



# The New Leaf

## Clarke County Conservation

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2024

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Conservation Director : Scott Kent

## Patience is a Virtue

I have been asked almost daily lately, “How is the new building coming along?”. My response is usually slowly but surely. One of the responses I got in return was “Patience is a virtue”. While I have heard this phrase a hundred times, I have never given it much thought, until now. So, what does it really mean? I knew what the word patience means, it is actually something I don’t have much of but am learning to have more as I get older. I like to get things done and not one to wait if I don’t have to. That is probably why I like the projects we have done at the parks. It is something that improves the area, gives back to the public, and I can usually get them done rather quickly. However, those are the projects that I am in full control. With some of the bigger projects we have tackled at Clarke County Conservation, such as the trail project, campground, and now the new building project, these are out of my direct control and take A LOT of patience. These bigger projects require design work, funding, bidding, more funding, selecting a contractor, waiting on material, waiting on weather, and all of the little things that can slow a project down. These are all normal for this size of projects, but when you don’t have a lot of patience, it can be aggravating. So now to Virtue. According to Merriam Webster, virtue means a beneficial quality or power of a thing. Basically, the saying “Patience is a virtue” equates to the ability to have patience. Reflecting back through all of the big projects we have accomplished, there is no doubt that I possess the ability to have patience. The problem is I still don’t like being patient. I also am realistic enough to understand that there are so many things that are out of my control when trying to complete large projects. It basically comes down to regardless of whether I want to be patient or not, I have no choice. So, in my case patience is not a virtue, it is required! As far as when the building will open, I don’t have a good answer. With delays of material, it is looking like an opening date will not be until sometime in late June or possibly into July. Once I have a confirmed date, we will plan a grand opening and let everyone know through social media of when reservations can be made. Until then we all get to be patient.

Patiently waiting with the rest of you on the opening of our new building,

Scott Kent

Director CCCB



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# Black crowned night Heron

## *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Black crowned night herons have a world wide distribution, being found in North America, South America, Africa, Europe, and Southeast Asia. They are 56-65 cm. long and weigh 525-800 gm with a wingspan of 105-112cm. Females tend to be a little smaller than the males, but since they are not sexually dimorphic (males and females look the same) this would be difficult to see. They have greyish bellies and sides, with the back being black and they have a black capped head with white nuchal plumes

and yellowish legs. Juveniles have a brown spotted and streaked plumage with a white background on the belly. It is very hard to distinguish black crowned night heron juveniles from yellow crowned night herons. Their habitat is extremely varied, being found in fresh, brackish, or salt water. Habitats include forested margins of shallow rivers, also lagoons, pools, ponds, lakes, swamps, marshes and mangroves. They also can be found near human habitation, feeding in any body of water, even catching goldfish out of people's goldfish ponds. They are very opportunistic feeders with a varied diet. This includes fish, frogs, tadpoles, turtles, snakes, lizards, crustaceans, mollusks, small rodents, eggs and chicks of other species. They are mostly crepuscular and nocturnal so they don't compete with other wading birds. They are passive feeders either standing still or walking very slowly. Black crowned night herons are colonial nesters and rookeries can have 5000-6000 nests. Nest sites are in trees, bushes, and cliff ledges, and they hold the record for being the highest arboreal nesters of any bird at 160ft. Nests are made of sticks and are surprisingly strong and used year after year. 3-5 bluish eggs are laid and incubated for 21-22 days by mostly the female. Chicks are light downy grey when they hatch and fledge at about 6-7 weeks. Black crowned night herons are migratory with North American populations wintering in S. USA, Central America, or the Caribbean. This species is not globally threatened and Native Americans used to call them "quock" birds because of the vocalization they make.

Happy birding,

Deb Talbot



# CICADA MANIA

Many of us can recall the “zing zing zinging” (or “music”) we hear during the summer months of the cicadas singing. Recent headlines read, “Massive Cicada Season is Coming” and “Cicada Invasion”. It sounds like 2024 could bring higher numbers of the little insect to some areas of the state.

The 2024 “invasion” we will experience includes the annual cicadas plus two different periodical cicadas, Brood XIII (emerges every 17 years) and Brood XIX (emerges every 13 years). The last time these two broods emerged at the same time was in 1803!

