



*Keokuk County
Conservation
Board News*

FALL 2014

Serving through education, recreation, and conservation of our natural resources



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From the Director's desk....

As I begin my 20th year as Director of the Keokuk County Conservation Board, I think back to how much has been accomplished over the years. In 1995 the Conservation Boards' top priorities were acquiring the last 438 acres needed for the Belva Deer lake project and raising the required funds to complete the construction project. We accomplished the first item in 1997 and by 2000 had the 2.5 million dollars in funding secured to build the lake.

During those five years, many labor intensive projects were completed. Some of those projects included; trail and bridge construction, painting all shelters and restrooms, converting hundreds of acres to native prairie, creating fish habitat in the lake bed, tree plantings, and other much needed maintenance. I felt that if we were telling the public how nice Belva Deer Park was going to be, we better show them we can take care of our existing parks before we take on more responsibilities with the lake.

During the two years of lake construction we continued to make improvements to all of the areas the board managed. The Conservation Board hired Pie in 1999 and with his carpentry and construction background, we built five additional shelters, a beach changing facility/restroom, shower building, and four pit vault restrooms. In addition, the south campground was constructed and hundreds of trees and shrubs were planted throughout Belva Deer Park. In

2003 we added three storage bays to the shop and built the new office and meeting room onto the south side of the



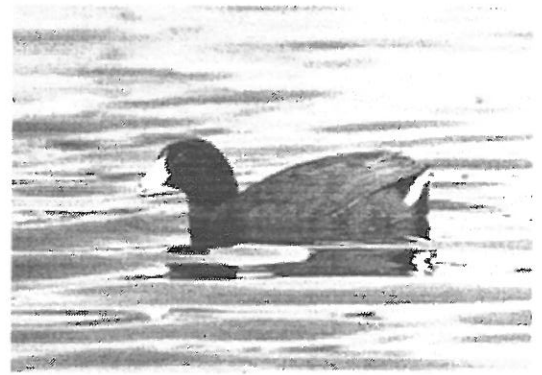
maintenance building. In 2006, five modern cabins were added to the park. In 2010, we paved the road through the park and in 2011 all camping pads and roadways were paved in the north campground. In 2012, the dump station and all camping pads and roadways were paved in the south campground. In 2013 three campground parking lots were paved and in 2014 the cabin road and parking lots were paved.

I know a few people might be thinking that all the improvements to Belva Deer were a waste of their tax dollars. Their thoughts couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, since the creation of the lake, \$1,770,550.00 in park improvements was all funded by grants, donations, or park generated revenue. Not one red cent of local tax dollars went into the park development. In fact many people don't realize the Conservation Board hasn't raised their tax asking budget since 2006. We now pay for all mowers, trucks, property taxes, equipment parts, hardware, rural water, garbage disposal, land, and all construction projects with park generated revenue. That's something everyone should be impressed with!

AMERICAN COOT

Fulica Americana

Among the least graceful of marsh birds, Coots are commonly referred to as “splatterers”, scrambling across the surface of the water with wings flapping as they struggle to become airborne. Mistaken by many to be ducks, the American Coot, a.k.a. mud hen, is actually a member of the *Rallidae* (rail) family. These medium sized, crane-like migratory birds are found all across North America and are often the first to show in the spring and fall, although their arrival is rarely witnessed as their flights take place at night.



Coots are plump, chicken like birds measuring thirteen to seventeen inches in length and having a wingspan of twenty three to twenty eight inches. Adult weights will range from one to two pounds with males being larger than females. As juveniles they will have olive brown crowns and a grey body but will change to their adult plumage of totally dark gray with a black head by four months of age. Their short, thick, pointed bill is bright white with a white frontal shield which has a small patch of red at the top between the eyes. The legs are fairly long and yellow-green in color with large feet. The feet are not webbed like a duck. Rather, each long toe has broad lobes of skin which flair out to help propel the coot through the water and support its weight on soft, mucky ground.

