

# Earthtones

Winter 2012

## Winter Weight

In the vernacular of one of my kindergarten teachers, our “marshmallows” are getting bigger.

During the State Theatre renovation, I had the opportunity to converse with the manager Dick. One thing he mentioned was the re-design included less seating. Why? Because the new seats would be bigger. Why? To accommodate the new average size of, uh, “marshmallows” (aka our hind ends).

This isn't new. I recall ages ago, news on a stadium renovation included less seating also for the same reason. Americans are steadily becoming larger, on average.

Now, I'm not going to go into all the hoopla about obesity, its issues, causes, or even the growing problem among children. Rather, what I want to talk about is how winter can help and hinder.

I first began teaching in Northern Minnesota during the longest, coldest, and snowiest winter on record. The facility was residential and most school groups stayed for three days, learning various nature and recreational topics. Being Minnesota, most students had the apparel to dress appropriately for three feet of snow and below zero temps.

With the exception of the coldest week (-50 degrees!), I was outside several times a day, sometimes for up to 6 hours (not consecutively). I ate like a horse, with food piled high on my plate and still lost weight. At the same



time, I was never more fit. I could grab a 6th grader stuck in the snow and pull him upright while on snowshoes. I loved it.

Now, fifteen years in southeast Iowa has lowered my cold threshold and my age has me grimacing at lifting 6th graders (including my own, who weighs little more than a stick).

And if I, like the rest of us, am not careful, winter is the perfect time to actually gain weight.

If we go back not too far, it makes sense. Climate control and sedentary lifestyles are relatively new. Before that, we were chopping wood for wood stoves and fire places to keep warm and making our calls of nature outside—in the bare cold (sorry, I couldn't resist).

Keeping our body warm requires energy. The colder it is, the more our bodies need to work to keep our temps at a steady 98.6 degrees. The energy for this comes from the food we eat. Our bodies, thus, are adapted to crave extra fuel/food as temps drop in order to keep up with the extra difference in outside and internal temperatures.

So, today's lifestyles creates a double problem: our bodies want to eat more at this time of year, though we no longer need it; and for most of us, winter is a time of less activity. Perfect conditions for weight gain.

What's the solution? Pay more attention to what we eat at this time of year. Exercise. Spend more time outdoors, letting our bodies work off our excess fuel. (See the back page on ideas for the latter.)

*By Pamela Holz*

## *True Albino Buck Enjoyed for Four Years*

Over the past four years, the southwestern corner of Washington County has been keeping a secret, a true albino buck. Recently, I had the pleasure of watching a few minute video of this buck during the summer of what turned out to be the last year of its life. The person running the camera did an excellent job of approaching him downwind as he stood out in a bean field. The width of rack was impressive, as was his white coat and pink eyes. Watching the video, it was apparent he was hearing the person holding the camera, but was having difficulty in seeing him. Without a doubt, the entire video would not have happened if the buck could have smelled him. (See a photo on the news board in the Center).

There is a distinct difference between being white and being albino. Many, many animals fare very well being white, especially during the winter in regions with snow. Perhaps one of the neatest natural tricks is that performed by our local weasels, turning brown in the summer and white in the winter.

Being a true albino means that the animal's body lacks pigment. This leads to a number of issues, the most notable being poor eyesight. As you may well imagine, poor eyesight in the natural world can have a profoundly negative impact on an animal's long term survival!

In the case of this particular deer, it does seem likely that its vision was less than most wild deer. The fact is that it very likely survived as long as it did because it is protected by Iowa law, and because the people in the neighborhood were also protecting it. In a way, this is also the fate of all deer in Iowa, with humans determining if and where they live.

Deer populations have been hotly debated here in Washington County for the past several years, with

sportsmen being the primary management tool available to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. According to the DNR Deer Biologists, their goal was to have hunters harvest does and bring the population back to the 1993 levels, a goal that was reached this year in Washington County. A large percentage of our hunters have stated their agreement, yet there remains a number of groups with significant political and economic power that will continue to pressure decisions for even lower deer numbers.

Washington County is full of outdoor opportunities as well as fascinating and unique individuals of wildlife. I bet many of you will identify with knowing this particular deer, and I hope that this article gives you fond memories of your own interaction with it.

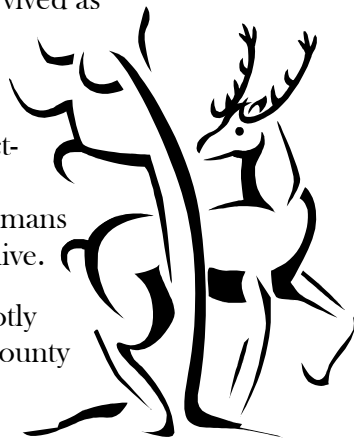
*By Steve Anderson*

### *White Deer Trivia*

The chances of being albino in deer is very rare, 1 in 20,000. For birds, as an example, it may be as high as 1 in every 2,000. An individual may be fully albino (pink-eyed), partially (pale-eyed) or piebald, with a mix of normal and white coloration.