The annual cicadas will emerge in July and stick around until frost. They will sing in the late afternoon to evening hours. The periodical cicadas that emerge every 13 to 17 years, will be in the state in June and July and will sing during the day.

When will they emerge? The cicadas will begin to emerge when the soil 8" beneath the ground reaches 64 degrees Fahrenheit. A nice, warm rain will often trigger an emergence. They typically emerge in May but have been known to emerge in late April or early June. It all depends on the weather. Periodical cicadas will typically emerge over a period of several days.

Once they have emerged from the ground, they make their way up a tree and begin the process of shedding their old nymph skins, expanding their wings, and changing to their adult coloring. When they go through this metamorphosis a crack will form down it's back, opening the cicada shell allowing the insect to crawl out of its own skin. I remember our kids finding the skeleton-like shells on the bark of trees when they would play in the back yard.

The male cicadas sing with a drum on the side of their abdomen which attracts females. Once the female is mated, she lays eggs and the cycle starts over where the nymphs burrow into the ground, feeding on the sap from tree roots for the next 13 or 17 years, before digging their way up to the



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surface 13 or 17 years later. There can be as many as 40,000 cicadas in a single tree!

Are locusts and cicadas the same? Although we have begun to call them one of the same, there is a difference. Cicadas have a piercing-sucking mouth part that sucks the liquid, or sap from tree roots. Locusts, on the other hand, feed by chewing, and can do some real damage. In general, cicadas are harmless and act as a valuable food source for other animals, especially birds. The only potential harm cicadas pose is to newly planted and small trees. It is recommended not to plant any new trees until this fall, as cicada activity could overwhelm and kill them. The most recent articles I've read have said, geographically, the overlap of the periodic cicadas will be more pronounced in Illinois. The 17-year brood will be more prominent in eastern Iowa while the 13-year brood will likely be found in southern Iowa, so if the Farmer's Almanac is correct, we won't have to worry about much of an overlap in Clarke County, and the threat of the zing zing zinging won't be as overwhelming as some of the media is reporting.





# SUMMER DAY CAMPS

By Judy Kjellsen

Summer Day Camp planning is well underway!

Every summer Clarke County Conservation offers a variety of day camps for kids going into 1st-3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 4<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This gives kids a chance to explore the park, learn about nature, make new friends, and most importantly, have fun! Be sure to share this information with your kids, grandkids, and friends and encourage them to join us. All camps will be held at East Lake Park on the edge of Osceola. The following half-day camps will be offered this summer. Watch for dates and times as well as additional activities at the park that will be added in the months to come.

## Pollinator Power

What is pollination, who are the pollinators and why is it important? Join us as we take on the role of a honeybee and learn all about life within a colony. We'll fly to new places to find pollen to carry back to the hive and learn what it is to be busy as a bee! Watch how a bee keeper tends to a hive, and enjoy a tasty honey treat!

## Nature Rocks!

For all you rock hounds, join us as we discover different types of rocks and how sedimentary rocks play a role in preserving fossils. Learn the difference between a mold and a cast and become a paleontologist, excavating your own fossil! Examine different rock specimens and see what's hiding inside Iowa's state rock, the Geode.

## Wings & Things

Set your sites on flying creatures from birds, to bats, to bugs. A local bird expert will talk about nest building, scavenging for food, feathers and flight patterns. Listen to the calls or peep through binoculars to find our fine feathered friends as we venture into the park. Whoooo else will we find hiding in the woods?

## Pond Life

Explore life in and around a pond by diving deep into what calls it home. We'll learn about water safety, plants, animals, and insects who live in the environment and how they thrive. We'll focus in on even the tiniest of creatures hidden in the water as we veer through the lens of a microscope.

## Monarch Mania & Wildflowers

Join us in the migratory journey of the monarch butterfly as we talk about these amazing pollinators. We'll learn about their transformation from an egg, to caterpillar, to butterfly and watch their interesting metamorphosis as it takes place. We'll explore the trails at the park to learn about the importance of wildflowers and what we can do to help the monarchs survive. Prepare to get your hands dirty as we finish the day by making Seed Bombs!