Coots are often seen diving for food but also forage and scavenge on land. Although they primarily feed on aquatic vegetation such as algae, duckweed and water milfoil with occasional forays for terrestrial plants and grains, coots are classified as omnivores, supplementing their diet with insects, crustaceans, snails and small vertebrates such as tadpoles and salamanders. During breeding season they are more likely to be eating insects and mollusks which constitute the majority of the chick's diet. They are opportunistic feeders who will not only hunt for themselves but will also eat the leftovers from dabbling ducks or pirate the plants brought to the surface by diving ducks such as Canvasbacks.

The Coot mating season occurs during May and June. Given suitable territory, the mate pairings will be monogamous throughout their life. The pair will aggressively defend their territory from intruders, first approaching them in a hastened patrol swim which changes to a wake producing charge finally ending in a splattering run across the water's surface. This sometimes leads to actual combat with the coots sitting back in the water grasping each other with one foot while slapping with the other and pecking with their bills. They appear to be attempting to push one another over onto their backs to be held under water. Prolific builders, they will create multiple floating nests in well concealed locations among tall reeds. One will be selected for egg laying; the others will be used as roosting and display platforms. The female will lay one egg per day between sunset and midnight until the clutch is complete, averaging about nine eggs. Once the clutch is established, incubation begins with both male and female sharing the responsibility. After twenty-one days the eggs will begin to hatch in the order they were deposited. Regardless of clutch size, eight is the typical maximum brood size. For reasons yet unknown, once a certain number of chicks have hatched the remaining eggs are abandoned. Coots are also prone to brood parasitism, with floater females laying eggs in another's established nest. Host females may recognize parasitic eggs when the egg deposition pattern deviates from the established one egg per day pattern. Coots have the ability to recognize and reject parasitic chicks by imprinting upon cues from the first chick to hatch, using it as a reference point to discriminate between later hatched chicks. Parasitic chicks are aggressively rejected by pecking, drowning and preventing them from entering the nest. The front half of newborn chick's bodies are covered with “chick ornaments”; conspicuously orange-tipped ornamental plumes which bleach out after six days. Increased chick ornamentation increases the likelihood of being chosen as a favorite by the parents at feeding time.

Large numbers of coots congregate on wetlands in Southeast Iowa during the fall migration enroute to their wintering grounds in the southern United States and South America.



Talk About Coming in with a Bang

By Vance Polton
Iowa DNR Fisheries Management Technician



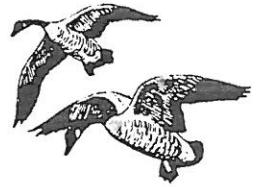
A young flathead catfish works its way along the bottom of the river looking for something to eat when he spies a large white worm wriggling along the bottom. He thinks “easy meal” as he closes the distance and strikes, except when he bites down on his prey it explodes in his mouth covering his mouth and gills in a white cloud of “particles”. *What happened?* He’s been had, that worm wasn’t a worm at all. It was a lure that a female Pimpleback mussel uses to attract a host for her babies (glochidia). That cloud of “particles” were glochidia that as they passed through the flathead’s gills they clamp onto them where they will spend the next few weeks as parasites living off the flathead’s blood and hitching a free ride. At the end of that time they will fall off the gills down to the river bottom where they grow into adults and spend the rest of their lives. Each species of freshwater mussel had developed a unique lure to attract their particular host target and they are very particular about that host. For example, our little Pimpleback’s babies can only attach to the gills of bullheads, flatheads, and catfish. That’s quite an “explosive” way to start your life when you’re an organism that spends its life filtering plankton from the water flowing across its gills and that most people don’t even think twice about even when they’re out on the river fishing.

