

# BLIND BANTER

Hoosier Creek Conservation & Retriever Association Quarterly Newsletter



## MARCHIN' INTO 2024 LOCAL CONSERVATION

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Use this QR Code to access an online version of Blind Banter!



[hccra.club](http://hccra.club)



[hccra18@gmail.com](mailto:hccra18@gmail.com)



[facebook.com/HOOSIERCREEK](https://facebook.com/HOOSIERCREEK)

# 2024 HCCRA BANQUET GUIDE



## BOTTOMLESS CUPS



**\$30 - ENGRAVED HCCRA METAL CUP**

**INCLUDES: UNLIMITED BEER, WINE, SELTZERS, SODA & WATER**

**ALSO INCLUDES - FREE ENTRY INTO WINCHESTER SX4 RAFFLE**

**\*LIMITED TO 100 CUPS/ENTRIES\***



**\$10 - RED PLASTIC CUP**

**INCLUDES: BOTTOMLESS BEER & WINE**

**\$3 SELTZERS  
\$1 SODAS  
\$1 WATER**

**PURCHASE ALL CUPS FROM THE BAR AREA**

**\*CASH ONLY\***

## AUCTION BUMP GUN

**GREAT ODDS TO WIN A GREAT GUN - ENTRIES LIMITED TO NUMBER OF LIVE AUCTION ITEMS**

### **BENELLI M2 - 12 GAUGE**

**EACH LIVE AUCTION ITEM WILL HAVE A 'BUMP UP' CHANCE**

**THE WINNER OF EACH LIVE AUCTION ITEM CAN PAY \$100 IN ADDITION TO THEIR AUCTION ITEM PURCHASE PRICE TO RECEIVE AN ENTRY INTO THE BENELLI M2 RAFFLE. IF THE BUYER CHOOSES NOT TO PURCHASE THE 'BUMP UP', THE ENTRY WILL BE AUCTIONED OFF.**



**CASH ONLY FOR AUCTION ITEMS AND 'BUMP UP' ENTRIES**

## EARLY BIRD CARD

### **EARLY BIRD CARDS:**

- **ALL GAMES**
- **GENERAL RAFFLE**
- **BUCKET RAFFLES**
- **TOP TIER RAFFLES**

Hoosier Creek Conservation & Retriever Club	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5
	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5
\$100 Early Bird Purch. Card	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$5

### **CASH ONLY:**

- **CAN-AM TICKETS**
- **50/50 TICKETS**
- **52 CARD RAFFLES**
- **30 ITEM RAFFLE**
- **LIVE/SILENT AUCTION & BUMP UP**
- **BOTTOMLESS CUPS**
- **BAR PURCHASES**



## TICKET LEGEND



**\$1 - CHANCE TO WIN VARIETY OF ITEMS & GEAR ON STAGE**



**\$10 - CHANCE TO WIN RAFFLE PACKAGES IN FRONT OF STAGE**



**\$20 - CHANCE TO WIN ONE OF THREE GUNS IN FRONT OF STAGE**

# 2024 HCCRA BANQUET INTRO



## Welcome to the 2024 Annual HCCRA Banquet!

The time is here for the long awaited 2024 Annual HCCRA Banquet! In being one of our favorite events of the year, the devoted HCCRA committee strives to make each banquet better than the last. The annual fundraising banquet is an absolutely crucial evening for the mission and efforts of HCCRA. All money raised is directly invested into local waterfowl & habitat conservation efforts, retriever training equipment and events, and youth involvement. Countless hours of planning, organizing, and preparation are dedicated to making the Annual HCCRA Banquet the best local banquet in the region. However, the main factor that makes the HCCRA Banquet top-tier year after you, is YOU! The over 425 attendees that spend your hard earned money and valuable time showing up in full force to support a cause that we all care so much about; preserving, conserving, and enjoying the passion of ducks, dogs, and hunting for generations to come. Every dollar raised stays in our local community.



One quick glance around the Amana RV Park Morton Building will let you see an overwhelming amount of games, raffle prizes, auction items, and GUNS! This year, HCCRA is giving away the most firearms ever at 56 guns! Not only is HCCRA giving away all those firearms, but the raffles are also full of high quality gear and equipment ranging from custom calls, to a Blackstone Griddle, to a DeWalt chainsaw, to a Hornady gun safe, to Tanglefree decoys, to a TurtleBox Speaker. Billy's Chicken Shack will once again be cooking up and serving a phenomenal meal that keeps HCCRA members wanting more year after year. Our youth table is always a highlight as well with 11 guns dedicated just for youth HCCRA members! Every youth member in attendance will receive a free prize! Additionally, HCCRA wants to make all of its female members have a great time as well, so a women's raffle is also set up with tons of great items, gift cards, and baskets!



