

Summer 2026

Vermilion Conservationist

Forest Glen Kennekuk Lake Vermilion Heron Kickapoo Rail Trail



In This Issue

New Kennekuk Playground!	2
Watch for Ticks!	3
Moths and Butterflies	4
The Compass Plant	5
Pack the Park!	6
Upcoming Events	7

41st Conservation Olympics held at Forest Glen on May 8!

Seven Vermilion County schools participated in Olympic-themed events at Forest Glen Preserve on Friday, May 8, 2026. Sixth grade students from Bismarck-Henning Junior High, Judith Giacomini (Westville), Mary Miller Junior High (Georgetown), Oakwood, Potomac, Salt Fork, and Schlarman Academy competed in the "Go Wild" Obstacle Course, Scavenger Hunt, Nature Race, Wildlife Scramble, Nature Hike, Environmental Relay Race, Animal Game, Class Feud, and Environmental Report.

This year, Oakwood's Team Boothe took first place, followed by Schlarman Academy, with third place going to Mary Miller Junior High.

The VCCD appreciates the teachers that prepare their students for the day, as well as the volunteers that help make the day a success!



An overhead view of the Class Feud Competition from 1987.





Thank you VCCF!

Vermilion Conservationist

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

VCCD, 22296 Henning Road
Danville, IL 61834
vccd@vccd.org

VCCD Executive Director
Jamie Pasquale

Editor
Lara Darling

Newsletter Contributors

Jamie Pasquale
Brenna Karcher
Kim Fox
Lara Danzl
Racheal Anderson
Cole Craft
Nick Jeurissen
Rhonda Orndorff

Board of Directors

Randy Johnson
Jessica Augustson
Todd Harris
Cristin O'Shaughnessy
Jared Lowe

The Vermilion County Conservation District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, or handicap in admission to or treatment or employment with the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois Constitution, Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the US Constitution.



With funding from the Vermilion County Conservation Foundation, four new playgrounds are ready for park visitors to enjoy. Two can be found at Forest Glen Preserve, one by the Edgewood Center and the second by the campgrounds. At Kennekuk County Park, a playground can be found near the White Oak Barn with the newest now complete at Horseshoe Pond (photos above).

Michael Courson, long-time VCCD Volunteer and VCCF Board Member, spearheaded these playground projects. Michael passed away on February 19, 2026. We are grateful for Michael's dedication and passion for our VCCD parks.

Learn how you can support VCCD programs and projects by joining the Vermilion County Conservation Foundation on page 6.

TICKS...

HIKERS BEWARE!

Lara Darling, Environmental Educator



It's an uncomfortable but important discussion to have if you spend any time outdoors: how to protect yourself from ticks since they can transmit diseases to humans and our pets.

When I started working for the VCCD in 1998, there were two main species of ticks I would find while hiking with school groups. Today, I can find three species on a regular basis.



The most common tick in our area is the **Wood Tick**, also known as the Dog Tick, shown left. This tick can transmit Rocky Mountain spotted

fever, tularemia, and possibly ehrlichiosis to humans. I do not believe the transmission rates of these diseases are high in our area however.

The **Blacklegged Tick**, also known as the Deer Tick, is shown at the top of this page. This is the tick that can carry Lyme disease.

In recent years, I have discovered the **Lone Star Tick**, right. This one has been spreading north as our climate changes. This tick's saliva can introduce the alpha-gal molecule into the host's body, causing the immune system to overreact when eating red meat.



Common tick myths are that they fly, jump, or fall out of trees. In fact, ticks are found near the ground in leaf litter or grassy areas waiting for a host animal to pass. Using their front two legs, the tick will grab ahold of the host and crawl up the body until finding a suitable location to start feeding on blood. For humans, this could be our legs, back, stomach, armpits, back of the neck, or hair.

Bug repellent sprays containing DEET can help deter ticks. Permethrin is a chemical that can be sprayed on your clothes or shoes - not skin! - to repel ticks as well. Baseball caps will not keep ticks off your head; these tiny, flat arachnids can crawl under that hat.

The quicker you find ticks, the better. Ticks need to be attached for approximately 24-hours before their saliva - and any possible diseases - is introduced into our bodies. Within one hour of outdoor time, check your clothes, skin, and hair. A sticky-lint roller over your clothes and skin can help remove small nymphs that are hard to see. Tweezers may also be used for those that have started to attach. Remember to grab the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible and pull upward with steady, even pressure, avoiding twisting or squeezing the body. Taking a shower can also help as you may be able to feel them when washing. Any I find are trapped in scotch tape and thrown in the trash. I carry a roll of tape in my backpack every time I hike.

