

the Conservationist

A Quarterly Publication of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Winter 2026

**The Winter Night Sky
Bundle Up and
Enjoy the Show**

How to Tell by the Shell

Winter Calendar



Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

from the president



For over a century, the Forest Preserve District has worked to protect prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. Today, that mission includes reducing our environmental footprint and preparing the preserves for the effects of climate change. Through our Clean Energy, Resiliency, and Sustainability Plan, we're identifying ways to save energy, cut greenhouse gas emissions, manage waste, and ensure our natural areas can continue to thrive for generations.

In support of our commitment to clean energy in particular, we've installed solar panel arrays at a number of sites. The fleet building at Blackwell; parts of the Danada Equestrian Center; the new net-zero-designed DuPage Wildlife Conservation Center at Willowbrook; and hot water systems, flush toilets, and parking lot lights throughout the preserves are all powered by the sun. Even the electric golf carts at The Preserve at Oak Meadows! And online in 2026, solar panels at Danada will power the District's headquarters building.

Recently, the District also joined Illinois Shines, a statewide community solar program that allows subscribers to support solar farms throughout the state and receive credits on their electric bills for the power the farms generate. You can read about our participation in this innovative endeavor on our website at dupageforest.org/blog.

I'm excited about all the ways the Forest Preserve District is contributing to a cleaner energy future and helping to make renewable power more affordable and accessible for all. Together, we're certain to ring in a bright 2026!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Hebreard".

Daniel Hebreard

President, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County



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BOARD MEETINGS

For schedules and agendas or to watch live or recorded meetings, visit dupageforest.org.



THE CONSERVATIONIST

Winter 2026, Vol. 63, No. 1



FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT OF DUPAGE COUNTY

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dupageforest.org

The Conservationist is a quarterly publication of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. Subscriptions are free for DuPage County residents and \$5 per year for nonresidents. To subscribe or unsubscribe, call 630-933-7248 or email forest@dupageforest.org. You can also read this and previous issues 24/7 at dupageforest.org. To receive an email when each new issue is available online, email forest@dupageforest.org.



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© Mary



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toshiko/stock.adobe.com



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On the cover: The constellation Orion Haryanto/stock.adobe.com

OUR *Mission*

To acquire and hold lands for the purpose of preserving the flora, fauna and scenic beauty for the education, pleasure and recreation of DuPage County citizens

news & notes

ANNUAL PERMITS ON SALE

Annual permits for 2026 for private watercraft, archery, off-leash dog areas, and model crafts are now on sale at dupageforest.org under “Get a Permit.”

Permits are also available Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. through Visitor Services at 630-933-7248 or at Forest Preserve District headquarters at 3S580 Naperville Road in Wheaton.



COLLECTIONS *Corner*

Among the many treasures in the Forest Preserve District's collections, few are as awe-inspiring as the mammoth remains discovered at today's McKee Marsh in Blackwell.

On June 21, 1977, heavy equipment operator Gary Jones was digging clay from an old bean field when he noticed large bones in the soil. District staff inspected the bones the next day and identified the remains to be from a prehistoric elephant, initially believed to be a mastodon then later confirmed as a woolly mammoth.

Excavation was slow and careful. Staff used hand tools to avoid damaging the bones and set up pumps to keep the muddy site from flooding. They mapped the location of each bone and protected the remains with wet burlap and water to prevent drying.

News of the discovery quickly spread, attracting thousands of curious visitors as scientists and volunteers continued the methodical excavation, ultimately recovering about 75% of the skeleton. Radiocarbon dating revealed the bones were more than 13,000 years old. Today, this incredible specimen is prominently displayed at Fullersburg Woods Nature Education Center, where it inspires curiosity and wonder in visitors of all ages.

NEW ENERGY, NEW SAVINGS

The Forest Preserve District is participating in a new community solar program called Illinois Shines that's increasing the use of renewable energy while lowering District expenses.

In fall 2025 the District entered a 20-year agreement with US Solar, a company that builds solar farms — large fields of solar panels — at various locations across the country. The District specifically subscribed to Illinois solar farms in Oregon and Manville, known as the USS Duck and the USS Man, which will produce and deliver roughly half the District's annual electricity usage, about 1.7 million kilowatts, to the power grid. In return, the District will receive 10% off its corresponding ComEd bills. Future solar farm subscriptions will offset the District's remaining 1.8 million kilowatts of usage and result in a 10% savings on remaining energy bills.

These community solar subscriptions come at no cost to the District. Illinois Shines helps to pay for the construction of the solar farms as part of the state's Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, which requires Illinois to be completely powered by renewable energy sources by 2050. Residents and private businesses can sign up for the community solar program as well but may incur subscription fees. You can read more about this project at dupageforest.org/blog.



\$10,000 GRANT TO SUPPORT NEW GREENHOUSE

As part of their 2025 Green Region Grant Program, ComEd and Openlands, a nonprofit committed to urban conservation in northeastern Illinois, have awarded the Forest Preserve District \$10,000 for the construction of a new greenhouse at its native plant nursery at Blackwell. The greenhouse is expected to double the District's seed collection and distribution efforts, ensuring the protection of local biodiversity and an increase in native pollinators.

The District grows nearly 90 different kinds of native flowers and grasses at its nursery. It spreads seeds collected from those plants across prairie and woodland restoration projects throughout the preserves.

ComEd and Openlands have a long-standing collaboration to create sustainable communities and maintain natural environments. In 2025 they awarded a total of \$150,000 to support preservation projects, expand habitats, combat climate change, and create environmental education spaces.



© Trevor Edmonson



THANK YOU *for Being a Friend*

The Friends of the Forest Preserve District gratefully acknowledges those who donated \$500 or more the prior quarter. The Friends engages the community in philanthropy to advance the District's mission and master plan for the benefit of wildlife and wild areas and to increase sustainability in the forest preserves.

Gift of \$10,000 or More

Robert & Toni Bader Charitable Foundation, Inc.

Gift of \$2,500 – \$9,999

nora fleming
Edith Podrazik
Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.
V3 Companies, Ltd.
Wheaton Bank & Trust

Gift of \$1,000 – \$2,499

Anonymous
Autumn Green Animal Hospital, PLLC
The Baran Family Fund
The Conservation Foundation
Friends of Danada, Inc.
Jonathan Kruger
Larry C. Larson
Susan and Craig Manske
Donald and Susan Panozzo

Gift of \$1,000 – \$2,499 (con't)

The Richard Laurence Parish Foundation
Monica Sentoff
David A. and Eileen Stang
West Chicago Garden Club

Gift of \$500 – \$999

Anonymous
Amy Caveney
Paul H. Herbert
Hey and Associates, Inc.
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Mallory Kim Neuberg
David and Amy Phillips
Amy and David Reeter
Rick Stastny
Lisa and Ronald Svegnago
John and Kathleen Westberg
Wight & Company
Thomas R. Williams and Kelly A. Quinn

Learn more or donate at dupageforest.org/friends or mail your gift to the Friends of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County at 3S580 Naperville Road in Wheaton, 60189. To discuss your giving plans or learn about Friends' board service opportunities, please contact Partnership & Philanthropy at 630-871-6400 or fundraising@dupageforest.org.

