

Audubon Sponsors Buses and Programs

Alysia Callison

School field trips are an opportunity for children to enter a different environment, engage with nature and history, and make lasting memories.

While many factors go into planning a field trip, one of the limiting ones is often the cost of transportation. "Field trip transportation can be about \$175 per bus," says Melody Arnold, President of the Decatur Audubon Society. This cost is often prohibitive for teachers and their students.

As such, the Decatur Audubon Society has generously announced that they will be providing \$10,000 in funding for bus transportation to a Macon County Conservation District site for a school field trip,

or providing funding for in-class programs or Zoom programs with Conservation District staff. This

gift will help many students from schools all over Macon County to experience a nature or history program either at a Conservation District site, in their classroom, or digitally via Zoom.

This is not the first time Decatur Audubon has extended a helping hand. Prior to the

COVID-19 pandemic, they sponsored school bus transportation to the District for several years in a row. These bus grants helped hundreds of children explore the outdoors and connect with their local history, an experience that is invaluable.

Since the pandemic, it has become even harder for classes to take a field trip or invite a speaker into their classroom, but the benefits of these experiences are undeniable. "Decatur Audubon feels that getting children out in nature or introducing them to nature topics by bringing presentations into the classroom is extremely important right now," says Arnold. "Decatur Audubon is very pleased to assist in that effort."

To inquire about the grant and schedule a program, contact Nature Center Manager Alysia Callison at (217) 423-7708 or ACallison@MaconCountyConservation.org. Grant funds will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. We are grateful to the Decatur Audubon Society for providing this opportunity to help children explore their world.





Naturalist Chats Return

By Brock Rowland



Prairie Trillium



Eastern Bluebird



Archaeology Artifacts

Want to learn about native plants and animals? How about different natural resources or local history? Well good news: our free weekly Naturalist Chats are back! We took a break from offering these short, informal programs due to the hustle and bustle of summer, but we're picking them up again.

Join a naturalist on the West Lawn of Rock Springs Nature Center every Tuesday to learn about the natural wonders in your neck of the woods. The topics change from week to week and will be a unique experience every time you visit. Topics are not announced ahead of time, so bring your sense of curiosity! Additionally, the naturalist leading these programs will be different every week, and all of our staff have different things they want to show you. These chats are a great opportunity to learn about Illinois and the natural beauty that surrounds us.

Chats are offered at 10 am on the first and third Tuesdays of the month, and at 2pm on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month. There will be no Naturalist Chat on the fifth Tuesday of the month. Naturalist Chats are free and for all ages, with no registration required. Please keep an eye on the weather and dress appropriately. We look forward to seeing you on an upcoming Tuesday!



Briefs

SKI AND SNOWSHOE RENTAL

Explore the conservation area trails on cross country skis or snowshoes this winter. If you don't have your own, you can rent the equipment from Rock Springs Nature Center. Borrow skis, boots, and poles, or one pair of snowshoes for \$8 for 2 hours or \$20 for 24 hours. Equipment available first-come, first-served. Skis and snowshoes are available for rent and welcome for use on any conservation area trail when 4 or more inches of snow covers the ground.



Exhibit Update

Thanks to a grant, we're currently updating the permanent EcoCenter exhibit inside Rock Springs Nature Center. It will re-open by spring. In the meantime, there is a new temporary exhibit in the north exhibit hall: *Exploring the Sangamon*. There, you can learn a little about the history and ecology of our local Sangamon River. *Exploring the Sangamon* will be up through December. Admission to Rock Springs Nature Center and all of its exhibits are free.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Have you ever visited the Homestead Prairie Farm at Rock Springs Conservation Area? It is rich with historical knowledge of the days before the Civil War upended our country. Share the sights, sounds, and textures of 1860 rural Illinois with others. For as little as an hour or two per month, after some training you can feel the gratification of leading tours and programs through this rare pre-war homestead. This volunteer opportunity is for ages 13 and up.

For more information or to sign up, contact Volunteer Coordinator, Jenny Garver at JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org or 217-423-7708. Explore additional volunteer opportunities at MaconCountyConservation.org.