## Notes from the field.....Nestboxes

In the world of birds there is an abundance of nesting strategies, but I'm going to focus on cavity nesters for now. I recently did the annual cleaning of the nestboxes at East Lake Park. These, however, aren't the only cavity nests in the park. There are several bird species that also enjoy the use of cavities such as, barred owls, wood ducks, all of the woodpecker species, nuthatches, titmouse, and tree swallows, to name a few. The birds that use our nestboxes at the park are primarily bluebirds, house wrens, and house sparrows. We have 13 nest boxes on the grounds maintained by park staff and all of them are numbered except the ones on the tall poles at the campground. I have installed Noel guards on half of these nestboxes. Noel guards are simple wire mesh cages placed around the opening of the nestbox. These keep out predators like raccoons and birds of prey, but not snakes or rodents. I was happy to see that there were no rodents in the nestboxes this year though.

This year, as I cleaned the boxes, I was pleasantly surprised to see that every nestbox had been used last year and I could tell this by the amount of nest material present. It is possible also to determine the bird species that used each nestbox by analyzing the kind of material used and the way it was constructed.



In nestboxes 1-9 all of these were occupied by house wrens. You can tell this by the base of the nest being made of small twigs. When a male house wren starts to look for a place to build a nest, he will choose 3 or 4 different sites and place small twigs in each nest site. Once the female comes along, he shows her every site he has chosen, and she will choose the one she likes the most. The female then proceeds to continue building the nest by adding grasses, plant fibers, rootlets, feathers and hair to form a cup. Incubation of the 6-7 oval white eggs, is by the female only and for a period of 12-15 days. They may have 2 broods in a season and not necessarily with the same mate. During the entire time I was cleaning this group of nestboxes, there were 3 pairs of bluebirds in the area singing. The house wrens have not arrived yet.

Now, in the 2 nestboxes on the north end of the campground, I had bluebird nests. The short nestbox has a noel guard and the tall one does not. The tall nestbox does have a plastic band around the pole to keep out predators. Since the bluebirds nested in these boxes the nest material is different and the shape of the nest is different. The nest is a loosely built cup of fine grasses, weed stalks and a few feathers. It is built by the female only over the course of 4-5 days. She will then lay 4-5, oval, pale blue eggs and incubate them for 13-15 days. They can have 2 broods, sometimes 3 in a season.



The other 2 nestboxes at the campground are on tall poles. One next to the wildflower parking lot, it has a noel guard, and one near the dumpster and it doesn't have a noel guard. During the time I was in this area there were 2 pairs of bluebirds singing in the area. These nestboxes were, used by house sparrows, however. There was a pair of house sparrows staked out at the nestbox by the dumpster when I first got there. The nest of a house sparrow will fill the entire nestbox, top to bottom. Nest material is composed of grasses, weeds, trash, feathers, hair, and string. It is built where the opening to the cup is in the middle of all that mess. Both male and female sparrows build the nest. The female lays about 5 oval, whiteish, brown spotted eggs which only the female will incubate for 12-13 days. Normally there are 2 broods in a season. One of the really cool things about these nestboxes, and really, cavity nesters in general, is they are easy to watch and keep track of. So, if you have some spare time and like to be outside, quietly watch a nestbox from behind a bush and see what happens. Patience is a must, however.