Do not let the threat of ticks stop you from exploring outdoors - prevention and awareness are key!

NATURALIST'S NOTES

MOTHS AND BUTTERFLIES:

A SYMBOL OF GROWTH AND CHANGE

Brenna Karcher, Environmental Educator



Butterflies are widely appreciated as brightly colored insects that alight on flowers and brighten our day. They collect nectar and pollen and help fertilize flowers so we can see new blooms each season. Culturally, they can symbolize beauty, youth, rejuvenation, transformation, and joy.

Moths are sometimes depicted as dull or plain cousins to the butterfly, other times they are connected to death. We often consider them pests when they are found in stored clothing or food items. Yet, there are other cultures that recognize them as messengers or representatives of the duality of light and darkness. Their colors are not always dull, rather they demonstrate many of the same array of colors that butterflies do.

There are more than 12,000 known species of moths and butterflies in the U.S. They start life in an egg, which is laid on or near a food source. For the well-known Monarch, that can only be the stunning (and poisonous) milkweed plant. Isabella Tiger Moths are much more general, laying eggs on a variety of plant leaves; including maple and elm trees, grasses, sunflowers, clovers.



The larvae are generally called caterpillars. They can be brightly colored to indicate danger to their predators or display simple camouflage techniques to hide. As they grow, they fatten up on food such as grains and leaves, then prepare to pupate.

Pupation is the stage that most often is considered an inspiring symbol of metamorphosis. During this time, a cocoon or chrysalis is formed. Within this structure the insect's larval body breaks down, wings form, and their adult body is finalized. At the end of this process, the adult crawls or chews their way out of their pupal casing. The wings are stretched for the first time, and they rest while the wing form stabilizes before taking first flight.

Adult life for moths and butterflies can be short or long, depending on the species. The Luna Moth, right, only spends 7-10 days as a large, bright



green, adult moth. The Mourning Cloak butterfly may be the longest-lived butterfly, living 10-11 months in their adult stage.

I see these unique insect groups as a bridge to the wild world of insects. They both catch the imagination, have incredible representations in art, and are parts of stories from visitors when they share magical moments in the wild. Next time you see a butterfly or moth, pause to see its' colors and shape and maybe try to learn more about where they go, what flowers they prefer, and appreciate their uniqueness.



COMPASS PLANT

PROVIDING DIRECTION

Lara Darling, Environmental Educator

The tallgrass prairie comes alive with color in the summer. You can find me hiking the forests during the spring, but I'm pulled to the prairie in the summer. One plant directing me there is the Compass Plant, *Silphium laciniatum*.

A member of the sunflower family, the Compass Plant thrives in the tallgrass prairie, growing 3 - 8 feet tall. Numerous yellow flowers can be found on the central stem with mature plants having as many as 30, which bloom during mid-summer for about 1½ months.

The flowers are favored by long-tongued bees, like bumblebees and miner bees, and butterflies; while the seeds are favored by birds and small mammals.

It's 10- to 15-foot taproot can reach underground water reserves helping it thrive in our hot Illinois summers and drought periods. The rare Prairie Cicada nymphs feed on the large taproot before emerging as flying adults.



Compass Plants have been known to live 50 - 100 years. Biologists believe this is due to their slow growth cycle and massive taproot.

The large heavily-lobed leaves have a tendency to orient themselves in a north-south direction. There is a theory that pioneers may have used the leaves to provide direction through the tallgrass prairie, giving the plant its common name. This north-south orienteering, however, is to minimize direct sunlight on the leaves which helps reduce water loss in the leaves.



The leaves have a rough sandpaper texture that deterred large grazing mammals, like bison, from eating.

While the vast majority of our Illinois tallgrass prairie is gone, Compass Plant can be found at both Forest Glen and Kennekuk.

When you're visiting the parks this summer, take a moment to notice the Compass Plant and remember this quote from Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, "What a thousand acres of *Silphiums* looked like when they tickled the bellies of the buffalo is a question never again to be answered, and perhaps not even asked."

Visit the VCCD

Contact and Address Information

For up-to-date information on programs, nature news, events, and more; be sure to visit <https://vccd.org> and follow us on Facebook. You can also sign up for our free electronic newsletters by sending your name and email to vccd@vccd.org.

