

BioBlitz & Breeding Bird Survey at Prairie Creek Recreation Area

Friends of Jackson County Conservation, Jessica Wagner, Maquoketa, Iowa

Friends of Jackson County Conservation hosted three BioBlitz events at a newly acquired county park, Prairie Creek Recreation Area, to learn more about the flora and fauna at the park. Professor David Shealer from Loras College conducted point count surveys at Prairie Creek in 2014 to get a baseline of bird species on this property. He returned three times this year to conduct the point count survey. The information gathered from the bioblitzes and surveys are being used when considering park development.

The main goal of this project is to provide baseline information about the breeding bird community of the recreation area prior to restoration efforts that are intended to be phased in gradually over a span of five to ten years. The breeding bird survey conducted last year summer (2014) and this summer (2015) will be benchmarks to gauge the success of the restoration efforts to improve habitat quality and diversity for resident and migrant songbirds that rely on prairie, woodland, and riparian habitats for nesting.

The goal of the BioBlitz events were to discover, inventory, map and learn about the animals, plant and fungi species in the park; to provide scientists and the public an opportunity to do fieldwork together; and to educate and increase public awareness about the importance of biodiversity and Iowa's natural resources. Professor Shealer and Dubuque Audubon members attended the three BioBlitz events and led participants on "bird walks" to document the species at the park. All of our goals were accomplished.

IOU funds were used to pay mileage and camping costs for our bird specialists when they came for the BioBlitz events and to conduct the point count surveys.

The breeding bird survey and bioblitz surveys will provide an inventory of the avifauna currently using the various habitats at Prairie Creek Recreation Area. Subsequent surveys will allow us to learn more about these bird species in relation to changes in the landscape as different conservation land practices are incorporated. Assessment of habitat restoration efforts often are conducted after the fact. This project represents a unique opportunity to conduct a longitudinal study of land bird habitat use prior to and during restoration efforts. The data collected from this survey and the surveys that will be conducted in the future will give us more knowledge about these Iowa bird species, their population levels and how they will fluctuate in response to the changes in the landscape and their distribution in the area being surveyed. This information can then be compared to other similar studies to determine long term impacts of implementing conservation practices on the landscape. Conducting some of the bird surveys at the public bioblitz events allowed us to educate the public about Iowa's bird species and to help them connect the importance of quality habitat for birds and other wildlife.