



Prairie Islander

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Shake Off Winter with a Dose of Nature

Ashton Dukeman

Celebrate the end of cabin fever because spring is here! Color and sunshine will finally be coming back into our lives as plants start to bud and bloom and the sun banishes those winter-gray skies. What better way to shake off the winter blues than by getting outdoors in less than four layers of thermal gear.

During the winter months, when many of us are confined to our homes, screens become a go-to source of entertainment to pass the time. This habit can be hard to break once the weather starts to warm, often leading to less time outside experiencing the natural world. Here are just a few of the reasons why spring is a great time to power down the screens and get out for a nature break.

Time in nature is a fantastic way to help us improve our mental state. Excessive screen time, busy urban environments, and long hours in the office can leave us feeling overwhelmed, overstimulated, and fatigued. Time outdoors can help to slow and calm both the body and mind, easing mental blocks and tension. It can also help to reduce anxiety and stress levels. With the go-go-go pace of our lives, it's hard to find the time to just slow down and breathe.

Any time we are active, it's great for our physical being. Going for a hike, walk, bike, swim, or paddle increases your activity level and gets your heart pumping! Even a slow and steady walk along the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail will benefit you a lot more than a Netflix binge session (even though that does sound nice).

Whatever you choose to do, getting outside in the fresh air will be beneficial to your mind and body. Spring is the perfect time to get out and Explore Your Outdoors!



Winter cobwebs have you needing some inspiration on what to do outdoors? Here are some ideas that are great for solo or family adventures!

- Visit one of our five Conservation Areas for a spring walk. What flowers do you see that are starting to bloom? Are there some species of tree that are budding faster than others? What kind of animals can you spot?
- Plan a picnic at your favorite park or Conservation Area. You'll have a relaxing place to eat and trails to walk on after. Just remember to pack out what you pack in!
- Go for a bike ride. The Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail offers 3.74 miles of paved trail, you could even combine your picnic with a ride!
- Register for one of our family-friendly hike programs. Let one of our Naturalists lead you on a leisurely walk where you'll not only get outside and get some steps in, you'll learn some cool nature facts along the way.



A Spring Awakening

Alysia Callison

As the days get longer and the air warms, the natural world begins to buzz with signs of spring. One seasonal staple is the appearance of baby animals – new to the world, they often cause concern for well-meaning folks who find them in their yards, along roadsides, or in green spaces. So, what should you do if you find a baby animal?

- Leave it alone! Unless the animal is clearly injured or showing signs of distress, don't touch it. Oftentimes, the parents know where the baby is and will return to check on it. Relocating the baby could cause it to become truly orphaned, or you could accidentally injure the animal (or it could injure you!)
- If you think the baby has been orphaned, observe it for a period of time. Rabbits only return to the nest twice a day – usually early in the morning and evening – and they are very stealthy. Deer will leave fawns in one spot all day while they forage, then return to and move the baby in the evening. A baby animal's best chance at survival is with their parent(s) in the wild – so jumping to action, while well-intended, is not always the right answer.
- If it is clearly injured or distressed, call a local wildlife rehabilitator. The Macon County Conservation District is not permitted to rehabilitate wildlife, and we are not equipped to care for injured, sick, or abandoned animals. Organizations like the Illinois Raptor Center and the University of Illinois Wildlife Medical Clinic can provide advice and assistance when needed. To find a full list of wildlife rehabilitators in Illinois, visit this link: bit.ly/40w6mvs
- To learn more about spring babies and how to help (and when not to), visit the Orphaned Wildlife page from the Illinois Department of Natural Resource's Wildlife Illinois website here: bit.ly/3EdOjTa





Briefs



Join staff at Rock Springs Nature Center for a summer packed with fun, educational activities for ages 1-15.

Five camp options will be available this summer:

- **Earth Adventures:** Ages 6-12 hike, swim, canoe, and discover the world around them in this full-day, week-long nature camp with optional Before and After Child Care. \$150/camper each week.
- **Mini Camp:** Ages 1-5 explore Rock Springs Conservation Area with their adult buddies in this 1 hour-long camp. \$8/child each camp.
- **Adventure Club:** Ages 5-12 join in on Earth Adventures camp on Tuesday mornings. \$20/camper each day.
- **History Camp:** Ages 6-12 become history explorers in this half-day camp on Thursday mornings. \$20/camper each day.
- **X-treme Camp:** Ages 10-15 gear up for adventurous fun. \$35/camper for in-county camp days, \$60/camper for out-of-county camp days.

