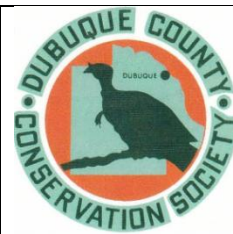


DCCS Newsletter

Dubuque County Conservation Society

“Organized in 1933 for Protection of Soil, Forests, Waters and Wildlife”

P.O. Box 645 Dubuque, IA 52004-0645



“It’s the beauty within us that makes it possible for us to recognize the beauty around us. The question is not what you look at but what you see.” - Henry David Thoreau

Join a First Day Hike on New Year’s Day

What are your plans for New Year's Day 2026? Iowa state parks and forests invite you to enjoy the outdoors and take a hike! More than 40 locations are offering either a guided hike with park staff or a suggested hike to explore on your own. At least 21 parks and forests are recommending trails for hikers to explore on their own. Local parks with a guided hike include Bellevue State Park, Maquoketa State Park and Mines of Spain. Check for meeting place and time.

Hikers can expect to be surrounded by the quiet beauty of nature in winter, and experience spectacular views, beautiful settings and the cultural treasures offered by Iowa’s state parks.

Complete details about Iowa’s First Day Hikes can be found at www.iowadnr.gov/firstdayhikes. To see a comprehensive national map of First Day Hikes, visit <https://www.stateparks.org/special-programs/first-day-hikes/>

Bundle up and get outside this Holiday/Winter Season

Keep the whole family active and entertained this holiday season and all winter long with these fun activities:

- Take a walk through your neighborhood, yard, or a local park. Stop and listen to the sounds of winter (e.g., wind or snow under feet). Find tips for exploring winter trees on the [Project Learning Tree Family Activity web page](https://www.plt.org/family-activity/evergreens-in-winter/) (<https://www.plt.org/family-activity/evergreens-in-winter/>)
- Make your own snowman bird feeder. Dress your snowman with food strings of unsalted, unbuttered popcorn and cranberries to increase the food variety and attract colorful birds.
- Snow shoeing, cross-country skiing and winter hiking are great cold-weather options, with [hundreds of miles of trails](#) in state parks.
<https://iowadnr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=49241621e66949c7b02f135bcfb85ee3>
- Winter is a great time to enjoy bird watching. Explore [Iowa DNR's Get Into Birding How-to Guide](#) for beginners.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9dbb56b9e3bc4658b075049f9063696b?>

Birds in spring are dressed to kill, while birds in the fall are dressed to chill. Nicholas Lund, Audubon Magazine Contributor

Get Into Birding -- How-to Guide for beginner birders link is shown above. Transform your backyard and explore Iowa's parks, wildlife areas, forests and wetlands!

Birds can be found just about anywhere including flying through our neighborhoods and hanging out in our backyards. Their songs and high-flying acrobatics bring us joy, they stimulate local economies, such as pelican festivals and the Decorah eagle cam, and they play a critical role in the health of our natural resources.

There has never been a more critical time when birds need our help! With changing landscapes across the world populations of birds have been in sharp decline since the 1970s with an estimated [2.9 billion birds lost](#). According to Cornell Lab of Ornithology (AKA the study of birds), some of the most common birds we see everyday are impacted the most, sparrows, blackbirds, warblers and finches, birds that love to frequent backyard habitats and feeders.

So, let's dive in and learn how to identify some common birds, create backyard spaces to help them thrive and if you are feeling adventurous, take your newly gained birding knowledge on the road to explore natural spaces in Iowa's parks, wildlife areas and forests.

Field guides are physical books or smartphone apps that offer information about birds. As a beginner, look for books or

apps that allow you to focus on Midwest or Eastern birds as those will have most of the species we see here in Iowa.

Field guides will provide the following information:

- Distribution of a species, Size, Color and specialized features to look for
- Differences between male/female and juvenile birds
- Migration details and Which habitat(s) a bird spends time in

Most smartphone apps include samples of bird songs or calls. They may also allow you to record what you are hearing or take photos of the bird you see. The app provides real-time suggestions for birds it recognizes.

