

jan/apr2018

friends

of the cache river watershed

Editor's Note: Due to family medical issues, our newsletter team was not able to publish a January/February issue. This special "super-sized" issue includes stories from January through April. Enjoy!

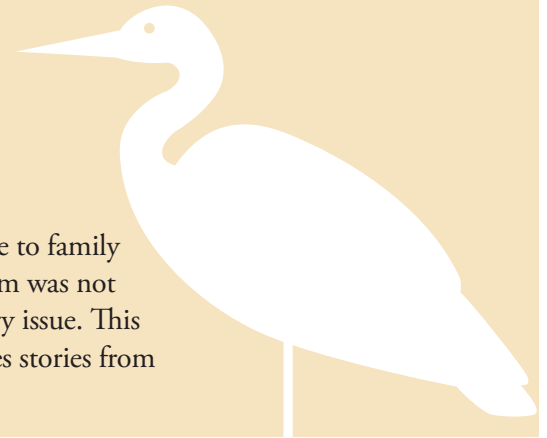


photo: Chris Benda

(l. to r.) Chris Evans and Chris Benda with the State Champion Water Tupelo at Section 8 Woods.

Field Notes

Six Questions for Chris Evans University of Illinois Extension Forestry Program

What is the Illinois Big Tree Register?

The Illinois Big Tree Register, initiated in 1962, is maintained by the Extension Forestry Program as a means of recognizing some of the state's biggest and oldest trees. To be registered as an Illinois State Champion, the tree must belong to one of the 184+ species

native to Illinois. Anyone can nominate a tree, whether it's in the woods, in a park or even in your own backyard.

What makes a tree a state champion?

A tree's overall "score" is determined by three factors: 1) circumference in inches, measured at 4½ feet from ground level; plus, 2) height in feet; plus, 3) one-quarter, in feet, of the average spread of the tree's crown. Trees identified as state champions must be re-measured every ten years or drop off the list. Recently, with assistance from Chris Benda, president of the southern chapter of the Illinois Native Plant

Society, I went on a quest to re-measure some of the big trees of the Cache.

What are the biggest trees in the Cache?

The Cache is historically a hot spot for big trees, especially the wetland species that have their northernmost range here. The region's largest tree is the State Champion Bald Cypress in Buttonland Swamp, which is also the highest-scoring tree of any species in Illinois, primarily because of its huge circumference – 34 ½ feet. The next two biggest trees are the State Champion Cherrybark Oak at Heron Pond and the State Champion Water Tupelo in Section 8 Woods. We're happy to report that all three still qualify to keep their crowns! We've also nominated a potential new state champion, a water elm located in Buttonland Swamp.

How does a "big tree hunter" get started?

First, do your homework. Consult the list of current state champions (available from the Extension Forestry office) to get a better idea of what constitutes "big" for any given species. For example, the former State Champion Devil's Walking Stick had a diameter of just 3 inches. When you're in the woods, look for trees that stand out. I was fortunate

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For more information, see www.friendsofthecache.org
e-mail friendsofthecacheriver@gmail.com
or like "Friends of the Cache River Watershed" on FACEBOOK.



What's Next

Nature Movie Night

*Thursday, March 8, 6-7:30pm
Cache River Wetlands Center*

Our 2018 nature movie series explores animals who were once native to Illinois. Tonight's free film features the *almost* cuddly black bear!

Waterfowl of the Prairie Potholes

*Saturday, March 24, 10-11am
Cache River Wetlands Center*

Join naturalist John Schwegman for this program on waterfowl of the prairie potholes of South Dakota, many of which winter in the Cache River Watershed.

Butterflies and the Plants They Need

*Saturday, March 31, 1-3pm
Cache River Wetlands Center*

Join Master Naturalist Anne Parmley to learn more about the types of plants that will encourage butterflies to reside in your landscape.

Van Tour in Cache River Watershed

*Thursday, April 12, various
departure times
Tunnel Hill State Trail Headquarters,
Vienna, Illinois*

This guided van tour for senior citizens and persons with physical limitations will explore a section of the Tunnel Hill State Trail, between Vienna and Tunnel Hill. Advance reservation required, please call 618-657-2064 for departure times.

Nature Movie Night

*Thursday, April 12, 6-7:30pm
Cache River Wetlands Center*

April's free movie about animals who once called Illinois home will feature the cat of many names – the cougar, puma or mountain lion.

Serendipity Nature Walk

*Saturday, April 14, 9am-noon
Cache River State Natural Area,
Tupelo Trail*

Take a guided hike along the wood and swamp habitats of the Tupelo Trail. Moderately difficult terrain. Meet at Marshall Ridge Access at the end of Sunflower Lane, Belknap, Illinois.

In Search of Big Trees

*Saturday, April 28, 2-3pm
Cache River Wetlands Center*

Chris Evans, Extension Forester, University of Illinois, will discuss the Illinois Big Tree Register and metrics used to measure big trees, highlight some of the biggest trees in Illinois, and encourage everyone to get involved by nominating potential state champions!

For more information on the above programs, call the Wetlands Center at 618-657-2064. For a complete schedule of 2018 programs, visit www.friendsofthecache.org and click EVENTS & ACTIVITIES.

