

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Spring 2010

MCCB Now on Facebook!

We have noticed many County Conservation Boards and other conservation organizations in Iowa moving to online exposure by creating social pages on Facebook. Facebook is a social networking website that allows people and organizations to post information, events, discussions, pictures and allows us to generally communicate online. With that in mind, we followed suit and created our own Facebook page. If you wish to become a "FAN OF MILLS COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD", there are several ways to find us:

1) Go to the Google search engine (www.google.com) and type in: "Mills County Conservation Board Facebook" - press ENTER, and you will find a link to our Facebook page at the very top of the list on the very first page.

2) If you are already on Facebook, search for "Mills County Conservation Board".

3) If you visit the MCCB homepage you will find a box at the bottom of the navigation panel that says "Find us on Facebook", if you click on this box, it is a direct link to our Facebook page. Our homepage is:

<http://mccb.millscoia.us/>

When you get to this new Facebook page, you will see all of our contact information, new upcoming events, photos of recent events, open discussion topics and more to come! We hope that you will become a "fan" of the Mills County Conservation Board.

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

This issue's "neighbor" is a bat, the mammal capable of true flight.

Did you know there are 11 documented species of bats in Iowa? Only nine of those regularly appear in Iowa. The other two documented species were the big freetail bat which was recorded twice, once in Cedar Rapids in 1910 and again in 1914 in Marshalltown. The Brazilian freetail bat was recorded in 1968 at an unknown location. Both of these species are well out of their normal active range and are therefore regarded as accidental occurrences. This means that their records are noted but since they do not roost or bear young in Iowa, they are not included in the count of resident species.

Identifying bats in Iowa is fairly straight forward since there are only nine resident species. This can be further simplified because only two species are known to regularly inhabit man-made structures – the big brown bat and the little brown bat.

To be specific, this issue's "neighbor" is *Myotis lucifugus*, the little brown myotis (aka: little brown bat). The oldest known LBM in Iowa was 30 years old! The LBM is primarily an insectivore, like many of the other eight microchiropterans (micro-bats) found in Iowa.

If you were to view two species of bats side by side you would most likely be confused. However, you could tell them apart from each other fairly readily by using a dichotomous key. A dichotomous key will identify an organism, often down to the species level, through a step by step elimination process that moves through a series of features found on similar organisms. For example, in the case of bats:

3 a. Ears longer than 25 mm. **GO TO: 6**

3 b. Ears shorter than 25 mm. **GO TO: 9**

There are several distinguishing characteristics used to properly identify the Little Brown Myotis:

- *Toe hairs: long, extend beyond claw
- *Forearm: 34 – 41 mm
- *Ears: small (< 16mm) and do not extend 2 mm beyond nostrils when laid forward
- Total Length: 76 – 95 mm
- Weight: 6 – 9 grams

The characteristics listed above marked with an * are key characteristics that will identify the LBM. Total length, weight, color, and other characteristics can overlap between species.



~ Little Brown Myotis colony on brick wall ~
Image courtesy of Timothy Carter, Ph.D.
Ball State University

Mating occurs in the fall of each year, but fertilization is delayed until spring. In the spring, fertilization occurs and young are born from mid May to mid June. Female LBMs will use unused manmade structures (attics, barns, wooden corncribs) as nurseries in the summer to birth 1 or

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two live young, called pups. Being a mammal, the mother needs to eat to produce milk for the young. When the mother leaves to feed, the pup will move to the wall along with the many other pups. When the mothers return, they feed their pups. Each pup has their own scent and sound, which the mother knows very well. The young will be able to fly at three weeks old, at which they are about 3/4 the size of an adult. Scavengers will often wait below some nursery sites, such as caves or manmade bat houses, to eat any pups that fall. Insects such as ants, maggots or beetles will often dispose of bat carcasses, but a few are eaten by feral cats & dogs, snakes, and other wildlife.

The little brown myotis is often subjected to control efforts. Part of this is due to their frequent use of manmade structures as roosts in the summer months, another reason for this is the fear that bats carry rabies. Less than 1% of bats carry rabies, but it is still best to avoid handling them. If you do have to handle them, wear gloves.

Some people will use bat traps, ultrasonic noise machines, mothballs, Mylar balloons and various other means to try to get rid of the bats in their buildings. In many cases these methods do not work. The best method of removal is a process called exclusion. Exclusions must be performed in either early Spring or late Fall. Exclusion starts with examining your site for openings during daylight hours or 15 minutes before sunset. You are looking for the openings in your building that the bats can use as entrance/escape routes. When you find those openings, you will want to plug them.

- Plug entry holes in April, before pregnant females begin forming nursery sites.
- Plug entry holes in September, before cold winter weather sets in, when bats migrate to winter roost sites.

The benefits of exclusion are numerous, including:

- Allows bats to leave on their own, but not to return.
- Allows you to seal the building, preventing bats from re-entering.
- Prevents bats from being sealed within a building.
- Prevents bats from searching for another way out, which may force them further into the building, causing more encounters with humans.
- No personal contact with the bats, preventing possible bites or scratches.
- ENSURES SURVIVAL

You should **NEVER** perform exclusion practices during the summer months. Any adult bats left inside will seek other

means of escape often moving to new areas of the building (eg. moving from the attic to your living room) and those trapped inside will die and leave a rotting mess.

