The Boone Forks region, where the Boone River joins the Des Moines River in Hamilton and Webster counties, is special. With its wooded bluffs, scenic sandstone cliffs, and abundance of wildlife, it is appreciated by a large number of outdoor enthusiasts each year. It is one of the richest areas in the state for woodland nesting birds such as the American Woodcock, Cerulean Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Eastern Whip-poor-will. This area also supports crucial habitat for birds during migration, providing both feeding and roosting areas and helping to sustain migrants as they move between winter and summer habitats, making it a clear choice for Iowa’s 16th Bird Conservation Area (BCA).

BOONE FORKS DIVERSITY

The rich woodland and riparian habitats contained in the Boone Forks Bird Conservation Area play host to a wide variety of plant and animal species throughout the year. The river bluffs and rolling, wooded hills of the BCA make it ideal for a variety of woodland and wetland species. Scattered prairie habitat and the unique species that depend on grasslands can also be found in the BCA. All four seasons provide new and stunning wildlife viewing opportunities along the Boone and Des Moines river valleys, so visitors can take advantage of the beauty of Boone Forks year-round.

BOCA MODEL

A BCA Model: Shaded areas depict public habitat protected for birds; white is private land.

BORED OF BIRDS

As part of this initiative and in an effort to protect dwindling populations of many Iowa birds, the Bird Conservation Area (BCA) program was established by the Iowa DNR Wildlife Bureau in 2001. The present model BCA encompasses at least 10,000 acres of public and/or private lands with approximately 25 percent of the area established as key bird habitat. This concept is backed by research that suggests viable bird populations require conservation efforts at a landscape-oriented level. Each BCA also includes a large “core” area of protected high-quality habitat. Surrounding this core are private lands, plus additional public tracts, all managed to provide good bird habitat.

IMPRESSIVE BIRD AREAS

Audubon’s Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program is a global effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. Designated IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. All Iowa Bird Conservation Areas are also Important Bird Areas.

The Boone River, with some of the state’s highest quality stream segments, holds rare fish like Western Silvery Minnow and Topeka Shiner, and it is one of few interior streams where a number of mussel species can still be found. Native butterflies can be discovered in the woodlands and prairies, while the wetlands and rivers are ideal places to spot dragonflies and damselflies.

PLANTS

Oak-hickory woodlands dominate the uplands of this area with a maple-basswood component in wetter areas, particularly along the rivers and streams. Several hundred species of prairie forbs (like Prairie Blazing Star) and grasses (like Little Bluestem) can be seen in prairie remnants, as well as in upland areas and roadsides where prairie is being restored. Cattails, bulrushes, sedges, arrowhead and a variety of other wetland plants exist in marshes and wet meadows that still exist or have been restored.

ANIMALS

With nesting evidence for more than 130 bird species in the Boone Forks Woodland BCA and at least 115 additional bird species using the area during migration, this is an area of especially high bird diversity. Because it contains a variety of habitats, this area also sustains a large diversity of other animals, including Bobcat, River Otter, Badger, and Southern Flying Squirrel. The Boone River, along the Boone and Des Moines rivers, is ideal places to spot dragonflies and damselflies. Butterflies can be discovered in the woodlands and prairies, while the wetlands and rivers are ideal places to spot dragonflies and damselflies.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Boone Forks Woodland Bird Conservation Area was created thanks to a partnership between the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Wild Turkey Federation, Iowa Audubon, Hamilton and Webster County Conservation Boards, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.