



Volume (2015), Issue 2

Winter 2015

Iowa DNR Private Lands Program

Management Corner

Do you own a farm or have a piece of recreational property? Ever have questions about how to manage the land you own for conservation purposes or wildlife? The Iowa DNR Private Lands Program may be a resource you can utilize in your county to get these questions answered! The PLP has been in existence now since the year 2000, when the three initial Private Lands Biologists were hired.

These first individuals were placed in the NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service) Area Offices located in Fairfield, Atlantic, and Ft. Dodge Iowa to assist the NRCS staff, other government agencies, and private landowners in sound wildlife management practices. Since that time, other biologist positions have been added in West Union and Sioux City along with several other DNR wildlife technicians to assist private land owners as well.

How can these folks be of assistance to private landowners? The first step might be to look at a copy of the PLP map located on the Iowa DNR Wildlife Bureau's web page and find out where your closest wildlife individual is located, and then give them a call! If your county does not have a PLP staff person, please give the closest person to your county a call for some help!

How, you might ask, can these folks help you out? The first thing they will do is set up an appointment to meet you at your

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Private Lands Biologists can help plan your habitat management strategies – everything from controlled woodland burns to planting new trees.

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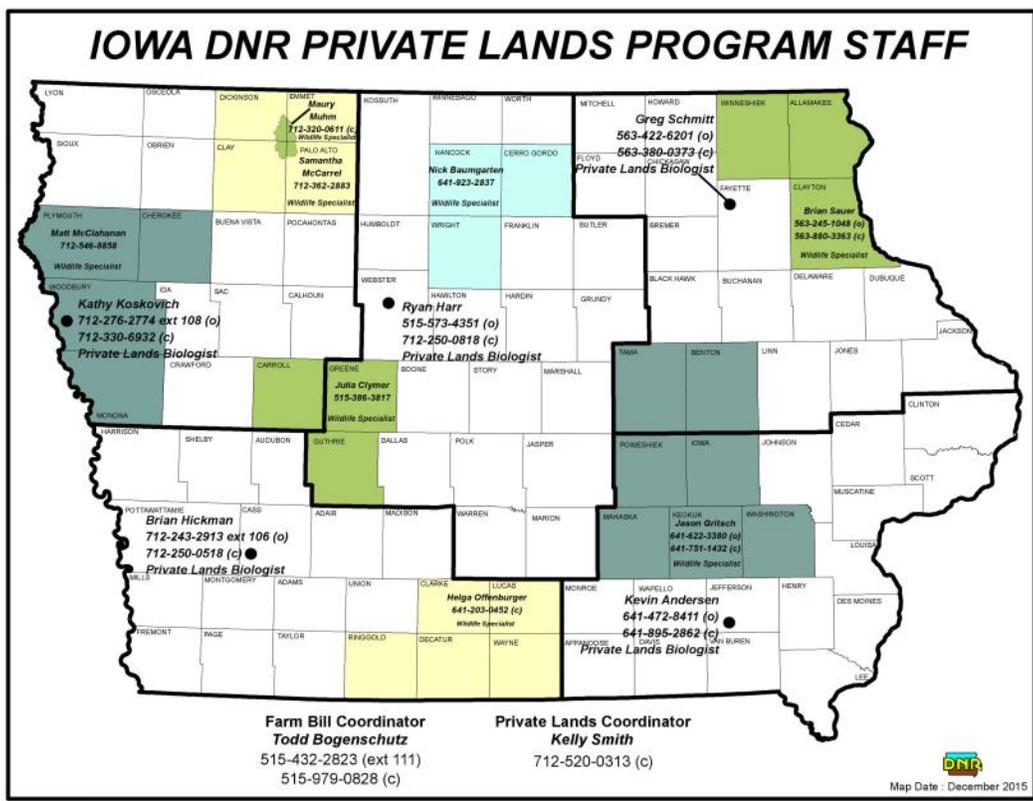
Iowa DNR Private Lands Program

Management Corner

property for a site visit. Then they will formulate a wildlife plan (with your input!), and also look for programs such as CRP (Conservation Reserve Program), or WRP (Wetland Reserve Program) that might be right for your piece of property. They may also try to find a cost share program such as REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection), EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentive Program), or use a DNR program to help you meet your wildlife or habitat goals! Finally, these folks will help you throughout the entire process, answering

questions about wildlife and habitat management, getting you enrolled in wildlife programs and helping you locate some possible cost share dollars to further your projects along. If you haven't heard of or utilized the Iowa DNR's Private Lands Program, please feel free to give any of the staff members a call!!