As filter feeders mussels are a good indicator of the water quality as they are one of the first organisms that are affected by poor water quality. Also as filter feeders they help improve water quality by cleaning the water of detritus, bacteria and algae. The variety of mussels found in a given area depends not only on the quality of the water but on the variety of fish that live in that stretch of stream since they depend on the host to get them to their original starting point in life. The further down a river you go, the bigger it gets, and the more species of fish you can encounter and so the more species of mussels you might find. For instance I can find 9 or 10 species of mussels in Crooked Creek and around 16 in the Skunk River in this area, and a few more start showing up as you head down past Mount Pleasant on the river. Most species of freshwater mussels have very similar habitat requirements so you can normally find several different species when you find a mussel bed. They prefer stable sections of stream bottom that has a fairly firm mixture of gravel, rock, sand and silt. Large stretches of shifting sand or silt are not good places for mussels live as they can’t get a good push-off with their foot to move them through the bottom material and they can also get dislodged and washed away during floods.

The variety of shapes and colors of freshwater mussels is only surpassed by their names. With common names such as Monkeyface, Pistolgrip, Wartyback, Wabash Pigtoe, White Heelsplitter, Mapleleaf, and Deertoe, you know that the biologists that named them had good imaginations. A good source of information on identifying freshwater mussels on the internet is <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/mussel/>. If you would like to see some of the displays (called mantle displays) and lures that mussels use to attract hosts for their young a good source is the Minnesota DNR at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mussels/quadrula/index.html> as well as several videos on YouTube, make sure to check out the Plain Pocketbook, another common Iowa freshwater mussel, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAzCkuqf_kY.

While it is legal to only collect dead shells on the interior rivers with a fishing license you can collect 24 whole mussel shells (both halves) or 48 shell halves. Also make sure of the species of what you collect as you cannot possess the shells of any that are listed as threatened or endangered in Iowa (listed on page 21 of the fishing regs). A nice thin coat of polyurethane varnish will bring back the “live” colors of a dead shell and help protect it from flaking and chipping.

Warden Notes'



I hope everyone had a great summer. This summer was a little wetter but also a little cooler than the past couple of summers. I checked lots of people using the Skunk River this past summer. People were able to find some of those big Flatheads but I don't think the fishing was as good as the past couple of summers before. I know Lake Belva Deer was a busy place all summer. It just amazes me how many fisherman fish that lake on a daily basis. Almost all work is done at Lake Darling now, and the citizens of Iowa should be proud at how nice of a park they now have.

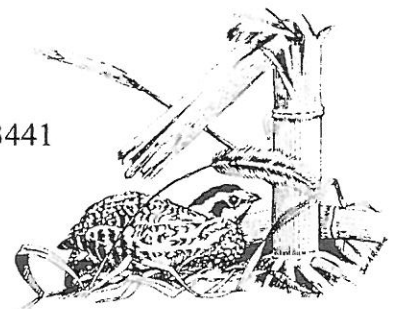
As I write this fall hunting seasons are getting into full swing. The pheasant opener opens this weekend, followed by trapping and then the gun deer seasons. I am going into the pheasant season very optimistic. My road counts in Keokuk and Washington counties were up. Some of this is related to the fact that we had some of dews on the mornings we conducted the counts. The past two years if you recall it was so dry in August it was hard to get a dewy morning. But I do believe pheasant numbers are up a lot. Wherever one can find some habitat you will find pheasant's. I don't believe we have the same numbers we had in the middle and late 90's but we are way better than we were compared to the past five or six years. One thing to watch is there are still a lot of crops still standing which will give the birds plenty of hiding places until the crops are harvested. So late season could be better than the first couple of weekends.

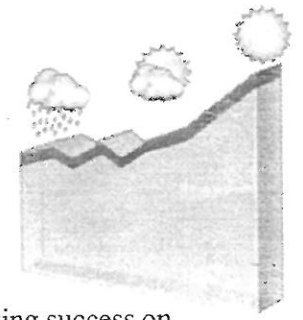
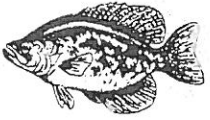
The biggest change you will see for the deer seasons is the elimination of the January antlerless seasons, as well as a significant drop in the antlerless tag quotas. If memory serves me correct last year Keokuk County had 1900 available antlerless tags and this year they dropped it to 450. I think this is a good thing for Keokuk county, I feel our deer numbers have dropped a lot from 10 years ago, but I also feel we still have enough deer to sustain some extra antlerless tags.