HCCRA also prides itself with forming relationships with local businesses and artists that believe in the mission of HCCRA enough to make generous donations to help raise money for local conservation efforts. Two beautiful hand-carved duck decoys from Tim Lawson, an amazingly crafted coffee table made by TSTR Wood Working, an incredible custom ice fishing rod from Kramer Custom Rods & Tackle, another beautiful donation from Country Landscapes, a 4-person hunt at Legacy Acres, along with many other items will be auctioned off with many bidders hopeful to take the one-of-a-kind items home.

***HCCRA thanks its volunteers, donors, sponsors,  
and members for another amazing banquet!***



**The 2024 HCCRA Fundraising Banquet will fund:**

- Tick Pond Restoration Project
- Nesting Structures / Wood Duck Houses
- Gear for HCCRA Annual Youth Hunt
- Equipment for AKC, NAHRA & HRC Hunt Tests
- Future conservation projects and strategic partnerships



## **CATCHIN' UP**

It was a short winter, and an already fun and wild spring for HCCRA. A chaotic spring snow goose migration had HCCRA members scrambling to get decoy spreads out much earlier than usual. Early snow melt meant HCCRA's 4-legged members could kick off their training season much earlier than usual. HCCRA's annual nesting day took place in February (discussed on Pages 5-7) when volunteers anxiously awaited the structure usage rate and hatching success that many volunteer hours have been invested in for installing, maintaining, and inspecting.

Then HCCRA also held its inaugural Poker Run (detailed on Page 8) which was an overwhelming success. All the while, the HCCRA committee was planning and organizing the 2024 Annual HCCRA Banquet. It has been a fun year so far, with much more to look forward to as hunt tests and the waterfowl season will be here before we know it.



Most people were more than pleased with the lack of snowfall this winter. However as waterfowl hunters and conservationists, many of us know that lack of snow melt can lead to lack of nesting habitat for waterfowl. Waterfowl rely heavily on seasonal wetlands for nesting habitat. With reduced snow melt, many of these seasonal wetlands remain dry as they did during the fall of 2023. As many of us recall, last years drought forced many members to scout for new and unfamiliar bodies of water to hunt rather than some of our favorite familiar small pockets and potholes. In the current drought cycle, HCCRA members are reminded during retriever training sessions, scouting trips, or waterfowl hunts how vital HCCRA's mission is. Conserving local waterfowl areas and providing waterfowl nesting habitat is becoming more important by the year. Money raised by HCCRA members over the course of the year is invested directly into **LOCAL** wetland areas. This money contributes to increased local waterfowl populations, local waterfowl hunting opportunities, local retriever training areas, and local areas to take youth members out to engage with the traditions we all love.

### **BLIND BANTER FORUM**

Have a question for the HCCRA committee members about waterfowl hunting, dog training, upcoming/past events, or project details? Have a comment or question about a past newsletter article? Send us your thoughts at [hccra18@gmail.com](mailto:hccra18@gmail.com) to get an answer in our next newsletter!

### **YOUNG HUNTER FEATURE**

Are you 18 years old or younger and have a hunting, retriever training, or conservation story to tell? Are you a youth that learned something afield that you would like to share with the HCCRA community? Send us your stories or articles over to [hccra18@gmail.com](mailto:hccra18@gmail.com) for a chance to be featured in the next newsletter!

# HCCRA NEWS/UPDATES



## HRC HUNT TEST

HCCRA is excited to be a new member of the Hunting Retriever Club, Inc and thrilled to be hosting HCCRA's first ever HRC Hunt Test. Keep your eye peeled for future Facebook postings regarding entry and registration. This will be a great opportunity for dog handlers in the region to test their dogs in another great club!

- **May 4th - May 5th, 2024**
- **Legacy Acres Hunting Club, 3018 O Avenue, Parnell, IA**
- **Registration details to come (Stay tuned on Facebook)**



## AKC HUNT TEST

HCCRA is looking forward to once again hosting its annual Spring AKC Hunt Test. This has been a great retriever event for the organization and local retriever handlers. Let us know if you are interested in volunteering at any of the HCCRA hunt tests!

