneath a rock or dead log. These places are the places of learning for young minds...and for seasoned minds as well. You just have to know to engage the mind. It helps to think about what you notice, wonder, hear, feel, and smell. All these things invoke the senses. As naturalists, we are here to interpret nature; we tell stories of the trees, the flowers, the insects, and the incredible natural phenomenon that occurs every moment that we are outdoors. Open your eyes and ears to the natural world, and you will begin to truly discover the unfolding of the season.

Since it's spring, I'll end with a few of my field notes on nature's revival:

- Budding trees and shrubs that seem to burst open overnight, their leaves uncurling. Their flowers blooming as the early pollinators or wind begin their cycle.
- The treasures that those trees leave on the trails. Discarded buds and flowers leaving themselves there for inquisitive minds to wonder what they are and where they came from.
- The sound of the red-winged blackbirds as they sing for a mate or make a call in defense of their territory.
- Warm sunshine beaming down to the woodland floor, highlighting the soft, emerald-green moss carpeting a dead log.



WAVING THE WETLAND FLAG

by Allison Nodurft, *Naturalist*

When walking the trails of Nahant Marsh during the months of May and June, you may spot a flower that looks like it doesn't belong. The leaves of this flower look very similar to a flower found in ditches across Iowa, and the bloom similar to flowers found in many yards. However, this flower does belong and can be found in many ponds and wetlands in Iowa. This member of the iris family is native to Quebec through Minnesota and a small bit of northern Iowa. The blue flag iris or *Iris virginica* L. has sword-like leaves and a bright purple flower. The flower resembles the domestic variety, but the petals are more slender. Plants will have six or more flowers with three petals. These flowers appear to have nine petals; upon closer inspection you will see they connect to three main parts. Although the flower is pleasing to the eye, it is not so pleasing to the stomach. The rhizomes, or area the plant grows from, contain a toxic substance, iridin, that is considered poisonous to humans and animals.



Native Americans have used this iris to treat earaches, respiratory problems, sore eyes, and liver ailments. They would pound and boil the roots into a paste that was applied to dressings for wounds and bruises to relieve swelling and pain. Early pioneers would use the blue flag iris to induce vomiting and cleanse the intestines. This flower's shape is also referred to as the fleur-de-lis, meaning "flower of the lily" which is common in French culture (pictured left).

We have recorded a specific variety, the Southern Blue Flag Iris (*Iris virginica* var. *shrevei*), growing at Nahant Marsh. This beautiful flower can be found at the marsh along the boardwalk near the open water or along the bottomland woodland trail. Next time you visit, keep your eye out, and let us know if you find one!

GUIDED NATURE HIKE

Hoping to see a Blue Flag Iris and other cool creatures, but not too confident in your ID skills? Then join us for a guided nature hike on the first Saturday of each month from 9-10am! See more on dates & locations at www.nahantmarsh.org

WOODCOCK OR WILSON'S SNIPE?

by Emily Schallert, *AmeriCorps Naturalist*



When bird watching at Nahant Marsh this spring, keep an eye out for one of our favorite little shorebirds: the Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*)! This species is commonly misidentified as the American Woodcock, as they are quite similar with small, plump, brown bodies and long, thin bills. To distinguish them from each other, look for the Snipe's pale belly, striped breast, and a neck and legs longer than the woodcock. These birds are usually loners, often being flushed singularly from grassy marsh areas, but multiple have been seen at the main marsh property this spring. Like many species of birds, the males have mating displays to impress the females, flying in circles, diving, and vibrating their tail feathers to make a unique "winnowing" sound. Nests are built on the ground, and each clutch contains 3-4 small, brown, speckled eggs. These eggs hatch in just 20 days, and in another 20 days, the young will be out on their own, hunting for worms and bugs along the muddy edges of the marsh. The conservation status of the Wilson's Snipe is one of least concern, but issues may arise from climate change, as well as continual destruction of wetlands. As the climate warms, it affects the colder northern areas, which are the breeding grounds for the snipes. Temperature changes will likely push their range further north. The draining of wetlands in the U.S., especially the Midwest, also poses concern for these shorebirds as their habitat disappears. For now, their numbers are safe, and they will always be a welcome sight here at Nahant.

