



# Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## The Prairie Islander is Going Digital!

By Ashton Nunn

Since its launch in 1976, the *Prairie Islander* has been a valuable source of District information and updates, documenting the evolution of the District with each printed edition. As we embark on a new chapter, transitioning from ink and paper to a digital platform, we reflect on the history that has shaped this long-running newsletter. Join us as we explore its journey through the decades, celebrating its legacy while embracing the future of sustainable communication.



When the newsletter began, it didn't go by the familiar name of *Prairie Islander* that we now know. It started as *The Interpreter* in June 1976 and ran under that name until March 1983. In April 1983, the name changed to the *Prairie Islander*, and it has kept that name ever since. Over the years, as technology advanced, the newsletter changed its look many times. Initially, it featured black and white text and clip art, but it evolved into the full-color version with bright and vibrant photos that you hold now in your hands.

**This edition of the *Prairie Islander* will be the last physical copy you will receive.**

As an organization committed to protecting and conserving our natural resources, we are moving our newsletter from a physical paper copy to a digital version.

This is beneficial in two main ways: 1) It saves trees and prevents paper from ending up in landfills. One-third of all paper products are not recycled, and we want to contribute to that as little

as possible. 2) It saves money. Money not spent on mailing thousands of copies of our newsletter can instead be spent on natural areas restoration and education.

While we know some will miss the tradition of a printed newsletter, we are looking forward to the opportunities that a digital format offers. Not only will it reduce our environmental footprint, but it will also allow us to reach a wider audience more quickly and efficiently. You will have access



to the same valuable content, including updates on conservation efforts, upcoming events, and educational resources, but now in a more sustainable and accessible format.

To sign up for the digital newsletter, scan the QR code on this page or visit [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org). The signup form can be found at the bottom of the web page.

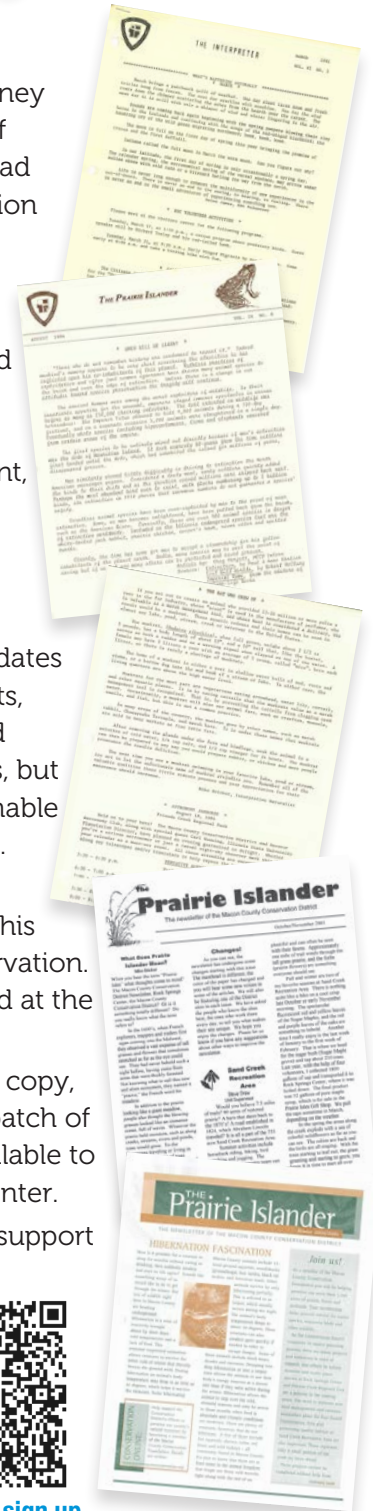
For those that prefer a physical copy, we will continue to print a small batch of paper newsletters that will be available to pick up at Rock Springs Nature Center.

Thank you for your continued support as we make this transition.

We look forward to continuing to share our journey with you through the new digital *Prairie Islander*.



