Important
Iowa
Conservationists

Iowa Natural Resource Heritage Series
Iowa Association of Naturalists
Iowa Association of Naturalists

The Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN) is a nonprofit organization of people interested in promoting the development of skills and education within the art of interpreting the natural and cultural environment. IAN was founded in 1978 and may be contacted by writing the Conservation Education Center, 2473 160th Rd., Guthrie Center, IA 50115, 515/747-8383.

Iowa Natural Resource Heritage

Iowa's changing land use and values, environmental laws, and dedicated citizens have shaped our natural resource heritage. The Iowa Association of Naturalists has produced this series of booklets to offer a basic, understandable overview of Iowa's natural resource heritage. These booklets will help educators teach students about the changes in how Iowans use and value the land, how environmental laws work to protect natural resources, and how the lives of some Iowans have influenced our natural resource heritage. The three booklets in this series are:

*Changing Land Use and Values (IAN-501)*
*Important Iowa Conservationists (IAN-502)*
*Iowa's Environmental Laws (IAN-503)*

REAP
Resource Enhancement And Protection

Education Board

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Important Iowa Conservationists

The making of a conservationist

Environmental education is the process of providing and fostering the awareness, knowledge, attitudes, commitments, and citizen-action skills required for achievement of the goal of long-term environmental quality. Each of the individuals highlighted in this booklet made, in her or his lifetime, significant progress toward that goal. Many environmental education scholars and researchers believe that evaluation of the lives of such dedicated conservationists reveals secrets or implications for the education of future, effective environmental citizens.

These researchers discovered in the 1980s that, while there was no single commonality among all studied conservationists, there were remarkable similarities in their experiences during their early years. The one factor that was noted to some degree in every subject of the study was the opportunity for outdoor experiences. In some cases, this outdoor experience took the form of outings with a parent. In other cases, it was solo exploration time or a school program. Other factors noted to be important to most of the subjects of the study included contact with undeveloped or relatively pristine environments, the experience of seeing a natural place destroyed, and the influence of parents and mentors who loved the out-of-doors.

It would diminish the achievements of the individuals mentioned in this book to fail to mention their unique qualities, such as extraordinary intelligence, perceptive abilities, and communication skills. However, it is likely that within each of us there is potential for becoming a citizen of
the environment. It is possible that part of our work toward the goal of long-term environmental quality must include unlocking those potentials within members of the younger generations.

**Iowa's American Indian conservationists**

The people discussed in this booklet have been important in the past 150 years of conservation in Iowa. If we define conservation as the wise use of natural resources, then it is clear that there have been conservationists in Iowa for more than 10,000 years. During the years prior to the beginning of written records, Iowa's **prehistoric** past, the locations and uses of natural resources were the keys to the survival of the American Indians. Native people made choices about where to live and hunt based upon the availability of natural resources. Physical evidence of the activities of these prehistoric peoples — the bones of large game animals and the projectile points or spearheads that were used to kill them — suggest that they were nomadic, following the herds of bison and elk.

There were many different groups of American Indian people in Iowa. The cultures and belief systems of those peoples varied significantly. Therefore, there is some controversy concerning whether or not it can be stated generally that American Indians were conservationists. Did they choose where and what to hunt and gather based upon the ability of the land to recover from the effects of that hunting and gathering? Did they respect the living things on which they relied for survival? Did they take from the land more than they needed for their survival? Did they consider the needs of their children, grandchildren, and future generations when making decisions about the use of natural resources?

Although those cultures and beliefs have undergone change over the course of the past several thousand years, studying the cultures and beliefs of the descendants of those early people can begin the process of answering some of these questions. In general, American Indian people do respect the land and all of the living beings with which they share Earth. This respect requires them to make choices carefully.
concerning which resources to use and how much resource use the land can sustain. Further, many American Indian people consider the needs of their descendants many generations into the future when making decisions concerning resource use.

If conservation is defined as the “wise use of natural resources” and we further define the term “wise” as making informed and responsible decisions, then there have been active conservationists in Iowa for at least several thousand years longer than there have been books about conservationists in Iowa.

Read more about it

Exploring Iowa's Past: A Guide to Prehistoric Archeology;
Lynn Marie Alex; University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, IA; 1980.