In northern Wisconsin, an albino deer herd (consisting of the different ranges of albinism as well as normal coloration) has existed since before settlement. Both explorer journals and Native American legends speak of this herd. More recently, a photography book showcased these unique animals. While science is at a loss to explain the herd, it may be that the white color is advantageous during the extra long northern winters.

Near Seneca, NY, a white, but not albino, herd of deer is claimed to be the largest in the world. However, they currently remain protected in a fenced-in old army depot, which helped create the artificial selection of white. Unfortunately, this herd's location is now threatened by development.



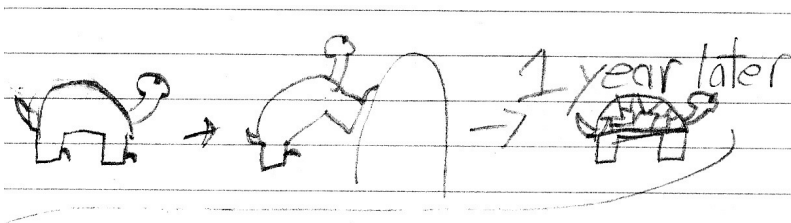
## Mythmakers

The following stories were created by the Wellman 5th grade class during a session on Native American myths. The students learned about how the word “myth” in this sense refers to a sacred story and the importance of such stories in the lives of Native Americans. After hearing an example of a Native American myth, the students were divided into groups and challenged to come up with their own myth. Here are three of the results.

### Why Turtle has a Shell

Once there was a turtle who wanted a way to defend himself. He carved a shell out of rock, with his claws. It took him over a year. When he was done and all the animals saw, they were jealous.

*By Matthew, Kaleb, and Chazlee*



### Why Squirrel Lives in a Tree

A long time ago, a Squirrel had a problem. His home kept getting flooded by the river. He did not like it because all the big bass would try to eat him. It happened 20 times. He could not figure out what to do. So he decided to throw nuts at the fish. The next time his home got flooded, he would throw nuts at that fish. So when it happened, it did not work. So the nuts did not work so he was not protected. When he saw a bird in a tree, he wondered what it would be like to live in a tree. So when the water went down, he decided to live in a tree. So he could be protected from flood water. And he built a home in a tree.

*By Evan and Josiah*

### Why Rivers Never Stay Still

One day, oceans, lakes and ponds wanted to go somewhere. So they asked the Great Spirit how to move. The Great Spirit said, “How would you like to move?” “We would like to move by land,” said the Lakes. “We want to move by air,” said the Oceans. The Ponds said, “We don’t really care.” The Oceans and Lakes were arguing because they couldn’t agree. Then the Great Spirit got fed up with this and yelled, “ENOUGH!” All three had become quiet. “You can all get your ways! Lakes, part of you can flow by land into the Oceans. Oceans, you can rise up into the sky. These will be called rivers for the Lakes and clouds for the Oceans.”



A year later, the Lakes said, “I want to stop flowing out of my home.” “But you got what you wanted,” said the Great Spirit. The Ponds and Oceans didn’t care. And the Rivers will never stop flowing.

*By Blake and Nate*



### Farewell

In December, Mike Davis provided notice to us that he will not be seeking a second term on the Washington County Conservation Board due to other commitments. All of the staff and board members continue to consider Mike a great friend and community leader.

## Winter Calendar

The Washington County Conservation Board meets the second Wednesday of each month. Meetings are held at the Conservation Education Center in Marr Park at 4:30 p.m.

The Conservation Education Center will be closed for the following holidays: January 2 and February 20.

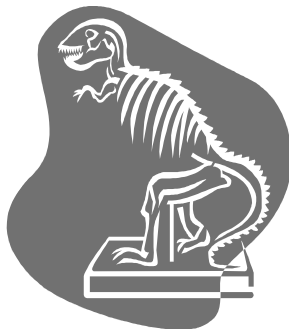


Sat., Jan. 21 1:00 p.m. Marr Park  
**Ice Fishing and Hunting Clinic**

This fun family event will feature a range of indoor and outdoor activities. Co-sponsored with Pheasants Forever, participants will ice fish, partake in a computer hunting simulation, learn about gun safety and the winter lifestyles of fish and other animals, and much more. If ice is unsafe, the indoor activities will occur as planned.

Sat., Feb. 25 1:00 p.m. Conservation Center  
**Dino-mite**

Learn all about fossils. Are they just dinosaur bones? What are the different ways they can form? What are some common fossils around here? We'll excavate some fake dinosaur fossils and other items. Finally, create your own "fossil" to take home. Great family activity.



March 27 & 29 6:00–9:00 p.m. Marr Park  
Sat., March 31 8:00–Noon  
**Hunter Safety Course**

Pre-registration is required. Register online at: [www.iowadnr.gov/training](http://www.iowadnr.gov/training) under Hunter Education classes. Or call the Center at 319/657-2400. Must attend all three sessions and be 11 years or older.

### Looking Ahead

The **Prairie Night Burn** will be coming in early April. We'll be burning the south prairie, near the nature center. Further details will be available once spring arrives and we can plan with the weather.