Before you reach for the photo button on your phone and ask the app to tell you what bird you are looking at, there are some key details to look for to help you identify birds.

- Size (compare the bird to one familiar, like a robin) and Shape (body, wings, tail)
- Bill/Beak (narrow, short/wide, curved) and Feet (webbed, perching, talons)
- Color and pattern and other Field Marks (things that stand out, like eye stripes, wing bars, or crests)
- Sounds - with some practices, many species can be identified by their unique songs and calls

Just as we don't look exactly like our grandparents, parents or siblings, birds of the same species may not look exactly like another - or exactly like the picture in your field guide.

For example, there may be times you can't fully see the feather crest of a blue jay, cardinal or the ear "tufts" of a great-horned owl. It might be the play of wind or light on their feathers, how the feathers grew in, or just the angle you are looking at them through the binoculars. But if you look at all the field marks together, eventually you can narrow it down to the right bird.

Just like we put on our best when we go out on that first date or to that special occasion, birds make sure to have the best and most vibrant colors showing each spring during the breeding season.

Some of the most colorful and fun birds to watch in the spring are migrating waterfowl. Wherever you find water you'll see flocks of ducks and geese with males showing off their best. In contrast, female ducks are muted in color, mostly tans and browns. Blending in with surrounding vegetation is critical while sitting on their nests or herding ducklings away from danger hiding in the standing vegetation along the shoreline.

Once spring fades to summer and fall, vibrant colors may fade which can make identification a bit of a challenge. This change is also what makes birding fun. For species with variable appearances, many field guides show the colors and patterns of males and females, juveniles and adults, and during different times of year so make sure to look at all the options when making an ID. No matter the time of year, you can always see something new, even on your favorite birds. As with all things, the more you practice identifying birds, the easier it will get!

Songbirds & Woodpeckers

Birds add enjoyment to our lives through the way they zip through the air or perch on a branch or trunk of a tree, the vibrant colors they show off, or by the beautiful songs they sing. Not all birds though are songbirds.

Songbirds are a specific set of birds that have a specialized ability to constrict their muscles around their voice box, called a syrinx, to produce the beautiful melodies we hear. The drumming you hear from woodpeckers isn't a song, but it is their unique way of communicating in the same way songbirds use song. In the end the sounds they make are all controlled by the same area of a bird's brain so they can mark territory, call for mates and notify when danger is close. In other words, survive.

Raptors

Raptors are birds of prey because they hunt and feed on other animals. The word raptor is actually derived from the Latin word *raptare*, which means to drag violently off, to ravage. Raptors showcase specialized features that aid in hunting and ultimately eating their prey. The sleek nature of falcons allow them to fly and dive at extremely high rates of speed to catch running or flying prey. Owls, deploy specialized wings that when flying at night elicit almost no sound so they can sneak up and snatch prey in their strong, sharp talons.

If you spend enough time looking towards the sky, you're likely to spy some of Iowa's frequent flyers. The state has several species of hawks, falcons, eagles, owls and vultures that call Iowa home or visit during the year.

Ducks, Swans, Herons and Shorebirds

If you are looking for these birds, you'll want to travel to one of Iowa's lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands or farm ponds.

Each spring and fall you can see waterfowl (ducks, geese and swans) flying in "V" formation high in the sky. If you listen

close enough you can hear them call as they fly, especially at night when the rest of the world goes quiet. If you love to be on the water, whether in a kayak or boat, if you are quiet enough and troll the shoreline, you'll see a wide variety of shorebirds traversing the water's edge habitat looking for small fish, aquatic insects and crustaceans.

Why Do Birds Migrate?


Birds migrate for a variety of reasons but mostly they are traveling from locations that have reducing resources to new places that have abundant resources, aiding their chances of survival. Migration takes place twice a year, in the spring as they move north to greener and cooler habitats where they can lay eggs and raise their young and then in the fall as they move south to warmer climates and abundant food sources.

Most songbirds migrate during nighttime hours. The night skies offer protection from predators, more stable weather conditions and improved navigation. Ducks, geese, swans, sandhill cranes and pelicans, however migrate at all times of the day, stopping at locations to rest and feed. Easy to spot, you can see these birds typically flying in a V formation high in the skies, soaring on the thermals and wind currents as they travel.

