

Iowa Prairie Network Newsletter

Summer 2024

The Regal Fritillary Should Be Iowa's State Insect

by Kara Grady

With the 2024 presidential election behind us, I wanted to shift our focus to perhaps an even more serious candidacy. This candidate has lived in Iowa their whole life and is admired throughout the state. Its platform focuses on ecosystem restoration and insect education. It is one of the largest, most beautiful butterflies, whose host plant is an equally beautiful and common wildflower.

With all these credentials to its name, it may shock some people that to this day, the regal fritillary still hasn't been named Iowa's State Insect. There are many good reasons to do so.

Let's start by outlining Iowa's existing state symbols: the wild rose (state flower), the geode (state rock), the American goldfinch (bird), and the oak (tree). According to the [State Symbols USA website](#), Iowa has fewer symbols than any other state. And while 48 states have a designated state insect, Iowa and Michigan have none.

The last time our people designated a state symbol was with the geode in 1967. Has our state pride for Iowa and what inhabits our land dried up in the last 57 years?

Some people may already be nodding their heads. Of course we should have a state insect! Let's pick one everyone knows, like the monarch butterfly or the honeybee. Yet those happen to be two of the most overused state symbols; they are the state insects of 25 states combined. In addition, six states have designated the ladybug, and five have chosen the tiger swallowtail.



Speyeria idalia, a.k.a. the Regal Fritillary at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania in 2008. Photographed by the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, available via Wikimedia Commons.

None of those insects have a unique relationship to Iowa. In contrast, the regal fritillary is native to the tallgrass prairie, which is now being restored in many parts of our state. It is a large, identifiable species with a 4-inch wingspan of vibrant orange, soft maroon, rich browns, sweet creams, and a hint of deep purple.

Its host plant is the native prairie violet, whose leaves it chews on throughout the spring as it molts six times over. (Now that's a hungry caterpillar!)

The regal fritillary's fascinating lifecycle begins with egg-laying in the fall, followed by winter dormancy among leaf litter. Then it emerges in the spring and eventually grows its sunset wings for take-off as a full-fledged adult. *Continued on page 2*

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Regal Fritillary (continued from page 1)

Becoming our state insect wouldn't give the regal fritillary any new conservation statuses or protections, though Iowa's population of this stunning butterfly is threatened due to habitat loss. But it would inform the public of its beauty and resilience, two attributes it shares with Iowa.

This author hopes that recognizing the regal fritillary would allow Iowa to follow Tennessee's example in naming a state butterfly as well as a state agricultural insect. So folks who think the honeybee is an obvious choice, cool your jets.

While efforts to make the regal fritillary our state insect have come and gone in the past, this author believes it's time for a new approach. If you believe this butterfly deserves it, please [sign this petition](#).

Thanks to Nathan Brockman for educating this author about the regal fritillary and Iowa's state symbols. The Reiman Gardens website has more information about the case for making the regal fritillary Iowa's State Insect.

support the regal fritillary AS IOWA'S OFFICIAL STATE BUTTERFLY

WHY THE REGAL FRITILLARY?

After reviewing all species found in the state the regal fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*) rose to the top because it is:

- native to Iowa and found statewide
- a large identifiable species
- common to prairie which is Iowa's native biome
- listed as a species of concern in Iowa
- and has a unique and educational life cycle



Birdsfoot violet, *Viola pedata*, has lost much of its range due to habitat loss. These early-spring wildflowers were once widespread, but today are typically found only in higher-quality remnant prairies



Life cycle

In the fall females lay eggs in the tallgrass prairie near their host plants, which are various types of violets. The violets have already died back for winter and must be found via a chemical compound left by the violets. Eggs hatch in late fall. First instar caterpillars eat the remains of their eggs and nothing else until spring. In early spring caterpillars eat the violet leaves and go through 6 instars, not the normal 5 like other butterflies. The caterpillars molt forming

their pupae where they'll stay for 15 days. Adults emerge in early summer. After mating, females go into summer dormancy until fall and then lay their eggs.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Contact your local legislatures and encourage them to support the regal fritillary as Iowa's official state butterfly.
www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators

For additional information contact Nathan Brockman, Reiman Gardens' Christina Reiman Butterfly Wing Curator at mantisnb@iastate.edu or 515-294-2567.



Prairie violet, *Viola pedatifida*, a declining native species and host plant of the Regal Fritillary Butterfly. Image Courtesy of the National Park Service.

For more information about the Regal Fritillary visit
www.reimangardens.com/collections/insects/regal-fritillary/

Iowa Prairie Conference Recap

by Leesa McNeil

The Iowa Prairie Conference had an incredibly successful 2024 event, reaching its capacity at the Lakeshore Learning Center and Iowa Lakeside Lab of 200 individuals.

Two prairie warriors were recognized and awarded the Prairie Advocate Award - Dr. Dean Roosa and Scott Moats.