Eastern Iowa Prehistory; Duane Anderson; Iowa State University Press, Ames, IA; 1981.

"I was anxious to see real wild and unbroken prairie and soon we began to see them, covered with waving grass and flowers. We took our time for the trip and I walked nearly all the way full of wonder and delight at everything that we saw."

— John F. Lacey

At the age of 14, John Fletcher Lacey moved with his family to Iowa, arriving first at Keokuk, and traveling across the unbroken prairie to Mahaska County. In his later years, Lacey would look to that trip across the prairie and his view of wildflowers and wild birds as pivotal in the development of his concern for the environment.

Lacey served in the U.S. Army and attained the rank of major during the Civil War. Upon his discharge, he returned to Iowa, married, and began to practice law. Lacey’s work as an attorney kept him close to the places where policies actually were made and provided him with opportunities to act upon his conservation-oriented beliefs until his death in 1913.

John Lacey was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1888. Prior to his arrival, there were very few pieces of legislation concerning the environment and very few voices for wildlife protection. The depth of Lacey’s convictions and the ability with which he turned those convictions into policies not only silenced his critics but also established conservation as an important component of politics in the United States.

At the federal level, Lacey has been given credit for coal mine safety legislation and for justice in the treatment of American Indians. He worked diligently for the establishment of federal wildlife sanctuaries and forest reserves, expansion of the national parks system, and more environmentally-sound...
management of all lands held in the public domain. In 1894, Lacey wrote and sponsored the Yellowstone National Park Protection Act, turning the park into the first national wildlife preserve in which hunting and trapping were prohibited.

The protection of migratory birds was one of Lacey's most important issues. The Lacey Bird Act of 1900 prohibited the transportation of illegally taken game across state lines, making the first significant dent in the economics of unrestricted market hunting and poaching.

While Lacey's conservation efforts were pioneering and critically important to the protection of wildlife nationwide, his constituents in Iowa did not share some of his beliefs. He was criticized for appearing to ignore economics and foreign trade, and he was defeated in his bid for office in 1906. Although he was offered a federal appointment by President Theodore Roosevelt, Lacey chose to return to his law practice in Oskaloosa in 1907.

In recognition of Lacey's work, Dr. Louis Pammel stated in 1915 that "John Lacey had done more for the protection of wildlife and to stimulate forestry than any other man ever did in our national life." John Lacey is often considered the "Pioneer of Federal Conservation Legislation" and the "Pioneer of Federal Game Protection." Lacey-Keosauqua State Park in southeastern Iowa was named in his honor in 1915.

Read more about John F. Lacey

Iowa's Natural Heritage; "John F. Lacey: Iowa's Almost Forgotten Conservationist," Greg Beisker; Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation; Summer: 1985.

Major John F. Lacey: Memorial Volume; Dr. Louis Pammel;
Bohumil Shimek was born in east-central Iowa just as great waves of pioneers began to move into the state, plowing the prairie in an attempt to create new lives for themselves. His parents moved to Iowa to escape political persecution in what is now the Czech republic. Shimek's father had been a noted scientist in Europe and clearly guided young Shimek into a study of science and literature.

The Shimek family was poor. Bohumil Shimek often sought to escape the struggle to eat and stay warm by retreating to the woodlands surrounding the farm. He was a keen observer and studied all he could about the natural world, from the tallest trees to the tiniest insects. It was in these woodlands that Shimek began a lifelong hobby and career collecting, identifying, and classifying the variety of species he encountered. Of particular interest to Shimek were the species that dominated the Iowa landscape prior to settlement.

Shimek entered the University of Iowa, obtained a degree in engineering, and embarked on a career as a civil engineer, but his engineering career was short-lived. After just two years, Shimek turned to teaching to more fully immerse himself in his primary interest, the
natural sciences. Shimek eventually became a professor of botany at the University of Iowa and devoted the rest of his professional career to teaching, research, and directing the Lakeside Biological Laboratory at Lake Okoboji.

One of Shimek's most interesting contributions to the understanding of Iowa's landscape was his definitive discussion of the aeolian, or windblown, origin of the sandy, glacial loess deposits found throughout the state. Shimek's study of what Iowa was like prior to settlement led logically to an understanding of how much had changed in his lifetime.