Scan here to sign up for the newsletter





# Lichen and Fungi... Oh My!

By Hope Moore

The kingdom Fungi have been very misunderstood for many years, only being classified as a kingdom since 1969. They had been considered plants prior to this year, meaning scientists have only had a small portion of time to truly study and understand them as their own kingdom. Not all fungi are created equal considering the many different ways they can appear. Some can be microscopic, others can form visible fruiting bodies (e.g. a mushroom), and they can come in many colors and sizes. With this, it can be really difficult to classify what each fungus is and to tell what is poisonous and what is not!

Out at Rock Springs Conservation Area, we have many different types of mushrooms that tend to pop up around the fall.



All year, however, you can see many different lichen species on the trees. Lichen is the product of a symbiotic relationship between a fungal species and either an algal species or a type of cyanobacteria. It can include multiple fungal species as well. They were first thought to be a mutualistic relationship, where both species benefit from the other. However it might actually be considered a parasitic relationship. This is because the algal species is far enough away



from its original habitat that it can't live without the fungal species. Lichen come in all different colors and sizes and can grow on pretty much anything solid outdoors.

We also can sometimes see a very unique species out here as well, which is a species called 'Dog Vomit'. At first glance, it looks very much like a fungal species. However, Dog Vomit (*Fuligo septica*) is not a fungus at all - it is actually a protist. Protista is a group of organisms that are not an animal, plant, or fungus, and includes things like amoebas and slime molds. Slime molds are very unique in their structure and are currently being studied. Some other famous species we can find on property include Chicken of the Woods (*Laetiporus sulphurus*). This is a well-known shelf fungus that can be seen growing on bases of dead trees.



On your next hike, try and see if you can find any fungi around. Please remember that it is against our regulations to forage, take, or consume any fungus on our properties (even morels!). If you'd like to learn more about fungi and how to identify them while visiting Rock Springs, feel free to stop by the reference library located inside the Nature Center!

**LEFT: Chicken of the woods *Laetiporus sulphurus***  
**RIGHT: Dog vomit slime mold *Fuligo septica* (amoeba)**  
**TOP: The Sickener *Russula emetica***

Briefs .....



**FALL HUNTING AND FISHING PROGRAMS AT THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

With fall comes the hunting and fishing season. Our Deer Herd Management and Upland Game Program will be opening soon, as well as the fall trout fishing season. The Deer Herd Management hunting areas



are located at Rock Springs, Sand Creek, Friends Creek, and Fort Daniel Conservation Areas by special permit only. We also have three disabled hunting blinds available, one at Rock Springs, one at Friends Creek, and one at Sand Creek.

The goal of the Deer Herd Management Program is to reduce the deer populations on District sites and to provide public hunting opportunities to Macon County residents. Participants must harvest an antlerless deer before taking any antlered deer.

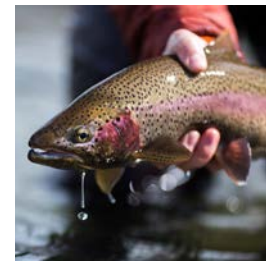
The Upland Game Hunting Program can be done at the Friends Creek Conservation Area's Upland Game Management Area, and hunters must submit an application for the one-day hunts. The Friends Creek Conservation Area upland game hunting area was partially funded with revenue generated through the sale of the Illinois Pheasant Stamp and developed with the cooperation of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

More information about both of these District hunting programs and their run dates can be found on our website at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org) under the "Conservation" menu.

Rock Springs Conservation Area will have trout stocked in the Cattail Pond for the fall fishing season. Trout are prohibited from being taken before the

start of the season, and the season runs until the trout are fished out. There is a daily limit of five fish for the trout season.

An inland trout fishing stamp is required along with a valid state of Illinois fishing license. The stamps are available for purchase from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) by going online at <https://dnr.illinois.gov>, to one of the IDNR offices located in Springfield, Rock Island, Bartlett, and Benton, or at many sporting goods stores and bait shops.



