

# Fungi

## Earth Star Fungus

*Geastrum triplex*



This fungus is in the puffball group. The ball holds the spores and is supported by the "star" below it. When the ball opens, the spores get released into the air, which looks like a puff of steam or dust.

Search for this species in the leaf litter of dense woodlands.

Do you know how to find mushrooms?

Look with your eyes, appreciate the colors, patterns, and habitat of each species. They are very important to the health of the forest!

Search for these bright yellow mushrooms on the side of a fallen tree at Big Rock Park.

## Golden Oyster

*Pleurotus citrinopileatus*



# Amphibians

## American Toad

*Anaxyrus americanus*



Photo: Dr. Nicole Palenske

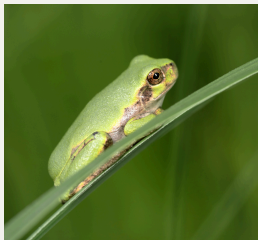
Are amphibians and reptiles ectotherms (sometimes called cold blooded) or endotherms (warm blooded)?

Can amphibians live on land and in water?

Both species can be found at Big Rock Park. Look on the trees or in the foliage for the tree frog. Look on the ground for the toad.

## Gray Tree Frog

*Hyla versicolor*



# Insects

## Green Metallic Sweat Bee

*Augochoropsis sp.*

("sp." means that we don't know the species).



Photo: Dr. Stephen Johnson

Have you ever seen a bee this colorful? Look for them on a warm summer day!

## Long-horned Bee

*Melissodes sp.*



Photo: Dr. Stephen Johnson

What is the powder-like substance that is covering this bee?

## Common Green Darner

*Anax junius*



Photo: Marla Mertz

This dragonfly is one of the most common darners and earliest bugs of spring. It is common around most water sources and in the surrounding uplands.

## Ebony Jewelwing

*Calopteryx maculata*



Photo: Marla Mertz

This damselfly is common around streams and creeks. Do you know the difference between a damselfly and a dragonfly?



Creator: Kayla Lindquist  
Photographer: Kayla Lindquist  
(unless otherwise specified)



# Discover What's Around You



# At Pella's Big Rock Park

Scan to learn more about Big Rock Park or to find the Mentoring Guide and other resources!



Thank you to Pella Community Foundation for funding this guide!



# Birds

## White-breasted Nuthatch

*Sitta carolinensis*



One of the most charismatic birds in the woods.

Find them climbing up and down tree trunks, often pausing upside down to look around or sing. They are easiest to observe in the park during winter and early spring.

A small but mighty woodland messenger.

A trusted indicator of safety or danger that many critters follow. Listen for "Cheeese-bur-ger" a three syllable song that echos cheerfully through the trees. Or their calls "chicka-dee-dee-dee" which vary in tone and in the abundance of "dees." More "dees" often signifies alarm in the environment. They are often found near brush with lots of hiding spots.

## Downy Woodpecker

*Picoides pubescens*

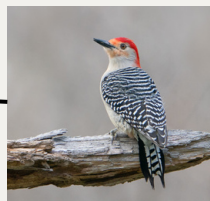


A very curious little woodpecker!

If you hear a small tapping reverberating through the woods, it's probably from this species, but always check! Common at Big Rock Park in every season. Look on the trunks of trees in the more wooded areas. If the back of the head has a red spot, you've likely found a male.

## Red-bellied Woodpecker

*Melanerpes carolinus*



Look for the red belly!

This species is often called the red-headed woodpecker but that's a different bird. That's because they both have very red heads, but this one has the red belly! And an extremely neat feather pattern on its back. You can often find them on oak trees, just look in the first meadow past the bench!

## Barred Owl

*Strix varia*



They say: "who cooks for you? Who cooks for yooouuu alllll?"

Often heard and seen at Big Rock Park. They are abundant in most midwest woodlands. A trick to finding them (when they aren't calling) is to look for mobs of songbirds. Several different species will amp up their activity and communication close to dusk around owls (a predation threat).

# Mammals

## Fox Squirrel

*Sciurus niger*



The most common squirrel in the region.

You can identify it by its red/orange fur, especially on its tail. The eastern gray squirrel is similar but lacks the rusty orange coloring.