Create A Backyard Oasis for Birds

Birds play an important role in our environment. When we think of pollinators, generally we think of bees and butterflies, but birds are huge contributors towards pollination too. They pick up and disperse seeds and they assist in pest control, eating some of those bugs and rodents you may not want in your backyard.

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|  | <p><i>This is part of IDNR 2025 series about 5 simple things we can all do to support our native Iowa wildlife.</i></p> <p>At one time, Iowa was covered with prairie. Wave after wave of big bluestem and Indian grass dotted with unique and beautiful wildflowers. From 70 to 80% of the ground in Iowa was prairie which supported large populations of Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, Ornate Box Turtles, Bullsnares, Regal Fritillary butterflies, Rusty-patched Bumble bees and so much more.</p> <p>The time of a prairie dominated landscape has passed and many of the wildlife that rely on prairies have diminished in numbers. However, we can achieve a landscape that honors and brings back some of that prairie heritage. It's as simple as including native wildflowers and grasses in YOUR landscape.</p> |
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There are a million ways native plants benefit wildlife but they can also be extremely beneficial to the landowner.

- Prairie plants tend to have deep roots that hold onto and help build soil. Once established they are excellent for solving erosion issues.
- Most prairie plants are resilient to drought conditions which means that once established they don't need to be watered to thrive. That can save money on water bills!
- Prairie plants can also save you money on gas or electricity used to run a mower. After the first year or two, mowing is only needed sporadically or not at all.
- Got a soggy spot? There are prairie plants that would love to grow there, keep water from pooling and as mentioned above stop erosion.
- Most prairie plants are either perennials, biennials, or hardy self-seeders. Because they don't need to be re-seeded or planted again, you save money on new seeds and plants every year.
- They are beautiful and can really enhance your landscape once established!

By planting native prairie flowers and grasses you are helping your landscape become a functioning community of wildlife from the ground up. The deep roots aerate, stabilize, and add organic matter to the soil encouraging a healthy and balanced soil community. The flowers and leaves attract a diversity of insects which have fed and lived on these plants for thousands of years. This foundation of plants and insects feeds everybody else. For example, during the nesting season, songbirds rely on insects to raise their young and then happily feed on plant seeds in the fall.

- Plants or Seeds? Buying started plants will be more expensive but they should establish and bloom more quickly and can be more strategically planned out. If you have a small space and want a more manicured look, using seedlings is likely best. If you have a larger area and want a more natural prairie look, a seed mix will be more

economical and easier to manage. It will take some work in the first 2-3 years to get established including site preparation and occasional mowing in the first year or two.

- Where to get plants? The [Tallgrass Prairie Center](#) maintains a good database of native plant nurseries and service providers. Also look for native plants at farmer's markets or native plant sales hosted by county conservation boards or Wild Ones groups in your area. There are several good online sources of plant materials as well.
- When to plant? If you wish to direct seed, right now is the ideal time! The perfect time would be before the ground completely freezes and right before a snow storm so the seeds get some insulation and protection from birds and mice. Seeds can be planted in the spring which is also the best time to put seedlings into the ground.
- How to Plant? Prairie plants will likely do best if planted pretty close together, filling the entire space of a garden bed. They are accustomed to growing with lots of competition and keeping them tight together will help discourage lawn-grass and other plants from moving in. To keep it neat looking, install and maintain a clean edge. They do not need enriched, fertilized soil. Other tips:
 - Plant clumps or swaths of each species. Not only will this look more organized and attractive but it's actually beneficial for foraging bees.
 - Use short grasses such as Side-oats Grama, Little Bluestem or Prairie Dropseed in between flower clumps to help provide structure and support for the flowers.

Resources for Gardening and Landscaping with Native Plants:

- <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/12595>
- https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/Native_Plant_Materials/Native_Gardening/index.shtml

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Winter Sowing: Starting Transplants Outdoors

Turn off the grow lights, gather a few milk jugs and potting mix and start planting seeds.