As always I hope everyone has an enjoyable and safe fall hunting season. And don't hesitate to call if you need anything.

Wes Gould

State Conservation Officer (641)660-3441





Notes from the Ranger.....

I hope this football season is finding everyone cheering on their favorite team and they are having success on the gridiron. This will be the last year I will see my son on a football field and although I love the sport and he is quite talented, I will not miss the worrying about injuries. I'm just trying to take his senior year slow and enjoy it as much as possible because in seven short months it will all be over but the crying. It's hard to believe I started this job when he was only 2 ½ years old. I still have a year and a half before my daughter walks across the stage, so I need to slow down and enjoy. Sometimes we take life too serious and we just need to take our time and enjoy every day. It's easy to slow down when you're forty-seven and not so easy when you're eighteen.

This fishing year at Lake Belva Deer has been somewhat unusual and I'm not sure why. The beginning of the year had one of the most phenomenal crappie bites that I have ever heard of or witnessed. The fall has been one of the slowest and worst since the lake's inception. We have heard multiple reasons why the fishing has been so bad the past three months. The lake is fished out, bass are eating everything, otters cleaned her out, Loch Ness Nessie ate it all, the fish ain't spawning, bullheads taking over, Heron's swallowed all the young fry, and on and on. You name it, we've heard it. Let's just say it's hard to be professional when engaging in conversation with the public at times. There are many reasons why the lake does not seem as productive as when it was new or within the first few years of its life and that reason is; it's not new anymore. There are many factors that affect fish feeding habits and that's what we are talking about, fish eating our bait. The list is long and relevant; water temperature, light, lunar cycles, water clarity, wind/surface disturbances, boat traffic, fishing pressure, water levels, and barometric pressure to name a few. Let's take one of these and address it briefly. Barometric pressure is one of the theories that most folks either agree or disagree with when talking about fish feeding habits. The theory goes when a dropping barometric pressure occurs this instigates feeding activity while rising barometric pressure diminishes feeding activity. Some believe that these pressure changes affect the fish's bladder and cause them to either feed or come to a state of inactivity. Barometric pressure is the measurement of the weight of the atmosphere above us taken at sea level, so most scientists' feel that unless the fish is at or lives on the water surface this has little effect on the fish's eating activity. The weather conditions created by barometric pressure changes would seem more likely to have an effect on feeding activity than the barometric pressure itself. Some of these changes include warm fronts, cold fronts, clouds, rain, wind, etc., thus barometric pressure is a good indicator of fishing change. In short there are many reasons why fishing is sometimes good and many reasons why it is sometimes bad. I guarantee this; the folks that know how to fish always catch fish at Lake Belva Deer and the ones who don't know how to fish couldn't catch fish out of the aquarium at the dentist office. Get outside and enjoy the fall colors and try to catch some fish.

The following table attempts to summarize the barometric pressure, and observations on fish activity and fishing techniques.

Ranger Pie Reighard

Pressure Trend	Typical Weather	Fish Behaviour	Suggested Fishing Tactics
High	Clear skies	Fish seek cover, look for logs, weeds in shallows. If water too warm, will stop biting.	Fish structure close to surface, with shallow crankbaits, poppers, etc..
Rising	Clearing or improving	Fish start to move out of deeper water. After a day or so, go to normal feeding.	Fish with brighter lures and near cover, moving from deeper water to shallower water.
Normal and stable	Fair	Normal activity.	Experiment with your favorite baits and lures.
Falling	Degrading	Most active feeding.	Range of different methods. Surface and shallow running lures may work well.
Slightly lower	Usually cloudy	Fish seek deeper water, with water temp maybe also slowing them down. May need to settle before feeding again.	Use deep running lures at a moderate speed.
Low	Rainy and stormy	Fish move to deeper structures, may not feed.	Fish deep structures, vary your methods.

