

## New Weekly Naturalist Chats

By Alysia Callison



An “interpreter” is someone who helps people understand the importance of our natural and cultural world, so that they might appreciate it and take steps to care for it on their own. Here at the Macon County Conservation District, we have a talented team of interpreters who enjoy developing your appreciation of the world and making your visits more meaningful. While we offer many formal programs to educators, school groups, nursing homes, and more, the question has arisen: How can we continue to reach more people?

Many visitors who use our trails and facilities have perhaps never attended one of our programs for a variety of reasons. The idea, then, is to hold regularly-scheduled informal opportunities to engage you and show you what makes Macon County so special.

Starting in December, Program Services will be offering weekly

Naturalist Chats – an informal program held every Tuesday on a topic of the interpreter’s choosing. One week we might take a hike down the Woodland Trail to see wildlife and identify trees, or introduce you to one of our education animals, or show you a unique item from the District’s collections. We won’t announce the topics ahead of time, so you are encouraged to bring a healthy curiosity if you decide to drop in! Macon County has a great wealth of natural treasures that we can’t wait to show you.

**These free Chats will begin at 10am on the first and third Tuesdays of the month, and at 2pm on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month.** (In a month with five Tuesdays, there will be no hike on the fifth one.) Staff will take turns presenting each week and no registration will be required. Guests wishing to join in are asked to meet staff on the West Lawn at Rock Springs Nature Center and to dress for the weather.

We hope you will join us for one (or all!) of our Naturalist Chats as we attempt to bring you closer to your natural roots. Whether it is the diversity of life in the prairie, the patterns on a box turtle’s shell, or the glimmer of sunlight on the pond, there is something worth seeing out in nature, and we can’t wait to show it to you.

### Meet Program Services Staff Giving Weekly Chats



**Alysia Callison,**  
Nature Center Manager



**Brock Rowland,**  
Senior Naturalist



**Jenny Garver,**  
Volunteer Coordinator



**Beth Lane,**  
Part-time Naturalist



# Renovations at Rock Springs Nature Center

By Richie Wolf

Rock Springs Nature Center is undergoing a face lift this winter.

As you enter the main doorway, you will notice the Administrative Assistant's new desk on the left, behind a classy limestone facing. The Human Resource/Finance Manager will have a new office to the right of the elevator. In addition to these moves, the Operations Manager, Historic Sites Manager, and Marketing Specialist will have new offices in the north wing of the Nature Center.

The reason behind this renovation is threefold. Firstly, stationing the Administrative Assistant at the main entrance allows visitors immediate access to a staff member who can assist them in locating the exhibits, restrooms, and meeting spaces. Over the years, observations have shown that many first time visitors are a bit disoriented when immediately entering the building, with no clear direction. Now, they will be able to immediately locate staff for any information they seek.

Secondly, now that the Administrative Assistant is upstairs, visitors can register for programs, reserve a pavilion, or book a campsite without searching for the elevator and venturing downstairs. This will help business be completed in a more timely and efficient manner.

Finally, now that most Nature Center staff will be located upstairs, it is believed that communication between workers will be improved. Time will be saved without traveling up and down stairways or the elevator. This should result in a more efficient workday for employees.

In the years ahead, we envision opening up the downstairs floorplan, converting it to a conference or reception hall with a full kitchen that will be available for large groups to rent. This downstairs transformation could take an additional 2-3 years to complete.

## Special Events



**GEMINID METEOR SHOWER**  
 Saturday, December 12, 9-11pm  
 Friends Creek Conservation Area

Bring your lawn chair to 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 11. Min/Max: 5/45.



**MAPLE SYRUP PROGRAMS**  
 Saturday, February 13, 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 12. Min/Max: 5/20.



Briefs

**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY**

Do you enjoy exercise and getting out into nature? We have over 25 miles of hiking trails stretched across 3,300 acres of land. Trail Monitor volunteers assist by reporting on trail conditions and picking up litter at conservation areas. You can volunteer a few times a week, once a month, or every few months. This is our most flexible volunteer position, as trail monitoring can be done on your own schedule anytime that a conservation area is open. This opportunity can be done by yourself, with a friend, or with your whole family!



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.

**ILLINOIS GEOLOGY EXHIBIT**

When many people picture Illinois, they see vast farm fields brimming with corn and soybeans, ready to feed the world. Even though much of the state is immersed in agriculture, there is much more to The Prairie State than corn. Beginning in January, stop by Rock Springs Nature Center and explore our next temporary exhibit: *More than Corn: Investigating Illinois' Unique Geology*. Open through April, this exhibit will highlight some of the many unique habitats and geological features throughout the state, including cypress swamps, hill prairies, spots untouched by glaciers, and more. Admission is free.