Kevin Anderson is a Private Lands Biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources



Iowa TWS Fall Workshop Recap

On September 29, 2015, 41 wildlife professionals from across Iowa gathered at Starr's Cave Nature Center for the annual Iowa TWS Fall Workshop. The topic was "Communication for Wildlife Professionals" and we were joined by Dr. J. Drew Lanham, Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Management at Clemson University. Dr. Lanham is primarily an avian ecologist by training, but is also a communicator extraordinaire. He has given many scientific and non-scientific presentations, appeared on a number of radio shows including National Public Radio and other local radio stations, and is an accomplished writer, both in the scientific and popular arenas. We were excited to have Dr. Lanham join us for an afternoon of learning how to effectively communicate something we all feel passionate about.



The workshop started just before lunch with an informative presentation by Dr. Julie Blanchong, Associate Professor and wildlife disease ecologist from Iowa State University, on White-Nose Syndrome in Iowa bats. Dr. Blanchong provided a wealth of information on the background and spread of this fungal disease and what she, as well as other researchers, are doing to monitor the disease and affected bat populations. Dr. Blanchong fielded many questions from attendees interested in learning more about this disease as it continues to appear in Iowa. We were very appreciate of Dr. Blanchong's presentation, particularly since she traveled more than 3 hours to give a 1-hour presentation!

After a quick lunch and exploration of the nearby caves by some, we launched into Dr. Lanham's presentation on effective communication for wildlife professionals. Dr. Lanham started by emphasizing the importance of communicating from "outside in". He walked attendees through five exercises that

helped identify their passion and issues that matter most to them, then using those issues as examples to work through tasks that resulted in effectively communicating the issues such as identifying your audience and choosing appropriate words. But, most of Dr. Lanham's tips on effective communication revolved around connecting "art and heart", using your passion to make issues you care about matter to others. A fun, exciting, and enlightening afternoon it was, and many attendees left inspired to impart messages that stimulate action. What better way to top off a workshop on effective communication of conservation issues? Why not visit the boyhood home of a conservation hero, Aldo Leopold. Attendees were treated to snacks and a tour of Aldo Leopold's boyhood home overlooking the Mississippi River in Burlington, Iowa. A moving experience it was for many and we are grateful to Steve Brower with the Leopold Landscape Alliance and residents of the Leopold home for allowing us the wonderful opportunity.

Many thanks to Dr. Julie Blanchong and Dr. Drew Lanham for their presentations. Also thanks to folks with the Des Moines County Conservation Board for hosting our workshop and to Bill Ohde and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for organizing the tour of the Leopold home in the evening. Another fun and successful workshop!

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Tyler Harms is an Assistant Scientist II in the Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology at Iowa State University and President of the Iowa Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Species Spotlight Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

The eastern cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) is a thriving game species in Iowa, although in recent decades hunters have often overlooked this source of wild food in pursuit of larger game. In the mid-20th century, when now popular game species such as deer and turkey were rare or nonexistent in most counties, cottontails made up a considerable portion of game harvested in Iowa, along with squirrels, ducks, and upland birds.

Cottontails are primarily found in brushy cover along forest edges and field fencerows, but are quite adaptable and good numbers can be seen among the lawns and shrubbery of small towns and



Eastern cottontails do not change color in winter as some other Lagomorphs do.

city suburbs. Often the daytime resting place for these rabbits is just a depression scratched out in a clump of dense grass or



Introduced pasture plants like white clover and Kentucky bluegrass now make up a large portion of the cottontail's food source.

brush pile. In winters with heavy snow they may use the shelter of woodchuck burrows. Most activity takes place at night or in early morning. If you happen to be bowhunting for deer in Iowa, you'll know you're about out of shooting light for the day when the cottontails (and white-footed mice) start to emerge from their daytime hiding spots.