MAYSLAKE HALL 2026 CLOSURE

Starting March 1 the Forest Preserve District will close Mayslake Hall for up to a year for renovations. The extensive project will upgrade mechanical systems to meet code, install ramps on the first floor to aid people who are not able to navigate the stairs, add or replace plumbing so there's access to water for cleaning purposes on all levels, remove the unused south section of the retreat wing, and upgrade the storage area that houses the District's collection of historic and natural history artifacts. For updates on these renovations, visit dupageforest.org.

Fully grown pistolgrip mussels can be up to 8 inches long. ▼

How to Tell by The Shell

by **EVERETT KRAUSE**, ECOLOGIST

© Mary

For many, a dip in the water is refreshing on a hot summer day. But for we ecologists who work at the Forest Preserve District's Urban Stream Research Center, that dip often takes place mid-January in a stream edged with ice.

Native freshwater mussels are filtering powerhouses that remove algae, bacteria, and pollutants from local rivers and streams, creating healthy habitats for fish and other aquatic animals. These mussels are also some of the most endangered animals in the world, so for 13 years the Forest Preserve District has been raising them at its Urban Stream Research Center in Blackwell for release into local waterways. To do so, though, ecologists first need to collect pregnant, or "gravid,"

females in the wild. Of the nine types of mussels that live in DuPage, seven are only gravid in winter, which means someone needs to get cold and wet.

Thankfully, the process starts in summer, when researchers wade in local waters in search of groups of mussels, recording where they find them. Occasionally, they'll move individuals to a certain stretch of a river to ensure they can locate them later during the small window when females are gravid, which can be as short as four weeks. Because mussels often burrow in the streambed in winter to avoid near-freezing temperatures, they can be incredibly hard to find, so having a good idea of their general location can help ecologists limit the time they need to crawl through the chilly water.



▲ The author looks for gravid freshwater mussels on a chilly February day.



▲ The white heelsplitter may have earned its name from its sharp posterior wing, which can be painful to step on.

© Daryl Golden

To make sure they collect the right species, ecologists need to be able to reliably identify mussels in the field without guides or microscopes – a skill that also helps them get out of winter water as quickly as possible! The thing about mussels, though, is that some have distinguishing features while others are more difficult to label.

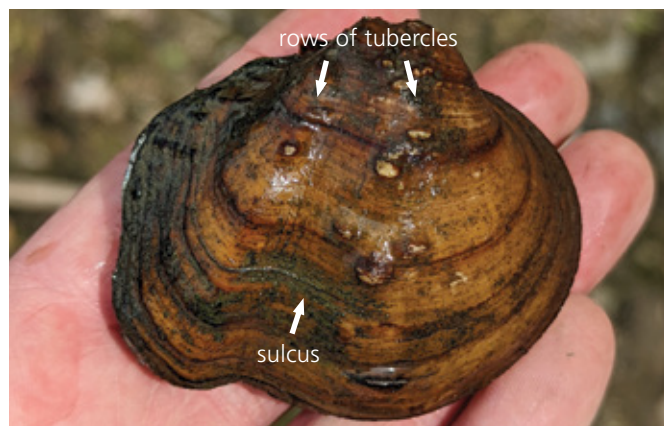
Of the 20 or so species ecologists work with on a regular basis (the District works with partner agencies to raise more than the nine that currently live in DuPage), the mapleleaf is one of the easier to ID. District ecologists first recorded the mapleleaf mussel in DuPage in 2023 as they were working in an unsurveyed stretch of the East Branch DuPage River. They quickly identified it by its distinct appearance, which includes a double row of raised knobs or bumps, called “tubercles,” separated by a shallow, elongated depression in the shell, known as a “sulcus.”

The mapleleaf was an exciting find, but more common species have equally striking appearances. One, the white heelsplitter, gets its common name from a part of its shell called “the posterior wing,” a flattened, often pointy extension at the back of the mussel’s body that can jut out of the riverbed as the mussel burrows. According to legend, the mussel earned its name when the scientist who first described it was walking barefoot through a stream and stepped on one, splitting his heel open. Since then, any mussel with a prominent posterior wing has been called a “heelsplitter.”

In wider northern Illinois, mussels have even more distinct features. One exemplary species (and one of my personal favorites) is the pistolgrip. This large mussel has a thick, elongated, laterally compressed shell with irregularly shaped raised bumps called “pustules” that cover about two-thirds of both halves of its shell. It’s one of the few freshwater mussels that’s sexually dimorphic, which means you can identify males and females just by looking at the shell. Males have shortened, squared-off shells. Female shells are longer and rounder so their gills have the space they need when they’re gravid. (Females carry developing larvae called “glochidia” in their gills before releasing them into the water. Ecologists can tell if a mussel is gravid by looking at its gills.)

Although some mussels are easy to ID, others have just one or two minute discerning features. The giant floater and the creeper are prime examples. Even to the trained observer the two are nearly identical. Only tiny ridges on the “umbo” or “beak” of the shell, the hinge where the two parts of the shell meet, offer a clue. On a giant floater, these markings are called a “double-loop sculpture.” Picture a curvy M or a child’s drawing of a seagull. In comparison, the markings on the beak of a creeper are thickened, raised U-shaped lines.

Whether marveling at the diversity in shells or eyeing that one defining feature, the ecologists at the Urban Stream Research Center are always ready and willing to dive into a river – even one covered in ice – for another opportunity to observe and propagate the freshwater mussels we love and that keep our local waterways healthy and clean. •



© Daryl Colden

▲ A mapleleaf has two rows of bumps called “tubercles” separated by a shallow depression called a “sulcus.”

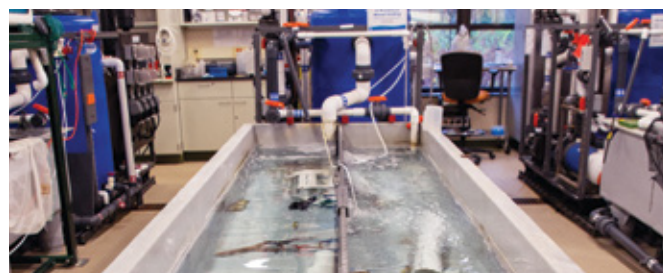


© Matthew Kram



© brewilliams

▲ Ecologists look at fine markings (overlaid above in red for emphasis) on the “beaks” of some mussels to help with identification. Those on a giant floater (top) look like a curvy M. On a creeper (bottom) they’re U-shaped.