Special Events

GEMINID METEOR SHOWER

Saturday, December 11, 9-11pm
Friends Creek Conservation Area

Join us at Friends Creek Conservation Area to view the strongest meteor shower of the year. These meteors originate near the constellation Gemini and are usually bright and colorful. We will have hot chocolate available. Wear warm clothing and bring a lawn chair and blanket if you like. Free. Register online by December 10. Min/Max: 5/50.



CHRISTMAS TEA

Sunday, December 5, 1-4pm

Stop by the Governor Oglesby Mansion to enjoy a traditional Christmas afternoon tea. Experience this historic Victorian home all decked out for the holidays. Refreshments will be served. \$2/person. No reservations necessary. Located at 421 W. William Street in Decatur, IL.



Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.



Hours

OFFICES OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

NATURE CENTER OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

Saturday, 9am-5pm

Sunday, 1-5pm

TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

Holidays & Closings

OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Friday, December 24, Christmas Eve

Saturday, December 25, Christmas Day

Saturday, January 1, New Year's Day

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Thursday, December 23, Christmas Eve (observed)

Monday, January 3, New Year's Day (observed)

Monday, January 17, MLK Day

Monday, February 21, Presidents' Day

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm
December 15, January 19, and February 16

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook.

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am



Connect with Us

Twitter: @MCCD_217

Facebook:

@MaconCountyConservationDistrict

Music

The following programs are free and open to the public at Rock Springs Nature Center.

DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm

December 11

January 8 & 22

February 5 & 19



Art

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS



Barn Colony Artists

November & December

Discover works in watercolor, pastels, oil, and mixed media depicting subjects from nature to portraits by talented artists in our community.

DECATUR CAMERA CLUB

January & February

Enjoy a wide variety of photography, including scenes of trees, birds, landscapes, and more from talented local photographers.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

David Castor

November & December

View photographs of white-tailed deer, great blue herons, and plants through the lens of photographer David Castor.



Melody Arnold

January & February

Experience the beauty of nature with local photographer and outdoor education specialist Melody Arnold.

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Mini Camp Nature Kits

There's much to explore in winter! Sprinkle some one-on-one family time into your season, whenever it fits your schedule, with fun nature-themed kits designed for children ages 1-5 and an adult buddy. These pre-packaged kits contain activities, games, and crafts exploring each camp theme. Kits will need to be picked up from Rock Springs Nature Center during the timeframe specified in registration. Allow 3 to 7 days for us to process your kit order. We will call you when the kit is ready for pick-up. Each kit includes materials for one participant. \$6/kit. Maximum of 24 kits available for each theme.



These photos show examples of last year's kits

DECEMBER KIT: PAJAMA PARTY

Pick-Up December 1 through December 22

Learn what animals do during the cold months and how animals' fur keeps them warm just like pajamas keep us warm. Register online by December 20.

JANUARY KIT: GLOWING MOON

Pick-Up January 4 through January 31

Shine light onto the secrets of the moon and animals who venture out after dark. Register online by January 27.

FEBRUARY KIT: SWEETHEART OWLS

Pick-Up February 1 through February 28

Give a hoot as we explore the world of owls and owlets through movement and activities. Register online by February 24.

Take Your Pick

Below you'll find activities offered at multiple times or locations. Register online before the last full weekday prior to the program. Programs held at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise noted:

NOTE: Programs may be canceled or adapted due to COVID restrictions. Check the event on our website before attending. Face coverings required. Please stay home if you are feeling unwell.

OWL PROWLs

Sand Creek Conservation Area

Saturdays, February 5 and 26, 7-8:30pm

Learn about these forest-dwelling, nocturnal predators. Discuss what makes owls special while we walk to find some. Dress for the weather. Meet at the entrance to Sand Creek Conservation Area.

\$3/person. Register online by February 4 and 25. Min/Max: 5/30.