Photo by Larry Lamsa

WILSON'S SNIPE

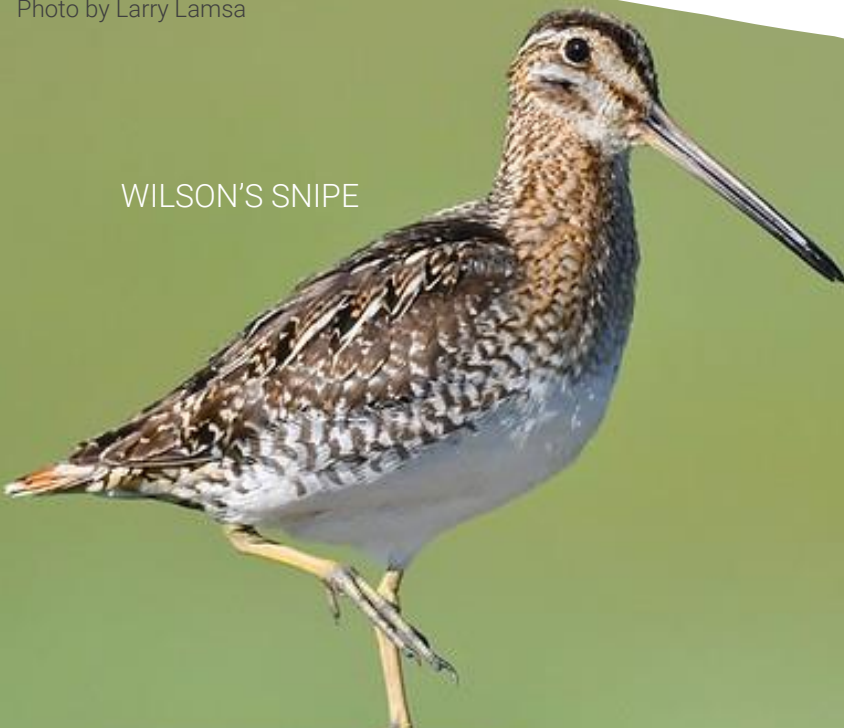


Photo from Mass Audubon
by Jonathan Eckerson

WOODCOCK



MAY MUSHROOMS

by Jimmy Wiebler, *Naturalist/Research Coordinator*

To many outdoor enthusiasts, the onset of spring brings to mind one thing: the start of mushroom season! Depending on temperature and precipitation, many choice edible mushrooms begin to show on the forest floor and on the bark of dead or dying trees in late March or early April. Well-known edibles such as white and grey morels (*Morchella americana*), black morels (*Morchella angusticeps*), and pheasant's back (*Polyporus squamosus*) peak in April and May in Iowa. One edible species, however, emerges even sooner.

Flammulina velutipes, known by several common names such as velvet shank, velvet foot, enoki, or winter mushroom, is a cold-loving fungus that can emerge on rotting hardwood as early as late October or early November, but they peak in March through May in Iowa. The sticky cap and velvety stem are golden-orange, similar to the color of a glazed doughnut's exterior crust. The caps are edible when cooked and can be used in dishes such as soups, stir fry, or risotto. The taste is prized enough that this species has been cultivated and farmed for sale, especially in Asia. Although they are the same species, cultivars have relatively long stems and small white caps that hardly resemble the wild version.

Be wary of toxic look-alikes during your mushroom forays. *Galerina marginata*, also known as the funeral bell or deadly skullcap, is extremely poisonous and grows at the same time and in the same location as the velvet stem. The only way to accurately identify a wild velvet stem mushroom is to take a spore print.

