

IOWA OUTDOORS

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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[Electronic photos available]

RICE LAKE PROVIDES UNLIKELY HOME FOR NORTH IOWA WALLEYES

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

LAKE MILLS---Wary, scrappy, and elusive the walleye is regarded as a prized gamefish wherever it occurs. In Iowa, peak populations are most frequently associated with big waters --- the Iowa Great Lakes, the Mississippi river, or the larger of our interior streams.

Mention walleyes to a north central Iowa angler, for example, and the conversation will immediately turn to Clear Lake --- one the state's premier walleye fisheries. But those anglers who have been around the block a time or two will tell you that there is always more than one way to skin a cat, and more than one place to hook a walleye.

Retired Lake Mills math teacher, Frank Banwart is a good example. On a sunny late autumn day you're likely to find him sitting at the end of a dock on Winnebago County's Rice Lake quietly keeping watch on a pair of plastic bobbers, patiently waiting for a plump walleye to take the bait.

At first glance, this shallow expanse of water seems a highly unlikely candidate

for a day of walleye fishing. Most famous for being the current home of Iowa's largest goose flock, Rice Lake often attracts upward of 40,000 Canadas during fall migration.

During recent years, however, Rice Lake has also become a fishery of some repute. Most anglers journey here in hopes of bagging hefty yellow perch, bullheads, or predacious northern pike. But the big stir around Rice Lake lately has been something well beyond the ordinary as anglers encounter unexpected catches of sleek adult walleyes.

As an able participant of Rice Lake's fishing fraternity, Banwart, 74, has been making the most of the unexpected opportunities.

"I've been getting a few crappies [eight and nine-inchers] and some small bullheads lately, but mostly I've been catching walleyes," reports Banwart.

"It's been fun," he smiles. "Last week, I brought my twelve-year-old grandson down here and he caught four walleyes --- a 17-incher, a 20-incher, a 22 ½-incher, and a 23."

"I didn't catch a thing," Banwart laughed.

Banwart adds that he releases nearly all of the walleyes he catches. "I just don't want to keep any fish that are full of eggs," he said.

Although the DNR conducts annual maintenance stockings of northern pike into Rice Lake, the initial source of this fall's walleye fest remains a mystery. DNR fisheries personnel are quick to note that Rice Lake has no official status as an Iowa walleye fishery. And although the lake has yielded several impressive limits of walleyes during late October, the fish should merely be regarded by anglers as a "pleasant bonus" says DNR fisheries technician, Scott Grummer.

DNR fisheries management involvement [at Rice Lake] began during the 1990s when a group of local anglers approached biologists with a request to install an aeration system that would provide more consistent fishing on the area, says DNR district fisheries biologist, Jim Wahl. As is the case with most shallow northern Iowa lakes, Rice Lake has a history of frequent winter kills.

In 1998, the DNR installed an aerator on the lake's south side for a cost of \$77,800. Although the aerator is not capable of totally eliminating fish kills, it has definitely reduced their frequency. For the time being, at least, things are looking good and anglers are grinning from ear to ear.

"The word [on these fish] is definitely out," says Banwart. "So far, I've seen license plates from Cerro Gordo, Mitchell, Floyd, Chickasaw, and others.

"A lot of people are coming here to fish."

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ROCK CREEK STATE PARK TO CLOSE FOR YOUTH ONLY DEER HUNT

KELLOGG – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will close Rock Creek State Park, including access to the lake, on Nov. 9, to allow for a youth deer hunt on Nov. 10 and 11. The park will reopen to the public on Nov. 12.

Rock Creek park ranger Kory Kinnick said 20 youths would participate in the two-day hunt, and each will be hunting with an adult mentor. He said the park was divided into zones to spread out the hunters. It is the first time a gun hunt has been in the park.

“We are hoping to make this youth hunt an annual event,” Kinnick said. “We’ve had a lot of positive feedback so far and once the word gets out, I’m sure others will want to participate.”

Youth must purchase a deer hunting license and only antlerless deer may be harvested. Hunting is restricted away from the housing areas.

The DNR has allowed archery deer hunting in Rock Creek State Park for three years to help reduce the number of deer in the park. The archery hunt will be suspended while the youth hunt is underway.

A complete list of all state park depredation deer hunts is available in the *Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations* booklet.

For more information, contact Kinnick at 641-990-3013.

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[Editor’s Note: Hold the Wilkinson Column Until Nov. 8]

WINTER BIRD FEEDING PREPARATION UNDERWAY

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Warm autumn weather bought you some time. This week, though, you are getting your reminder. If you’re going to feed the birds this winter, it’s past time to start.