Want to learn more about the Forest Preserve District’s work to bring freshwater mussels back to local rivers? Then meet our experts (including the author!) and get a behind-the-scenes look at the Urban Stream Research Center at Blackwell on Jan. 17. See Page 10 for details.

winter calendar

Plants & Wildlife
Ways to Play
Living Green

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Heritage
Nature Art & Culture
Volunteer

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| 29 | 30 | 31 | mar | | | |

January

- 2** Peabody's Pages Book Club
Three-Part Program Begins
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 3** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 4** Archery: All Ages
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 7** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 8** Climate Conversations:
Mussel Matters
Volunteer Restoration Workday

- 9** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 10** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 11** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 15** Words on Birds: A Book Talk
With Jeff Reiter
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 17** Archery: Adults
Urban Stream Research Center
Open House
Volunteer Restoration Workday

- 18** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 19** Archery: Games All Ages
- 21** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 22** The Challenge: Trivia Quiz Game
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 24** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 29** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 31** Volunteer Restoration Workday

February

- 1** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 4** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 5** History of St. James Farm
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 6** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 7** Cocktails and Conservation:
Backyard Birds and Brews
Fishing: Hard Water Classic
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 8** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 12** Nature Date Night: Romantic
Night Hike
Volunteer Restoration Workday

- 13** Nature Date Night: Romantic
Night Hike
- 14** Archery: Games for Adults
Nature Study Explorers
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 15** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 16** Volunteer Restoration Workday
Archery: All Ages
- 18** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 19** The Challenge: Trivia Quiz Game
The Other McCormick of DuPage:
Chauncey McCormick
Volunteer Restoration Workday

- 21** Maple Sugaring
Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 22** Bagels and Birds
Maple Sugaring
- 24** Archery: Adults
- 26** Volunteer Restoration Workday
- 28** Living History Performance With
Actress and Scholar Leslie
Goddard: Abigail Adams
Maple Sugaring
Volunteer Restoration Workday



How to Register Online

1. Visit dupageforest.org. Scroll down, and click on "Find a Program."
2. Click the link to search by activity number.
3. In the search box, enter the five-digit number next to the program name in this calendar.
4. If a program has more than one date, time, or location, click "View Subactivities" to find the one you want.

March

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">1 Maple Sugaring Volunteer Restoration Workday3 Native Landscaping: Creating Your Garden Plan4 Volunteer Restoration Workday5 Climate Conversations: Reducing Waste With Worms Volunteer Restoration Workday6 Volunteer Restoration Workday7 Maple Sugaring Volunteer Restoration Workday8 Maple Sugaring10 Native Landscaping: Creating Your Garden Plan12 Volunteer Restoration Workday14 Living History Performance With Actress and Scholar Leslie Goddard: Amelia Earhart Volunteer Restoration Workday | <ul style="list-style-type: none">15 Gentlemen Farmers of DuPage County Volunteer Restoration Workday17 Native Landscaping: Creating Your Garden Plan18 Volunteer Restoration Workday19 The Challenge: Trivia Quiz Game Volunteer Restoration Workday21 Ranger Discovery Hike Volunteer Restoration Workday24 Native Landscaping: Creating Your Garden Plan26 Volunteer Restoration Workday28 Fishing: Trout Fishing for Kids31 Native Landscaping: Creating Your Garden Plan |
|---|--|

JOIN THE HUNT ON goosechase!

Discover cool facts about plants, animals, and history as you use your phone to search for clues on a forest preserve scavenger hunt!

1. Scan the QR code and download the Goosechase app.
2. Search for "DuPage Forest" in the app.
3. Pick your hunt and begin!



Amateur Astronomy Night Pop-Up Programs at Blackwell

Looking for a fun intro to astronomy? Then join us for a night out at Blackwell when we'll use binoculars and spotting scopes to identify winter stars and constellations.

We'll have activities demonstrating the effects of light pollution and a nice warming fire to keep everyone toasty. Each of these all-ages programs (under 18 with an adult) is \$10 per person.

We'll schedule programs from week to week based on forecasts for clouds and temperatures, so text POPUP to 866-743-7332 and we'll text you when one is on the calendar!





winter calendar



Plants & Wildlife

Bagels and Birds 28087

Bring your appetite for knowledge, fun, and bagels to this relaxing program for beginning and long-time birders alike! Enjoy observing the birds that visit the feeders at Fullersburg Woods with an expert who will answer questions and share fun facts about the species you see. All ages; under 18 with an adult. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|---------|-------------|-------------------|
| Feb. 22 | 8 – 10 a.m. | Fullersburg Woods |
|---------|-------------|-------------------|

Climate Conversations: Mussel Matters 27980

Grab some popcorn and join a screening of *Mussel Matters: Saving Critical Species in DuPage County* followed by a moderated panel Q&A with local experts. The film highlights modern challenges within the Upper DuPage River and Salt Creek systems and community efforts to protect local watersheds that are home to nearly a million people across 77 municipalities. Ages 21 and up. \$10 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248. For dining reservations at the Greenway Table & Tap before or after the program, visit dupagegolf.com/greenway-tap.

| | | |
|--------|---------------|-------------|
| Jan. 8 | 6 – 7:30 p.m. | Oak Meadows |
|--------|---------------|-------------|

Cocktails and Conservation: Backyard Birds and Brews 28088

Discover how to contribute to bird conservation by participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count. Look for local birds during a short walk, and then grab a drink and learn how to become a community scientist. Ages 21 and up. \$15 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248. For dining reservations at the Greenway Table & Tap before or after the program, visit dupagegolf.com/greenway-tap.

| | | |
|--------|------------|-------------|
| Feb. 7 | 2 – 4 p.m. | Oak Meadows |
|--------|------------|-------------|

Urban Stream Research Center Open House 28108

Get a behind-the-scenes look at the Forest Preserve District's efforts to raise freshwater mussels and federally endangered Hine's emerald dragonflies. Then, meet some of the crayfish, insects, and fish that call the county's waterways home. Tours begin every 30 minutes. All ages; under 18 with an adult. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|---------|------------------|-----------|
| Jan. 17 | 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. | Blackwell |
|---------|------------------|-----------|

Words on Birds: A Book Talk With Jeff Reiter 28072

Join author Jeff Reiter for a discussion of his new book, *The Best of Words on Birds*. New birders will find helpful guidance, and bird nerds will appreciate stories about backyard birds, rare finds, and cross-country bird-watching adventures. Ages 18 and up. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-206-9566.

| | | |
|---------|----------------|----------|
| Jan. 15 | 11 a.m. – Noon | Mayslake |
|---------|----------------|----------|

Ways to Play

Archery

Adults 28130

Whether you're new to the sport or looking for a refresher, join us to learn safety tips, proper shooting techniques, and basic skills. Equipment provided. Ages 18 and up. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|----------------|
| Jan. 17 | 10 – 11:30 a.m. | St. James Farm |
| Feb. 24 | 10 – 11:30 a.m. | St. James Farm |

All Ages 28127

Whether you're new to the sport or looking for a refresher, join us to learn safety tips, proper shooting techniques, and basic skills. Equipment provided. Ages 9 and up; under 18 with an adult. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|---------|----------------------|----------------|
| Jan. 4 | 10 – 11:30 a.m. | St. James Farm |
| Feb. 16 | 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. | St. James Farm |

How to Register Online

1. Visit dupageforest.org. Scroll down, and click on "Find a Program."
2. Click the link to search by activity number.
3. In the search box, enter the five-digit number next to the program name in this calendar.
4. If a program has more than one date, time, or location, click "View Subactivities" to find the one you want.