You can contact us at vccd@vccd.org or:

Kennekuk County Park
22296 Henning Road
Danville, IL 61834
217-442-1691

Forest Glen Preserve
20301 E. 900 North Road
Westville, IL 61883
217-662-2142

Location Addresses:

Heron County Park
15494 West Newell Road
Danville, IL 61834

Lake Vermilion County Park
2607 Denmark Road
Danville, IL 61834

Kickapoo Rail Trail, Oakwood Parking Access
201 E South Main Street
Oakwood, IL 61858

Support the



Your Vermilion County Conservation Foundation membership will help conserve and protect natural areas, support environmental education, and maintain public access with the VCCD.

Choose a level of giving:

- LIFE \$1000 (payable in up to 4 installments)
- PATRON \$100
- SUPPORTING \$50
- REGULAR \$25

Mail your check or money order to:

VCCF, 22296 Henning Road
Danville, IL, 61834

Or Scan the QR Code to join through the website:

<https://www.vccfoundation.info/>



at Kennekuk County Park featuring Crozier & Co.

Come out to Kennekuk County Park for the 2nd **PACK the PARK** concert

Car Cruise-In from 4pm to 6pm

Food vendors onsite serving food from 4pm to 8pm

There is no entry fee, but donations are welcomed at the entrance to the park.

All proceeds will be used for outdoor education at Kennekuk & Forest Glen

In Bloom will kick it off at 4:00 pm with Crozier & Co. to follow at 7:00 pm

August 8th

Scan here for more information





UPCOMING EVENTS

June - early September 2026

For Up-to-Date Information, visit VCCD.org

Vermilion County Conservation Foundation Meeting

June 12, 9am, Kennekuk Education Center
Public Invited

VCCD Board of Trustees Meeting

June 17, 4:30pm, Gannett Center, Forest Glen
Public Invited

IDNR ENTICE Workshop: Illinois Dragonflies

June 27, 9am-3pm, Kennekuk Education Center
Take part in field work and lab studies as we discuss the identification, life history, and behaviors of these fascinating invertebrates, both as aquatic nymphs and as adults.

Pre-registration of \$11 required at
<https://enticeworkshops.com/>

Full Moon Guided Hike

June 27, 8:30-9:30pm, Forest Glen Preserve
Meet at Pine Knoll Shelter as we explore the park after dark.

Pre-registration of \$5/person required at
<https://moontower2026.eventbrite.com>

BHHA, Ed Center at Kennekuk, Ed Center and Pioneer Cabin at Forest Glen Open to Public

July 5, 1-4pm

Free, No Registration Required

VCCD Board of Trustees Meeting

July 15, 4:30pm, Kennekuk Education Center
Public Invited

Stardew Valley IRL - Summer in the Sun

July 18, 2-4pm, Pioneer Cabin, Forest Glen
Stardew Valley has the best fishing game- so we'll talk real-life fishing tips and tricks try our hand will willow poles and fishing lures.

Pre-Registration required at
https://summer_sun.eventbrite.com
Free with optional \$10 activity

BHHA, Ed Center at Kennekuk, Ed Center and Pioneer Cabin at Forest Glen Open to Public

August 2, 1-4pm

Free, No Registration Required

VCCF Pack the Park Event

Bunker Hill Historic Area, Kennekuk

August 8, 4pm

Free, See page 6 for more information

Vermilion County Conservation Foundation Meeting

August 14, 9am, Kennekuk Education Center
Public Invited

VCCD Board of Trustees Meeting

August 19, 4:30pm, Kennekuk Education Center
Public Invited

Moonlight Glow Paddle on Lake Mingo

August 29, 8-10pm, Lake Mingo, Kennekuk
Nights can be totally still or loud and full of life; we will use the light of the full moon and glow sticks to discover Lake Mingo after dark.

Pre-registration and fee required at
<https://Glowpaddle26.eventbrite.com>

BHHA, Ed Center at Kennekuk, Ed Center and Pioneer Cabin at Forest Glen Open to Public

September 6, 1-4pm

Free, No Registration Required

River to Rail Ride

September 12, Kennekuk County Park
Bike the scenic roads of Vermilion County with SAG-supported routes!

Pre-registration and fee required at
<https://RtoR2026.eventbrite.com>

Natural Dye Day

September 12, 10am-3pm, Pioneer Cabin at Forest Glen Preserve

Free, No Registration Required

ISSN-1094-9615

Vermilion County Conservation District
22296 Henning Road
Danville, IL 61834

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Danville, IL
Permit No. 839

Printed on Recycled Paper



Catch the blooms of

Prairie Blazing Star

Favored by long-tongued bees, butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds, this native prairie plant blooms late June to July and thrives in tallgrass prairies.

Learn more about butterflies inside on page 4.