Happy Birding, Deb Talbot

These photos were  
taken by Judy Kjellsen



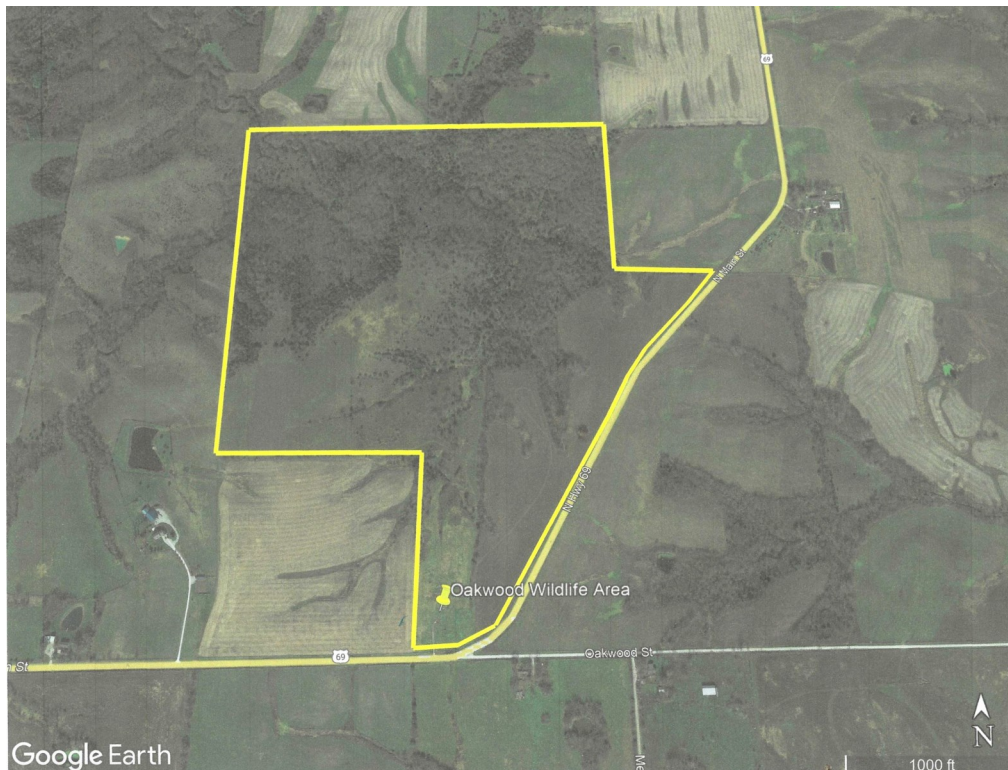
## Back Through Time: Vawn Wildlife Area by Barry Mateer

In the Spring 2024 issue of The New Leaf, there was some background information on the donation of 80 acres by James Vawn to Clarke County Conservation Board and the purchase of an additional 122 acres from the Vawn estate which had been left to Simpson College. <https://clarkecounty.iowa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Clarke-Conservation-Spring-2024.pdf>

In 2007, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation was asked by the Clarke County Conservation Board (CCCB) if they could purchase the land from the Vawn estate/Simpson College, and hold the title until the required funds could be raised to purchase the land and pay the accrued interest.

The following agencies and groups made it possible for the Clarke County Conservation Board to purchase the additional 122 acres, then valued at \$1,631 an acre.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources Habitat Stamp 99,000  
CCCB REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) 18,971  
CCCB Land Acquisition & Development Fund 40,000  
Friends of Clarke County Conservation 15,000  
National Wild Turkey Federation 15,000  
Clarke County Development Corporation Pillars Grant 12,500  
Clarke County Pheasants Forever 5,000  
South Central Iowa Community Foundation 3,000  
Madison County Pheasants Forever 1,500  
Iowa Pheasants Forever 1,000  
Warren County Pheasants Forever 1,000



The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) was an indispensable partner in making it possible. INHF also did surveys of the plant and animal life on the land; about 40 acres in Liberty Township and 120 acres in Fremont Township. In the NW-NW quarter of section 30 in Liberty Township, they identified three remnant prairie patches. These prairie patches will be monitored this growing season to see what native plants are still there.

#### Original Land Patent issued in Chariton in 1855

It was the maternal side of James Vawn's family who had been owners of the 202-acre Vawn Wildlife Area and the 188-acre Oakwood Grassland Area. The ancestral history of the Vawn Wildlife Area can be traced back to the first deed of July 16, 1855 to James Vawn's 2nd great grandparents, James and Mary Bonham Miler, issued at the Chariton land office. The 1929 obituary of James's great grandmother, Emeline Miler Hart, said that the family arrived in Clarke County on August 1, 1855 and that the family still owned that original purchase.

In this area of Iowa, before 1854, land patents (directly purchased from U.S. Government) were recorded in Fairfield. After 1854, the recording was done in Chariton. Land which had been deeded over to an individual needed to be recorded in the county in which the land was located. It was somewhat common for land to be officially recorded months and even several years after the actual possession of the land was transferred from owner to owner.