Games All Ages 28133

Compete with others in fun games for all skill levels. Equipment provided. Ages 9 and up; under 18 with an adult. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|---------|----------------|----------------|
| Jan. 19 | 10 a.m. – Noon | St. James Farm |
|---------|----------------|----------------|

Games for Adults 28161

Compete with others in fun games for all skill levels. Equipment provided. Ages 18 and up. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|---------|----------------|----------------|
| Feb. 14 | 10 a.m. – Noon | St. James Farm |
|---------|----------------|----------------|

The Challenge: Trivia Quiz Game

Challenge your friends and neighbors and show off your knowledge during this friendly quiz game with questions on music, animals, geography, history, and more. Come with a team of up to seven, or have us help you find one. Ages 18 and up. Free. No registration. Questions? Call 630-206-9566.

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-------------|
| Jan. 22 | 7 – 8:30 p.m. | Oak Meadows |
| Feb. 19 | 7 – 8:30 p.m. | Oak Meadows |
| March 19 | 7 – 8:30 p.m. | Oak Meadows |



2026 Summer Camps

Multiple Forest Preserves

We'll have a great lineup of camps for kids entering kindergarten through eighth grade, many focusing on nature's relationship with science, technology, engineering, and math. With time for team-building, exploration, and play, kids might not realize they're firing up new neurons as they're making new friends!

Feb. 1 at 9 a.m. **Descriptions go online at dupageforest.org/camps.**

Feb. 17 at 9 a.m. **Early-bird registration opens for DuPage residents at dupageforest.org.**

March 2 at 9 a.m. **General registration opens.**

Fishing

Hard Water Classic 28006

Take part in the only competitive ice-fishing tournament in DuPage, and then stick around for door prizes and awards. Bring your own equipment and bait. All ages; under 18 with an adult. \$20 per person in advance; \$25 at the event. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
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| Feb. 7 | Noon – 3:30 p.m. | Blackwell |
|--------|------------------|-----------|

Trout Fishing for Kids

Introduce your young anglers to trout fishing at this preseason event just for them! Bait provided. Ages 15 and under with an adult. Free. No registration. Questions? Call 630-933-7200.

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| March 28 | 8 a.m. – Noon | Wood Dale Grove |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|



More Ways to Play

SNOW TUBING

Blackwell

When there's plenty of snow on Mount Hoy, take a thrilling 800-foot ride down the hill. Only Forest Preserve District inner tubes are allowed. Rentals are \$10 per tube per day and end at 3:30 p.m. Credit card or exact cash only. Questions? Call 630-933-7248.

**Saturdays, Sundays, and
School Holidays Through Feb. 22
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.**

SNOWSHOES

Blackwell & Fullersburg Woods

Rentals are \$10 per day and are available when there's plenty of snow on the trails. Credit card or exact cash only.

- When snow tubing at Mount Hoy is open, rent at the base until 2 p.m.
- Rent Monday – Saturday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. (last rental at 2 p.m.) at Fullersburg Woods Nature Education Center. Call 630-850-8110 in advance for availability.

winter calendar



Nature Date Night: Romantic Night Hike 28162

Celebrate a romantic evening on a magical 1.5-mile lantern-lit stroll with crackling fires and complimentary hot chocolate and s'mores. Hikes leave at the top of the hour. Last group leaves at 8 p.m., and trails close at 9 p.m. Ages 18 and up. \$12 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248. After, warm up inside the Greenway Table & Tap, known for amazing food, handcrafted cocktails, and stunning views. For dining reservations visit dupagegolf.com/greenway-tap.

Feb. 12 & 13 6 – 9 p.m. Oak Meadows

Ranger Discovery Hike 28134

Learn all you ever wanted to know about the forest preserves — recreational fun, plants and animals, history, and more — on a wildly entertaining ranger-led hike. All ages; under 18 with an adult. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

March 21 10 a.m. – Noon Greene Valley

The Indoor Riding Arena

St. James Farm

RIDING YOUR HORSE IN THE INDOOR RIDING ARENA

Exercise and school your horse at this historic venue. Ages 12 and up; under 18 with an adult. \$10 per horse-rider combo per hour. Register at 630-580-7027.

OBSTACLE COURSE PLAY DATE 28011

Exercise and school your horse at your own pace through a series of obstacles, which may include cake box, vines, carrying items, chutes, teeter-totter, or trot pole variations. Share the arena with up to three other riders, or register and pay for all four slots and have the arena all to yourself for one hour. Ages 12 and up; under 18 with an adult. \$10 per horse-rider combo. Register online or at 630-580-7027.

Saturdays & Sundays

January 10, 11, 24 & 25

February 7, 8, 21 & 22

March 7, 8, 21 & 22

11 a.m., 12:15 p.m., 1:30 p.m. & 2:45 p.m.

Living Green

Climate Conversations: Reducing Waste With Worms 28086

Composting at home is a simple step anyone can take to help tackle climate change. Learn how to transform kitchen scraps and backyard cuttings into rich compost for your plants and gardens, and create your own worm farm to take home. Registration includes a signature mocktail or cocktail and all supplies. Ages 21 and up. \$25 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248. For dining reservations at the Greenway Table & Tap before the program, visit dupagegolf.com/greenway-tap.

March 5 6 – 8 p.m. Oak Meadows

Native Landscaping: Creating Your Garden Plan 28089

Share drawings or photos of your garden space prior to a one-hour one-on-one online meeting, and then get customized expertise that will help you select native plants to match your goals and growing conditions. Ages 18 and up. \$30 per session. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

March 3, 10, 17, 24 & 31 3 & 5:30 p.m. Online



New Plant Sale Site This Spring!

NATIVE PLANT SALE

DuPage County Fairgrounds

Shop in person at the fairgrounds in Wheaton May 15 and 16 for native flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees! Support the Friends of the Forest Preserve District and purchase a ticket for an exclusive advanced shopping event May 14.

For details, including a list of plants and info on tickets for the May 14 advanced event, visit dupageforest.org/native-plant-sale after March 1. We'll see you there!



How to Register Online

1. Visit dupageforest.org. Scroll down, and click on "Find a Program."
2. Click the link to search by activity number.
3. In the search box, enter the five-digit number next to the program name in this calendar.
4. If a program has more than one date, time, or location, click "View Subactivities" to find the one you want.

Heritage

Gentlemen Farmers of DuPage County 28003

Learn about gentlemen farmers Francis S. Peabody of Mayslake, Arthur A. Cutten of Sunny Acres, and Dan and Ada Rice of Danada and how their country estates became forest preserves. Ages 18 and up. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|----------|---------------|----------------|
| March 15 | 2 – 3:15 p.m. | St. James Farm |
|----------|---------------|----------------|

History of St. James Farm 28009

Get an in-depth look into St. James Farm's fascinating history through stories and historic photographs, and learn about the people who were part of its legacy. Ages 18 and up. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|--------|---------------|----------------|
| Feb. 5 | 2 – 3:15 p.m. | St. James Farm |
|--------|---------------|----------------|

1890s Living

Kline Creek Farm

Suggested admission donation of \$5 per person ages 3 and up to enter the farm. All ages; under 18 with an adult. No registration. Questions? Call 630-876-5900 or visit facebook.com/klinecreekfarm.