More information about the trout season dates will be posted on our Facebook page and website once it becomes available.

**MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF**

David Castor, President  
 Mark Allen, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
 Gussie Reed, Treasurer  
 Michael Sams, Secretary  
 Karen Schneller, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
 Jerry Culp, Executive Director  
 Philip Julius, Director of Operations  
 Alysia Callison, Director of Program Services  
 Nicky Besser, Director of Finance & H.R.

**Contact Us**

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708  
[mccd@MaconCountyConservation.org](mailto:mccd@MaconCountyConservation.org)  
[MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org)

# Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://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

Thursday, November 28, Thanksgiving Day

### OFFICES CLOSED

Monday, September 2, Labor Day

Monday, November 11, Veteran's Day

Friday, November 29, Thanksgiving

Macon County  
Conservation District



## Open Houses

### BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturdays, September 7 & October 5, 1-4pm

See what going to school was like in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at this historic one-room schoolhouse located at Friends Creek Conservation Area. 13734 Friends Creek Park Rd., Cisco, IL. Free.

### HOMESTEAD PRAIRIE FARM

Saturdays & Sundays, June-October, 1-4pm

Discover this 1860s farmhouse and the lives of the people who lived there. Located at Rock Springs Conservation Area, 3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL. Free.

### GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

September 29, October 27, & November 24, 2-4pm

Tour the restored home of Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby. Explore the lives of its family members and their late 1800s lifestyle. Recommended donation of \$5/adult and \$2/child. 421 W. William Street, Decatur, IL.



## Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Games

Join us for the national pastime: base ball! Cheer for your home team, the Rock Springs Ground Squirrels, in a game of vintage base ball played with authentic 1858 rules. All games will be at Beautiful Trobaugh Field at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise stated.



Saturday, September 21, 12pm

Away game vs. the Champaign Clippers in Champaign, IL

Saturday, September 28, 10am

Home Game – Douglas Cup Tournament

Saturday, October 26, 12pm

Goodwill Match vs. the Lafayette Square Cyclones in St. Louis, MO

Follow the team on Facebook for additional games and more information or visit [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).

## Meetings

### MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm

September 18, October 16, & November 20

### DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook.

### ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am

## Connect with Us

Follow us on social media!  
[MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org)





Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.  
Register online at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## Music

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

### DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm  
September 14 & 28  
October 12 & 26  
November 9 & 23



### ACOUSTIC MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 2-4pm  
September 8, October 13, November 10

## Art

### NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Curt Knapp  
September/October



Photographer Curt Knapp captures the essence of nature with thrilling portraits and landscapes featuring majestic eagles, stealthy mountain lions, and noble wolves, among other captivating subjects.

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.

### SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Earth Adventures Summer Camp Art  
September/October

These talented young artists had the opportunity to learn all about our native Illinois habitats this year, and we wanted to bring the outside 'in' to show you what we've seen.

Ronie Verbena  
November/December



Talented local photographer Ronie Verbena has traveled all over Illinois, capturing photos of plants and animal life in every habitat, from prairies to swamps.

## Mini Camps

Children ages 1-5 explore nature with an adult buddy through crafts, activities, songs, and stories. These camps are a great stepping stone for little ones to spend time with other children with the comfort of a loved one nearby. \$8/child. Online registration required. Min/Max: 4/12.



### CREEPY CRAWLIES

Tuesday, September 3, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, September 5, 9:30-10:30am

Learn about some of the strange critters crawling around outside, in nature and your own backyard.

### SLITHERING SNAKES

Tuesday, September 17, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, September 19, 9:30-10:30am

Discover the life of a snake by looking at a snake skin, examining a skeleton, and meeting a real snake up close.

### BUSY BATS

Tuesday, October 1, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, October 3, 9:30-10:30am

Fly into the world of bats to learn what they eat, where they sleep, and what makes them special.

