



# Vermilion Conservationist

## Fall 2020

Forest Glen

Kennekuk

Lake Vermilion

Heron

### Nature is Continual and Dependable

By Lara Danzl, Education Supervisor



There are several moments in history that have a profound effect on our emotions and memories. I still remember details of what I was doing and how I felt on September 11, 2001. I believe the unfolding of events in March earlier this year with the COVID-19 pandemic will be another historical time that will remain in our memories for years to come.

I recall having discussions in early March with co-workers if it would be safe to host the Maple Syrup Open House scheduled for March 17. As one of our most popular events, we expect attendance of 500 to 900 people coming out to enjoy pancakes and sausage with pure Forest Glen maple syrup. Out of caution, the event was canceled. Once the stay-at-home order was issued, I remember having a team meeting in Executive Director Jamie Pasquale's office discussing the best plan of action to keep the parks open. While we did not close any of the VCCD parks, operations were modified as a precaution to keep the staff and public safe.

All our education programs, including Outdoor School and Conservation Olympics, were canceled for the spring. I've worked with the Conservation District for 22 years; not being able to teach and share my love of nature with students and others made me feel very out of place. Not knowing how much COVID-19 would affect Vermilion County, my family and friends, and my children now at home with remote learning added to the uncertainties I was feeling.

I am proud the VCCD parks have remained open throughout the duration of this pandemic and equally proud of the park visitors that were respectful of our parks during those early months. I'm incredibly grateful to have my job with the district as others have not been as fortunate in retaining employment. But there was still an emotional toll felt with all the unknowns that were to possibly come.

One thing that helped ease the uncertainties was the consistency I found in nature.

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## Vermilion Conservationist

This newsletter is a publication of the Vermilion County Conservation District. It covers news, programs, and natural history information of interest to residents of Vermilion County. It is free upon request from:

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## Director's Dateline

Jamie Pasquale

Several months into the COVID situation, the VCCD is still adapting to the rules and regulations that are in place. Our offices are open normal hours and can be reached by phone or walk-up window. Other VCCD buildings and facilities have restrictions and limited access. Despite some of the limited access and building closures, all of the VCCD parks have remained open. Keeping the parks open was essential for us and our visitors.

All of our programs and events for the year were canceled. Now that the regulations allow for some smaller sized groups the education staff is planning to offer some new or modified programs. These programs will certainly be smaller in size and have restrictions and safety precautions in place, but it is a step in the right direction to get back to offering programs and events.

Overall, the VCCD revenues have held steady despite the uncertainty. We were fortunate that our final budget approval happens in May and we were able to adjust our budget and proceed cautiously. Shelter and building reservation revenues have seen a large decrease in revenue due to the many cancellations from group size restrictions. Camping has returned to normal, but the loss of revenue during the campground closure in the spring had an impact. On a positive side, lake passes for Lake Vermilion and Lake Mingo saw an increase this year.

The VCCD was able to accomplish some needed repairs and upgrades despite our reduced staff and uncertain revenues. A dozen buildings had new roofs installed, most of the buildings were at Forest Glen and had received hail damage in 2019. A new septic system at the LJK Visitor Center was installed, this was funded by the Lorna J. Konsis Foundation. The Family campgrounds at Forest Glen have a new septic system and dump station for RV users. Some roads at Kennekuk were resurfaced. Kennekuk's White Oak Barn has new indoor restrooms, a kitchen, and a covered patio added on; this was funded by a private donation. Lake Vermilion had some new sections of concrete poured near the boat ramp as well.

**F**or up-to-date information on programs, events, nature news, and more; be sure to visit [www.vccd.org](http://www.vccd.org) and like us on our Facebook page under "Vermilion County Conservation District."

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# Nature is Continual and Dependable

Continued from front cover

While we didn't know when restaurants would be able to reopen, we knew when the spring wildflowers would begin to bloom. We may not have known if events would be able to go on as planned, but the hummingbirds and warblers returned from their winter locations during the spring migration right on schedule.

