

ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



Family Fun On The Booming Grounds

Load the car with pillows and sleepy kids and head to an early morning ritual none will forget. The DNR-hosted sixth annual Greater Prairie Chicken Day is Saturday, April 11, at the Kellerton Grassland Bird Conservation Area near Mount Ayr.

“We have such a unique opportunity for public viewing here,” says event coordinator and wildlife technician Micah Lee. “There isn’t anything else like this anywhere in Iowa.” Activities begin at daylight, about 6:30 a.m.

DNR Biologist Chad Paup says the show is for all ages. “Sitting out on the viewing platform, soon you hear cooting and hooting in the dark. As the sun rises you start to make out silhouettes of chickens on a high spot of ground. The males arrive first, puffed up to look big. They will spar with other males for dominance.”

The public grassland virtually guarantees seeing and hearing wild prairie chickens on a booming ground, which refers to the mating ritual, called booming. “We’re very fortunate to have this,” adds Lee. The chickens are active late March, but peak the first three weeks of April.

Coffee, donuts, good conversation, and spotting scopes are provided and DNR wildlife staff offer interpretation. Viewing continues until birds leave the booming grounds—usually by 9:30 a.m. Stick around for good chances to view other grasslands birdlife.

WHAT TO BRING

While binoculars and spotting scopes are provided,

extras are appreciated. Be sure to dress for the weather.

“It can be a morning for long underwear, gloves, hat and a heavy jacket,” says Paup. The event is rain or shine, so pack raingear.

WHERE TO STAY

The recently built Mount Ayr Inn offers some of the best lodging in southern Iowa and includes a continental breakfast. Located in Mount Ayr 20 minutes west of I-35 at the intersection of state highways 2 and 169 at 1304 East South St. **641-464-3500 or 866-464-2093**
www.mountayrinn.com.

WHERE TO EAT

On the north side of the town square is the Iowa Roadhouse, a family sit-down place with sandwiches, prime rib, steaks and daily specials. Attached bar. 104 West Madison St. Mount Ayr. **641-464-2442**.

TO FIND THE BOOMERS

Travel two miles west of Kellerton on Highway 2 and head south for one mile on 300th Avenue. Ample parking and wheelchair accessible viewing stand.

HEAR THE BIRDS

The racket the booming birds make sounds more like wildlife in a deep jungle or a Tarzan movie than Iowa grassland. Give a sample listen at www.prairiechicken.org.