### PLAYING OPOSSUM

Tuesday, October 15, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, October 17, 9:30-10:30am

Learn what a 'marsupial' is, and other things that make these misunderstood animals unique.

### SILLY SPIDERS

Tuesday, November 5, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, November 7, 9:30-10:30am

Explore the difference between insects and spiders, and learn how they make and use their webs.

### STINKY SKUNKS

Tuesday, November 19, 9:30-10:30am  
Thursday, November 21, 9:30-10:30am

Discover why skunks are so smelly, and find out what they do in the winter.

# Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## September

### POKÉMON TRACKING

Sunday, September 8, 2pm

Learning about the lives of Pokémon can help us track real-world animals in their habitats. Get ready for an exciting adventure where we will try to identify real-world animals, as well as the 'Pocket Monsters' they inspire. Free. Register online by September 6. Min/Max: 5/30.



### WILD ABOUT WOOLLY WORMS

Saturday, September 14, 2pm

Explore the life cycle of the woolly worm, also known as the woolly bear caterpillar, and learn where they're headed in the fall. Free. Register online by September 13. Min/Max: 5/30.

### PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: AWESOME OPOSSUMS

Sunday, September 15, 2pm

Learn about these misunderstood animals and what makes them unique. We will make a craft, read a story, and go outside to explore the habitat where opossums live. Free. Register online by September 13. Min/Max: 5/20.

### VAN TRIP TO KINMUNDY LOG CABIN VILLAGE

Saturday, September 21, 9am-5pm

Head south to Kinmundy, IL to discover their historic Log Cabin Village during their Fall Festival. Explore a dozen 1800s-era log cabins, learn from costumed interpreters dressed in period clothing, and enjoy the vendor and craft fair. Bring a lunch or purchase one onsite. \$25/person covers transportation. Register online by September 20. Min/Max: 5/10.



### STARTING A LIFE LIST: FUNGI

Sunday, September 22, 2pm

A 'life list' is a list of all species that someone has observed in the wild. Wildlife observers keep these lists as a sort of lifelong challenge, with an ultimate goal of seeing as many species as possible firsthand. Join a naturalist to start your own life list and see how many types of fungi you can find at Rock Springs, then take your list with you and keep it growing! \$3/person. Register online by September 20. Min/Max: 5/20.

### VAN TRIP TO SNAKE ROAD

Tuesday, September 24, 7am-7pm

Head south to Shawnee National Forest to discover a unique spot nestled in the Larue Pine Hills. 'Snake Road', as it's called, is a forest road that hosts a migration of snakes, turtles, and amphibians in the spring and fall. Join our naturalist and see what you can find. Wear long pants and sturdy shoes, and plan for a walk. Lunch is on your own; we will stop at a restaurant nearby. \$35/person covers transportation. Register online by September 23. Min/Max: 5/10.

### CANOE OR KAYAK BIG CREEK

Saturday, September 28, 10am-12pm

All equipment is provided for this leisurely exploration of a local waterway. At least one adult required per boat. Meet at Cannon Park on S. Baltimore Ave. \$25/canoe or kayak. Register online by September 27. Min/Max: 4/10 boats.



## October

### BIGFOOT HIKE

Saturday, October 5, 7-9pm

Learn about our most famous cryptid and the history of local sightings and recorded sounds, then take a hike to try and find the "big guy" ourselves. We will also learn about the other nocturnal creatures of the forest and then wrap it all up with hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows around the fire. \$5/person. Register online by October 4. Min/Max: 5/30.





Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## NATURE EXPLORATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: MARINE DEBRIS TRACKER

Sunday, October 6, 2pm

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has ushered in many technological advancements, and the field of nature exploration is no exception! Discover the Marine Debris Tracker, an app that helps scientists learn more about plastic pollution, then go outside and put it to the test. \$3/person. Register online by October 4. Min/Max: 5/20.