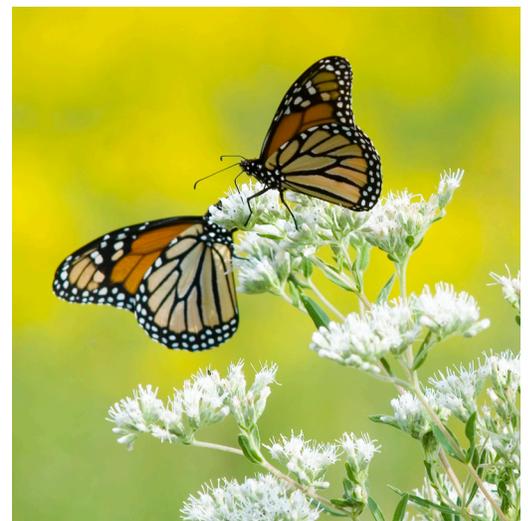
I took great comfort in observing the dependable progression of the spring rituals found in trees, flowers, insects, birds, and more throughout the spring months. Nature was there for me. It was continual and dependable when other aspects of my life were not.

There are numerous studies that show the healing impact nature can have on people. Studies have shown being in the great outdoors can not only make us feel better emotionally but it can also lower our blood pressure and stress hormones, reduce the effects on our nervous system, enhance our immune system functions, increase our self-esteem, and reduce anxiety. A comprehensive and updated list of those studies can be found at <https://www.childrenandnature.org/> in their Research Library link.

While an important goal of Outdoor School is to educate students about Vermilion County habitats and wildlife, I also want students to understand the benefits of simply being in nature. To achieve this, we will stop somewhere along a trail and I will ask the students to spread out and find a comfortable place to lean against a tree or sit on a fallen log, rock, or mossy area. Once comfortable, we take five minutes to just relax and think about anything we'd like or simply watch the sunlight filter through the leaves above, watch the tree limbs bend with the wind, smell the earth beneath us, observe an ant crawling over the plant next to us, or hear a bird call in the distance. After five minutes, I share that sometimes we can use the outdoors as a place to observe nature, relax, and breathe. If you're not able to visit the parks on a regular basis, finding a place in your backyard under a shade tree or in the grass to watch the clouds above and feel the sun on your face works just as well.

The first few months at the beginning of the stay-at-home order, there were large numbers of people at the parks. A regular Tuesday in April seemed to have as many visitors as a Saturday in June. People were enjoying picnic lunches, hiking the trails, riding bikes, or just sitting at picnic tables having conversations with the family under the shade of an oak tree. It was great, a vast majority of the visitors were very respectful of the COVID-guidelines and we did not see a large increase in litter or vandalism.

Now that our lives are slowly returning to 'normal,' I hope we remember to return to nature when we have anxieties and uncertainties in our lives. I hope we remember nature is here for us, it's continual and dependable when other aspects of our lives are not.



# VCCD welcomes Jennifer Krainock to the Education Department

With the retirement of Charlie Rhoden last year, several internal staff position changes occurred with VCCD staff. Previously, Nick Jeurissen was on the education team but is now VCCD Land Management and Facilities Maintenance, which opened up a position in the education department. Jennifer Krainock accepted the position back in early March just before the stay-at-home order was issued. While the first several months on the job have been quite different than what was explained during the interview process, Jennifer has stepped up helping with trail maintenance and with the development of the "Summer Camp in a Bag" kits provided in place of our summer camp programs. She also has started a Junior Naturalist Club with a monthly e-newsletter sharing facts and challenges about native Vermilion County Wildlife.

Jennifer was previously employed with the Danville School District #118, so she brings a formal classroom teacher perspective to the VCCD education programs. She is currently developing curriculum correlated to Illinois Learning Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards to assist teachers during hybrid remote learning. Future plans are to also create a Youth Conservation Council for area high school students to plan, budget, and complete a service project at the VCCD parks.

Jennifer states, "Nature based activities were a large part of my upbringing when I was a child. I was always taught to respect and appreciate the outdoors. I attended many of the VCCD programs as a child myself, so I could not be more excited for the opportunity to join the education staff at VCCD. I look forward to helping bring conservation education to the area youth."

Jennifer and her three children, reside in Catlin, IL. They enjoy spending time outdoors together riding bikes, hiking, and camping.



Jennifer Krainock participating in an activity at the IDNR ENTICE Tree Squirrel Workshop

## THE COLORS OF FALL



### GREEN: CHLOROPHYLL

Chlorophyll is responsible for helping trees and plants turn sunlight into sugar used for food.