Winter birdwatching--whether from the kitchen window or tromping through snowdrifts with your binoculars—is growing in popularity as Iowans find out they can

get their exercise, connect with the outdoors and maybe stave off cabin fever. The easiest way to watch birds is to attract them to yard feeders. That should start well before the winds and snows of winter. Winter birds do not depend solely on your feeders. However, if kept stocked and relatively cat and other predator free, those feeders will become part of the circuit birds will follow each day.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, in its latest outdoor recreation survey, says a whopping 1-million Iowans do some ‘around the home’ wildlife watching. Another 404,000 are more active; doing their watching ‘away from home.’ Together we shell out \$304 million for trips, equipment, supplies—among them, most certainly a lot of birdseed and feeders. In a breakdown, our west north central region had significantly higher participation rates than the rest of the country.

And as the birds keep winging into Iowa, the checkout lanes get busier. “I really saw it starting in the last (couple) weeks; as temperatures got cold at night,” says Ronda Wilson, from the Birds Eye View store in Coralville. “It’s best to set up your feeding stations while birds are establishing their territories.”

There will still be good numbers of cardinals, goldfinches and other species you watched through the summer. Part of the attraction, too, of late fall and winter birdfeeding is to identify and watch new species, as they show up for handouts. “The warblers and kinglets follow the nuthatches and chickadees,” notes Pat Schlarbaum, from the Department of Natural Resources wildlife diversity program. “From late October on, you can see just about any migratory bird moving through. This fall, a lot of red-breasted nuthatches have been seen in Iowa.”

What you get in your backyards, and what you *keep* through the cold weather months, depends on what you feed them. Generally, black oil sunflower seeds attract the largest variety of ‘desirable’ winter birds. Cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches and even bluejays are common diners at the two sunflower seed feeders in our backyard. As I write this, there is even a goldfinch with its beak in the seed port, even though a nyger thistle feeder stands 30 feet away.

From there, specific food sources attract different birds. Goldfinches (though more gray/green than gold now) flock to nyger thistle. Titmice will chow down on sunflower chips, as well as peanuts. As the weather gets colder, suet feeders are magnets for downy, hairy and occasional redheaded woodpeckers. Several other species utilize them, too.

Peanuts are a pretty good draw for several species. That’s where I’ve seen red-breasted nuthatches (most winter nuthatches in Iowa are the white-breasted) clinging sideways to the wire mesh feeder through the last couple weeks. A couple flickers have staked a claim to it, as have a small flock of white crowned—or white-throated?—sparrows. “Over the last year or so, more and more people have been buying peanuts,” relays Wilson. “Woodpeckers are common, but people tell us they’re seeing a fair number of Carolina wrens and red-breasted nuthatches eating them, too.”

If it's numbers you want, the millet-based mixes are fairly inexpensive and bring in a variety of sparrows, juncos, mourning doves and grackles. If you prefer for sparrows and grackles to keep their distance; scatter millet or cracked corn in a far corner of the yard, trying to keep them away from the more expensive stuff.

Beyond the actual food, though, water and cover are important. A steady source of shallow, unfrozen water is critical for birds. Our yard is overdue for a new birdbath. The old dish literally crumbled away in the last two winters, leaving us with a perfectly good pedestal and clip-on heating element. But nobody sells 'just' the dish. Luckily the neighbors have us covered for now.

"Cover is always pretty important, too," emphasizes Schlarbaum. "Not just for how birds access your feeders, but keeping it a short distance away so cats can't get too close." A dense row of bushes will hold dozens of birds on a cold, windy day.

Plan your feeding spots...and get to work filling them now...and you should have a winter full of feathers, on those cold snowy days.

Sidebar: Birdwatcher Support Systems

As a slightly more than casual bird feeder, I'm always amazed by the birding network out there. You can double check the best food for attracting specific birds. You can learn when and where the next local field trip is. You can find out what's been seen where (like the Pacific loon seen over the weekend at Saylorville Reservoir).

A few sites of the many you may want to try include:

www.icbirds.org (Iowa City based; recent sightings, upcoming field trips)

www.iowabirds.org (with a photo gallery and several 'how to' pages)

www.audubon.org (with great pages on getting started with bird feeding)

www.iowadnr.gov (DNR website, click on Non Game Wildlife)

Or just type in 'birdwatching + Iowa' and 89 websites or blogs pop up for you to choose among.

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TROUT HEADING TO BACON CREEK LAKE NOV. 15

SIoux CITY – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the City of Sioux City will stock 2,000 trout in the 34-acre Bacon Creek Lake at 2 p.m., on Nov. 15. This is the second year trout were stocked in Bacon Creek Lake.