Online registration opens April 1. Find out more information and register at MaconCountyConservation.org.

CAMPGROUND:

The campground at Friends Creek Conservation Area will be opening for the season on May 2. The campground welcomes RV and tent camping, and includes flush toilets, showers, and a dump station. Daily fees are \$25 for 30 amp service, and \$30 for 50 amp service. A large, group campsite is also available for \$25 per night for up to 25 people, and \$1 per night for each additional person up to 60 people. New to the campground are three, non-



electric tent camping spots for \$20 per day. For more information, visit MaconCountyConservation.org. All campground reservations are taken online.

The picnic pavilions at Rock Springs, Friends Creek, Fort Daniel, and Griswold are also open for the season. Reserve a pavilion for \$35/day to host your own outdoor party or event at MaconCountyConservation.org

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.

NATURE IN VIDEO GAMES

Wednesday, March 12, 10am-12pm

Some of our favorite video games draw inspiration from real-world sources, from Minecraft to Pokémon. Learn how the games compare to their real-world counterparts. Register online by March 10.



GARDENING

Wednesday, April 9, 10am-12pm

Gardening teaches valuable lessons in responsibility, science, and patience, while offering the rewarding experience of growing your own food. Learn how to start a garden and get some seeds to take home. Register online by April 7.



COLORS IN NATURE

Wednesday, May 14, 10am-12pm

Discover the colors of nature, from grassy greens to crimson leaves. Register online by May 12.



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

Sunday, April 20, Easter

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, April 18, Good Friday

Monday, May 26, Memorial Day

Macon County
Conservation District



Open Houses

BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturday, May 3, 1-4pm

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

GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

Sundays, March 30, April 27, and May 25, 2-4pm

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

Connect with Us

Follow us on social media!
MaconCountyConservation.org



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. To see their complete schedule, go to Facebook.com/GroundSquirrels

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

David Castor, President

Gussie Reed, 1st Vice President

Mark Allen, Treasurer

Michael Sams, Secretary

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Jerry Culp, Executive Director

Philip Julius, Director of Operations

Alysia Callison, Director of Program Services

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Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708
mccd@MaconCountyConservation.org
MaconCountyConservation.org

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

Wednesdays, March 26, April 16, & May 21, 5:30pm

DECATUR AREA AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Connect with Decatur Audubon on Facebook.

ROCK SPRINGS QUILTERS

Wednesdays, 9-11am



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.

Music

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

DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm

March 1, 15, & 29

April 12 & 26

May 10 & 24



ACOUSTIC JAM SESSION

Sundays, March 9, April 13, and May 11, 2-4pm

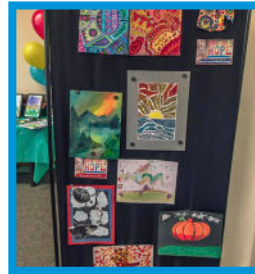
Art

GALLERY OF HOPE

March & April

North and South Galleries and Exhibit Hall

View over 200 pieces of artwork created by local children in partnership with Heritage Behavioral Health Center.



CELESTINO RUFFINI

North Gallery

May & June

Artist Celestino Ruffini uses many mediums to capture the beauty of nature, including coal, paint, pen, and wood.



JANE KOENIG

South Gallery

May & June

View the beauty of nature just outside your backdoor as captured by local photographer Jane P. Koenig.



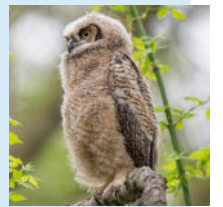
Mini Camps

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

FLOOFY OWLS

Tuesday, March 4 & Thursday, March 6, 9:30-10:30am

Learn about these exceptional night-time predators and listen to the sounds they make.



FULL, BRIGHT MOON

Tuesday, March 18 & Thursday, March 20, 9:30-10:30am

Discover why the moon looks different throughout the month, and find out how it glows.



RUMBLING STORMS

Tuesday, April 1 & Thursday, April 3, 9:30-10:30am

Find out why springtime brings rumbly, thundering storms.



COLORFUL SPRING FLOWERS

Tuesday, April 15 & Thursday, April 17, 9:30-10:30am

Take a walk to look for wildflowers and see what colors they come in.