HOUSE TOUR

Join us in the farmhouse for a look at 1890s home life with themes that change to reflect the seasons.

March 1 – 30

Thursday – Monday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on the hour

HOUSE TOUR: CURING A COLD IN THE 1890S

Join us for a guided tour of the 1890s farmhouse focusing on keeping the family healthy during the winter months. Learn what kinds of foods were prepared for ailing family members and the use of candy as medicine.

Jan. 2 – Feb. 28

Thursday – Monday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on the hour

Maple Sugaring

Discover how sap becomes syrup as you try tapping with tools from the 1890s, check the collection buckets, and watch sap thicken over the fire. Suggested admission donation of \$5 per person ages 3 and up to enter the farm. All ages; under 18 with an adult. Free. No registration. Questions? Call 630-876-5900 or visit facebook.com/klinecreekfarm.

| | | |
|------------------|------------|------------------|
| Feb. 21, 22 & 28 | 1 – 4 p.m. | Kline Creek Farm |
| March 1, 7 & 8 | 1 – 4 p.m. | Kline Creek Farm |

Nature Study Explorers

Have you ever wanted to explore the outdoors just like kids did in the 1890s? Then take a step back in time and learn from the nature-study movement of the late Victorian era with craft projects or science experiments geared to the time of year. Suggested admission donation of \$5 per person ages 3 and up to enter the farm. All ages; under 18 with an adult. Free. No registration. Questions? Call 630-876-5900 or visit facebook.com/klinecreekfarm.

| | | |
|---------|------------------|------------------|
| Feb. 14 | 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. | Kline Creek Farm |
|---------|------------------|------------------|

The Other McCormick of DuPage: Chauncey McCormick 28060

Chauncey McCormick of St. James Farm was a farmer, gentleman, and philanthropist whose influence is far-reaching but little-known. Get to know the life of this man who played a significant role in the county's history. Ages 18 and up. \$5 per person. Register online or at 630-933-7248.

| | | |
|---------|---------------|----------------|
| Feb. 19 | 2 – 3:15 p.m. | St. James Farm |
|---------|---------------|----------------|

Tours at Mayslake

Mayslake Peabody Estate

AT HOME WITH NATURE HOUSE TOUR

Learn the surprising history of Mayslake Hall, the 1921 home of F.S. Peabody and architectural gem that has been surrounded by an oasis of nature for over 100 years. Ages 12 and up; under 18 with an adult. \$8 per person. No registration. Questions? Call 630-206-9566.

Jan. 2 – Feb. 28

Monday – Friday 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Saturdays 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.



winter calendar



Nature Art & Culture

Living History Performance With Actress and Scholar Leslie Goddard

Abigail Adams 28070

Experience the lively wit and fiery patriotism of Abigail Adams. Celebrate 250 years of U.S. history with her views on life as the wife of one president and the mother of another and on the great figures and events of her day. Ages 12 and up; under 18 with an adult. \$7 per person. Register online or at 630-206-9566.

| | | |
|---------|----------------|----------|
| Feb. 28 | 11 a.m. – Noon | Mayslake |
|---------|----------------|----------|

Amelia Earhart 28071

Enjoy vivid stories from the famous 1920s and 30s adventurer Amelia Earhart, the first woman to cross the Atlantic by airplane and to fly solo across the Atlantic. Ages 12 and up; under 18 with an adult. \$7 per person. Register online or at 630-206-9566.

| | | |
|----------|----------------|----------|
| March 14 | 11 a.m. – Noon | Mayslake |
|----------|----------------|----------|

Peabody's Pages Book Club

Three-Part Program 28069

Join these enriching meetups to discuss great reads with fellow book fans. In January we'll discuss *Lady in Waiting* by Anne Glenconner; in February, *The Caretaker* by Ron Rash; and in March, *The Comfort of Crows* by Margaret Renkl. Titles are subject to change. Ages 18 and up. \$10 per person for all discussions. Register online or at 630-206-9566.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Jan. 2, Feb. 6 & March 6 | 10 – 11:30 a.m. | Mayslake |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------|

Volunteer

Volunteer Restoration Workday 28136

Help improve a prairie or woodland by collecting seeds or removing nonnative plants. Ages 8 and up; under 18 with an adult. Free. Register online or at 630-206-9630 at least five days in advance (10 days by phone for groups of five or more).

Churchill Woods

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Jan. 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, 18 & 31 | 8:30 – 11 a.m. | Churchill Woods |
| Feb. 1, 7, 8, 14, 15 & 28 | 8:30 – 11 a.m. | Churchill Woods |
| March 1, 14 & 15 | 8:30 – 11 a.m. | Churchill Woods |

Fullersburg Woods

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-------------------|
| Jan. 10 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Fullersburg Woods |
| Feb. 14 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Fullersburg Woods |
| March 21 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Fullersburg Woods |

Maple Grove

| | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| Jan. 10 & 24 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Maple Grove |
| Feb. 7 & 21 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Maple Grove |
| March 7 & 21 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Maple Grove |

Oldfield Oaks

| | | |
|------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Jan. 7, 10 & 21 | 9 – 11 a.m. | Oldfield Oaks |
| Feb. 4, 18 & 28 | 9 – 11 a.m. | Oldfield Oaks |
| March 4, 14 & 18 | 9 – 11 a.m. | Oldfield Oaks |

Springbrook Prairie

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Jan. 8, 10, 15, 18, 22 & 29 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Springbrook |
| Jan. 24 | 1 – 4 p.m. | Springbrook |
| Feb. 5, 12, 14, 19 & 26 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Springbrook |
| Feb. 28 | 1 – 4 p.m. | Springbrook |
| March 5, 7, 12, 19, 21 & 26 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Springbrook |
| March 15 | 1 – 4 p.m. | Springbrook |

Wayne Grove

| | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| Jan. 10 & 24 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Wayne Grove |
| Feb. 7 & 21 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Wayne Grove |
| March 7 & 21 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Wayne Grove |

Willowbrook

| | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| Jan. 9 & 24 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Willowbrook |
| Feb. 6 & 21 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Willowbrook |
| March 6 & 21 | 9 a.m. – Noon | Willowbrook |

Bundle Up and Enjoy the Show

by **DEREK GRONLUND**, ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETATION SUPERVISOR



toshiki/stock.adobe.com

The short days and long nights of winter can make it a challenge to enjoy the outdoors. By the time most people are free in the evening, the sun is below the horizon, and hunkering down inside seems like the only option. But although the temptation to wait out winter in semihibernation is strong, it would mean missing out on some of the best stargazing of the year.

Winter is the perfect time to admire the stars. First, the nights are darker than in summer. In summer, the Earth's position points our part of the world toward the dense center of the Milky Way, our home galaxy, which has an estimated 100 billion stars. This means that in July or August, even though we can't make out all those stars, we're looking into their light, which gives the sky a hazy appearance. From December through March, though, the sky faces away from the galaxy's center. Just a thin band of the Milky Way is visible, leaving a lot of empty space.