Bacon Creek does not have a boat ramp but has excellent shoreline fishing access all around the lake.

The trout are raised at the Manchester hatchery. Anglers are required to purchase a trout stamp (\$11) in addition to a fishing license to fish for or possess trout. The daily bag limit for trout is five and the possession limit is 10.

For more information, contact DNR fisheries biologist Lannie Miller, at 712-657-2638.

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TROUT STOCKING AT BANNER LAKE SET FOR NOV. 20

INDIANOLA – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will stock 1,500 rainbow trout in South Banner Lake around 1 p.m., on Nov. 20. The DNR stocks the 59-acre lake three or four times during the fall and winter months to offer a different type of fishing experience in central Iowa.

Summerset State Park is the only trout fishery in central Iowa. The trout are raised at the Decorah hatchery. Anglers who want to fish for the trout are required to purchase a trout stamp (\$11) in addition to an Iowa fishing license. The daily bag limit for trout is five and the possession limit is 10.

For more information, contact DNR fisheries biologist Ben Dodd at 515-432-2823.

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CORRECTION TO SPRINGBROOK STATE PARK JANUARY DEER HUNT

GUTHRIE CENTER – The January 5 - 6 depredation deer hunt at Springbrook State Park, north of Guthrie Center, will allow hunters to use a variety of firearms, not just muzzleloaders, as stated in the *2007/08 Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations*.

Hunters may use a shotgun, muzzleloader or handgun as part of the depredation hunt. A list of firearms and calibers is on p. 23 of the regulations. Center-fire rifles are not allowed.

Hunters wanting to participate in the antlerless only deer hunt should contact the state park office at 641-747-3591. There are 75 antlerless only licenses available for the two-day hunt. Contact the park for more details.

For more information, contact park manager, Carolyn Hack, at 641-747-3591.

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COMMISSION ADDS ITEM TO NOV. 8 MEETING

DES MOINES – The Natural Resource Commission of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will meet at 8:30 a.m., Nov. 8, in the fourth floor conference room, Wallace State Office Bldg., in Des Moines.

Commission and DNR staff will meet at 1 p.m., Nov. 7, at the Holiday Inn Downtown, for a tour of the area. The meeting and tour are open to the public.

Members of the commission are Kim Francisco, Elizabeth Garst, Carol Kramer, Lennis Moore, Gregory Drees, Janelle Rettig and William Bird. The Director of the DNR is Richard Leopold.

The following is the agenda for the November meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of October 11 Meeting
- Director's Remarks
- Conservation and Recreation Donations
- Contract – Iowa State Park Self-Guided Trails and Wayside Design and Fabrication
- Project Agreement with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF)
- Lake Restoration Assessment with Iowa State University
- Final Rule Filed Emergency – Chapter 15, General License Regulations
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 94, Deer Hunting by Nonresidents
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 30, Water Trails and Low-head Dam Safety Program
- Construction Projects
 - Lake Rathbun Fish Hatchery, Appanoose County – Pond Liner Repair
 - Backbone State Park, Delaware County – Hatchery Wall Replacement
 - Waubonsie State Park, Fremont County – Shower Building and Septic System Replacement
 - Geode State Park, Henry County – Water and Wastewater Improvements
 - Elk Rock State Park, Marion County – Boat Ramp, Road and Parking Development
 - George Kunch Prairie, Tama County – Entrance Sign
 - Dolliver State Park, Webster County – Campground Electrical Upgrade
 - Brushy Creek State Park, Webster County – Shoreline Stabilization

- Honey Creek Resort State Park, Appanoose County – Lagoons, Sewer, Grading
- Honey Creek Resort State Park, Appanoose County – Golf Course Clubhouse and Maintenance Building
- Land Acquisition
 - Stone State Park, Woodbury County – INHF
 - Christopherson Slough, Dickinson County – INHF
 - Big Spirit Lake, McClelland’s Beach, Dickinson County – Bartels, Bartels and Fox Ltd. Donation
 - Big Spirit Lake, McClelland’s Beach, Dickinson County – Bartels, Bartels and Fox Ltd.
- Easements
 - Forest Legacy Conservation Easement, Allamakee County - Ryan
- Management Agreement – East Fork Des Moines River Wildlife Management Area, Humboldt County
- Final Rule – Chapter 7, Rules of Practice in Contested Cases
- Honey Creek Hotel Management Interim Agreement
- General Discussion.
- Items for Next Meeting, Dec. 13, in Des Moines

For more information, contact Karyn Stone at 515-281-8650