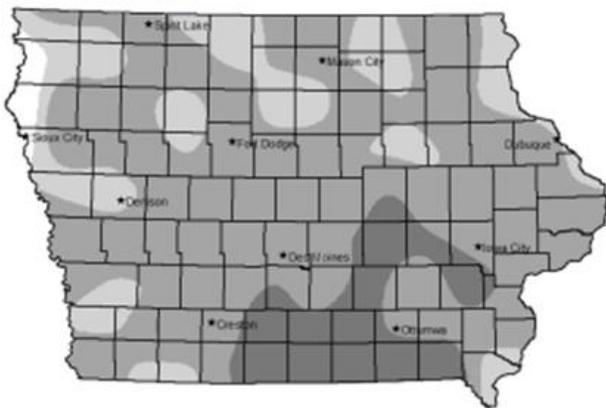
Eastern cottontails do not grow a white winter coat of fur like the white-tailed jackrabbit of northwestern and central Iowa. These smaller Lagomorphs (gnawing mammals with 2 sets of incisors in the upper jaw) remain a grizzled gray-brown color throughout the year. Some albino (white) or melanistic (black) individuals occur rarely.

Species Spotlight

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

Cottontails can be found statewide. In southern Iowa, where forest and pasture edges are plentiful, cottontail home range

COTTONTAIL



Results of the Iowa DNR's 2015 August Roadside Survey. Dark shading indicates higher population densities.

sizes vary from 1 to 5 acres, but in areas of poorer quality habitat they may cover as much as 15 acres in search of food. Cottontails eat a variety of vegetation types by prefer soft green plants. In the Midwest the introduced pasture species Kentucky bluegrass and white clover make up a significant portion of their diet. In winter native shrubs and tree seedlings provide buds, twigs and bark, but much of their food is still obtained from dormant grasses and forbs. In some extreme cases cottontails will even eat carrion, caterpillars, or snails.

Cottontails breed like rabbits. In Iowa mating usually starts for the year in February, with 4-5 young born about 28

days later. Cottontails tend to produce more young in years with high moisture during the growing season. Litters are produced throughout the spring and summer, and a single female may produce 35 young in one breeding season.

Rabbit populations continue to do well in Iowa, with the highest densities in the southeastern region of the state. The results of the Iowa DNR's 2015 August roadside survey indicated that numbers are statistically unchanged from 2014 and higher than the long-term average. Cottontail hunting season



Rabbit hunting season in Iowa extends well past the closing dates for deer and turkey, ending on February 28.

Species Spotlight Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

extends well past the closing dates for deer and turkey, ending on February 28. It might be time to dust off the .410 and grab the kids for day of hiking in the snow. Below is great rabbit recipe in case you have good luck.

Pete Eyheralde is an Assistant Professor of Biology at William Penn University.

Dutch Oven Rabbit



Ingredients

- 1 rabbit, skinned and quartered
- 1 onion
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled
- 3 fresh bay leaves or 6 dried
- 15 to 20 whole black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds (yellow or brown)
- salt and cracked black pepper
- 1 cup olive or canola oil
- Lemon wedges, for squeezing

Directions

1. Before cooking brine the rabbit overnight in a refrigerator. Mix 3 tablespoons salt and 1 tablespoon sugar in a bowl with just enough water to cover the meat.
2. Preheat oven to 300°F. Rinse the rabbit under cold running water.
3. In a heavy 4-quart or larger pot or a large Dutch oven, combine the rabbit with the onion, garlic, bay leaves, peppercorns, thyme, rosemary, mustard seeds, oil, and 1 tablespoon of salt. Cover the pot with a lid and transfer to the oven. Cook until the meat is tender but not falling apart, about 3 hours. Remove the pot from the oven.
4. Preheat a charcoal or gas grill or cast-iron grill pan until hot but not smoking. Lift the rabbit pieces out of the oil and season with pepper. Reserve the oil until serving time. Lightly sear the meat just long enough to char it.
5. Drizzle the meat with a little of the oil and squeeze a wedge of lemon over it.
6. Expect no leftovers!



Deer hunting with lead ammo poses risk for Bald Eagles on the Upper Mississippi

Research Corner



Large concentrations of Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) are found on the Upper Mississippi River each winter. While these birds typically hunt for fish and waterfowl during warmer months, they will also opportunistically scavenge food, including animal carcasses from road sides, dead hog remains spread along with manure over farm fields, and deer gut piles left in the field by hunters. The large numbers of eagles wintering along the Upper Mississippi, combined with large numbers of deer hunters in the area, created a unique opportunity to study the potential exposure of bald eagles to lead in hunter-killed deer carcasses and gut piles.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a study to determine the percentage of Bald Eagles found dead in the states of Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin that have lead in their systems, and to see if deer gut piles are a potential source of lead exposure to scavenging wildlife. In 2012, 58 dead eagles were examined to measure lead concentrations in livers, and to look for differences in lead exposure among ages and between sexes. Researchers also