Does your high school student need volunteer hours? Ask us about our youth volunteer opportunities! Email our Volunteer Coordinator, Jenny Garver, at JGarver@MaconCountyConservation.org



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.

March

OWL PROWL

Sand Creek Conservation Area
Saturday, March 8, 8pm

Learn about these forest-dwelling, nocturnal predators. Discuss what makes owls special while we walk in search of some. Dress for the weather. Meet at the entrance to Sand Creek Conservation Area. \$5/person. Register online by March 7. Min/Max: 5/30.



WOMEN IN CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Saturday, March 15, 10am

For Women's History Month, learn about some of the remarkable women who have shaped the fields of conservation and forestry, and how you can help continue their legacies. Then, meet a panel of local women who have made significant contributions in our own community for a Q&A session. Free. No registration required.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: HOPPING RABBITS

Sunday, March 16, 2pm

The rabbits we see at the pet store are a bit different than our native rabbit, the Eastern Cottontail! Learn about some of these differences through a craft, story, and an encounter with our very own rabbit educational ambassador, Basil. \$2/child. Register online by March 14. Min/Max: 5/20.



NIGHT HIKE

Saturday, March 22, 8pm

How do our senses compensate when our eyesight is limited? Find out through fun, sensory activities on a night hike along the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail. Dress for the weather. \$5/person. Register online by March 21. Min/Max: 5/30.

CELEBRATE WORLD METEOROLOGICAL DAY

Sunday, March 23, 2pm

Join a naturalist to learn about Illinois weather and the impact it can have on local ecosystems. Free. Register online by March 21. Min/Max: 5/30.

VAN TRIP TO THE BLACK HAWK STATE HISTORIC SITE

Sunday, March 30, 7am-6:30pm

Take a trip to the Black Hawk State Historic Site in Rock Island for a bit of nature and history. When we arrive, one of our naturalists will lead the group on a walk along one of the trails at the on-site Nature Preserve. In the afternoon, visit the Hauberg Museum to learn about the history of the Sauk and Meskwaki people. At 2pm, award-winning Ojibwa author Kim Sigafus will lead a presentation called Singing Bird and the Importance of Native American Women in Illinois History. Lunch is on your own; we will visit a nearby restaurant at noon. \$40/person. Register online by March 28. Min/Max: 4/10.

April

VAN TRIP TO HISTORIC HOMES IN SPRINGFIELD

Tuesday, April 8, 9am-4pm

Join us for a trip to Springfield to visit two unique historic homes in Springfield, IL. First, we will head to the Dana-Thomas House – a home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright at the turn of the 20th century. After a guided tour, we'll grab lunch nearby before visiting the Edwards Place Historic Home for a private tour and historic craft, where we will make our own Victorian Cards. This Italianate mansion was a social hub during Lincoln's time in Springfield, and is home to the 'courting couch' on which he and Mary Todd sat during their courtship. Lunch is on your own, all other costs are covered. \$30/person. Register online by April 1. Min/Max: 5/11.





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.

ALL AGES CRAFT: POKÉMON TERRARIUMS

Saturday, April 12, 2pm

What habitats would some of our favorite Pocket Monsters live in if they were real? Learn about the natural history of animals that inspired different Pokémon, like aquatic turtles, frogs, and lizards, then build a unique terrarium for your very own mini figure. \$15/person. Register online by April 10. Min/Max: 4/16.



EGG HUNT

Saturday, April 19, 10-11:30am

From tiny, bright blue eggs to expertly camouflaged speckled eggs, birds lay a variety of different types of eggs. Learn about some of our local birds and the eggs they lay, then go on a walk to hunt for hidden eggs! There will be a special prize for the person who finds the Golden Egg. Don't forget to bring your basket! Free. Register online by April 18. Min/Max: 3/40.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: SPROUTING SEEDS

Sunday, April 20, 2pm

Learn about seeds and how they grow. Children will do a craft, hear a story, take a walk outside to see what the plants are up to, and plant a seed to take home. \$2/child. Register online by April 18. Min/Max: 5/20.

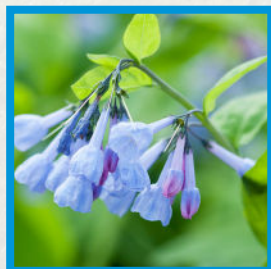
May

WILDFLOWER HIKE

Friends Creek Conservation Area

Saturday, May 3, 2pm

Venture into the forest to see what spring ephemerals are peeking out. Species we may hope to find include spring beauties, Virginia bluebells, trillium, and more. \$2/person. Register online by May 2. Min/Max: 5/30.