Where do you usually find fox squirrels?

Have you ever found an eastern gray squirrel? If so, what were the differences in their habitat?

## White-footed Deer Mouse

*Peromyscus leucopus*



This mouse got its name "deer mouse" because their fur is very similar to that of a deer, and they are agile! "White-footed" describes their white feet, which helps with identification.

Find them in habitat edges or ecotones, like the area where the woods and prairie meet. They can often be heard rustling around at night.

Have you ever heard or seen one?

## Raccoon

*Procyon lotor*



Raccoons, also known as masked bandits, can be found in both urban and wild areas.

In wild spaces you can see them fishing (with their hands) for crayfish and other wetland snacks.

Have you ever seen one in the more-than-human world? The young raccoon on the cover just woke up from a nap.

Look for their hand-like tracks in the winter snow. You can also find them in tree cavities curled up into a ball.

## White-tailed Deer

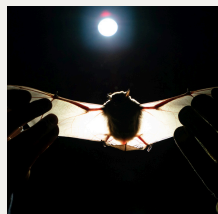
*Odocoileus virginianus*



As the name suggests, this species of deer has a white-tail. Have you ever seen them running away in the distance? Deer are a great teachers of awareness. They listen to the birds for warnings within the landscape and have very keen senses of smell, hearing, and sight. Try to be like a deer when you're outside. Walk lightly, focus on your senses, and minimize your impact so you can see more wildlife.

## Big Brown Bat

*Eptesicus fuscus*



Have you ever seen a bat?

This species is about the size of a dollar bill. It is big and strong and loves to live in buildings. Therefore, it is one of the most commonly sighted species around.

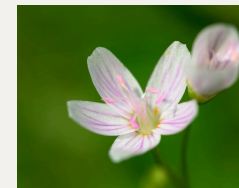
Bats do a tremendous amount for ecosystems! Even our crop lands benefit from their insect-rich diet. In the tropics bats eat anything from pollen to frogs to fish or nectar.

In the summer time look up at the sky a little after sunset and if you're lucky you will see some bats. Pay attention to their flight patterns and agility as they catch insects.

# Plants

## Spring Beauty

*Claytonia virginica*

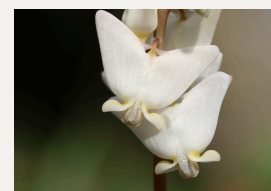


This dainty little flower can be found throughout most of Big Rock Park. The meadow, past the first bridge and under the bur oaks, is the best place to see it. It is one of the first spring ephemerals to flower.

Look closely at the pink stripes that go down the petals towards the middle of the flower. What purpose do you think the stripes serve?

## Dutchman's Breeches

*Dicentra cucullaria*



Here is another fantastic spring ephemeral.

This species is plentiful at Big Rock Park. Fitting for Pella, Dutchman's breeches refers to the shape of the flower, which looks like a pair of pants (breeches) drying upside down on a clothesline. Take a journey to a nearby woodland this spring and try to find some!

## Jack in the Pulpit

*Arisaema triphyllum*

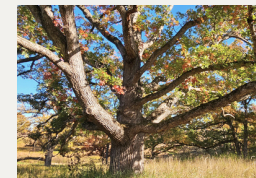


Don't Touch! These vibrant red berries belong to a unique spring ephemeral.

These berries are produced in late summer and turn red in fall. They may be toxic to us, but are enjoyed among birds and mammals. If you find a cluster of red berries on the ground, return next year and maybe you will find the plant and its unique flower.

## Bur Oak

*Quercus macrocarpa*



One of my favorite trees! A healthy bur oak has limbs that sprawl out over the prairie. They have big acorns with fuzzy caps, which is why we also call them mossycup oaks.

A good place to see some is Big Rock Park's meadow.

## Jacob's Ladder

*Polemonium reptans*



Jacob's ladder is another spring ephemeral that has light violet or blue petals. Under the bell-shaped bloom you find the leaves. The foliage resembles a ladder, as the leaves are opposite on the stem (which means they grow directly across from each other).

This species can be found at Big Rock Park in pockets. It is more challenging to find, so look for the characteristic "ladder" formed close to the ground.