- **May 18th - May 19th, 2024**
- **Legacy Acres Hunting Club, 3018 O Avenue, Parnell, IA**
- **Lodging available at hotels in Williamsburg**
- **Register by May 2nd at midnight at [www.entryexpress.net](http://www.entryexpress.net)**



**AMERICAN  
KENNEL CLUB** SM

## NAHRA HUNT TEST

After a great turnout last year, HCCRA will be hosting its annual NAHRA Hunt Test again in the summer of 2024. There were over 30 entries in 2023, and HCCRA is excited to hopefully exceed that number this year!

- **August 3rd - August 4th, 2024**
- **Legacy Acres Hunting Club, 3018 O Avenue, Parnell, IA**
- **Lodging available at Legacy Acres and hotels in Williamsburg**
- **Registration details to come (Stay tuned on Facebook)**



## MONTHLY HCCRA RETRIEVER TRAINING

HCCRA hosts monthly retriever training days on the third Saturday of each month that is open to any HCCRA members. The training events generally are located at the Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area. HCCRA Members are welcome to attend to just observe the training exercises, or to bring their retrievers of any skill level along to participate in the training. It is requested that participants bring \$20 to help cover the cost of equipment used for the training. Different skills and training exercises will take place each month.



# 2024 HCCRA NESTING DAY



Sunday, February 4th, 2024 marked the annual HCCRA nesting day. HCCRA members and volunteers congregated in the Atherton Wetlands parking lot to delegate locations, tasks, and responsibilities for the day ahead. Over 25 HCCRA members volunteered their time. The annual nesting day is one of the most anticipated events for HCCRA, because members can visually observe the positive impacts that their money and time has on the local waterfowl population. HCCRA has nesting structures at many wetland locations across east central Iowa, including Atherton Wetlands, Lake McBride, Coralville Reservoir, Wakpicada Natural Area, Pinicon Ridge, and several other locations in Johnson and Linn Counties. Duties for volunteers during the 2024 Nesting Day were to clean out structures of old nesting material, eggs, and any debris. New bedding was also placed in each structure to provide a safe and effective nesting area for the 2024 nesting season. Lastly, volunteers inspected and recorded the usage and egg count for each nesting structure.



There is no shortage of enjoyment from volunteers when a nesting structure is opened up containing an array of hatched duckling eggs. With the spring migration in full effect, many volunteers were able to see White-Fronted Geese, Swans, Mallards, and Canada Geese overhead. When groups of volunteers began returning to Atherton Wetland, the consensus was that the HCCRA nesting structures had been used at an unprecedented rate for the 2023 nesting season. HCCRA Conservation Chair Eric Harris has led this initiative and analyzed the data since 2015. Nesting waterfowl encounter predators and dangers on a daily basis including anything from animals, to humans, to environmental factors. Common predators in Iowa including coyotes, fox, racoon, skunk, mink, possum, crows, hawks, eagles, and many other animals or birds look at nesting waterfowl as vulnerable targets. Flooding or drought conditions also can disrupt nesting patterns though as well. Therefore, Eric Harris strategically plans where HCCRA's nesting structures are located to provide a safe nesting area for waterfowl, as well as being located in areas with abundance of food for the nesting hen to remain close to the nests. HCCRA primarily uses DuckHut boxes for nesting structures, and typically observes better success in these boxes when compared to wooden structures. The DuckHut boxes are easier to maintain and inspect compared to traditional wood structures.

# 2024 HCCRA NESTING DAY



Since 2015, HCCRA has installed over 200 Wood Duck boxes and 15 hen houses locally. As of 2023, there were 144 nesting structures available for local waterfowl. 52% of the available nesting structures were used in 2023, which was above the average HCCRA usage rate of 44% over the past 9 years. While the usage rate was slightly below the 2022 and 2021 results (55% and 58%, respectively), it was still very good compared to national averages. These statistics are especially impressive considering most of the unused nesting structures were located in areas void of water due to last year's drought conditions. The 2023 statistic that really stood out was the total number of eggs laid in HCCRA's structures. There was a whopping **536** eggs laid in 2023, which was a massive increase from any previous year. For reference, 2022 saw 407 eggs laid and 2021 saw 428 eggs laid, both of which were already considerably higher than previous years. Several wood duck boxes even showed signs of multiple hens using the same box, with several egg dumps noted. Overall, these results are a testament to HCCRA's efforts to waterfowl conservation. These statistics directly show that time and money from HCCRA members devoted to the mission of conservation are resulting in more ducks in the sky over east central Iowa. This annual initiative will keep occurring with the support of HCCRA members, since there will always be a need to repair, replace, and add to nesting structures in the local area. HCCRA thanks DuckHut, Paulsen Electric, and the Hess Family for their contributions to the program.