x-rayed gut piles of 25 deer known to have been shot with lead ammunition, to calculate the percentage of gut piles containing lead fragments. Published in a 2014 *Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management* (*Bald Eagle Lead Exposure in the Upper Midwest*), Sarah Warner, Edward Britton, Drew Becker and Michael Coffey found that 60% of eagles studied had detectable lead concentrations, and 38% had concentrations within the lethal range for lead poisoning. There were no differences in lead levels between male and female eagles or among ages, but they did find that dead eagles with higher concentrations of lead in their livers had lower body weights and smaller fat reserves. X-rays revealed that 36% of deer gut piles contained lead fragments, ranging from 1 to 107 particles per gut pile.

Given the high exposure rates of eagles to lead from hunter-killed deer remains, the authors recommend the use of nontoxic ammunition, such as copper shotgun slugs or rifle bullets for deer hunting, to reduce a potential source of lead exposure to eagles and other scavenging wildlife.

Screech Owl color morphs vary across Iowa

Research Corner

Eastern Screech Owls come in two distinct flavors, red (rufous) and gray. It's thought that the red color in these owls is dominant, while the gray color morph is recessive. Only rarely can you find Screech Owls of intermediate red and gray coloration.

Across North America, most (70-80%) of Screech Owls at the center of the species' range are red, while at the edges of their range most (80-100%) Screech Owls are gray. Experimental studies have shown that gray morph owls are better able to survive low winter temperatures than red morph owls. Other studies have found that red Screech Owls are better camouflaged in the low light and vegetation associated with cloudy weather in humid climates. A recent study of Screech Owl color morph distribution in Iowa (a state in the northwestern part of the owl's range) was conducted by researchers at Luther College. Records of 519 Iowa screech owls from museums, wildlife rehabilitators, bird-banders, and bird watchers were used for the analysis.

Reporting in a 2014 *Wilson Journal of Ornithology* (*Distribution of color-morphs of the Eastern Screech-Owl in Iowa*), Tex Sordahl found that 41% of Iowa screech owls were red morphs, 55.7% were gray morphs, and 3.3% were inter-



Red and gray color morphs of the Eastern Screech Owl

mediates. 45% of males and 58% of females were red. Other studies have also found that female owls are more likely than males to be red. Greater numbers of red morph owls were located in eastern Iowa than in western Iowa, but the ratio of red to gray owls was the same from north to south in the state. This suggests that natural selection of Screech Owl color morphs in Iowa is influenced more by precipitation than by temperature. Based on records dating 1880–2003, red Screech Owls were more common in the early 20th century than at present.

**Research
Corner**

**Driftless prairie butterflies
threatened by habitat alterations**

Between 1986 and 1990, driftless area naturalist John Nehnevaj collected 345 butterflies from 13 hill prairies and a fen in Allamakee County, Iowa. The collection tallied 69 species, and 14 of these butterflies are now listed in Iowa as species of greatest conservation need. In Nehnevaj's original collection you can find 41 ottoe skippers (*Hesperia ottoe*), a species that until recently was thought to be extirpated from the state. Today many of these remnant prairie communities in north east Iowa are threatened by invading eastern red cedar trees (*Juniperus virginiana*), as well as frac sand mining operations.

In the summer of 2013, researchers from Luther College set out to re-survey these areas to see which butterfly species were still present and how population sizes compared to those from 25 years ago. Four of the original hillside prairies were not surveyed because they had become completely covered by red cedars.

Publishing in a 2014 Journal, *The Great Lakes Entomologist (Butterflies (Lepidoptera) on Hill Prairies of Allamakee County, Iowa: A Comparison of the Late 1980s With 2013)*, Nicole Powers



Great spangled fritillary on pale purple coneflower

and Kirk Larsen reported observations of 2,860 butterflies of 58 species. The great spangled fritillary (*Speyeria cybele*) was the most commonly found butterfly in the 2013 survey. Thirty four ottoe skippers (i.e. not extirpated) were found on 6 of the hill prairie sites. A total count of 80 butterfly species were observed in the 2 combined studies, with 47 species in common between the late 1980s and 2013. Eleven species were found in 2013 that had not been collected in the original survey, but 22 species collected by Nehnevaj were not seen in 2013. Encroaching red cedars have reduced the size of hill prairies by an average of 55.4% at the study sites since the 1980s.