### RED: ANTHOCYANIN

Unlike other colors that always exist in the leaves, anthocyanin is produced as the chlorophyll breaks down.



### ORANGE: CAROTENE

Carotenes starts to break down at the same time as chlorophyll but at a much slower rate.

### YELLOW - XANTHOPHYLL

Xanthophyll also breaks down slower than chlorophyll which allows it to last longer into the autumn months.



## WHY DO LEAVES CHANGE COLOR IN THE FALL?

Leaves actually don't change color. The colorful pigments we see in the fall are actually always there in the leaves. During the summer months, the green chlorophyll is so busy and active turning solar energy into food, it covers the other colors found in the leaves.

Shorter days and cooler temperatures signal the trees to stop producing chlorophyll, the green pigment found in leaves. Once the green chlorophyll begins to break down and disappear, the other colors that were always present in the leaves start to appear.

The brightest colors are seen when late summer is dry, with the beginning of autumn having bright sunny days and cool nights. An early freeze or drought conditions can cause leaves to dry out before they can reveal their colors.

# From the Garden

by Susan Biggs Warner  
Environmental Educator, Naturalist



Bunker Hill Historic Area Herb Garden

The herb garden at Kennekuk's Bunker Hill Historic Area is still going strong as this is being written, but the season is quickly coming to an end. Soon the snow will fly and we will be tucked away planning for next year's garden.

With fall, we all start to have a renewed interest in cooking. Cilantro and basil will be replaced for rosemary and sage. This only makes sense, given that rosemary and sage can be dried and stored for the dark months of winter. With a little luck, some gardeners bring their rosemary plants in for the winter and they become fragrant little Christmas trees. Sage on the other hand puts up a good fight and stays viable through the winter.

The following recipe is an old one. Here at the Conservation District, we used to make herb bread and sell them and this was a favorite. Now you can make it at home, most of us need to have a project to keep us home right now and out of harm's way. I hope this doesn't contribute to your "COVID pounds".

## RAISED CORNBREAD

2 cups warm water	1 cup cornmeal
1 tablespoon sugar	1 tablespoon salt
1 packet dry yeast	Chopped sage, to taste
1 cup frozen corn kernels, thawed and drained	
4 ¼ cups unbleached all-purpose flour	
Additional cornmeal	

Mix 2 cups warm water, sugar, and yeast in a large bowl of a heavy-duty mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Let stand until foamy, about 10 minutes.

Add 2 ½ cups flour to yeast mixture and beat on low speed until well blended, about 5 minutes. Cover the bowl with plastic and a clean kitchen towel. Let rise in a warm draft-free area until doubled in volume (mixture will be very spongy), about 45 minutes.

Stir down yeast and flour mixture. Stir in 1 ¾ cups flour, 1 cup cornmeal, and salt. Turn dough out onto a generously floured surface and knead until the dough is smooth and elastic, adding more flour if the dough is sticky for about 5 minutes. Knead in chopped sage and corn. Lightly oil a large bowl. Add dough to the bowl. Turn to coat. Cover bowl with a clean kitchen towel. Let dough rise in a warm draft-free place until doubled in volume, about 1 hour.

Punch down dough. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead briefly until smooth. Divide dough in half. Roll each piece into a 10-inch long by 2½ inch wide log.

Sprinkle a large baking sheet with additional cornmeal. Transfer loaves to a prepared baking sheet. Using a small sharp knife, cut 4 diagonal slashes about ½ inch deep into the top of each loaf. Cover loaves with a towel and let rise until almost doubled, about 45 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Bake loaves until crust is very crisp and loaves sound hollow when tapped on bottom, about 50 minutes. Cool on racks.

THIS RECIPE WAS ADAPTED FROM ONE BY Bon Appétit

# Bob, Bob-White

by Cole Craft, Lake Vermilion/Heron County Park Superintendent and VCCD Hunting Manager

I experienced an unusual sighting while on my normal route to work a couple of mornings back that got me rather excited. As I was driving down a country road just outside of Danville, I noticed six small figures standing on the road looking at me while I approached. When I slowed down, I realized that these figures were actually Bob-White Quail. I came to a complete stop and they scurried off into a cornfield. While I was stopped there, I took a quick glance around and noticed that the habitat was perfect for these birds, another thing that I rarely see around here these days. Today I am going to discuss things we can do in hopes of bringing a good population of Bob-White Quail back to life here in Vermilion County.