IMMIGRANTS IN EARLY DECATUR

Sunday, February 13, 2pm

at Rock Springs Nature Center or Thursday, February 17, 7pm for a Virtual Presentation

Learn about the first immigrants to make Decatur their home in the days before the Civil War. Find out what countries they were from, what jobs they had, and discover a few of their personal stories. Free. Register online by February 11 and 16. In-person Min/Max: 5/30. Virtual Min/Max: 5/50.

MAPLE SYRUP PROGRAMS

Saturday, February 19, 11am, 12pm, & 1pm

Discover how sap becomes syrup, why spring is the best time of year to harvest sap, and how people used sap throughout history. Registrants will get to sample real maple syrup. Free. Register online by February 18. Min/Max: 5/30.





Happenings

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December

NATURE ORNAMENT CRAFT FOR ADULTS

Saturday, December 4, 10am

Use nature-themed supplies to make a unique, handmade ornament to decorate your home with this holiday season. All supplies provided. Free. Register online by December 2. Min/Max: 5/20.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: PINECONES

Sunday, December 19, 2pm

Where do pinecones come from? We will learn this and more as we read a story, make a pinecone bird feeder, then go outside to search for some. Free. Register online by December 17. Min/Max: 5/30.



January

ALL ABOUT EAGLES

Saturday, January 8, 2pm

What makes the bald eagle so interesting? Learn the natural history and cultural significance of these birds, and find out the best place in Macon County to look for them. Note: no live birds will be present. Free. Register online by January 7. Min/Max: 5/30.



NIGHT HIKE

Saturday, January 15, 8-9:30pm

Use your senses to find your way through the woods. Discover what makes your eyes, ears, and nose work at night. Wear warm clothes. \$3/person. Register online by January 14. Min/Max: 5/30.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: MOON AND STARS

Sunday, January 16, 2pm

Discover outer space as we read a story, make a paper rocket ship, and learn about some of the things in the night sky that you can see from your own backyard. Free. Register online by January 14. Min/Max: 5/30.

WORLD'S CRAZIEST CREATURES

Sunday, January 23, 2pm

Step into a world of unusual adaptations! Some animals from all over the planet have extraordinary defense mechanisms like secreting poison, generating electric shocks of up to 800 volts, or throwing a punch at 50 miles per hour. Learn about some of these fascinating creatures. Free. Register online by January 21. Min/Max: 5/30.

HOMESCHOOL PROGRAM: ANIMALS IN WINTER

Wednesday, January 26, 2pm

Where do all the animals go in winter? Learn how wildlife adapt to colder weather and go on a hike to look for evidence of animal activity. Free. Register online by January 25. Min/Max: 5/30.



Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.
Register online at MaconCountyConservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

WINTER BIRD HIKE

Fort Daniel Conservation Area
Saturday, January 29, 10am

Bundle up and head outside on a hike to look for overwintering birds. We will look for migrants such as red-breasted nuthatches, white-throated sparrows, and more. Free. Register online by January 28. Min/Max: 5/30.



ICE AGE MAMMALS OF THE MIDWEST

Sunday, January 30, 2pm

During the Ice Age, giant mammals dominated the Midwestern landscape. Discover what they were, where they went, and what mammals of today have in common with them. Free. Register online by January 28. Min/Max: 5/30.

February

INTERNATIONAL DARWIN DAY

Saturday, February 12, 2pm

To celebrate Charles Darwin's birthday, we'll take a deep-dive into some of the ideas presented in his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*. Free. Register online by February 11. Min/Max: 5/30.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: FURRY MAMMALS

Sunday, February 20, 2pm

What is a mammal and what kinds of mammals do we have in Macon County? Learn all about them, then make a fuzzy craft and go outside to look for some. Free. Register online by February 18. Min/Max: 5/30.



POKÉMON IN REAL LIFE

Sunday, February 27, 2pm

Investigate the similarities between fictional Pokémon and their real-world counterparts. We will then take a short walk to see if we can find any creatures, real or otherwise. Who knows, maybe we'll find a PokéStop along the way! Free. Register online by February 25. Min/Max: 5/30.



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Contact Us

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