Please attend our "Bats of Iowa" program in April to learn more about the bats of Iowa.

Nettles and Mustard and Morels! Oh My!

The weather in late April into May sends many of us scurrying through the forests, fields and hills looking for that succulent morsel, the Morel mushroom. Have you ever thought about what it takes for these native delicacies to grow? Many will argue that the morel is a fickle fungus: they do what they want, when they want. There are many conditions that have to be just right to get these fungi to emerge. Factors like day and nighttime temperature, humidity, soil acidity and many other factors have to be conducive to their growth. In the spring remember that overnight temps above 40 degrees, day temps of 60 degrees or better combined with moisture produce Morels.

To find them, try looking around dead or dying American elm, Ash and apple trees. Some are found around dead coniferous trees like pines, others found in old fruit orchards. Some will say look on south facing slopes, others say north facing slopes. Do what produces results for you, but keep your mind and eyes open.

When hunting Morels, you should carry a small pocketknife, a stick, and a sack of some sort. Use the knife to cut the mushroom off at the base, trying not to disturb the roots if you can avoid it. You can use the stick to push things out of the way to get a better look underneath. Some morel hunters will tell you that using a mesh bag will let the morel spores and any large bugs fall out while you continue to hunt but inevitably you will use what you have available.

While you're out hunting for mushrooms, you will want to avoid poison ivy which will be appearing at the same time, as well as nettles – more commonly referred to as "itch weed". Another plant to be concerned about is Garlic Mustard. It is an invasive species native to Europe.



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As seen in the image, it has coarsely toothed triangular or heart shaped leaves that stay green all winter. This plant is found in moist soils in areas such as floodplains, forests, roadsides, trail edges and forest openings. This plant can reach up to 3 ½ feet tall, making it hard to see the mushrooms underneath. When the leaves are crushed, they produce an acrid garlic smell. As an invasive, it will compete with native plants for light, moisture, nutrients, soil and space in any area where it is found. It spreads quickly and aggressively. If you find this plant while you're mushroom hunting, pull them up out of the ground to help prevent their spread.

A few final notes: Do not eat what you cannot identify. Check yourself for ticks. Remember that if an area of private property (not yours) looks good for mushroom hunting, ALWAYS get permission first.

MCCB WISH LIST

We are in need of the following items to complete our collection of pelts representing mammals found within the state of Iowa. Animal pelts are used in several of our various Environmental Education programs.

Pelts

1 tanned groundhog (AKA woodchuck or marmot)
1 tanned adult Opossum

Skulls

1 adult groundhog (AKA woodchuck or marmot)

Please inform us if you are willing to donate any of these items to the Mills County Conservation Board. Your assistance, donations and support of Environmental Education programs in Mills County are greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Volunteer Opportunities

Contact the Mills County Naturalist if you have any questions regarding volunteering.
Phone: (712) 527-9685,
Email: millsccbia@hotmail.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL

4/09/10 7pm
Bats of Iowa @ Pony Creek Park

Learn what they eat, their habitat requirements, how they affect you, bat exclusion practices, and how you can help them.

4/17/10 10am - 1pm
Festival of the Young Child @ Glenwood YMCA

The festival of the Young Child has moved to the larger Glenwood YMCA building due to last year's high number of visitors. The Naturalist will be present - look for him!

4/22/10 EARTH DAY!

4/24/10 10am
Mushrooms & Blooms! @ Pony Creek Park

Let's take a walk on the wild side...or at least a walk through the woods looking for mushrooms and early spring wildflowers! Please bring your own bag for collecting mushrooms & bottle of water and please dress accordingly.

MAY
05/01/10 10am - 3pm
Gifford Farms Nature Day - Bellevue, NE.

James will be at Gifford Farms making plaster animal tracks for children. It's a great chance to get outside!

05/15/10 10am
May Hike @ Pony Creek Park

We'll hike trails at Pony Creek Park observing some of the flora and fauna throughout the park. Please bring your own bottle of water and please dress accordingly.

JUNE
6/05/10 10 am
Iowa's Invaders @ Pony Creek Park

We will talk about many of Iowa's current plant, animal and insect invaders. Learn why these species are a cause for concern for Iowa, how they're transferred, hazards they pose, and possible treatments. We will also be hiking trails at Pony Creek Park in search of a fairly common wood and grassland invader. Please dress accordingly.

To pre-register for these events or to ask questions, please call James at (712) 527-9685. Thank you.

The Mills County Conservation Board is able to accept, in the name of Mills County, any gifts, bequests, contributions and appropriations of money or other personal property for conservation purposes. Your tax-deductible donations, and our grant writing, promote the growth and betterment of our facilities for the enjoyment of the citizens of Mills County and its many visitors.

Remember to use and take care of your County Parks. They belong to You!