### Washington County Conservation Board

**Office:** 319/657-2400

**Fax:** 319/657-2500

**E-mail:** [wccb@iowatelecom.net](mailto:wccb@iowatelecom.net)

**Website:**  
[co.washington.ia.us/departments/conservation](http://co.washington.ia.us/departments/conservation)

**Members:** Lyle Moen  
Liz Kaufman  
Craig Capps  
Bill Nickell  
Mike Davis

**Staff:** Steve Anderson, Exec. Director  
Bob Bellmer, Park Ranger  
Pamela Holz, Naturalist  
Fritz Engel, Maint. Technician  
Kathy Dolan, Center Coordinator

Washington County Conservation Board meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at the Conservation Education Center. Visitors are welcome.

*The WCCB is an Equal Opportunity Employer.*

If you would like a copy of this newsletter in larger print, please contact our office.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

## *Thank Yous*

- ⇒ John Beam for pallets for the range
- ⇒ Duane Dunbar for various electrical supplies
- ⇒ Frank Libe for \$500 memorial donation for Center feeder
- ⇒ Bill and Mildred Wilson for \$250 Adopt a Feeder program for the Bird Blind
- ⇒ Dan Pulz for buckskin

## *Wildlife in Winter*

Wildlife adapt to the changes of the weather in many ways. Some hibernate, unable either to be active in the cold or to find their food. Some choose avoidance, and migrate south. Others, like some insects, avoid the cold in a less preferred way: death. These species winter over in egg form.

But many species remain active year-round. How do they do it?

A few, like the weasel Steve mentioned, turn white to blend in with the snow. Some, like bobcats and rabbits, have large feet like snowshoes to run atop the snow with ease. Still others take advantage of snow's insulating properties and hide beneath it. Voles, or meadow mice, create tunnels under the snow, not only because it's warmer but also it gives them protection from predators.

Wildlife also spend more time foraging, looking for food as well as eating. The colder the temperature, the more they need to eat to maintain their body temperature. Fatty foods work well for them. But if winter goes overlong, then desperation foods, such as bark, may be eaten.

Winter can be unpredictable. No snow and frigid temps can be as bad as deep snow. Wildlife have to be tough to make it.

## *Halloween Hike Helpers*

Our Halloween Hike + Prairie Exhibit Grand Opening event was a huge success. We had 200 people attend this year and learn about the importance of Iowa prairie, particularly about the different kinds of animals found there and their adaptations. Thanks to everyone that helped make this a success!

### Donations

HyVee	Wal-Mart	Fareway
KFC	Subway	Pizza Hut
County Line Mart/Kleins		Sacha
Noon Kiwanis		Backyard candle
Sass Family Farms		Duane Hammen
Steve Anderson		Bob Bellmer

### Volunteers

Ed and Meredith Raber	Bob Shepard
Alena Neygebauer	Addie Pacha
Don and Marge Kline	Olivia Pacha
Jennine Wolf	Jim Blakeney
Jeff Koepp	Chad Dolan
Craig and Ila Capps	Patty Elliot
Carson Bean	Bailey Anderson
Cassie Bellmer	Linda Holz
Lyle Moen and Nancy Rash	
Barb, Bob and Austin Donkersloot	
Samantha and Anna Holz	



*Addie Pacha as the Badger at the Underground Challenge*

PRESORTED STANDARD  
U.S. Postage  
**Paid**  
Permit No. 43  
Keota, IA 52248

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD  
2943 HIGHWAY 92  
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

**Return Service Requested**

***Center Winter Hours***  
Monday, Thursday & Friday  
8:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

Saturday  
8:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

Sunday  
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

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***Spend Time Outside this Winter***

Getting outside is not only a great way to keep physically fit, but will also help you mentally, emotionally, and socially as well (fight the winter blahs).

Do the low temperatures deter you? The more you go out, the more acclimatized (or used to the cold) your body will be. Just take it one step at a time. Second, dress appropriately, in layers with wool or synthetics (cotton is poor for winter).

Need something to do? Here are some ideas:

- \* Ice Fishing—learn about it at our clinic on January 21. Be sure to know how to tell when ice is safe.
- \* Snow shoeing or cross country skiing—an excellent way to see nature, get exercise, and enjoy yourself. Introductory snow shoes can be borrowed from the Conservation Education Center.



- \* Tracking—after a new snowfall, go out and follow animal tracks. Discover who made them, what they did, and where they are going.
- \* Explore—nature is different in winter. You can see farther in the woods without all the leaves in the way and often you can move quieter, perfect for seeing wildlife.
- \* Winter astronomy—the air is clearer in winter and thus, more stars can be seen. Look for Jupiter as well as bright stars of Sirius, Rigel, and orange Betelgeuse (the latter two on opposite sides of Orion). The Pleiades are also up.
- \* Bird Blind—birds are visiting the blind at Marr Park. Visit and see for yourself!
- \* Just take a walk. In town, in the country, it doesn't matter.