## HCCRA DUCK PRODUCTION DATA

NESTING SEASON	HOUSES AVAILABLE FOR PRODUCTION (#)	UTILIZATION RATE (%)	TOTAL EGG PRODUCTION
<b>2023</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>536</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>407</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>428</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>113</b>



# 2023 HCCRA NESTING DAY





# INAUGURAL HCCRA POKER RUN



March 16th, 2024 was the inaugural 'Straight Slush' SXS Poker Run, benefitting Hoosier Creek Conservation and Retriever Association. There was great support from the community to make this ride a massive success. Participants had a chance to win a ton of outstanding prizes based on the results from their poker hands. Participants registered at Shuey's in Shueyville or Wild Hogs in Walford, then had stops at Odies in Ely, Black Squirrel in Swisher, and the Swisher American Legion. All proceeds from poker hands purchased at registration went directly to HCCRA, where the money will be used for local waterfowl and habitat conservation, retriever training opportunities, and youth involvement. After the ride was complete, participants met at Shuey's to draw their poker hands. 550 poker hands were sold to participants, so plenty of shuffling, dealing, and bad beats were experienced. Between 200-250 SXS registered at this inaugural HCCRA Poker Run which was an overwhelming success. The cold and blustery weather didn't stop the local HCCRA supporters from coming out in full force to support the club and have a great ride. Can-Am Raffle tickets were sold by HCCRA at the event as well as \$1060 raised for the 50/50 raffle. HCCRA is looking forward to hosting another SXS ride in the future after seeing the great support for HCCRA and participating local bars/restaurants, along with the amount of fun had by all the participants.

***HCCRA thanks CR Metro Harley-Davidson Suzuki Can-Am, Shuey's, Wild Hogs, Odies, Black Squirrel, Swisher American Legion, HCCRA volunteers, and all of the Poker Run participants for an incredible ride!***



# CREEKER'S KITCHEN



Creeker's Kitchen is devoted towards the culinary art of waterfowl, and providing the HCCRA community with a diverse range of recipes to try with their harvested birds. If you have a favorite recipe, feel free to email it to us for a chance to be featured in the next issue.

## This Quarter's Recipe:

### Sausage from the Sky

Rather than a specific recipe, this quarter's Creeker's Kitchen article is more so detailing a variety of great tasting sausage-type options you can create with just a few kitchen gadgets. Snack sticks, summer sausage, sandwich salami, brats.....the choices are endless.

#### Meat Processing Gadgets:

- Meat Grinder
- Sausage Stuffer (Suggested)
- Meat Mixer (Optional)
- Smoker
- Meat Lugs (Suggested)
- Food Scale
- Meat Slicer (Suggested)
- Vacuum Sealer (Suggested)

**Note: If grinding large volumes of meat throughout the year, a good grinder is very beneficial and worthwhile. Most grinders have sausage stuffer attachments, however a separate sausage stuffer is recommended for efficiency and ease of use. A meat mixer comes in handy for large batches of meat, but mixing by hand is feasible for small batches.**



#### Meat Preparation Process

- Thaw out frozen or wash off fresh skinned waterfowl breasts
- Trim any fat, bloody, or shot areas of the breasts off
- Cut breasts into 1"-2" strips to see any embedded bird shot to remove prior to grinding (metal detectors struggle to identify bird shot deep in goose breasts or when composed of heavy metals)
- Prepare pork shoulder (per table below), cut appropriate portion size off shoulder and trim any bloody meat
- Ideally, meat mixture will be cut in chunks (for grinder) in 5 pound increments to correlate with seasoning
- Freeze strips of breast meat and pork shoulder for approximately 30 minutes prior to initial grinding
- Remove meat mixture from freezer when firm, but not frozen (this helps grinding, can also add ice cubes)
- Complete an initial grind through a large grinder plate (10 mm; 3/8" recommended), alternating fowl and pork
- Refreeze ground meat mixture for approximately 30 minutes prior to second grind
- Remove ground meat mixture from freezer when firm, but not frozen (can add ice to mix to cool grinder)
- Complete a second grind through a smaller grinder plate (see table below)
- Mix ground meat with seasoning of choice per manufacturer instructions for desired meat product (LEM Backwoods Seasoning are suggested) \*Please pay attention to cure requirements for food safety.
- Refrigerate seasoned meat mixture overnight to assist with meat taking on flavor of seasoning.
- High temperature cheese can be added to any of these sausage mixtures at a 10% ratio.