Winter nights are also colder, which helps with clarity. Warm summer air holds more moisture in the form of water vapor, microscopic droplets that act like tiny lenses, bending and scattering light across the night sky. This produces a bright, hazy appearance that makes stars and planets appear fuzzy.

Cold air with low humidity also means fewer atmospheric disturbances. Think of how the air above a fire or grill appears to shimmer and waver, distorting any objects behind it. The same thing happens on a larger scale above the Earth's surface in summer. Warmer temps create a more turbulent

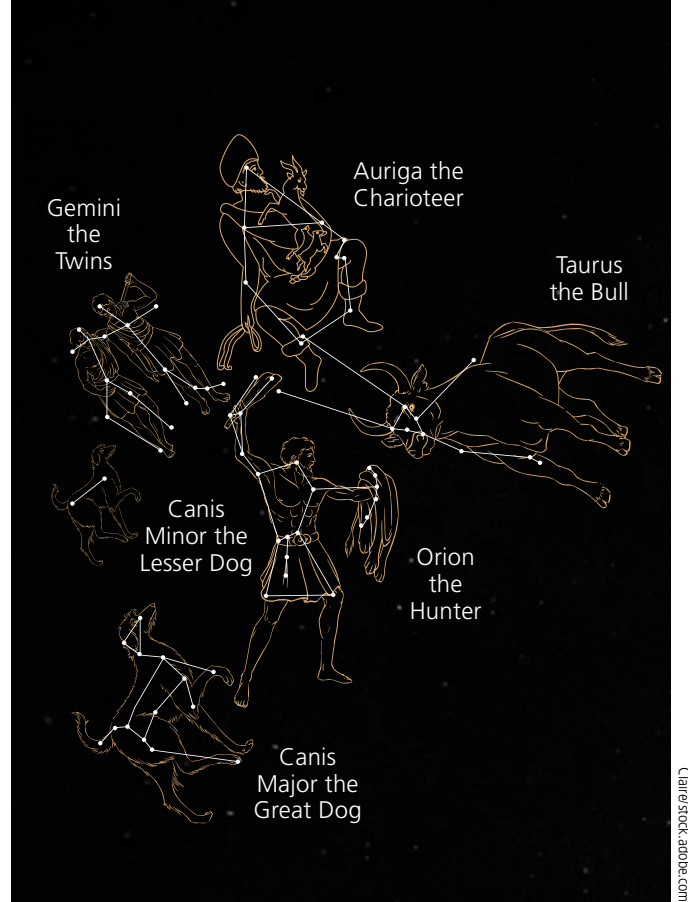
atmosphere that refracts light before it can reach your eyes. During a cold winter night, however, the air is stiller, resulting in sharper celestial images.

DuPage forest preserves aren't open at night, but star lovers can get some crisp healthy outdoor air and a look at the stars from their own backyards. Even in developed DuPage County, several celestial objects are visible in winter with the unaided eye. One is an asterism known as the Winter Hexagon.

The term "asterism" is likely not as well-known as "constellation," but both describe familiar patterns of stars that are easy to pick out in the night sky. The main distinction between the two comes down to global recognition. In the late 1920s the International Astronomical Union designated 88 official constellations. This allowed astronomers worldwide to develop standardized star maps so they could share findings more accurately and efficiently. Asterisms lack this designation. For consistency's sake the IAU also chose to use

Amateur Astronomy Night Pop-Up Programs at Blackwell

The forest preserves aren't open at night, but we're planning some special after-hours viewing programs, providing a rare opportunity to observe the stars from Blackwell and to learn how we can all make night skies darker in DuPage. Details are on Page 9.



Claire/stock.adobe.com

▲ For millions of years the winter night sky in the Northern Hemisphere has included the set of celestial objects on the left. For thousands of years humans have been drawing imaginary lines between those objects, turning them into fabled people and animals, such as the constellations depicting characters from classic Greek and Latin mythologies on the right. Stories vary, but here, Orion is seen with his two dogs as he confronts Taurus. Twins Castor and Pollux, known as Gemini, spend half the year in the stars, the other half in the underworld. To some, Auriga was a charioteer; to others, possibly a goat herder.

names from classic Greek and Latin to label the constellations although cultures worldwide continue to use their own regional names as they have for tens of thousands of years.

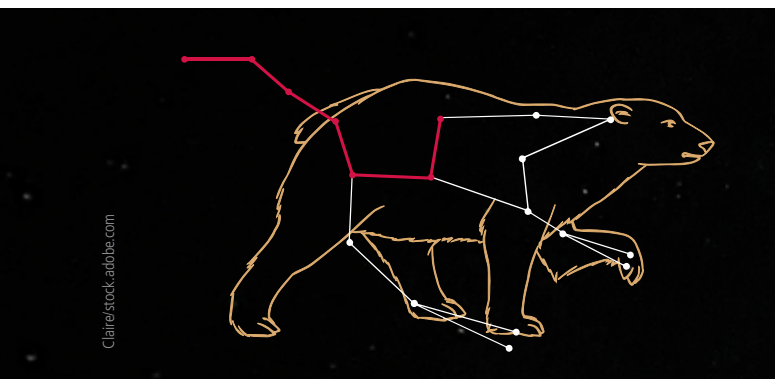
Many times, an asterism is the most visible part of a larger constellation. A prime example is the seven-starred Big Dipper, which is actually a part of the constellation Ursa Major, or the Great Bear. But an asterism can also be formed from the brightest stars of several different constellations. Such is the case with the Winter Hexagon.

Shortly after sunset, look to the eastern horizon, and you

should be able to make out six bright stars in a large loose circle rising high in the sky. This ring is formed by the six brightest stars in the constellations Orion, Taurus, Auriga, Gemini, Canis Minor, and Canis Major, stars named Rigel, Aldebaran, Capella, Pollux, Procyon, and Sirius, respectively. Once you're comfortable locating the Winter Hexagon, finding other objects is just a matter of some simple star-hopping.

Orion the Hunter is probably one of the easiest constellations to pick out. As soon as the sun sets, look to the south, and you should be able to see Orion in the lower-right corner of the Winter Hexagon. Look for the distinct hourglass shape of his body and the three stars that make up his "belt."

If you draw an imaginary line through the three stars of the belt and extend it out to the right, the next brightest star you'll see is Aldebaran, the reddish eye of Taurus the Bull. Taurus is one of the oldest-recognized constellations, dating back to the Bronze Age. Greek stargazers named a smaller V-shaped asterism within Taurus the Hyades after a sisterhood of nymphs who, according to legend, were transformed into stars and heralded the onset of the rainy season. Aldebaran is one of hundreds of stars that make up the Hyades, stars that average around 600 million years old. The majority are red giants or white dwarfs, stars that have used up a majority of their fuel and are entering the final phases of their cycles,



Claire/stock.adobe.com

▲ The familiar seven-starred asterism known in the U.S. as the Big Dipper, highlighted in red, is part of the larger constellation known as Ursa Major, or the Great Bear.

burning cooler and giving off more red and orange colors as they do.