## FIVE SACRED TREES: MUSIC AND MYTHOLOGY

Sunday, October 20, 2pm

Join Professor Claire Taylor from Millikin University to preview *Five Sacred Trees*, a concerto for bassoon and orchestra from composer John Williams, that she will be performing with the Millikin-Decatur Symphony Orchestra in November. Professor Taylor will play some of the music from the concerto and provide some of the mythological background behind the pieces, then a naturalist will join us for a leisurely walk outside to learn about the forest. Free. No registration required.



## PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: NATURE'S CLEANUP CREW

Sunday, October 20, 2pm

Discover the secret world of decomposers and explore their role in nature. We will talk about mushrooms, vultures, worms, and more as we do a craft, read a story, and go outside to search for some. Free. Register online by October 18. Min/Max: 5/20.

## NATURE: MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Sunday, October 27, 2pm

Do wolves really howl at the moon, and which species of owl actually hoots? Learn about commonly-heard wildlife myths and legends, and see if you can determine fact from fiction. Free. Register online by October 25. Min/Max: 5/30.



# November

## FALL FOLIAGE TOUR

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

Saturday, November 2, 2pm

Join a naturalist to take a walk around Fort Daniel Conservation Area and check out the fall foliage. Learn about some of our native tree species and why they change colors in the fall, and enjoy some warm apple cider and cookies. \$3/person. Register online by November 1. Min/Max: 5/30.



## HISTORY OF THE ROCK SPRING WATER COMPANY

Sunday, November 3, 2pm

The Rock Spring was a Macon County landmark for generations before it became a Conservation Area. Unknown to many though is its history as an early tourist attraction and business that sold bottled spring water and its years as a dairy and turkey farm. Free. No registration required.

## VISIT THE SITES TOUR

Tuesday, November 5, 1-4pm

Join a naturalist at Rock Springs Nature Center, then hop in our van as we visit some of the other District sites throughout the county. \$10/person covers transportation. Register online by November 4. Min/Max: 5/20.



## PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: NATURE EXPLORERS

Sunday, November 17, 2pm

Dust off your magnifying glasses and put your investigative skills to the test! Learn the different clues nature provides to tell you what's happening in the forest, then go on a scavenger hunt to see what's out there. Free. Register online by November 15. Min/Max: 5/20.

## FALL HALF DAY CAMP

Wednesday, November 27, 9am-12pm OR 1-4pm

Children ages 6-12 can join Nature Center staff for a half day of activities, games, crafts, and outdoor fun. A snack will be provided. Please bring a water bottle and dress for spending time outside. \$20/child. Register online by November 15. Min/Max: 5/20.

