



The Babies

The Prothonotary Warbler (Protonotaria citrea), often referred to as the Golden Swamp Warbler, is a resident of Iowa's backwaters. It prefers hollow tree cavities for nesting, which are always near (or over) water. They feed upon insects and larvae. This male has returned to the nest with a May Fly, which will satisfy the youngster's hunger for only a short time. The male sings a ringing 'sweet..sweet...sweet' song as he stakes out his territory. This pair set up house-keeping on my wetland property south of Granger.

The Babies

Spring is a time of rebirth. When our wild places become nurseries for the year's new life. Migrating spring birds select a territory, find a mate, nest, and rear their young. Our resident Bald Eagles will lay their eggs, which will hatch and develop into fully grown birds by the time they leave the nest, in mid-June.

Meanwhile, mammals also secure mates and look for den sites in which they will give birth and raise their young. Foxes and coyotes excavate new dens, or clean out old ones. Raccoons look for cozy cavities in hollow trees. All of these young animals will utilize the summer months to perfect their foraging or hunting skills, before the cool winds of fall start to hint to the cold winter winds to come.

*Following the passage of the Endangered Species Act, the American Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) has made a remarkable recovery in our state. At this writing there are approximately 400 nests in 97 of 99 counties each year (right, this page). Our wintering eagle population swells to around 3,500 birds when resident eagles are joined by birds that have migrated from the far north.*

*Iowa's coyote (*Canis latrans*) population has spread northward across the state in recent years. This adaptable canid will eat nearly anything and, because of this, can even be found in our suburbs. As this mother begins to howl, (opposite page) her pups will soon join in.*









*As Iowa's most numerous hawk species, the Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) can be found nesting from one side of the state to the other. They aren't picky eaters, and will dine on mice, squirrel, rabbit, snakes, and even toads. This parent is feeding small pieces of meat to her two chicks (opposite page).*

*It's always special when you find a new-born Whitetail fawn (*Odocoileus virginianus*). Their spotted coat and large brown eyes make them a favorite of wildlife watchers. This fawn (left, this page) was hiding in a woodland area filled with trillium in bloom.*

The feisty American Mink (Neovison vison) may be the most widespread, yet unnoticed, of Iowa's small mammals. Their crepuscular nature (active at dawn and dusk) and their dark coloration help them avoid detection, even though they live in both the suburbs, and large cities. This mother mink (right, this page) has used a hollow log as a den in which to give birth and raise her young.

A pair of young Great-horned Owls (Bubo virginianus) have left the nest and are exploring their nest tree (opposite page). At this stage of their lives, they are often referred to as 'branchers', because they climb from branch to branch for a few days before they take their first flight.









*Red Foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) are doing well in Iowa, and their kits are among the cutest of baby animals. For many years a vixen has denned beneath one of our out-buildings at our Urbandale acreage (opposite page).*

*Although baby raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) are adorable, they soon grow up, and become pesky adults. This species (left, this page) has benefited greatly from the expanded available food sources that European settlement and agriculture have provided.*

*Genetically pure bison (*Bison bison*) roam the Northern Loess Hills, at The Nature Conservancy's Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve. As new calves (right, this page) are born each spring and the bison herd continues to grow, the Conservancy plans to open more acreage at Broken Kettle for the herd to graze. Each summer the grazing area will expand until the Conservancy meets its goal: a herd of 250 bison grazing 2,500 acres.*

*The groundhog (*Marmota monax*), or woodchuck, is one of 14 species of marmots. These rodents gorge themselves all summer to build up large reserves of fat. Late in the fall season, they retreat to their underground burrows and snooze until spring, drawing their sustenance from this body fat. While hibernating, the animal's heart rate plunges, and its body temperature is not much warmer than the air temperature inside its burrow. This trio of youngsters (opposite page) was caught posing at a den site near a friend's yard.*