#### The Agriculture Census of 1860

The 1860 Agriculture Census showed James and Mary Miler owning 100 acres of land. Having lived on the land for five years, 20 acres of the land was categorized as having been 'improved.' This designation would indicate timber and brush would have been cleared for pasture and 'prairie hay'; or 'improved' could have indicated that the prairie sod had been busted and was being transformed into crop land. .

<https://www.itakehistory.com/post/sod-breaking>

The 'Cash Value' of the 100-acre farm was listed as \$500 with an additional \$30 of farming implements and machinery. The Miler family owned no horses or mules but did have two 'working oxen' and two 'milch cows' and one 'other cattle.' Along with one sheep and seven head of swine, the value of the family's livestock was listed as \$110.

As for crops produced during the last year, 300 bushels of 'Indian Corn' was enumerated for the Miler family. Mr. Miler recorded having no wheat, rye, or oats harvested. Included on the census for the Miler family of nine: 3 bushels of 'peas and beans,' 30 bushels of 'Irish potatoes,' 200 pounds of butter, 12 gallons of sorghum molasses, and \$60 worth of animals having been slaughtered that year.

James and Mary Miler had 7 children by 1860. The oldest was James Vawn's great grandmother, Emeline Miler Hart, who was then 17. Her oldest brother, Freland, was 15 and most likely he was toiling alongside his father from sunrise to sunset. The other children were 11, 9, 6, 3, and half a year old. Their father, James, would pass away four years later. Charles Miler who was living nearby with his family was her husband's younger brother.

Mary Miler's obituary provides little information about her struggles as a single parent on a farm after her husband passed away. <http://iagenweb.org/boards/clarke/obituaries/index.cgi?read=882502>



## Number of Dwellings and Farmers

The Ag Census of 1860 indicated that there were 51 farm families in Liberty Township and 40 farm families in Fremont Township. One man did all of the census data collection for the whole county, a Mr. R. Lamson. One could assume that he did not stop to register the newly arrived farmers who had not yet had the time to improve land or had not yet had a complete growing season under their belt.

In the 1862 census, a year after the Civil War began, Troy Township had but 29 dwellings recorded with a total of 150 people living in the township. The town of Murray was not to be established until after the Civil War when the railroad was built through Clarke County in 1868.

## A Century Farm and A Heritage Farm

2005, the year James Vawn passed away at the age of 63, would have been the 150th anniversary of his 2nd great grandparents having bought land in Clarke County. James' land bordered the land which they began working on back in 1855. The patches of remnant prairie now on Vawn Wildlife Area is land on which his ancestors would have walked through as they hunted and harvested from the area's natural bounty.

James might not have been able to certify his land with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) as being a Heritage Farm, as having been in his family for 150 years, but his land would have certainly qualified as a Century Farm.

As of 2023, it seems that there has been certification of 71 Century Farms in Clarke County; the least of any county in Iowa. Six other farms in the county are registered as 150-year Heritage farms.  
<https://centuryfarms.iowaagriculture.gov>

Of course, the list of 71 Century Farms in Clarke County does not mean that all of them are still currently owned by a relative of the original family who applied for certification. It has been 48 years since the program was started in Iowa as part of the Bicentennial Celebration for 1776.

In a couple of years, the Declaration of Independence will be 250 years old. Vawn Wildlife Area, itself, will then be nearly 20 years old ... well on its way towards a golden anniversary milestone ... hopefully with its Remnant Prairie patches still intact.