SAUSAGE TYPE	GRINDER PLATE SIZE	FOWL/PORK SHOULDER RATIO	CASING DIAMETER - TYPE
SNACK STICK	4.5 MM / 3/16"	75% / 25%	19 MM - SMOKED COLLAGEN
SUMMER SAUSAGE	4.5 MM / 3/16"	70% / 30%	MAHOGANY COLLAGEN
SANDWICH SALAMI	6 MM / 1/4"	65% / 35%	JUMBO RED FIBROUS
BRATS	6 MM / 1/4"	60% / 40%	32 MM - SMOKED COLLAGEN

## Sausage Stuffing Process

- After overnight refrigeration, take meat mixture out, add 1/4 cup of water per 5 lb of meat, mix thoroughly
- Add meat mixture to sausage stuffer
- Use sausage stuffer nozzle that is slightly undersized compared to desired casing size (in Table on Page 9)
- Prepare casings in accordance with manufacturer instructions (LEM casings are suggested)
- For brats and snack sticks, unroll as much of the casing onto the sausage stuffer nozzle as possible
- For summer sausage and sandwich salami, hold the closed end of casing as close to nozzle as possible
- Slowly crank (or engage motor for electric stuffer) to begin sausage stuffing. Compress meat mixture prior to starting stuffing to remove all air from the meat mixture. (Having two people for this step helps, one cranking and one holding the casing)
- Fill casing firmly and thoroughly with meat mixture to avoid air voids or gaps in sausage
- For snack sticks, fill the entire casing, and tie end of casing
- For summer sausage, fill entire casing and tie end of casing with twine
- For sandwich salami, fill entire casing and tie end of casing with twine
- For brats, fill entire casing, and tie end of casing. Pinch casing at desired brat link length, then twist casing 2-3 times, then alternate twisting directions for each link thereafter.
- Refrigerate sausage products for approximately 6 hours to let meat adhere to casings

## Smoking Process

- After refrigeration, remove sausage product and preheat smoker.
- Once preheated, place sausage product on smoker.
- Smoke sausage products at temperatures in table below, until internal temperatures noted below are met.
- Once internal temperature is obtained, immediately transfer sausage product to an ice bath. The ice bath helps shrink the casing, adhere the meat to the casing, and prevents meat from overcooking.
- After cooled to room temperature, cut/slice sausage product accordingly and vacuum seal excess sausage.

SAUSAGE TYPE	SMOKING TEMP (F)	DESIRED INTERNAL TEMP (F)	ESTIMATED SMOKE TIME (HR)
SNACK STICK	150 F FOR 1 HOUR 165 F FOR 2 HOURS 180 F FOR 2 HOURS 205 F UNTIL IT REACHED	160 F	5.5 HOURS
SUMMER SAUSAGE	150 F FOR 1 HOUR 165 F FOR 2 HOURS 180 F FOR 2 HOURS 205 F UNTIL IT REACHED	155 F	5.5 HOURS
SANDWICH SALAMI	150 F FOR 1 HOUR 165 F FOR 2 HOURS 180 F FOR 2 HOURS 205 F UNTIL IT REACHED	155 F	5.5 HOURS
BRATS	150 F FOR 1 HOUR 165 F FOR 2 HOURS 180 F FOR 2 HOURS 205 F UNTIL IT REACHED	150 F	5.25 HOURS





# **SPONSOR/DONOR APPRECIATION**



This page is dedicated to show our appreciation of our 2024 Sponsors and Donors. HCCRA wouldn't have the ability to impact habitat, waterfowl, retrievers, and the local community the way it has since 2018 without your time, effort, and contributions.

## **HCCRA THANKS YOU!**

- Air Gas
- Amana Society
- American Laser and Awards
- Avery/Banded
- Benelli USA
- Big Marsh Retrievers
- Blackstone Products
- Bryan Robinson
- Capture U Photography
- Collins Road Goodyear
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- CR Metro Harley-Davidson Suzuki Can-AM
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- Solon Feed Mill
- Stahls Kalls - Shawn Stahl
- TangleFree
- The Barkery LLC
- The DAISY
- The Funky Zebras Boutique
- Thermacell
- Tim Lawson
- TSTR Woodworking
- TrueNorth
- TurtleBox
- Vault Boutique
- Wild Hogs Saloon & Eatery
- Zach French

**Please support and thank our sponsors and donors that make the mission of HCCRA possible!**

If interested in being a sponsor/donor, please reach out to HCCRA at [hccra18@gmail.com](mailto:hccra18@gmail.com)