Bohumil Shimek was a well-trained, disciplined, and well-published scientist. He was also an educator, believing the best place to teach natural history was in the field. He was among the first to espouse a comprehensive conservation and environmental education program for Iowa. In the wetlands, on the prairie, and among the trees, he helped his students not only learn about the natural world but also protect it. He shared with them his love of nature and helped them develop their own conservation values. He focused the educational process on awareness and knowledge of the natural world, sharing and facilitating positive attitudes toward the environment, and teaching the skills required to act for the protection of the natural world. This is, today, the basis for the definition of environmental education. Therefore, among many things, Bohumil Shimek is considered Iowa's first environmental educator.

Read more about Bohumil Shimek
"Bohumil Shimek;" Cecelia Burnett; Unpublished essay.

Iowa Conservationist; "Iowa's State Parks: Sustaining A Vision from 1895 to 1995," Rebecca Conard; Volume 54(1); January/February 1995.

Who Was Who In America; "Bohumil Shimek," Volume 1.

Born: June 25, 1861 in Shueyville, Iowa
Profession: Professor of botany at the University of Iowa and first director of the Lakeside Biological Laboratory at Lake Okoboji
Died: January 30, 1937

Iowa Association of Naturalists
Louis H. Pammel
Founder of Iowa’s state park system

“It is our duty to present to the next generation some typical and scientific areas in different parts of the state.”

—Louis H. Pammel

Most individuals who played pivotal roles in conservation had childhood opportunities to explore and learn from the living world around them. Louis Pammel was no exception. His early days were filled with farm chores and regular forays into the woodlands around LaCrosse, Wisconsin. He learned to love the woodlands and the edges of the rivers. Another significant event Pammel shared with other conservation visionaries was watching the disappearance of something he had learned to love. By the time he arrived in Iowa in 1889, Pammel had witnessed the killing of passenger pigeons, wanton cutting of forests, and plowing of the prairies.

Louis Pammel earned a Ph.D. in botany from Iowa State College and remained there as a professor and researcher for the rest of his career. He taught bacteriology, mycology, and plant pathology. He was particularly interested in agriculture and founded the first seed-testing laboratory in the United States. Pammel wrote ten books and more than 700 scientific papers on subjects ranging from poisonous plants to the pollination of plants by honeybees. Through his work as a

Louis Pammel
1862–1931
teacher, he served as a mentor to such individuals as Ada Hayden and George Washington Carver.

Dr. Pammel’s early explorations in the natural world and his extensive scientific training came together in a personal philosophy based upon the belief that humans could not exist without direct contact with the living world. Pammel suggested that it was our duty to hand to the next generation some “typical and scientific areas in different parts of the state.” Thus he is credited with developing the first working definition of conservation for Iowa. Pammel took this definition of conservation a step further by recommending that nature be taught in the public schools.

Louis Pammel played a key role in establishing the first Iowa State Board of Conservation in 1917, serving as its president from 1919 to 1927. During this period, Pammel acted upon his beliefs by establishing 38 state parks. The first was Backbone State Park in Delaware County. Pammel State Park, near Winterset, was dedicated in 1930 to honor the man now recognized as the “Founder of Iowa’s State Park System.”

Read more about Louis Pammel

**Iowa Conservationist**: “Iowa’s State Parks: Sustaining A Vision from 1895 to 1995,” Rebecca Conard; Volume 54(1); January/February 1995.

**Iowa’s Natural Heritage**: “And Who Was Pammel?” Marjorie C. Pohl; Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation; Spring 1991.
Jay Norwood ‘Ding’ Darling
A picture is worth a thousand words

"Those were the days when the golden plover came in great flocks and moved across South Dakota, and from early spring until the prairie chicken sought cover in the fall along the thickets bordering the creeks and marshes, my mind was filled with pictures which have never been erased. It was the disappearance of all that wonderful endowment of wildlife which stirred the first instincts I can remember of conservation."

— Ding Darling

According to his biographer, “most of Jay Darling’s recollections of his youth were drawn from his days in the prairie frontier town of Sioux City, Iowa. He thrived in the spacious fields of high grass through which he roamed. He spent summer nights on the prairie and along the banks of the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers. He intended not to let any marsh, lake, or pothole escape his attention.”