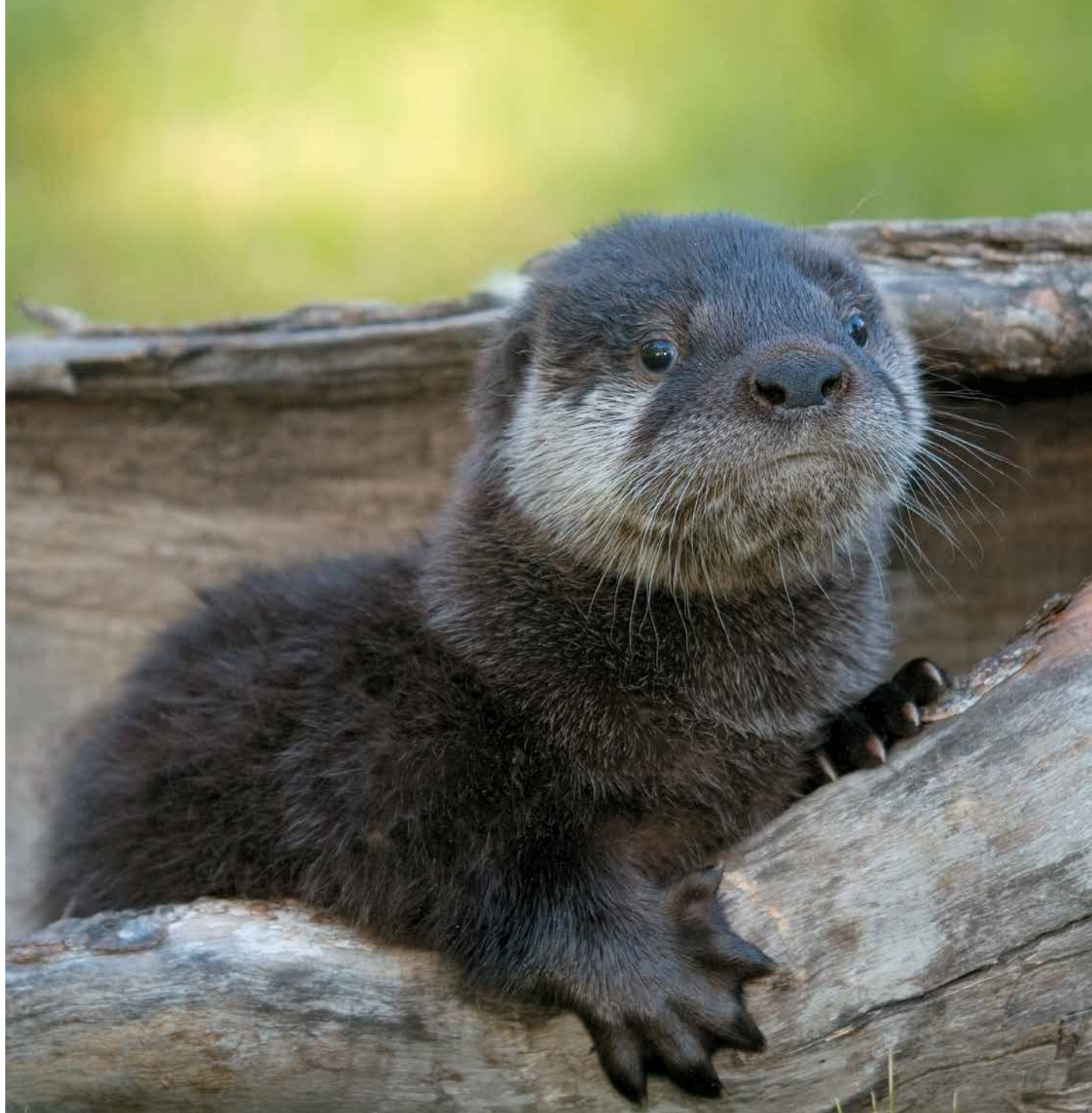


*The Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) is commonly found throughout northeastern Iowa, but they are somewhat uncommon throughout the rest of the state. They will sometimes enlarge a woodchuck burrow and use it as a den during the mating season and when raising young. They have are able to climb trees and will occasionally forage for food or rest in a tree. The kits (opposite page) are playful, and love to frolic near the safety of the den.*

*There are few conservation success stories rivaling the reintroduction of the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) to Iowa's landscape. Thought to be extinct, a remnant population of the Giant Canada was discovered in Rochester Minnesota, in the 1960s. This population became the seed flock for re-establishment of the largest Canada Goose species in the nation (left, this page).*

The North American River Otter (Lontra canadensis) primarily eats fish. It will also eat whatever is easiest to find, like insects, birds, oysters, shellfish, crabs, crayfish, frogs, rodents, turtles and aquatic invertebrates. This youngster (right, this page) was photographed playing along a river bank.

The Great Egret (Ardea alba) is a common resident of the island rookeries of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge. The youngsters grow quickly, and these nestlings (opposite page) will soon fledge.









*The Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) is the most common skunk in North America. Cute skunk kittens like this one (opposite page) can spray when they are only a few days old, long before they can aim. They start to develop this skill after their eyes open at about 24 days old. At this age the odor is a little annoying but not nearly as strong as an adult's. Skunks are nocturnal and eat a variable diet, including insects, small mammals, carrion, and some vegetation.*

*It's spring and in northeast Iowa that means the Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) chicks are hatching. The youngsters (left, this page) are precocious and will follow their mother through the woods, as soon as they dry off.*



*Its early summer and a nest of Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) is hatching (right, this page). Both parents will feed the nestlings.*

After 3–4 weeks the young (opposite page) will leave the nest to wander through the colony, returning to the nest to be fed. They will make their first flight at about 5–6 weeks, and will be independent at 9–10 weeks.







The fast-growing population of American White Pelicans (Pelecanus erythrorhynchos) is doing well on the island paradise of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge (opposite page).

The parents must provide roughly 150 pounds of food to nourish a pelican chick (left, this page) from its birth until the time that it's ready to forage on its own. At 2–3 weeks old, chicks leave their nests and form into groups called crèches. Parents continue to forage for them, returning to the crèche and searching out their young to feed them.

Though great blue herons (Ardea herodias) hunt alone, they typically nest in colonies. They prefer tall trees, but sometimes nest in low shrubs when nesting on Mississippi River Islands. Females produce two to seven eggs, which both parents protect and incubate. These youngsters (right, this page) are about two months old and will soon be on their own.

Most Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis) return to breed at the colony where they were hatched. After they breed for the first time, they are likely to return to the same breeding spot each year, often nesting within a few meters of last year's site. This Ring-billed chick (opposite page) was old enough to wander around his island home in the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge.





