

Nature's Notebook

WINTER 2022 ISSUE

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THE POWER OF THE PRESERVES



Natalie Brunson is an avid trail runner and forest preserve advocate. We asked Natalie to talk about her experience in the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County. **Here is her story.**

"When I moved to Rockford, Illinois, I had some requirements. I wanted to have a good YMCA, snow, reasonably priced housing, and *greenspace*. I got all of my requirements, but when it comes to our greenspace, the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County really deliver. We have 44 forest preserves run by the county and you can see what they all offer on their website. They offer camping, biking, hiking, splashing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, shelter rentals, kayaking, tubing, running, birdwatching, fishing, and probably even more things that I don't even know about. Several of the preserves have paved paths. All of the preserves have abundant wildlife and more plants than you can imagine. Each one is so very different and they change with the season. They are really well cared for, with trails that are easy to navigate and ample parking. Many feature water and several have playgrounds.

I preach to everyone who will listen that they should check them out. *I even had prizes made so when my friends visit them all they get a prize from me.* I personally tube or kayak from the preserves every summer. I bike on the paved paths (weather permitting). I run in them year-round. Some of my favorites are Pecatonica Wetlands, Pecatonica River, Four Lakes, Seward Bluffs, and Oakridge. I am also a trail steward for Four Lakes Forest Preserve. Sometimes I bring my family for impromptu clean-up days to various preserves and we pick up trash during our hikes.

My kids have grown up in these preserves. I hope that more people will visit, realize the treasure we have, and grow to love them and want to protect them as I do!"

Photo by Forest Preserve
Deputy Tim Speer



Winter Preserve Status

"Please enjoy your preserves during the day, but remember, preserves close 1/2 hour after sunset.

Help me out by having your vehicles out on time, and avoid getting locked in. Thank you and see you on the trails!"

*-Forest Preserve
Deputy Speer*

Break out your snow boots, snow shoes, or cross country skis and experience the winter wonder of your forest preserves! Walk-in use is welcome at all forest preserves, however, not all parking lots and roadways will be cleared. Once roadways become snow or ice covered, vehicle access to preserves will be limited. Hard paths such as the Kishwaukee Recreation Path and the paved path at Headquarters Forest Preserve are cleared and accessible year round.

Remember, be prepared! Check weather conditions, dress appropriately, and pack water, snacks, & first aid essentials!

Winter Birding: *what to look for*

Grab your gloves, wool socks, and binoculars - head out to your forest preserves this winter and take in the sights and sounds of the birds that stick around for the colder season! Below is a quick guide to some common birds you may see in Winnebago County. For a full list, visit www2.illinois.gov/dnr.

Red-Headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

The red-headed woodpecker is a common winter resident in Illinois. They live in woodland edges, open areas with scattered trees, as well as deciduous and coniferous woodlands. You may also see them take up homes in telephone poles. Red-headed woodpeckers are quick! They feed by catching insects while flying.



Photo courtesy of Robert Clark

Source: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

Blue jays are permanent residents in Illinois. They are often found in woodlands and residential areas, where they find ample food supply. They eat nuts, corn, fruits, insects, and the occasional dead animal. Blue jays have a reputation of being aggressive towards other birds and can mimic other birds' calls, as well.



photo courtesy of Canva

Source: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Black-Capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*)

The black-capped chickadee is a permanent resident of the northern half of Illinois. They live in woodlands, shrubs, and thickets. They often build nests in cavities in trees or fence posts, abandoned woodpecker holes, and other natural cavities. They eat insects, seeds, acorns, and berries. A black-capped chickadee call can be recognized as "chick-a-dee-dee".



Photo courtesy of Canva

Source: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)

The American robin typically migrates south for winter, however, some may stay to overwinter in Illinois. In colder months, the American robin moves to wooded areas where it can feed on fruit. Once warm weather arrives, they eat earthworms and insect larvae from the thawed ground.



photo courtesy of Robert Clark

Source: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

This permanent resident is also the state bird of Illinois! The northern cardinal can be found in woodlands, thickets, brushy/weedy areas, and residential areas. You may recognize the northern cardinal's "whoit, whoit, whoit" call. This bird eats insects, grains, fruits, and seeds.



Photo courtesy of Canva

Source: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

"SNOW" YOUR ANIMAL TRACKS

*Winter is a great time to search for and identify wildlife tracks!
How well do you know your tracks?*



Bobcat (photo courtesy of Robert Clark at Colored Sands Forest Preserve)



Gray Squirrel



White-Tailed Deer

*For more wildlife track identification of native Illinois species,
visit www.wildlifeillinois.org*

2022 YEAR IN REVIEW: NURTURING NATURE

2022 was a great year for the FPWC staff and our volunteers that nurture nature! We value and appreciate our volunteers' dedication to protecting and preserving Winnebago County's natural areas!



FPWC Natural Resources Department

Our Natural Resources Department works diligently to conserve and restore vital habitat throughout your forest preserves. This year they:

- planted 1,024 trees
- restored 80 acres of native prairie
- collected 1,228 pounds of native seeds
- burned 1,396 acres



FPWC Volunteers

We had 120 active volunteers with a recorded 1,872 hours of service. The monetary value of these volunteer service hours add up to \$56,066. We hosted four R.E.A.P (Restoration.Education.Appreciation.Preservation.) Volunteer Workdays where volunteers assisted in collecting native seeds and planting greenhouse plugs.

2023 R.E.A.P Volunteer Workdays

- June 17, July 15, August 19, September 16



Community Science Volunteer Program

In 2022, 88 active volunteer Community Scientists put in 500 hours documenting and monitoring different plant and animal species.

- Budburst - 187 observations
- BeeSpotter - 31 observations
- Bluebirds - 21 forest preserves monitored
- Frogs - 27 volunteers
- Bats - over 1,400 recordings

2023 UPCOMING EVENTS

January

- 1 First Day Hike (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 5 First Moon Tranquility Walk (Klehm Arboretum)
- 7 Snowshoe Hike (Klehm Arboretum)
- 9-30 Frosty Leaf Watercolor Workshop (Klehm Arboretum)
- 14 Conservation Crew Workday (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 14-15 Second Weekends (Macktown Living History)
- 21 Winter Mindfulness Walk (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 23 Conservation Crew Workday (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 28 Family Shelter Building (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 30 Megan Cain presents: Your Garden Can Feed You All Year
(Klehm Arboretum)

February

- 4 Winter Watercolor Class with Jenny Mathews
(Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 11 Conservation Crew Workday (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 11-12 Second Weekends (Macktown Living History)
- 18 Winter Mindfulness Walk (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 26 Travelogue: The Colorado Rockies (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 27 Conservation Crew Workday (Severson Dells Nature Center)

March

- 5 Travelogue: Iceland, Land of Fire and Ice
(Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 11 Conservation Crew Workday (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 11-12 Second Weekends (Macktown Living History)
- 12 Travelogue: Yosemite, The Journey to Half Dome
(Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 18 Spring Mindfulness Walk (Severson Dells Nature Center)
- 27 Conservation Crew Workday (Severson Dells Nature Center)

Save the Date!

- June 10 Hooked on Fun Kid's Fishing Derby
(Four Lakes Forest Preserve)

*Cover photo taken at
Colored Sands Forest Preserve
courtesy Robert Clark*



discover the nature of life.

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For complete details on Forest
Preserves of Winnebago
County facilities, programs,
and events visit our website at
winnebagoforest.org