Darling entered Beloit College in Wisconsin to major in pre-medicine. His studies in the biological sciences would serve him well in later years. College life provided Darling with an opportunity to edit the school yearbook. Darling began creating humorous sketches of campus events and professors in order to make the yearbook pages more interesting. To keep his identity secret, Darling used a contraction of his last name, D’ing.

Ding Darling, as he would be called for the rest of his career, never became a doctor. Darling honed his artistic talents, combined those talents with the study of biology, and began to see the natural world as a living system. In 1906, Ding Darling was offered a position with the Des Moines Register and Leader, a position in which he would stay, with the exception of a few years in New York, until his death in 1962.

Ding Darling’s journalistic work served to raise a new ecological awareness not only within the general public but
also among politicians. He was appointed to Iowa’s Fish and Game Commission in 1931 and convinced the commission to fund a state biological survey, later conducted by Aldo Leopold. Leopold and Darling would cement their relationship as colleagues by serving together on the advisory committee that eventually recommended to President Franklin Roosevelt the creation of a federal Bureau of Biological Survey, now the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Darling found politics and bureaucrats frustrating, but he believed that he could make a difference. Darling served for several years as the chief administrator of the Bureau of Biological Survey and played a significant role in the creation of our current system of national wildlife refuges. One of those refuges, an island in Florida to which Darling often traveled to seek rest and relaxation, was designated as the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge in his honor in 1965.

Of his own cartoons, Darling stated: “The cartoon is the applesauce in which political pills were immersed and fed to unwilling children.” He was aware of the educational power of such a well-crafted message. Others, apparently, were also aware of his unique talents. His drawings were awarded Pulitzer Prizes on two occasions and one of his drawings was used for the first Federal Duck Stamp. His drawings carry messages as valuable today as they were when they were originally created.

Read more about “Ding” Darling

Iowa Conservationist; “Iowa’s State Parks: Sustaining A Vision from 1895 to 1995,” Rebecca Conard; Volume 54(1); January/February 1995.

Ada Hayden
First voice for the preservation of Iowa’s prairies

“Prairie preservation is crucial as prairies are the chief botanizing places for the students of native grassland vegetation and almost the only locations where school children may become acquainted with native fauna and flora or where persons who entertain a sentimental interest in historical aspects of the state may reconstruct a picture of the original Iowa landscape.”

—Ada Hayden

Born: 1884 in Ames, Iowa

Profession: Professor of Botany at Iowa State College (now Iowa State University)

Died: 1950

Ada Hayden grew up on a farm in Iowa where her family kept a small tract of virgin prairie simply to preserve its natural beauty. This love of native prairie became a scientific curiosity and the focus for her professional career. She became the first woman and one of the first four individuals to earn a Ph.D. from Iowa State College. Her major professor and mentor was Dr. Louis Pammel, then chair of the Botany Department.

Dr. Hayden accepted a position at Iowa State College as professor of botany and curator of the university herbarium. She remained there until her death in 1950. In addition to her numerous contributions to scientific literature, Hayden was also an accomplished photographer and illustrator.

Dr. Hayden was among the first scientists to study prairies and to define the quality of remnant prairies in terms of the diversity of prairie species. In 1945, Hayden was given a $100 grant to survey the entire state and locate and document native prairie tracts. By the time her work was finished in 1946, she had identified and documented 32 prairies and located 89 others. Today, nearly half of the total acreage Dr. Hayden recommended has been purchased and protected by state and county agencies. One of the largest prairie tracts she recommended was purchased in 1946 and dedicated as Hayden Prairie in her honor in 1950.
In 1947, Dr. Hayden pointed out that Iowa’s prairie once covered more than 80 percent of the state and what was left was reduced to small remnants, many of which occurred along roadsides. Thirty years later, her work was cited when the first comprehensive integrated roadside vegetation management programs began to take shape.

Ada Hayden studied prairies as complete ecosystems. She described the diversity of species comprising what she viewed as the most healthy prairies, as well as the relationships among those species. She viewed native prairies as valuable living scientific laboratories in which soil types, endangered species, and wildlife management could be studied. Her holistic view of native prairie as a key component of our natural and cultural heritage started a lasting prairie preservation effort in Iowa. Although the effort to preserve Iowa’s prairie heritage did not gain much momentum until well after her death, it carved a permanent place for her among Iowa’s conservation visionaries.