Winter sowing is a way to start transplants from seeds outdoors without a greenhouse or cold frame.

- If you can't get a starter plant from a friend, take a walk in a prairie, grab some seeds and attend the following
 - <https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Jackson/Events>
 - Winter Seed Sowing and Project Wingspan JAN 11 2026, 2:00 PM

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Winter Tree Pruning, Iowa DNR

January and February are the best time of the year for tree pruning because trees are dormant in the winter.

Learn what tools you need to properly prune a young tree in your yard with the [three step method](#).

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VB29w_T2MH8)

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THE EYES OF THE WOLF



Emily Thoroski & Merlin Shoesmith

A Leopold-Inspired Song - Leopold's infamous "green fire" moment recently inspired a duo of wildlife biologists to write a new song!

[The Eyes of the Wolf](#) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRsw7O5RPsw>

Emily Thoroski, a.k.a. The Environmental Musician, and her mentor Dr. Merlin Shoesmith are both members of The Wildlife Society, and wanted to trace the arc of conservation history: from Aldo's "Thinking Like a Mountain" moment, where he shot a wolf and watched the "fierce green fire" die in her eyes, to the creation and evolution of TWS.

The Wildlife Society - From Science to Song: Merging Music and Wildlife

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEO-AFsiYA0>

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Avian influenza H5N1 strain is a highly transmissible, naturally occurring virus found in certain waterfowl and shorebirds. There are various subtypes and strains, most of which cause limited harm to domestic poultry (low pathogenic) but some of which are lethal (highly pathogenic). HPAI can also affect animals that consume infected carcasses, including other birds like hawks, and mammals, like red fox. The virus can remain viable in a deceased bird or contaminated water for several weeks, depending upon environmental conditions.

Information for Waterfowl Hunters

Waterfowl hunters can use these simple precautions to limit their exposure while field dressing and consuming wild game: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fsc_hpai_hunters.pdf. Cooking meat to an internal temperature of 165° F can kill the virus, if present. Additionally, please bag and dispose of offal and carcass parts to prevent exposure to scavengers.

While there is some inherent risk to hunting dogs given the nature of their interaction with carcasses, sick birds often become poor, uncoordinated flyers and so are less likely to be harvested. Hunters should prevent dogs from interacting with unknown carcasses, and avoid feeding them raw meat from harvested birds. More information is available online at <https://www.ducks.org/conservation/waterfowl-research-science/waterfowl-hunters-and-the-avian-flu-what-you-need-to-know>. Media Contact: Dr. Rachel Ruden, VMD, PhD, State Wildlife Veterinarian, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-823-8544, rachel.ruden@dnr.iowa.gov

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We're losing the race against plastic, but solutions exist By Winnie Lau, For the LA Times

Within 15 years, a garbage truck's worth of plastic could be entering our environment every second. ***Not every minute. Every second.***

Plastic is everywhere in modern life and has essential, lifesaving uses, but the proliferation of plastic has also made it one of the great environmental challenges of our time. Plastic pollutes our land, air and water; costs governments billions each year to manage; and is putting human health at increasing risk. On the current trajectory, the consequences of plastic pollution are far worse than we understood even five years ago. The latest findings by the Pew Charitable Trusts are sobering, but they also chart a clear path forward using solutions that already exist.

The world already creates more plastic than can be effectively managed. And it is on pace to grow plastic production by more than 50% by 2040 — twice the expected increase in waste management capacity over the same period. This means that despite more than \$32 billion in additional investment in waste management capacity, plastic production will continue to grow faster than the infrastructure being built to manage it.

And these costs come not just in dollars and cents but also through various health threats linked to plastics — including cancer, heart disease, asthma, decreased fertility and developmental issues. Micro-plastics have been found throughout people's bodies, including in placentas alongside fetuses. The science is mounting on the potential harm from microplastics and the thousands of chemicals that are used in plastic production. Currently, 6 million years of healthy life is being lost each year due to illness, disability or premature death associated with plastic production and waste.

These health risks stem primarily from air pollution caused by production facilities or the burning of plastic waste in places that lack the capacity to properly manage it. By 2040, nearly 10 million years of healthy life will be lost per year — and that's before accounting for any health impacts from the use of plastic products.