Of course, the longer a period of high feeding activity, the more likely the fish are to stop feeding and the longer the period of inactivity, the more likely the fish are to start feeding.

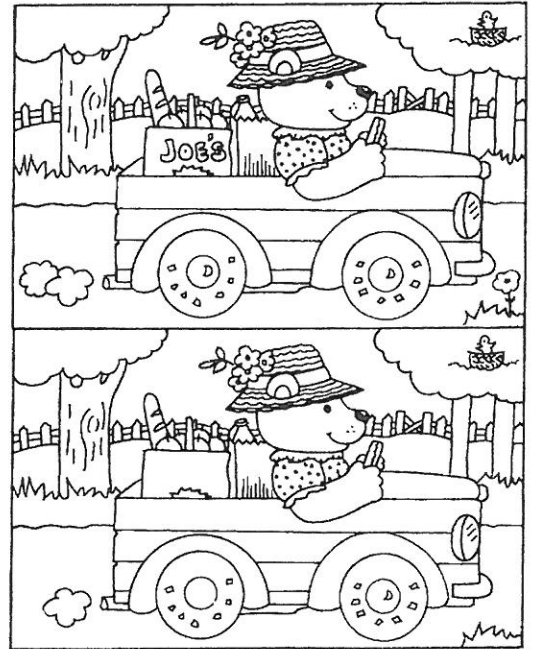


KIDS PAGE



FIND THE DIFFERENCES

These 2 pictures look exactly alike, but look again. Can you find the 4 places where they are different?



PILGRIM'S CELEBRATION

AUTUMN
CHESTNUTS
CHINA
COOK
CORN
COURSES
DRESSING
ENJOY
FAMILY
FORKS
GOBBLER
GUESTS
HOLIDAY
HOME
HOST

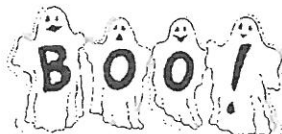
INVITATIONS
KNIVES
LINENS
MENU
MINCEMEAT
NAPKINS
PIES
PLACES
PLAN
PLATTER
PREPARE
RECIPE
SAGE
SALAD
SCRUB

SERVE
SERVICE
SHOP
SILO
SPOONS
STORE
STUFFING
SUCCOTASH
TABLECLOTH
TASTE
THANKSGIVING
TIME
TURKEY
VACATION
YAMS

H	S	T	S	E	U	G	N	I	V	I	G	S	K	N	A	H	T
S	S	K	R	O	F	A	G	D	D	S	N	O	O	P	S	F	A
A	H	G	J	E	P	M	A	N	P	O	E	M	I	T	A	S	B
T	O	V	Y	K	T	L	C	F	I	I	L	V	O	M	R	U	L
O	P	X	I	B	A	T	E	T	H	F	K	N	I	Q	T	N	E
C	W	N	Z	S	E	C	A	L	P	C	F	L	D	N	O	S	C
C	S	G	J	M	N	T	P	L	O	S	Y	U	V	I	K	E	L
U	M	Y	C	G	I	E	F	R	P	E	I	L	T	O	T	I	O
S	A	G	A	V	O	U	N	E	M	E	P	A	R	S	U	P	T
T	Y	X	N	B	E	B	S	I	H	R	C	I	A	E	M	O	H
U	K	I	I	N	E	B	Q	L	A	T	T	C	W	Z	D	O	
N	N	G	H	J	S	M	P	L	V	P	S	I	V	E	Y	C	L
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S	S	B	U	H	C	S	E	G	B	R	K	O	O	C	S	E	D
E	H	O	K	T	N	Q	A	R	E	P	T	T	L	E	W	Z	A
H	C	D	H	G	U	S	J	S	D	S	M	P	H	I	S	V	Y
C	Y	C	F	I	N	A	L	P	L	O	R	V	U	X	S	B	E
E	N	J	O	Y	E	K	R	U	T	A	E	M	E	C	N	I	M

Up, Up in the Sky!

Help Wilma Witch over the clouds to her house on the moon!



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