Dean Roosa has served as Iowa's state ecologist, board member for the Iowa Chapter of the Nature Conservancy and the Natural Areas Association, chair of the Iowa Natural History Association, and president of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union. He is the coauthor of *Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie* and *The Vascular Plants of Iowa* (Iowa, 1994).

Scott Moats is the Director of Stewardship at The Nature Conservancy. The TNC wrote on Facebook about Scott some years ago:

"Prairies are close to Scott's heart. His strong leadership, attention to science, and professionalism have contributed to the conservation of much of Iowa's remaining grasslands. Scott led the establishment of the Broken Kettle Grasslands bison herd through a partnership with the National Park Service and leads the Conservancy's fire program in Iowa."

Attendees had the chance to enjoy many of the eleven different hikes/outings that were offered, including a Prairie Strips field outing, a pontoon excursion on the Excelsior showcasing work to stop shoreline erosion, the Annie Gardner cabin, and an oak savanna restoration on the east side of Spirit Lake.

Most of these places are public areas welcoming minds any time of year, and this year's proceedings were recorded online for you to view at your leisure. [Check them out here!](#)

While the beauty of Iowa's grasslands stole the show during the field trips, a variety of presentations educated attendees on a wide range of topics from archaeology to soil conservation and cooperative management. Notably, 2024 marked the first year of the IPC striving towards an event free from single use plastics.

Many thanks to the sponsors, presenters, attendees, and especially the Iowa Lakeside Lab for providing a superior site to host this event!

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Every steward knows the pain of having more work than manpower. It can feel at times like a tall order just to slow down the degradation of high-quality natural areas, let alone reverse that momentum.

So it was that in the tail end of 2023, IPN vice-chair Tony Vorwald approached me with an idea: what if all of us working in our own little silos spent a few days each year to help a neighbor out? The Loess Hills enjoy a robust culture of partnership, and the results have proved phenomenal for taking meaningful bites out of the never-ending stewardship to-do list.

Tony and I talked over zoom a few times and eventually felt like we had enough concepts of a plan to reach out to our neighbors here in Eastern Iowa and see if an appetite existed to host a few professional work days on sites where the lift felt too heavy for one organization to handle.

Turns out yes, the appetite was there. The EIHP hosted four work days in 2024 in Clayton, Jackson, Delaware, and Dubuque County. Each event netted between 15-20 practitioners who quickly, safely, and efficiently accomplished several days worth of work on each site in a few short hours. Get a couple dozen people together who know the assignment and have experience with the tools, and we can move mountains - or at least, piles of buckthorn.

So far, it seems, the math works out to everyone's favor. Each outing has brought experienced pros who came to get their hands dirty. When 20 people with saws roll in, we can do a month's worth of work in an afternoon. Our bosses seem to like that part. But we don't keep score, and there's more value than just the tangible accomplishment.

Stewards aren't always the best networkers. We're drawn to the work because we generally don't like meetings, don't like rubbing elbows, don't like talking when there's work to be done. Perhaps that's why there's no stewardship equivalent of a "CCPOA," (County Conservation Peace Officers Association) or "IAN" (Iowa Association of Naturalists).

Or maybe there is and I just haven't been invited. Either way, these events have provided a real value as a venue to talk shop. We can compare notes - what do you do with your piles? What's your burn prescription look like for a site like this? Every site is different, and so is every steward. If we don't get out occasionally to see how others skin their cats, we can easily get caught in the dreaded phase of doing things a certain way because "that's how it's always been done."

It speaks to the importance of community, especially when the task feels too big. Prairies are social things, built on harmony between disparate guilds. It's no wonder we often feel overwhelmed trying to go it alone. Well, in Eastern Iowa at least, we don't have to anymore.





Prairie Home Companions: Why More Farmers are Planting Native Landscapes In Their Crop Fields

By Rachel Cramer, Harvest Public Media Reporter and attendee of the 2024 Iowa Prairie Conference!



Have a story, picture, poem, or other media you'd like to see in our newsletter?

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IowaPrairieNetworkOrg@gmail.com

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Iowa Prairie Network
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The membership form can also be downloaded from our website – click “Join Us”

You can join online or give an additional gift with PayPal

Don't forget to **RENEW** your membership! www.iowaprairienetwork.org. **Thank you!**

The Iowa Prairie Network is a grass-roots, volunteer organization that is dedicated to the preservation of Iowa's prairie heritage. IPN was formed in 1990 by Iowans concerned that our prairie heritage was disappearing. People needed an organization that would bring those who know about prairie together with those who wanted to learn, to form a network of advocacy for Iowa's natural heritage.

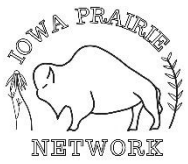
Save the Date!

IOWA PRAIRIE
NETWORK

Winter Seminar

Ames High School
February 15, 2025
Doors open at 8:30 am

For Love of Prairie



Iowa Prairie Network, Inc.
P.O. box 1624
Iowa City, IA 52244
iowaprairienetworkorg@gmail.com
www.iowaprairienetwork.org

IPN's Mission: To Learn About, Teach About, Enjoy, and Protect Iowa's Prairie Heritage



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