Macon County  
Conservation District  
3939 Nearing Lane  
Decatur, IL 62521

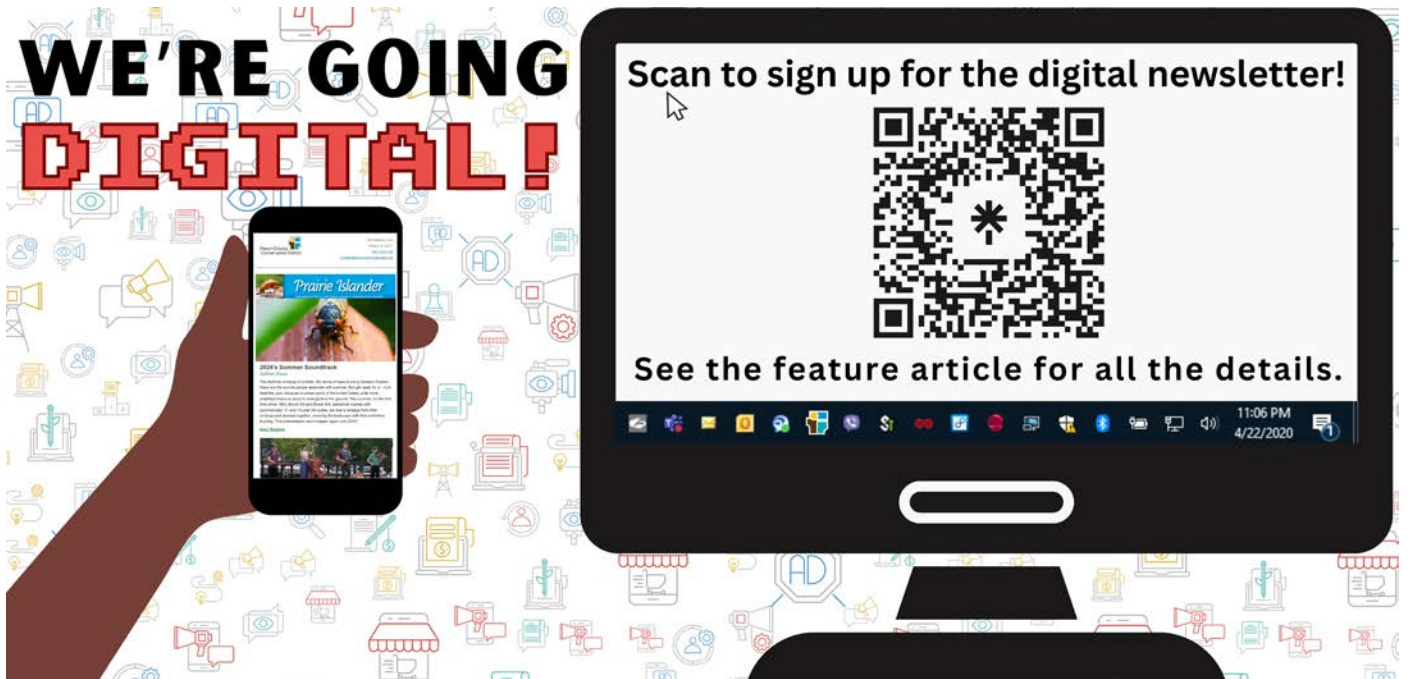


NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Decatur, IL 62521  
PERMIT NO. 232

Return Service Requested



**WE'RE GOING  
DIGITAL!**



For trail conditions, visit [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).



The Prairie Islander is a free quarterly publication. Call or email for additional copies.  
"Go Green" by reading it online or subscribing to our email newsletter at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).

Macon County  
Conservation District





# Special Events



## MONARCH MADNESS

Saturday, September 21, 2-4pm

Learn about monarch butterflies from naturalists, then help capture and tag live butterflies. Enjoy crafts, face painting, balloon animals, and more. Co-sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension Office. Free. No registration required.



## PRAIRIE PEDAL

Sunday, September 29, 6:30am-2pm  
Rock Springs Conservation Area

Support local wildlife and natural areas by riding your bicycle in this fundraiser event for the Macon County Conservation Foundation. Choose from a 20, 40, or 62-mile route along quiet country roads. Your registration includes a giveaway item, well stocked rest stops along the routes, and food at the finish line. Door 4 Brewing Co. will be onsite serving alcoholic beverages. Registration is \$35/rider before August 31, and \$40/rider beginning September 1. Learn more and choose how you want to register at [MaconCountyConservationFoundation.org](http://MaconCountyConservationFoundation.org).

## FALL HARVEST FESTIVAL

Saturday, October 12, 1-4pm

Celebrate fall at Rock Springs Nature Center with fall-themed activities including archery, canoeing, pumpkin painting, wagon rides, tours at Homestead Prairie Farm, and more. Archery and canoeing are \$3 per person, pumpkin painting is \$5 per pumpkin, and all other events are free. The Macon County Conservation Foundation will also have a concession stand with snacks for purchase. No registration required.



## TREAT TRAIL

Saturday, October 19, 6:30-8:30pm

Explore Rock Springs after dark for a spooky stroll along the treat trail! Put on your costume and bring your treat bag to visit a series of treat stops along the bike trail and through the pine forest. Each stop will also have an interactive activity to take part in. When you're through, stop inside the Nature Center for warm apple cider and cookies. \$5 per treat-collector. No registration required.