However, there is a path to a healthier and cleaner future — a path that transforms the plastic system. With the solutions available today, plastic pollution can be cut by 83% by 2040 and almost eliminated from one of its leading causes: packaging.

To that end, governments and companies need to deploy solutions throughout the global plastic system. These solutions' effectiveness depends on transforming the plastic system by reducing production, improving product and system design, enhancing waste management, and increasing the transparency of the supply chain and its impacts.

Google 'Plastic waste by Winnie Lau' for the full article.

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Protect Our Planet from Plastic

The challenge: It's estimated that 4,900 million metric tons of plastic have accumulated in landfills and in our environment worldwide, polluting our oceans and harming wildlife such as seabirds, whales, and turtles that mistakenly eat plastic, or become entangled in it.

The cause: Plastic takes more than 400 years to degrade, and 91% of plastics created are not recycled. Studies show that at least 80 seabird species ingest plastic (<https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2015/08/27/1502108112>), mistaking it for food. Cigarette lighters, toothbrushes, and other trash have been found in the stomachs of dead albatrosses.

Reduce your plastics: Avoid single-use plastics including bags, bottles, wraps, and disposable utensils. It's far better to choose reusable items, but if you do have disposable plastic, be sure to recycle it.

Take it further: Advocate for bans of plastic bags, styrofoam, and straws. Encourage stores to offer incentives for

reusable bags, and ask restaurants and other businesses to phase out single-use plastics.

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Plan your fishing trips with DNR's new interactive fishing report

Iowa DNR's popular fishing report has been updated with new search and filter options including by location, fish species and various amenities available at each location.

The weekly fishing report is broken down by fisheries regions and management districts – Mississippi River, northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest. You can check the activity of your favorite lake, pond, river and stream within each region, including which species are being caught, a rating of the bite (slow, fair, good or excellent), and simple tips and tricks for targeting those fish.

Each section of the report has a timestamp indicating when it was last updated to help you decide how to use the information. If you only want brand new updates (within a week), you can filter by checking the "Recent Reports Only" checkbox. Go to <https://programs.iowadnr.gov/lakemanagement/FishingReport/> to plan your next fishing adventure.

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Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation - Breen Prairie Workday — Monticello, Wednesday, January 7, 1–3 p.m.

You're invited to Breen Prairie — to help steward this beautiful land — and remove brush and pesky invasives!

Winter can be a great time to work outdoors — no bugs, no humidity and no dense brush to work around. This is an opportunity to explore an area not usually open to the public. No experience is required, and all tools will be provided. Will it be cold outside? Probably! But that's exactly what makes stepping back into your warm, cozy home afterward so much more hyggely. And remember — there's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing choices. So, bundle up and join us this winter as we continue the important restoration work that helps our native plants thrive come spring. Don't miss out on the chance to laugh, commiserate about the cold, and prove you can handle whatever Iowa throws your way. Let's show our fellow Iowans what Iowa tough looks like — all in the name of conservation.

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Stay safe on the ice this winter

The recent blast of arctic air is growing ice on lakes and ponds across the northern two-thirds of Iowa. Outdoor ice enthusiasts are ready to get out ice fishing, snowmobiling, ice skating or fat-tire bike riding.

The DNR recommends a minimum of four inches of clear ice for fishing and at least five to seven inches for snowmobiles and ATVs. Larger off-road utility vehicles should wait for seven or more inches of clear ice.

Ice forms at different rates on each body of water depending upon the size and water depth. Once frozen, conditions change constantly and ice thickness can vary across the lake. Rocks, trees, or other things that poke through the ice will conduct heat and make the ice around it less stable. Trust your instincts – ***if the ice does not look right, don't go out.*** A blanket of snow on top of an ice-covered lake insulates the ice, slowing the growth of ice and hiding potential hazards or weak spots. River ice is 15 percent weaker than lake ice. Avoid slushy or honey-combed ice and stay away from dark spots on the ice. Don't walk into areas where the snow cover looks discolored.