BIRD MIGRATION HIKE

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

Saturday, May 10, 8am

Join a naturalist to learn about spring migration and try to find and identify birds as they move through the forest. Meet at the pavilion at Fort Daniel Conservation Area. \$3/person. Register online by May 9. Min/Max: 5/30.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: NATURE ART

Sunday, May 18, 2pm

Use natural elements to create a masterpiece to take home. We will venture outside to collect supplies for our artwork. \$2/child. Register online by May 16. Min/Max: 5/20.

EXPLORING CAJUN CULTURE

Sunday, May 18, 2pm

Guest speaker Dan Guillory, Professor Emeritus of Millikin University, will present a program on Louisiana Cajun culture. Focusing on its music, language, and history, he will use maps, poems, stories, and music to share this distinct part of America. Growing up in a bilingual family, Guillory learned to speak Cajun French and is currently working on a book on this topic. Free. No registration required.



PADDLE BIG CREEK

Saturday, May 24, 10am-12pm

All equipment is provided for this leisurely exploration of a local waterway. Canoes and kayaks are available, and at least one adult is required per boat. Wear shoes and clothes that can get wet and be sure to wear sunscreen and bring a water bottle. Meet at Cannon Park on S. Baltimore Ave. \$25/boat. Register online by May 23. Min/Max: 4/10 boats.



Special Events



GALLERY OF HOPE OPEN HOUSE
Saturday, April 5, 1-4pm

Visit Rock Springs Nature Center to view artwork created by local children and thoughtfully presented by Heritage Behavioral Health Center. The pieces of art support conversations around mental health. While there, decorate a cupcake, create your own artwork, and engage in other family-friendly activities. Free. No registration required.

SANGAMON RIVER CLEANUP

Saturday, April 26, 10am-12pm

Rock Springs Conservation Area

Help clear trash from the banks of the Sangamon River to make it a safer and more beautiful place for wildlife and people. Dress to get dirty and bring your own gloves. Bags will be provided. Come by yourself or bring the whole family. Organized groups should call 217-423-7708 in advance. Co-sponsored by the Community Environmental Council. Register and meet at the Rock Springs Information Shelter.



FESTIVAL OF SPRING
Saturday, April 26,

Celebrate Earth Day and welcome spring with a day of outdoor family activities. In the morning, observe bird banding, go on a naturalist-led hike, or pitch in at the Sangamon River Cleanup. Then, in the afternoon enjoy wagon rides, canoeing, a scavenger hunt, a live bird show from the Illinois Raptor Center, tours of Homestead Prairie Farm, and much more. Learn what other organizations are doing in our community to protect water and wildlife. Co-sponsored by the Decatur Area Audubon Society. Canoeing \$3/person. All other activities are free. No registration required. Visit our website for a full lineup of activities and times, as well as organizations in attendance.

Special Events



ROCK SPRINGS RAMBLE 5K RUN/WALK

Saturday, May 17, 8am

The Macon County Conservation Foundation will be hosting their fifth annual Rock Springs Ramble this spring on Saturday, May 17. This race features a 5K, a 1-mile Fun Run/Walk, the Rock Springs Challenge, and a Kid's Fun Run. It will begin and end at the main parking lot at the Rock Springs Conservation Area and utilize portions of the Rock Springs-Fairview Bike Trail. Registration is \$35/runner for the 5k or 1-mile, \$65/runner for the Rock Springs Challenge, and \$10/child for the Kid's Fun Run. In addition to being a great opportunity to exercise and explore nature, participants will receive race swag, including top finisher prizes. All event proceeds will benefit Macon County's natural areas and wildlife. You can register or donate at RunSignup.com/RockSpringsRamble



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. Contact us at 217-423-7708 to schedule a workshop for your troop.

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





FESTIVAL of SPRING

Saturday, April 26
See inside for more details



Some of the most memorable moments can be found outside the classroom. 



Teachers, let us help you plan a field trip that will leave lasting memories, and inspire future stewards of nature.

Contact us today: 217.423.7708
MCCD@MaconCountyConservation.org 

REGISTER TODAY

FOR THE 2025 ROCK SPRINGS RAMBLE!



SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2025