Read more about Ada Hayden

Iowa Conservationist; “Iowa’s State Parks: Sustaining A Vision from 1895 to 1995,” Rebecca Conard; Volume 54(1); January/February 1995.

Iowa Conservationist; “Hayden Prairie: Celebrating 50 Years;” Volume 54(7); July/August 1995.

Iowa Conservationist; “Ada Hayden: Pioneer Protector Of Iowa’s Prairies;” Katy Wilcoxen; Volume 46(7); July 1987.
Aldo Leopold
Pioneer of modern conservation

"Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

— Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

Born: January 11, 1887 in Burlington, Iowa
Profession: Professor of Wildlife Management at the University of Wisconsin–Madison
Died: April 21, 1948

Aldo Leopold attended Burlington High School in Iowa, Lawrenceville Preparatory Academy in New Jersey, and Yale University in Connecticut. He worked for Gifford Pinchot in the U.S. Forest Service in New Mexico, completed Iowa’s first statewide biological survey, and created the nation’s first Department of Wildlife Management at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Throughout his academic and professional career, Leopold took full advantage of opportunities to study literature, philosophy, and the full range of biological sciences. He was a respected scientist and professor.

The one aspect of Leopold’s life and career that most significantly contributed to his status as a pioneer of modern conservation was the fact that Leopold was a writer. The literary classic, A Sand County Almanac, explains his view of the natural world as a complex, beautiful, living community. We also have a view of the stages through which Leopold traveled on his journey to those visionary conclusions. In these writings can be found lessons from which we can learn.

Through his letters, journal entries, and early essays, Aldo Leopold can be seen as an intelligent scientist and keen observer. He enjoyed and wrote about the out-of-doors, Mississippi River backwaters, and hunting game with his father.

Leopold’s early essays also espoused views that, in retrospect, are mistaken. For example, in his early years, Leopold did not fully appreciate the role of predators in a natural community. In his own words, “I thought that because fewer wolves meant
more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise.” By reading this essay, “Thinking Like A Mountain,” we not only have an opportunity to learn why predators are important in the natural world but also how Leopold arrived at that conclusion. We can see Leopold as an ordinary person who valued life-long learning and who continually re-evaluated his beliefs in light of what he learned.

Leopold’s new appreciation of predators led him to see a biological community as a living system of interrelated and interdependent parts. According to Leopold, studying those parts — the soils, waters, plants, and animals — was important but not enough. Also important was the study of the interrelationships among those parts. Therefore, Leopold is given credit for pioneering the study of ecology. Prior to this time, the profession of conservation focused on managing the populations of individual species of wildlife, particularly game species. Modern conservationists work to study and strengthen ecosystems.

Leopold’s most important contribution to modern conservation probably was the incorporation of this new understanding into his personal values and beliefs. In his essay, “The Land Ethic,” Leopold suggested that our sense of right and wrong should be extended beyond the human community to include the entire natural community of which we are a part. With his words, Leopold gave us a foundation upon which ecologically-sound decisions can be made.

Read more about Aldo Leopold
A Sand County Almanac; Aldo Leopold; Oxford University Press; 1949.


Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work; Curt Meine; University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI; 1988.
“The Conquest of Nature philosophy is surely based in part upon human experience when wilderness dominated and man was weak. During hard times, we can say facetiously to give the land back to the Indians, but, whenever a census shows fewer people than the preceding one, the rallying cries of progress may exhort us to regain the spirit of the pioneers. The ideas of making the desert bloom as a rose and all its other variants presupposes that man has a moral right and duty to assert his mastery over the forces of raw Nature. Desert and wilderness, accordingly, are not only regarded as wasteland, but as wasteland to be redeemed for the production of conventional values as much as their resources warrant.”

—Paul Errington

Paul Errington spent his early years exploring the prairies and pursuing an understanding of the wild things that inhabited them. Errington completed a Ph.D. in zoology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison just as Aldo Leopold arrived there as the first chair of the Department of Wildlife Management.

Dr. Errington’s early research focused upon populations of bobwhite quail. He was particularly interested in the predator-prey relationships between the quail and such birds of prey as the great-horned owl and red-tailed hawk. He continued his studies of quail and raptors and added mink and muskrats when he moved to Iowa to accept a position of professor at Iowa State College in Ames. Errington made pivotal contributions to the emerging views of predators as crucial members of healthy natural communities.