## CANDLELIGHT TOUR

Saturday, November 9, 6:30-8:30pm  
Homestead Prairie Farm  
at Rock Springs Conservation Area

Electricity and modern conveniences were not always at our fingertips. Glimpse what an evening in the 1860s was like at Homestead Prairie Farm, lit by candlelight and lamplight, as guides in period clothing walk you through the home. Free. No registration required.



# Homeschool Programs

Homeschool children ages 5-15 can join a naturalist and explore nature and history topics through discussion, hands-on activities, crafts, and games. Homeschool students will spend time indoors and outdoors, investigating concepts and engaging with nature. \$15/child. Register online by date specified.



## THE POWER OF POLLINATORS

Wednesday, September 11, 10am-12pm

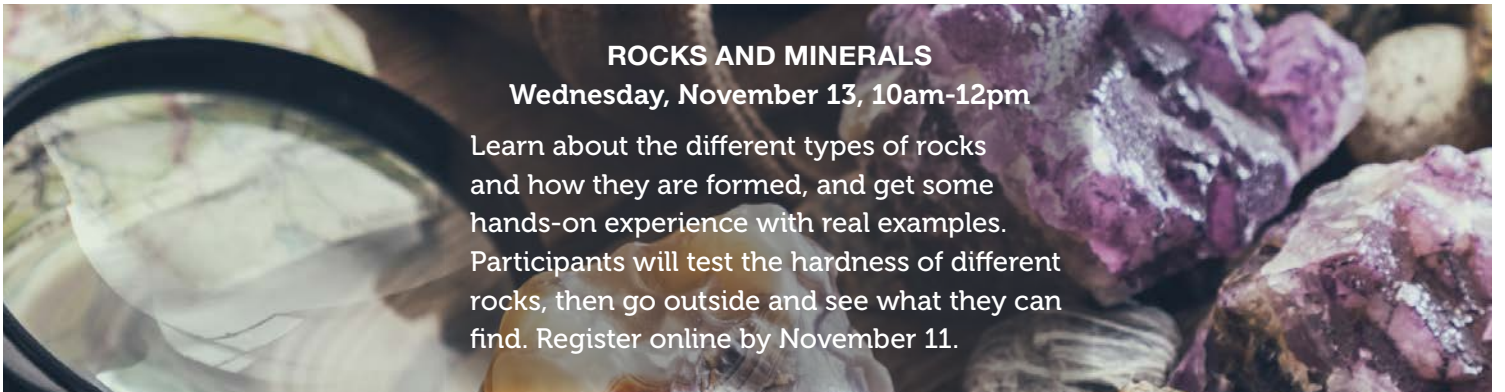
Discover the important role that pollinators play in the ecosystem, and learn to identify some of them. Participants will explore the life of pollinators through activities and outdoor exploration. Register online by September 9.



## FALL COLORS

Wednesday, October 9, 10am-12pm

Learn why the leaves change colors and fall, and what this means for the rest of the ecosystem. Participants will use hands-on activities and outdoor exploration to learn more. Register online by October 7.



## ROCKS AND MINERALS

Wednesday, November 13, 10am-12pm

Learn about the different types of rocks and how they are formed, and get some hands-on experience with real examples. Participants will test the hardness of different rocks, then go outside and see what they can find. Register online by November 11.

# Scouts

The Macon County Conservation District offers badge workshops for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other scouting organizations. Workshops typically last 2-3 hours and cover a variety of nature-and wilderness-related badges. Cost is \$9/scout for a two-hour workshop and \$12/scout for three hours. Visit our website or contact us for more information.

Macon County Conservation District  
3939 Nearing Lane | Decatur, IL 62521 | 217-423-7708  
MaconCountyConservation.org