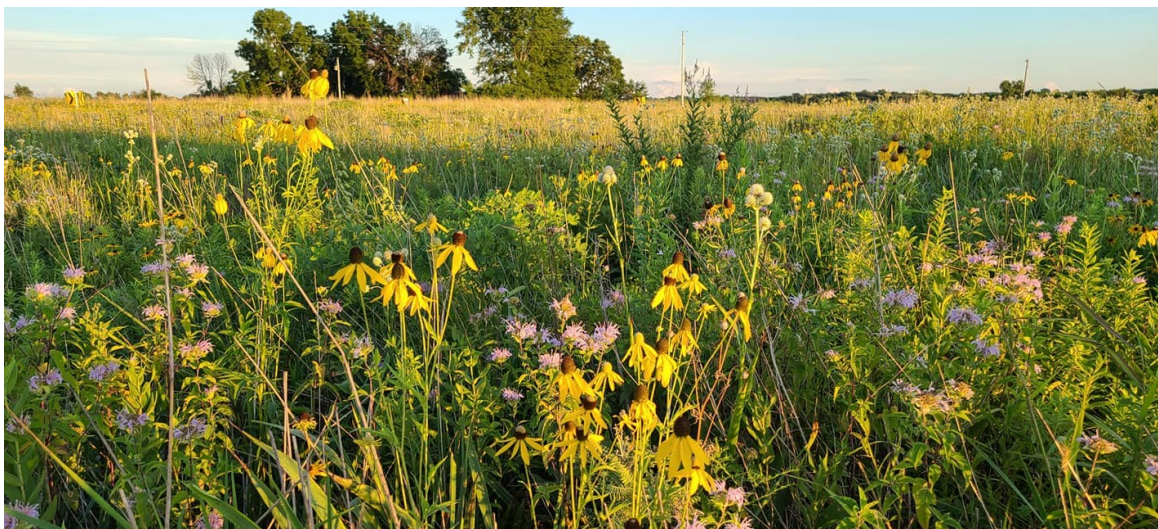


Photo of Oakwood Grassland in full bloom. Photo courtesy of Judy Kjellsen

## Did you know?

**You can donate to our 501c3 as a charitable contribution directly from your IRA if you are 72 ½ or older! It will count as your required minimum distribution that the IRS makes you take out of your IRA every year and excluded from your taxable income!**

### What are the rules for qualified charitable distributions?

With anything in estate planning and charitable giving, the tools you use depend on your personal and financial goals. Consult with your IRA administrator or a qualified financial advisor to determine what is best for you.

Qualified charitable distributions are direct transfers from an IRA to qualified charities. Instead of taking a regular IRA withdrawal, you tell your IRA custodian to send the money directly to the charity for you.

Details	Qualified Charitable Distribution	Charitable Deduction
Age requirement	70 ½ or older.	No age requirement.
Source	IRA account.	Personal income.
Tax benefit	Excluded from taxable income.	Reduces taxable income.
Itemization	Automatic; no itemization required on your tax	Requires itemized deductions on your tax re-
Contribution limit	\$100,000 per person, per year.	Up to 60% of your adjusted gross income.
Required Minimum	Can count toward RMD.	Does not affect RMD.

Source:

Qualified charitable distributions allow eligible IRA owners up to \$100,000 in tax-free gifts to charity | Internal Revenue Service ([irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov))





## Friends Of Clarke County Conservation

The Friends of Clarke County Conservation Foundation, known as *Friends*, is a tax exempt corporation organized under the Iowa Nonprofit Corporation Act, Chapter 504A of the 1990 Code of Iowa, and the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The foundation was established in 1997 for the purpose of soliciting and accepting gifts and donations from persons and organizations for developing and enhancing environmental education and conservation projects within the scope of the jurisdiction of the Clarke County Conservation Board.

The goals of the organization are: (1) to support and further the functions of the Clarke County Conservation Board by serving as a vehicle for community involvement, (2) to advise CCCB of the needs of the community regarding facilities and programs, (3) to raise funds for designated projects, and (4) to serve as an organizational base for volunteers.

Categories of membership are determined by the annual dues, which range from Student at \$5.00 to Organizational at \$100, (see enclosed membership form). Membership dues and contributions are tax deductible. Membership in the "*Friends*" foundation is open to everyone regardless of race, religion, creed, national origin, age, gender, or handicap.

An annual general membership meeting is held to elect the "*Friends*" Board of Directors, a seven (7) member board that sets the policies and goals, and generally manages the affairs of the foundation.

### Friends of Clarke County Conservation

#### Membership Application

- ☐ Organization/Business (\$100)
- ☐ Family (\$20)
- ☐ Individual (\$10)
- ☐ Student (\$5)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Yes! I want to be a part of the "*Friends*" volunteer corps.

Make checks payable to:  
Friends of Clarke County Conservation,  
C/O Clarke Co. Conservation Board  
100 South Main, Osceola, IA 50213





Clarke County Conservation  
100 S. Main St.  
Osceola, IA 50218