**SAVE THE DATE!**

The Macon County Conservation Foundation is planning a new 5K run/walk for April 10! The Rock Springs Ramble will begin and end at the main parking lot at Rock Springs Conservation Area and utilize portions of the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail. Registration will be \$30/adult and \$5/child. In addition to being a great opportunity to exercise and explore nature, all participants will receive plenty of swag, including top finisher prizes. All proceeds will benefit Macon County's natural areas and wildlife. Learn more at MaconCountyConservation.org.



**Mini Camp Nature Kits**

There's much to explore in winter! Sprinkle some one-on-one family time into your season, 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 dates specified. Allow 3 to 7 days for us to process your kit order. We will call you when kits are ready for pick-up. Each kit includes materials for one participant. \$6/kit. Maximum of 24 kits available for each theme.

**DECEMBER KIT- JINGLE BELLS**

Pick-Up: December 1-23

Explore winter pastimes and traditions involving mittens and snow through hands-on activities and songs. Register online by December 21.

**JANUARY KIT- SNOW WHAT FUN**

Pick-Up: January 1-31

It's time to discover the weather! We will use our senses to investigate snow. Register online by January 27.

**FEBRUARY KIT- PUFFY CLOUDS**

Pick-Up: February 1-28

Our imaginations will run wild as we look to the sky and learn about clouds. Register online by February 24.



# 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-Wednesday, Friday, 8am-5pm

Thursday, 8am-8pm

Saturday, 9am-5pm

Sunday, 1-5pm

### TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

## Holidays & Closings

### OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Thursday, December 24, Christmas Eve

Friday, December 25, Christmas Day

Friday, January 1, New Year's Day

### NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Monday, January 18, MLK Day

Monday, February 15, Presidents' Day

## Music

The Macon County Conservation District hosts a number of groups that give free, live performances throughout the year. Due to COVID-19, these events are suspended for the winter. Check back for them in spring!

## Art

### NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Decatur Camera Club

January & February

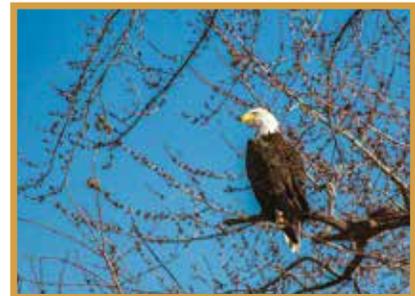
Enjoy a wide variety of photography, including scenes of trees, birds, landscapes, and more from talented local photographers.

### 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.



## Meetings

### MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Third Wednesday of each month, 5:30pm  
December 16, January 20, and February 17

### DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Until in-person meetings return, connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook.

## Connect with Us

Find out how you can make a difference  
217-423-7708  
[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.

**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.

## 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:

### MEET OUR EDUCATION ANIMALS

Thursdays, December 17 and January 21, 6pm

Our education department is made of more than just people! Join a naturalist to learn why we have education animals, tour their enclosures, and meet a few up close.

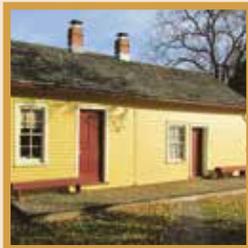
\$2/person. Register online by December 16 and January 20. Min/Max: 5/20.



### RESTORING HOMESTEAD PRAIRIE FARM: A LOOK BACK IN PHOTOS

Tuesday, January 5, 2pm; Thursday, January 14, 7pm; Sunday, January 24, 2pm; or Virtual Presentation on Thursday, January 28, 6:30pm

Homestead Prairie Farm has been a part of the Macon County Conservation District since the 1970s. Step back in time and see how this site was transformed into a museum by staff and volunteers. Choose a day and time to attend in person, or attend virtually via Zoom on January 28. Free. Register online no later than the day prior to the program. Min/Max: 5/25.



### DECATUR'S FIRST PHOTOGRAPHERS

Tuesday, February 2, 2pm; Thursday, February 11, 7pm; Sunday, February 21, 2pm; or Virtual Presentation on Thursday, February 25, 6:30pm

Several professional photographers have called Decatur home since the invention of photography before the Civil War. Join our Historic Sites Manager as we look for evidence of our city's first photographers, their time here, and any surviving works. Choose a day and time to attend in person, or attend virtually via Zoom on February 25. Free. Register online no later than the day prior to the program. Min/Max: 5/25.