Paul Errington’s reputation as a scholar and researcher is evident in the dozens of books he published. His ability to see connections and build bridges, however, helped him carve an important and unique place in the history of conservation in Iowa. Among his colleagues, Errington was known as the individual who could compile disparate opinions into cohesive committee reports. He taught himself the Scandinavian
languages in order to build bridges between his American colleagues and Scandinavian scientists doing similar work. To his students, Errington was known for his unique ability to open doors for them into the academic world.

Most importantly, Paul Errington was able to bridge the gap between the scientific community and the general public. He was able to create a literary style which allowed the general public to share his love of nature and his observations in the field. His articles not only explained how farmers could improve quail populations on their land but also helped them understand, in terms of the principles of ecology, why those strategies would work. Errington was among the first scientist-authors to advocate the protection of wetlands and wilderness areas for their own sake, in terms understandable outside the scientific community.

Paul Errington was given numerous awards for his scholarly work. His highest award in the opinion of many was given to him in 1962 when he was awarded the Aldo Leopold Award by The Wildlife Society in recognition of his scientific and philosophical contributions. Iowa State University continues to honor Errington’s ability to build bridges between science and the general public by hosting an annual public Errington lecture on a topic related to wildlife biology.

Read more about Paul Errington


The Red Gods Call (an autobiography);

Sylvan Runkel is remembered for his quiet humor, expertise on Iowa’s natural history, and sweat-stained ranger’s hat. He grew up near Jacksonville, Illinois. In addition to countless opportunities to increase his understanding of the wild things in the woods around him, Runkel also learned to appreciate a good joke. One story he related from his youth involved slipping a bullsnake up his sleeve and allowing its head to peek out while shaking someone’s hand.

Runkel graduated from Iowa State College (now Iowa State University) in 1930 with a degree in forestry and was hired as the superintendent of the first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp near Albia, Iowa. It was then that he began to wear the felt ranger’s hat that became his trademark.

After World War II, Sylvan Runkel worked as a biologist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Soil Conservation Service. During these years, Runkel extended his assigned writing and speaking topics beyond the usual soil conservation topics to include the wonders of the natural world. At that task, Runkel was a natural.

During the 20 years after his retirement, Runkel co-authored four books. Runkel led countless natural history hikes for teachers, naturalists, scouts, and anyone who had a blossoming love of the out-of-doors. He was particularly interested in American Indian, pioneer, and other traditional uses for the plants he highlighted. Iowa’s native flora
provided Runkel with occasional opportunities to display his love of a good joke. He was known to jump and shout "rattlesnake!" at the sight of the prairie wildflower, rattlesnake master, just to be certain he still had his audience's rapt attention.

Runkel believed that direct experience with the environment was critical to the development of knowledge and appreciation for the environment. He often said, "You really don't get it unless you get out there and get your hands in the dirt and touch leaves and smell smells of the woods or prairie or marsh and see the colors. You must become a part of it."

Sylvan Runkel believed strongly in enjoying time spent in the outdoors. He believed the joy and knowledge he shared with educators would be multiplied by the number of students touched, in turn, by those educators. Thus was paved a path to a better environment. For his educational and conservation efforts, Sylvan Runkel was honored by the Iowa Academy of Science, Iowa Chapter of The Wildlife Society, Boy Scouts of America, and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

Read more about Sylvan Runkel

_Iowa Natural Heritage;_ "Wahoo to You, Sylvan Runkel!" Jennifer Ealy; Winter 1995.

_Wildflowers of Iowa Woodlands;_ Sylvan Runkel and Alvin Bull; Iowa State University Press, Ames, IA; 1987.

_Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie;_ Sylvan Runkel and Dean Roosa; Iowa State University Press, Ames, IA; 1989.
John Madson
Converting biological facts to music

"Thinking of myself as a bad habit that’s gotten out of hand is not the sunniest of outlooks, nor is the realization that the Higgin’s eye mussel contributes more to the Earth than I do. The mussel helps stabilize the streambed in which it lives; it filters and clarifies water that passes through it, straining out suspended materials and converting tiny organisms to tissue that can be used, in turn, by such higher forms as fish, otters, muskrats, waterfowl, and crawdads. I can’t do those things; I tear at the riverbeds, poison the food chain, and corrupt the waters that sustain me. All that is bad enough. But the real blow to my lordly pride is the knowledge that while the mussel can make a pearl, the best I can do is gallstones."