Fun Fact: Research shows that the fruiting bodies of velvet stem mushrooms contain flammulin, an anti-tumor substance that can inhibit the growth and encourage the death of breast cancer cells.

Pheasant's back mushroom



Wild velvet stem mushroom



Cultivar of the velvet stem mushroom, or enoki



Funeral bell mushroom



ON BLUEBELLS: HOW SOMETHING SO FINITE CAN CREATE A LASTING IMPACT

by Madeline Young, *AmerriCorps Naturalist*



Growing up there was this cycle that happened at the end of each winter. The sun would shine a bit brighter, my dad would take the plow off of his blue 70s Bronco, and in the underbelly of our forest, the bluebells would begin to show their fragrant little heads. It is intoxicating to see that first little blue flower pop up, a signal of the end of a long winter spent inside our limestone house. I think on this now, the idea of *ephemera*, on things that are meant to last only for a short while.

Memory is such a fickle thing. I am sure that the blue of my dad's Bronco was more mottled, the flowers less brilliant. But in my mind there is something so lasting about these flowers that I no longer have access to. I still see bluebells everywhere. Not the flower exactly, but the feeling of seeing them for the first time each year. It is the same feeling I experience when I see furry buds on trees that I don't always know the names of or when I see a date scratched into sandstone; it is the feeling of a year as a cycle, each season a point in time we are always returning to.

The movement that spring inspires is felt in every moment I experience; from the desire to dance, to let my toes sink in the mud created by winter's snow, and to write letters to pen pals from summers long ago. So as the bluebells push through the soil, as the Earth approaches its aphelion, I look to this time with joy and an understanding that fleeting moments such as these can last a lifetime.



UPCOMING EVENTS

TODDLER TALES

A great way to introduce young children, ages 3-5, to the wonders of the outdoors! The first Wednesday of each month from April-October, Nahant educators lead a nature-themed story, craft, and outdoor adventure. Join us from 10-11 am for this great program!

May 3: Which Nest is Best?

June 7: Camper Time!

\$5 Members / \$9 Guests

BREAKFAST NATURE CLUB

BNC meets year round on the first Friday of the month. Enjoy a continental breakfast during a nature-themed presentations from 8:00-9:00 am.

May 5: What's for Dinner Tonight? Your Backyard!

June 2: Unique Fish of the Mississippi

\$5 Members / \$10 Guests

NATURE HIKE

Hikes are offered year round on the first Saturday of the month and give visitors an opportunity to learn more about the diverse flora and fauna of this unique natural area.

May 6 & June 3 | 9:00-10:00 am

\$5 Suggested Donation

FUNGI FORAY

This program is part of a series of fun and informal forays led by mushroom expert Joshua Shomo focused on finding and identifying common mushrooms of our area with information about habitat, seasonality, and key identifying features of edible, interesting, and dangerous mushrooms and fungi.

May 20 | 9:00 am-11:00 am

\$5 Suggested Donation

BIRD HIKE

Join Nahant Naturalist, Jimmy Wiebler, and other local bird enthusiasts for a guided bird walk through Nahant Marsh! These walks are for everyone- experts, novices, and people who have never gone birding!

May 25 | 6:30-8:00 pm

\$5 Suggested Donation

SUMMER CAMPS

There are still some slots left for our 2023 Summer Camps! Check out our website and the list below for available camps!

Critter Camp (1st - 2nd Grade)

Campers connect with nature as they learn about insects, reptiles, and other critters through live animal encounters, outdoor exploration, and more!

June 8: Scales and Shells

July 20: Wildlife Habitats

June 22: All About Birds

August 3: Insectigations

\$50 per camper

Jr. Naturalist Camp (3rd - 6th Grade)

Dive deep into the world of plants and animals! Campers will engage in various research techniques that are used by wildlife biologists to study insects, birds, reptiles, and mammals.

June 13–15 | \$140 per camper

Nature Adventure Camp (3rd - 6th Grade)

Explore wetlands, woodlands, and prairies with the naturalists at Nahant Marsh. Campers will get hands-on experience learning about wildlife and practicing outdoor skills.