Northern Bobwhite, Male  
Photo © Linda Chuttum, Macaulay Library

The property where I saw these Bob-White Quail was nothing more than an old pasture field that hasn't been used in ages. A fence row surrounded the pasture field and connected to another fence row that zig-zagged north for many miles dividing agricultural property lines. The one thing this field lacked that other pastures have is fescue. Fescue grows really thick and stays green just about year-round. However, quail cannot walk through a thick patch of fescue. It's too dense and doesn't make for very good nesting habitat. This old pasture field was nothing but warm-season grasses and forbs. Imagine walking through the woods. You don't want to have to walk through a wall of honeysuckle, autumn olive, or saplings. You want to walk where there are tall trees casting a shadow over the whole forest and nothing that is going to require you to duck down or push through a thicket of trees. This is what the quail want but in a warm-season grass and forb prairie. Think overhead cover with nothing but tall skinny stems and bare ground to walk on.

I'm not going to get into fence rows and why we shouldn't remove them because I have a lot to say about that. So, let's just get into how we can make our field better suited for quail because what is good for quail is good for many different types of species. The pollinator plots that were implemented by the state are nice because the seed mix they planted was full of forbs, flowers, and some grasses. However, the more you mow these plots the more prevalent the grasses will become, and before you know it the field will be back to a fescue patch. Burning these fields will prove to be more beneficial but I know sometimes it just can't be done. Let's go through some easy steps to get you on track for a prime quail prairie.

## **Step 1: Remove all the fescue and any invasive species present.**

This is not as easy of a task as it may sound. The first thing we are going to do is come in Late Fall/Early Spring and spray Glyphosate (Round-up). We do it at this time because fescue is about the only thing that is still green and growing.

## **Step 2: Burn, disc, or just see what happens!**

Most people prefer burning off the dead fescue instead of discing. Discing stirs up the seed bank and you never know what kind of plant species are going to pop-up afterward. You can always just wait to see what types of species start shooting up in the spring during the growing season. Spraying glyphosate shouldn't damage the seeds, if they have buried themselves a little, that were dropped in the fall. The seeds should still grow the following spring.

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# Bob, Bob-White

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## Step 3: Planting Seed

Going with a good pollinator seed mix is always a great choice, just make sure you read the label. Some companies have species in their mix that you don't want. If you prefer to make your own mix that is fine as well. Just make sure to go heavy on the forbs and flowers and you can throw in things like switchgrass. Most types of clump grasses are preferred for quail habitat. Clump grasses stay in their little group as opposed to other grasses that grow thick all throughout. Quail can still navigate through clumps of grass with no problem.

A lot of this information is just scratching the surface for quality habitat. If you would like to get more information you can contact the VCCD at (217)442-1691.

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## "Friends of the District" Thank you!

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and Mike & Kathleen Swiersz

In Memory of Ruth Campbell – Dawn Campbell, Bev Brazas, Jack & Cathy Van Camp, Bill & Becky Shannon,  
and Uncle Ben & Aunt Peg

Donations - Greta Clendenen and family - rope bed, feather tick, quilt, and doll for BHHA Atwood Home  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles McGee - two antique quilt frames for Pioneer Homestead and Atwood Home

In Appreciation for Keeping Parks Open - Forest Glen - Jo Ann Thompson and Bill Sakotnik

Monetary Donations: Educational Programming and Kickapoo Rail Trail - Kiwanis Noon Club of Danville  
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### JOIN THE VERMILION COUNTY CONSERVATION FOUNDATION MEMBERSHIP ROSTER FOR 2021

Join the VCCF in making a difference in your community and commit to all natural and wildlife resource conservation activities. Currently, the Foundation is working with the VCCD on Beech Grove Trail and Site Improvement and the Kickapoo Rail Trail Phase II construction. The first phase of the trail is complete and open to the public.

Each Year the Foundation helps fund mailing of this newsletter, printing cost of Outdoor School Workbooks for over 1000 students, and the cost of equipment needed to keep your Vermilion County Parks looking good.

Your VCCF membership at any level entitles you to a 10% discount on District rentals and user fees like camping, boat decals and VCCD hunting fees, and expires each December 31. Choose a membership today that is right for you!

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- \$100 Patron
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