—John Madson

Born: 1924 in Ames, Iowa
Profession: Biologist, author, and “river rat”
Died: April 19, 1995

John Madson attended Ames High School and earned a degree in biology from Iowa State College (now Iowa State University) in Ames. Madson worked for the Iowa Conservation Commission (now the Iowa Department of Natural Resources) as the editor of the Iowa Conservationist magazine. In later years, Madson worked for the Des Moines Register and the Winchester Firearms company, finally becoming a free-lance writer in 1979. Madson was a prolific outdoor writer, his work appearing frequently in such magazines as Smithsonian, Audubon, National Geographic, and Field and Stream.

Madson traveled extensively to wild and natural places all over the world as his published articles fully document. But the Midwest was the place of his youth, the place he called home, and the place about which he wrote most eloquently. Growing up on the central Iowa prairie, Madson paid careful attention not only to events in the natural world but also how those events shaped the lives of the people. Madson was a keen observer and a collector of stories. These he was able to
weave together into a musical tapestry of stories and sensations.

These stories and sensations became his books and the foundation of his efforts to preserve the places he came to know. Madson believed that people could not be separated from the land that shaped their experiences. Truly understanding the land, therefore, meant understanding the stories of the people, as well as the natural history and ecology of a place. These two ingredients, together, create a community of which humans were a part and on which humans could focus their conservation efforts.

In recognition of his achievements as an author and biologist, John Madson was honored by the Outdoors Writers Association of America, The Wildlife Society, Iowa Wildlife Federation, and National Wildlife Federation.

Read more by John Madson


The individuals mentioned in this booklet have made important contributions to the understanding of the wealth of Iowa's natural and cultural resources. Many had childhood opportunities to learn about and enjoy the natural world in the company of a parent or mentor. These significant life experiences fueled their commitment to find unique and effective ways of communicating not only their love of the natural world but also their insights as to what would be necessary to ensure future generations would have similar opportunities. Their work is discussed here so that it can be studied further, admired, and emulated by those of us who make decisions every day that affect the quality of our environment.

It is important to note that none of these individuals would have considered themselves extraordinary. In fact, each of these people would have been the first to suggest that their work should not be considered in isolation. Each professor and scientist, for example, had colleagues and students whose individual efforts may have been incorporated into a larger project. Each individual involved in politics had staff and writers who played a role in how conservation values and beliefs could be turned into public policy. All of the individuals mentioned had family and friends through the generations before and after their own who provided stories, insight, support, and encouragement that shaped the courses of their lives.

There are dozens of others who made important contributions to conservation in Iowa. Thomas MacBride, Margo Frankel, Henry Wallace, Freda Haffner, Cora Call Whitney, Frederic Leopold, and John Reuben Keyes, to mention just a few, are other individuals who have left an important conservation legacy for Iowa.
More importantly, there were, are, and will be many others whose conservation efforts never were and never will be noticed by the media. These are the individuals who make the most significant impacts on the quality of the environment. They plant trees and prairies, conserve energy, share their love of the outdoors with others, recycle, vote, read, attend seminars, and volunteer their time.

In short, they consider the environment and future generations every time they make a decision. They learn, continually evaluate their own opinions and beliefs, and make certain their beliefs clearly show through in their actions.

The individuals in this booklet are a few of the leaders; the real conservation work will be done by the rest of us.
Iowa’s Natural Resource Heritage

*Important Iowa Conservationists* is one in a series of three booklets that are part of the Iowa Natural Resource Heritage booklet series. The booklets in the series include:

- Changing Land Use and Values (IAN-501)
- Important Iowa Conservationists (IAN-502)
- Iowa’s Environmental Laws (IAN-503)

The Iowa Association of Naturalists also has produced four other booklet series that provide readers with a clear, understandable overview of topics concerning the Iowa environment and conservation. The series titled “Iowa’s Environmental Issues” is currently under revision and will be available in the near future. The booklets included in each of the first four series are listed below.

### Iowa Wildlife and People

- Iowa Wildlife Management (IAN-401)
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