Continuing that imaginary line a little further past Aldebaran, you should see a fuzzy cluster that makes up another asterism, the Pleiades, also known as the Seven Sisters. (Auto fans may know this group as the six stars in the Subaru logo, Subaru being the Japanese name for this cluster.) With a pair of binoculars you can see dozens of luminous bright blue stars within the Pleiades, but the asterism actually contains thousands. Their color indicates the stars are extremely hot and relatively young, astronomically speaking, a mere 100 million years old.

Of course some lights in the night sky aren't stars at all. One such spot is in Orion. Just below the three stars that make up Orion's belt hangs his sword. The middle light of that sword is a nebula made up of gigantic clouds of gas and cosmic dust, a mix of carbon, ice crystals, and other ionized particles. Over millions of years gravity will pull these gases and particles together, concentrating their mass and eventually forming the dense hot cores of new stars.

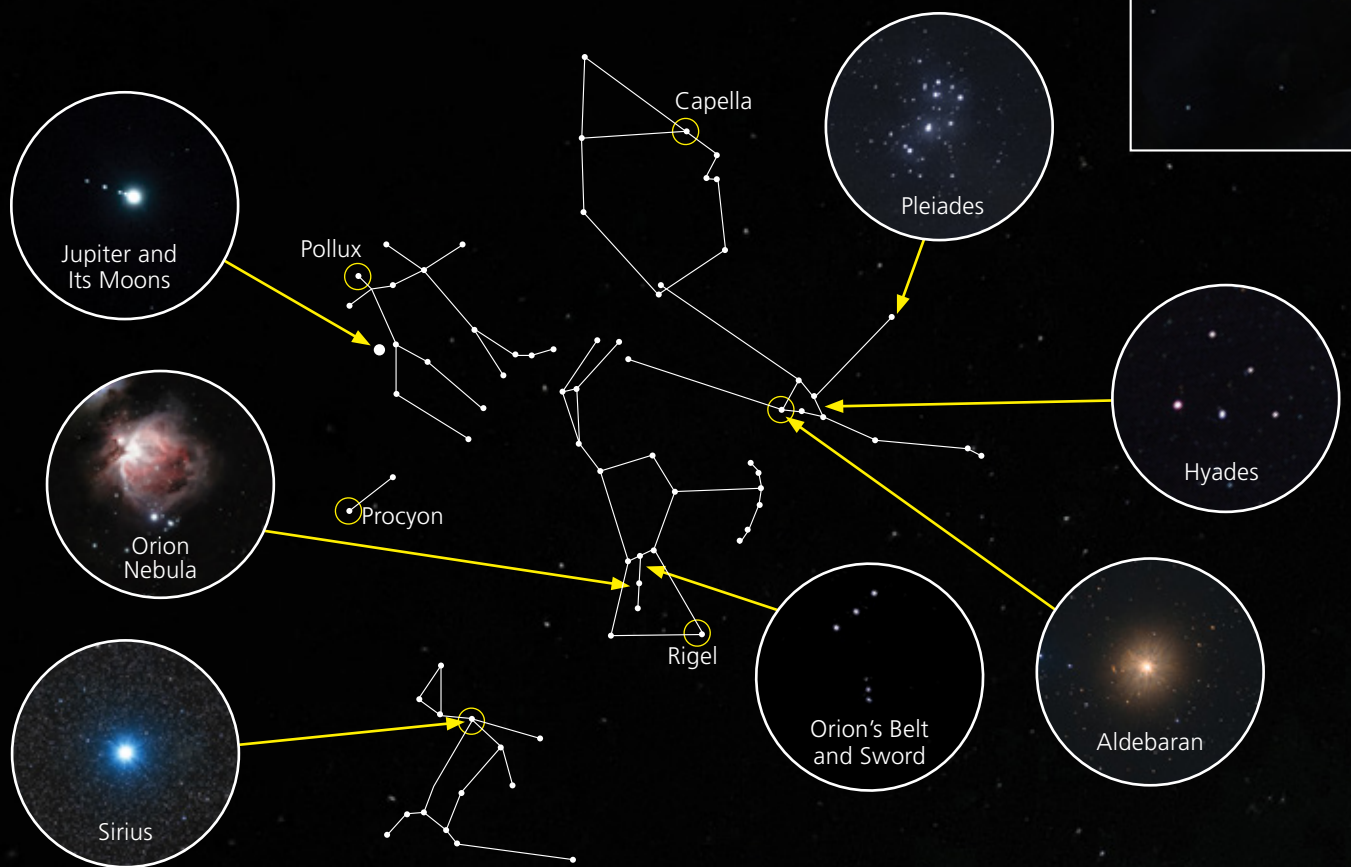
Another bright spot is Jupiter, the largest planet in our solar system. It takes about 12 Earth years for this king of planets to orbit the sun, and in early 2026 this journey will position Jupiter inside the Winter Hexagon near the constellation Gemini. In January, Jupiter will also be "in opposition," meaning it will be directly between the Sun and the Earth and at maximum brightness. Still, despite being an estimated 89,000 miles in diameter (that's about 11 times bigger than the Earth), from here, Jupiter will appear as a bright dot slightly bigger than the surrounding stars. With a pair of binoculars and a reasonably steady hand, though, you may be able to see four of Jupiter's largest moons — Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto — faint pinpoints of light extending in a straight line from the planet's equator. They're known as the Galilean moons because they were first observed and described by the 17th-century astronomer Galileo Galilei.

While it may take a bit of bundling up, do your best to get out and under the night sky this winter when conditions will be prime. You may have to deal with some ice, snow, or wind, but there will at least be one advantage — no mosquitoes! •

Key Objects in the Winter Night Sky

These objects were photographed with powerful telescopic lenses. To the naked eye they appear as mere pinpoints, but their presence in the sky has fascinated humans for eons.

The six stars circled in yellow make up the Winter Hexagon asterism, isolated here on the right.



directory

HEADQUARTERS

35580 Naperville Road
Wheaton • 630-933-7200
TTY 800-526-0857
dupageforest.org
forest@dupageforest.org

Visitor Services

630-933-7248
Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Office

Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Volunteer Services

630-933-7233

Partnership & Philanthropy Friends of the Forest Preserve District

630-871-6400

Law Enforcement

630-933-7240

FOREST PRESERVE *Hours*

Most forest preserves are open daily from one hour after sunrise until one hour after sunset.

PARTNER *Sites*

DANADA HOUSE

Wheaton • 630-668-5392

FISCHER FARM

Bensenville • 630-766-7015

BARTLETT NATURE CENTER

Bartlett • 847-608-3120

LYMAN WOODS NATURE CENTER

Downers Grove • 630-963-9388

EDUCATION *Centers*

DANADA EQUESTRIAN CENTER

35507 Naperville Road
Wheaton • 630-668-6012

Office

Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Closed Saturdays & Sundays

Barn

Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Saturdays & Sundays 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.

DUPAGE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION CENTER

525 S. Park Blvd.
Glen Ellyn • 630-942-6200

Animal Admittance and Phone Hours

Thursday – Tuesday 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Wednesdays 9 a.m. – Noon

Visitor Center

Thank you for your patience! The center is expected to open in 2026. For updates, visit dupageforest.org.