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Safety Tips on the Ice

- No ice is 100 percent safe. New ice is usually stronger than old ice.
- Don't go out alone - if the worst should happen, someone will be there to call for help or to help rescue.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you will return.
- Check ice thickness as you go out - there could be pockets of thin ice or places where ice recently formed.
- Avoid off-colored snow or ice. It is usually a sign of weakness. Ice with a bluish color is safer than clear ice.
- The insulating effect of snow slows down the freezing process.
- Bring along these basic items to help keep you safe: hand warmers, ice cleats to help prevent falls, ice picks (wear around your neck) to help you crawl out of the water if you fall in, a spud bar, a life jacket, a floating safety rope, a whistle to call for help, a basic first aid kit and extra dry clothes including a pair of gloves.
- Use extreme caution when snowmobiling on ice. Snowmobiles can be difficult to steer and take a long time to stop with limited traction on ice. Slow down and avoid heavy braking.
- Avoid alcohol or other drugs while operating a snowmobile, operate at reasonable speeds and stay on designated trails or routes. When Iowa temperatures fluctuate with extreme wind chills, cold weather gear – including helmets - is of utmost importance.

Business Members

Artistic Cleaners
109 Locust St.

Dennis Baumhover Ins.
2615 Dodge St.

Behrs Funeral Home
1491 Main St.

Breitbach's Country Dining
563 Balltown Rd.

Cedar Cross Overhead Door
1040 Cedar Cross Rd

Citizens State Bank
P.O. Box 50
New Vienna

Copper Kettle
2987 Jackson St

*Dubuque Arboretum &
Botanical Garden*
3800 Arboretum Drive

Dupaco Credit Union
P.O. Box 179

DuTrac Credit Union
3465 Asbury Rd.

*Environmental Management
Services - 5170 Wolff Rd*

Sherry Horsfield
Farm Bureau Financial Svcs
20214 E Pleasant Grove Rd

The Friedman Group
880 Locust St. P. O. Box 1780

Hendricks Feed & Seed
2040 Kerper Blvd

Herbst Upholstery & Auto
76 Main St

Kaufmann Painting
17368 S John Deere Rd.

Klauer Optical
1705 Delhi St

Miller Flooring
Box 125 New Vienna

Oky Doky Food Mart
P.O. Box 300 Dubuque

O'Meara Custom Products
8915 N. Badger Rd.
East Dubuque IL

Origin Design
137 Main St - Suite 100

Pfohl's Blinds, Drapes Inc.
335 West 1st Street

Pregler Electric
216th Ave LaMotte IA

Premier Bank
2625 Northwest Arterial

Schuster Tree Service
7273 Schueller Heights Rd
Schustertree@gmail.com

Sisters of Saint Francis
3390 Windsor Ave.

Skip Breithbach Feed
Balltown, IA

Spahn & Rose Lumber
250 Harrison St.

Stecklein Tree Service
Epworth, IA

Therapeutic Massage
2255 JFK Road

U.S. Bank
270 West 7th

White Front Feed & Seed
4290 Dodge St.

White Water Native Seeds
Epworth, IA

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Reach any board member by email at dbqccs01@gmail.com

Dubuque County Conservation Society
PO Box 645
Dubuque, IA 52001



Connect with the Iowa DNR - <https://www.iowadnr.gov/newsroom/social-media>

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<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Jackson/Events>

- Winter Seed Sowing and Project Wingspan JAN 11 2026, 2:00 PM
- Spring Plant Swap MAR 27 2026, 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM

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Dubuque County Conservation events and projects:

- <https://secure.rec1.com/IA/dubuque-county-ia/catalog>
- <https://www.facebook.com/dubuquecountyconservation/>

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Jones.aspx>

Dubuque County Conservation Society website: <https://www.dbqccs.org/>

Conservation Society Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dbqcntyconsoc>

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DCCS online renewal link or on website: <https://dubuque-county-conservation-society.square.site/>

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DCCS meetings are held September through May on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m.

Next meetings: Tuesday, January 13. At the National Guard Armory

In case of inclement weather, check with one of our board members for change/cancellation.