The authors recommend maintaining and enhancing butterfly habitat on hillside prairies through limited burning (so as not to torch all the butterfly eggs), brush cutting, light grazing, mowing or spot herbicide applications. Not removing half the bluff side to remove frac sand helps butterfly populations too.



Ottoe skippers on pale purple coneflower

Pete Eyheralde is an Assistant Professor of Biology at William Penn University.

Iowa Chapter of The Wildlife Society Fall Business Meeting Minutes

September 29th, 2015 **Starr's Cave Nature Center, Burlington**
Meeting Attendance: 30 Start Time: 4:20 pm End Time: 4:58 pm

Call to Order – Tyler Harms, President

OFFICER REPORTS

Secretary: Curt Kemmerer

Gave the meeting minutes from the 2015 Winter Meeting held at Quality Inn & Suites in Ames.

Stephanie Shepherd motioned to approve the 2015 Winter Meeting Minutes. Mike Griffin second. Motion carried.

Treasurer: Curt Kemmerer

Gave the Treasurer's report from 28 February 2015 through 29 September 2015

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit Committee: Travis Russell-Chair

Tyler Harms reported that Don Pfeiffer has stepped down as chair and Travis Russell has assumed chairmanship of the committee. Tyler reported that an audit was conducted on 8/14/15. Don Pfeiffer conducted the audit and found all financial records to be in order.

Awards Committee: Stephanie Shepherd-Chair

Stephanie asked the group to think of folks to nominate for an award. She also asked the group to consider serving on the committee.

Conservation Review Committee: Matt Dollison-Chair

Matt reported that he was asked to serve on the Conservation Affairs Network for the North-Central Section of TWS.

Education and Information Committee: Pete Eyheralde-Chair

Pete led a brief discussion on creating a listserv for the Chapter. He discussed the details and benefits of a listserv. He also mentioned the Chapter's communication plan concept. He also asked for input for the next newsletter.

Membership Committee: Dusten Paulus-Chair

Tyler Harms reported that Dusten Paulus is again planning on attending the CCB Winterfest meeting in January and is looking for ideas and volunteers for a presentation at the event.

Resolutions and Public Statements: Brain Sauer-Chair

Tyler Harms shared that there is nothing to report at this time.

Nominations and Elections: Terry Haindfield

Terry put out a call for volunteers to run for elected offices on the executive committee.

OLD BUSINESS

Lead Ammunition Statement (Terry Haindfield)

Terry informed the group that he intends to have more to report by the winter meeting

Commercial Turtle Harvest Statement (Tyler Harms)

Tyler reported that a draft is nearly ready to be sent out to the membership for comments. He hopes that the final draft will be ready for the legislative session. He mentioned that we have reached out to AFS for their support on the statement, and that we are awaiting their response.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tyler Harms announced the details of the Chapter Communication Plan. He described details of what it is and why we need it. The plan consists of 2 parts – internal & external communication. The committees are just getting started, but the plan will be out when it comes together.

Tyler Harms announced details surrounding the upcoming meeting with DNR leadership regarding their Depredation Program, including background on why TWS got involved in the issue. He asked for any other volunteers to represent the Chapter at the meeting.

Announcement of upcoming winter meeting on February 17-18, 2016 in Ames.

Karen Kinkead made a motion to adjourn. Bruce Ehresman second. Motion carried.

Meeting Adjourned – 4:58 pm

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- **The Stewardship Network 2016 Science, Practice & Art of Restoring Native Ecosystems** , 15-16 January 2016, East Lansing MI. For more information go to www.stewardshipnetwork.org
- **Iowa Association of County Conservation Board Employees (IACCBE) Winterfest**, 19-21 January 2016. Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center, Waterloo, Iowa. For registration and more information, www.mycountyparks.com/Info/WINTERFEST.aspx.
- **Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference**, 24 - 27 January 2016 at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For registration and other information, visit www.midwestfw.org
- **Iowa Chapter of The Wildlife Society Winter Meeting**, 17-18 February 2016, Ames, Iowa Stay tuned for details!
- **National Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic**, February 19- 21 2016, Kansas City Convention Center, Kansas City, MO For more information, visit www.pheasantsforever.org/Pheasant-Fest.aspx



**We're also
online!
Check out
Iowa TWS
at
iowatws.org**

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[2015-2016 Iowa Chapter The Wildlife Society Education and Information Committee Members](#)

Pete Eyheralde (Chair)
Vince Evelsizer
Molly Gillespie
Shannon Hansel
Tyler Harms
Andy Kellner
Jessica Manken