

Conservation Corner

By Corinne Peterson
Pocahontas County Naturalist



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*I think of that star of long ago, that lighted the wanderer's path below;
In faith I look up and o'er me I see, that star in its beauty still shining for me.*

As the words and melody of this old Skoog hymn looped through my mind throughout Christmas week, I thought of that star of long ago and the many wonders of faith and nature still shining today. To close out the year, let's take a look back at the faces of the many stars of nature that shone across Conservation Corner in 2016.

We started the year with a challenge to visit a national park, monument, or trail in celebration of the National Park Service's 100th Birthday. In March we traveled along with the Hubbell girls to Phoenix and a tour of the Garden of the Gods, San Juan National Forest, Sedona's Red Rock Country, and the Grand Canyon. Did you visit a national site this year?

The skies over Conservation Corner 2016 were bright with the possibility of a new Planet 9, the Juno spacecraft in orbit around Jupiter, and several spectacular supermoons. Meanwhile, back on Planet Earth, many creatures flew, crawled, ran, or swam with the current each week. We tracked the prints of mammals – the Red Fox, Bobcat, Spotted and Striped Skunk, American Badger, Black Bear, and the Virginia Opossum. We followed the flight of birds – the American Bald Eagle, Western Grebe, Baltimore Oriole, Bobolink, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Cattle Egret, and Barn Owl. Along the way we observed a few insects – the Monarch Butterfly, EAB, Cockroach, Firefly, and Winged Ant; several amphibians – Wood Frogs, Spring Peepers, and even a blue frog; and a couple reptiles for good measure – the Fox Snake and Wood Turtle. We also dug into several plants growing along the path including the Violet, Common Bladderwort, Wild Bergamot, Aster, and Indian Pipe.

Throughout 2016 we also learned more about the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, Leap Year, dinosaur evolution, pollinators in peril, fishing and famous trees in Iowa, bat monitoring along the Des Moines River, and meteorites in Antarctica. We also featured several events throughout the year including the Spring Garden Show, School Days, Jr. Naturalist Day Camp, Wiegert Fall Fest, Honey Days, Trail Rides, and Fall IAN as well as several highlights of 2016 – restoring the Wiegert Schoolhouse, Lincoln #5, touring the Reimen Gardens filled with LEGO® sculptures, and researching the Dunn Family Collection of Indian artifacts.

We'll end the year with another challenge – America's State Parks First Day Hike Initiative. This year our closest free, guided hikes are scheduled at Dolliver Memorial State Park at 9:30 a.m. and Brushy Creek State Recreation Area at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, January 1, 2017. What better way to start the new year than surrounded by the beauty of nature in winter?

In closing, I'd like to thank our faithful readers who join us each week as together we look up and discuss the many faces of nature still shining for us. See you in 2017!