June 26–30 | \$240 per camper

Art in Nature (3rd - 6th Grade)

Campers will immerse themselves in nature and get their creative juices flowing with crafts. We will explore insects, prairies, and more during this art-infused camp!

July 11–13 | \$140 per camper

Wildlife Ecology Camp (6th- 8th Grade)

In this advanced version of our Jr. Naturalist Camp, campers will use field journals and smart devices to conduct surveys and collect data on insects, mammals, and reptiles. Campers will learn how plants and animals interact within a variety of ecosystems.

August 8–10 | \$140 per camper

Visit www.nahantmarsh.org to learn more and register!

OBERHOLTZER AWARDS

The 4th Annual Oberholtzer Awards were a great success! We recognized three amazing individuals for their work in conservation, and raised funds to support our mission to protect, enhance, and restore the Marsh through education, research, and conservation.

Elton Fawks— Recipient for Past Conservation Leadership

Elton Fawks dedicated much of his life to studying and protecting Bald Eagles. His observations played a key role in banning the toxic pesticide DDT, which he found to be a leading cause of Bald Eagle mortality. He spearheaded a campaign to protect a vital area in Hampton, IL that Bald Eagles use as a roosting site, which now carries his namesake as the “Elton E. Fawks Bald Eagle Refuge”. Fawks was also active in several conservation organizations in the QCA.



Mark Roberts – Recipient for Present Conservation Leadership

Mark Roberts was a career Naturalist for 34 years before retiring in 2022. He had a very decorated career with countless accomplishments. He played a pivotal role in reintroducing Trumpeter Swans to Clinton County, grew Clinton County Conservation’s education department to what it is today, secured a 24-passenger pontoon boat to be used to educate the community on the Mississippi River, and much more!

Nicolina Pappas – Recipient for Future Conservation Leadership

Nicolina Pappas is an 11-year-old aspiring conservationist who has already made waves in the community. She started Nicolina’s Turtle Co. at the age of 8 with the mission of reducing the use of single-use plastics. She has volunteered countless hours with many environmental organizations, organized environmental education outreach in local schools, presented at nationwide summits, and more!



OBER AWARDS SPONSORS

Thank you to our donors for supporting Nahant Marsh’s growth, and to this year’s sponsors for making this event possible!



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Judith Lee

Nicolina Turtle Co.

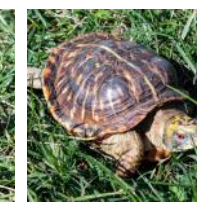
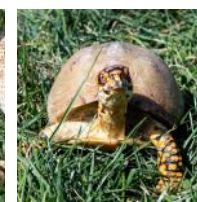
Pudge Musk Turtle

Kennedy Sticker on behalf
of Navarro Canoe

Nicolina Turtle Co.

Thomas Thompson

CURRENT ANIMAL ADOPTIONS



EDUCATION CENTER HOURS

Monday–Friday: 8:30 am to 4:30 pm

Saturday: 9 am to noon

(extended to 3 p.m. April–October)

There is no fee to visit the Education Center, but donations are always appreciated.

PRESERVE HOURS

Open Daily from Sunrise to Sunset

If the main gate is locked, trails are accessible from the front parking lot.

Look for the opening in the fence near the kiosk.



GETTING TO NAHANT MARSH

**Nahant Marsh
4220 Wapello Ave.
Davenport, IA 52802**

From Davenport, Iowa—Take Highway 22 south (Rockingham Road), turning left on Wapello Avenue (the last turn before the I-280 overpass).

From Rock Island, Illinois—Take I-280 into Iowa to the Highway 22/Rockingham Road exit. Turn right onto Highway 22, and then right onto Wapello Avenue.

**Follow Wapello Avenue toward the river.
Nahant Marsh will be on the left just before the railroad crossing.**