### OWL PROWLS

Griswold Conservation Area  
Saturdays, February 6 and 20, 7-8:30pm

Join us to learn about these forest-dwelling nocturnal predators. We will discuss what makes them special, then take a hike to find some. Dress for the weather. Meet at the large pavilion at Griswold Conservation Area. \$2/person. Register online by February 5 and 19. Min/Max: 5/20.



# Happenings

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**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.

## December

### NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT

Saturday, December 19, 2pm

Use your camera to 'capture' clues on a hike and scavenger hunt. We will look for evidence of life, such as pinecones, deer tracks, and feathers. The person that finds the most items on our list wins a prize! Bring a camera or use the one on your cell phone. Free. Register online by December 18. Min/Max: 5/20.



### NATURE ORNAMENT CRAFT FOR ADULTS

Sunday, December 20, 2pm

Use nature-themed supplies to make a unique, homemade ornament to decorate your home this holiday season. All supplies provided. Free. Register online by December 17. Min/Max: 5/20.

## January

### NATIVE AMERICAN SKY LEGENDS

Saturday, January 2, 2pm

What did different Native American peoples see when they looked to the stars? Learn about constellations through stories and legends passed down through generations. Free. Register online by December 31. Min/Max: 5/20.



### NATIVE AMERICAN GAMES AND LIFESTYLES

Sunday, January 3, 2pm

What was life like for the Native Americans who inhabited Illinois over 200 years ago? Learn about their cultures, lifestyles, and experience the skill-building games they played. Free. Register online by December 31. Min/Max: 5/20.



### NIGHT HIKE

Saturday, January 9, 8pm

Use your senses to find your way through the woods. Discover what makes your eyes, ears, and nose work at night. Wear warm clothes. \$2/person. Register online by January 8. Min/Max: 5/20.

### WINTER BIRD HIKE

Saturday, January 16, 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 15. Min/Max: 5/20.

### WOLVES OR COYOTES?

Sunday, January 17, 2pm

Learn the difference between wolves and coyotes, see real pelts and skulls, and find out how common each one is in Illinois. Free. Register online by January 15. Min/Max: 5/20.

### FULL MOON HIKE

Thursday, January 28, 7pm

See the full moon 50x larger through our telescope, then take a short hike to view the forest illuminated by our only natural satellite. Dress for the weather. Free. Register online by January 27. Min/Max: 5/20.



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Register online at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org) by noon, unless otherwise noted.

## ANIMALS IN WINTER

Saturday, January 30, 2pm

Discover what different animals do when it gets cold outside! We will start with an indoor presentation, then take a short hike to look for signs of life. Dress warm. Free. Register online by January 29. Min/Max: 5/20.

## ALL ABOUT EAGLES

Sunday, January 31, 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 29. Min/Max: 5/20.



## ICE AGE MAMMALS OF THE MIDWEST

Sunday, February 28, 2pm

During the Ice Age, giant mammals dominated the Midwestern landscape. Discover what they were, where they went, and what the mammals of today have in common with them. Free. Register online by February 26. Min/Max: 5/20.

## CROSS COUNTRY SKI & SNOWSHOE

Whenever 4 or more inches of snow covers the ground, you can explore the trails on cross country skis or snowshoes.

You can rent 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.



February

## PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: FURRY MAMMALS

Sunday, February 7, 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 5. Min/Max: 5/20.



## WINTER STAR PARTY GRISWOLD CONSERVATION AREA

Saturday, February 27, 7pm

View the full moon, listen to space legends, and enjoy a warm cup of hot chocolate. Dress for the weather. Meet at the large pavilion at Griswold Conservation Area. Free. Register online by February 26. Min/Max: 5/20.

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

Karen Schneller, President

Nina Bendsen, Vice-President

David Castor, Secretary

Doug Johnson, Treasurer

Richie Wolf, Executive Director

Shane Ravellette, Operations Manager

Alysia Callison, Nature Center Manager

Pam Smith, Finance & H.R. Manager

### Contact Us

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

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



## ***Maple Syrup Programs***

**Saturday, Feb 13**

Hourly at 11am, 12pm, & 1pm  
at Rock Springs Nature Center  
3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur, IL

Free. More information inside.



Macon County  
Conservation District



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 at [MaconCountyConservation.org](http://MaconCountyConservation.org).