FULLERSBURG WOODS NATURE EDUCATION CENTER

3609 Spring Road
Oak Brook • 630-850-8110

Monday – Saturday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Closed Sundays

GRAUE MILL AND MUSEUM

3800 York Road • Oak Brook
630-451-3430

Open mid-April – mid-November
Wednesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Closed Mondays & Tuesdays

KLING CREEK FARM

1N600 County Farm Road
West Chicago • 630-876-5900

Suggested admission donation \$5 per person ages 3 and up

Thursday – Monday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Closed Tuesdays & Wednesdays

MAYSLAKE PEABODY ESTATE

1717 W. 31st St.
Oak Brook • 630-206-9566

Monday – Friday Noon – 3 p.m.
Saturdays 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Closed Sundays

Due to interior restoration work, Mayslake Hall will close for the year at the end of February. For updates, visit dupageforest.org.

ST. JAMES FARM

25541 Winfield Road • Warrenville
630-580-7025

Office and Visitor Center

Please call for hours.

GOLF *Courses*

THE PRESERVE AT OAK MEADOWS

900 N. Wood Dale Road
Addison • 630-595-0071

MAPLE MEADOWS GOLF COURSE

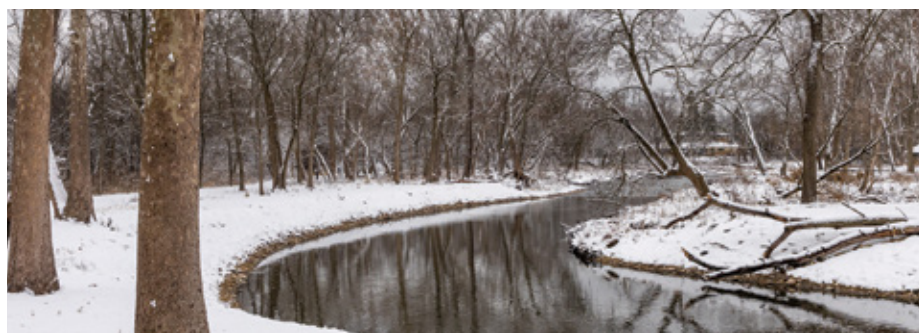
272 S. Addison Road
Wood Dale • 630-616-8424

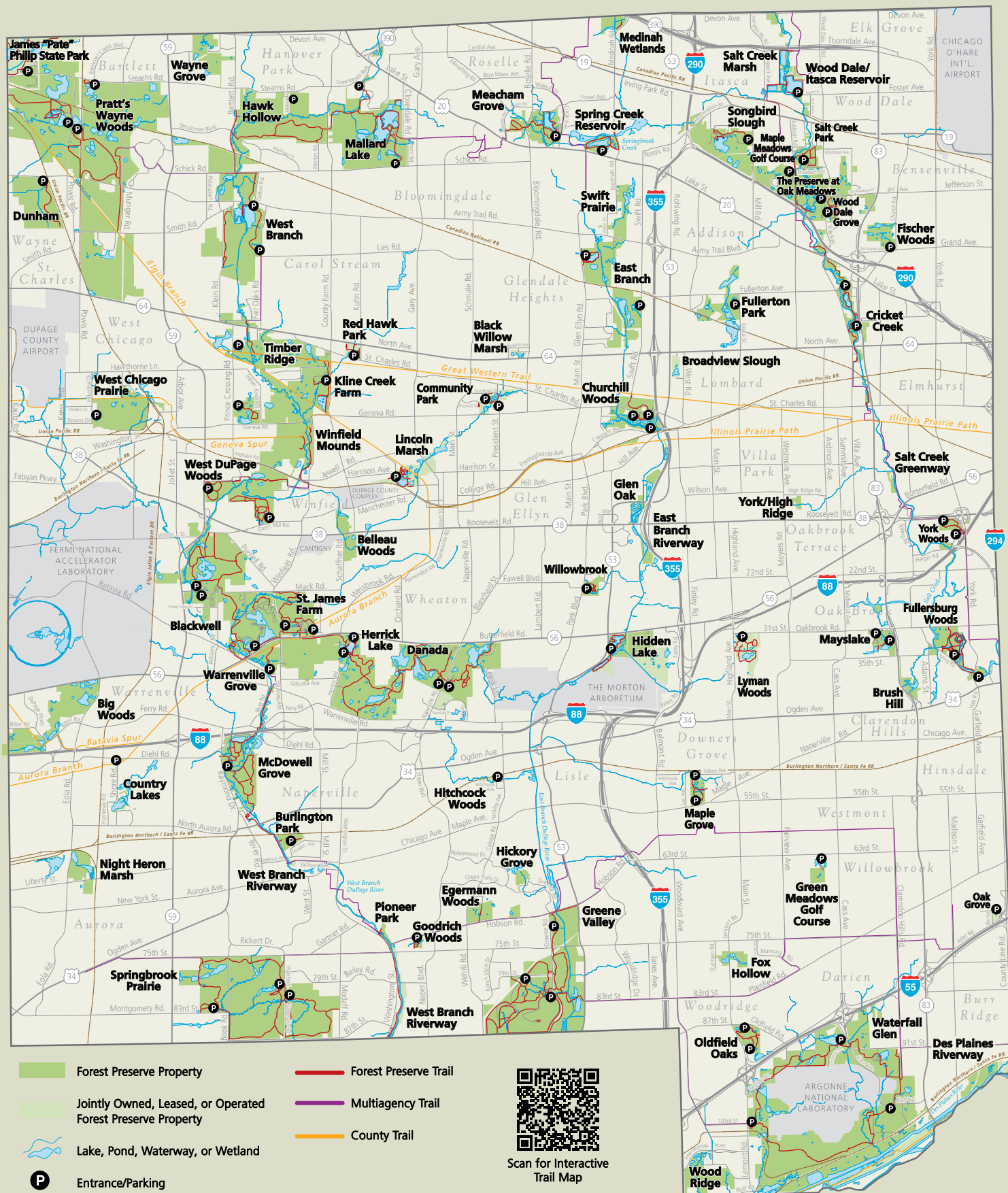
GREEN MEADOWS GOLF COURSE

18W201 W. 63rd St.
Westmont • 630-810-5330

ACCESSIBILITY

If you have accessibility needs or concerns, please contact our ADA programs and activities coordinator at 630-871-7537 or TTY 800-526-0857 at least 48 hours before your visit or at least two weeks before any registration-based program.







**Forest Preserve District
of DuPage County**

35580 Naperville Road
Wheaton, IL 60189

dupageforest.org



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the Conservationist

A Quarterly Publication of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Winter 2026

DUPAGE FOREST PRESERVES
SUMMER
Camp
FOR KIDS ENTERING
GRADES K – 8

FEB. 1 @ 9 A.M.
Descriptions go online at
dupageforest.org/camps.

FEB. 17 @ 9 A.M.
Early-bird registration opens for
DuPage residents at dupageforest.org.

MARCH 2 @ 9 A.M.
General registration opens.