Field Notes *cont' from page one*

enough to find the State Champion Green Ash, two years ago near the Iron Furnace in Hardin County. I was conducting plant surveys nearby and noticed a “bump” on the horizon above the canopy. I knew this had to be a really big tree, which, once I found and measured it, turned out to be a champ.

What if I find a potential champion?

If you find a tree in the woods, at a park or on your own property that you think might qualify, measure the circumference at a height of 4 ½ feet with a tape measure. Then, do your best to estimate the tree's height. Contact us at Extension Forestry and we'll be happy

to come out and take more precise measurements. No need to be embarrassed if your tree doesn't turn out to be championship material – we are just glad to raise interest and awareness.

Where can I learn more?

To learn more about Illinois' big trees and the calculations and equipment involved in measuring them, come to my program at the Cache River Wetlands Center on April 28 (see event calendar above for details). Meanwhile, feel free to contact me with questions at cwevans@uillinois.edu. We encourage everyone to learn more about our native tree species and get out there and help us identify more big trees!

Stewardship Saturdays are back!

Help AmeriCorps members and staff complete a variety of habitat restoration and trail maintenance tasks within the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Earn volunteer hours, gain experience and have fun! Stewardship Saturdays will be held on **March 10**, **April 14** and **May 12** from 9am to noon. Volunteers will meet at the Cypress Creek Maintenance Shop, located at 2808 Butter Ridge Road in Ullin, Illinois. Please dress appropriately for the weather and wear sturdy shoes or boots and work gloves. Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Workdays will be held rain or shine, but may be cancelled if severe weather is forecast. For more information, contact Cypress Creek at 618-634-2231.



Currently celebrating its 200th anniversary as a county seat, Vienna began its colorful history as an Indian trading post. When Johnson County, which once stretched from the Ohio to the Mississippi, was divided up in 1818, the original county seat, Elvira, was abandoned in favor of this more central location along the old Golconda-Jonesboro stagecoach route. A town was platted and a log courthouse quickly built: the court's first recorded

item of business in November 1818 was the purchase of wolf scalps.

Tradition says Vienna (pronounced vi-ANN-ah) was named after Vienna Reynolds, a relative of one of the county justices. By the 1850s, the thriving town had mills, schools, newspapers, general stores, churches, a tan yard, a hotel and the first wool-carding machine in southern Illinois. The Big Four Railroad came through in 1872, and Vienna was incorporated as a city

in 1893. Located at the intersection of U.S. Route 45 and State Route 146, with I-24 just a mile away, Vienna continues to be the county's commercial hub, as well as its seat of justice, with a population of 1,434.

Two buildings on the town square are listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the Italianate-style courthouse was completed in 1871 and the Vienna Carnegie Library was built in 1911. Designed by local architect Thomas Clymer, the library served as American Red Cross headquarters during the devastating influenza epidemic of 1917. The city park contains a monument commemorating the Trail of Tears, which passed through Vienna in 1838, roughly following the route that is now Highway 146. Considered by some as the "Bicycling Capital of the Midwest," Vienna is headquarters for the Tunnel Hill State Trail.

"Communities of the Cache" will highlight a different town in each issue. If you'd like to share historical photos and tidbits about your community, please contact newsletter editor Paula Havlik at phavlik@illinois.edu.



photo: INPS

It is with great sadness we share the news that **Jim Waycuilis**, former site superintendent of the Cache River State Natural Area (CRSNA) passed away on March 8. He was a tireless proponent of conservation and environmental education, who loved the Cache and will be greatly missed. Friends of Cache board members Michael Jeffords and Susan Post echoed the feelings of many as they paid tribute to Waycuilis, recalling how he often accompanied them on their explorations of the Cache: "Jim's assistance went beyond mere maps and information -- he welcomed us with southern Illinois hospitality and friendship."

Waycuilis grew up in Chicago's inner city and learned to love the outdoors during summer visits to his uncle's farm. He worked for IDNR for more than 37 years; but, once he accepted the job at CRSNA in 1990, he never looked back, turning down more lucrative offers because, as he said, "I really love this place, and I think it shows."

The CRSNA consisted of just over 6,000 acres when Waycuilis took over. By the time he retired in 2012, it had grown to 15,000 acres, one of the largest natural areas in Illinois. A crowning achievement during his tenure was construction of the Cache River Wetlands Center, completed in 2004. Waycuilis is pictured at left with Chris Benda, accepting the 2017 Conservation Leadership Award from the southern chapter of the Illinois Native Plant Society.

Notes from My 3x5 Notebook

January/February
in the Swamp

By Susan Post

Winter is a great season to appreciate the unique characteristics of water, the only substance on earth that occurs naturally in all three phases—solid, liquid, and gas. A late winter visit to any swamp in the Cache may feature **ice spiders**, formed by water flowing from under the ice into snow that covers the ice sheet. A central hole allows water to infiltrate



the snow layer, giving the “spider” its characteristic shape. Often, the center of each ice spider may contain a dead fish! I can only guess that the freeze causes a fish kill and perhaps the dead fish forms a warmer nucleus

around which the ice melts to create the opening in the ice. A simpler explanation may be that there are many dead fish in the winter and the opening allows them to float to the surface.



To all of our members, thanks so much for your generous support this past year!

Together, here's what we accomplished in 2017:

- Published six issues of digital newsletter
- Maintained website and active Facebook page
- Published 2017 Calendar of Programs and Activities
- Created permanent signage for the Pollinator Interpretive Trail at the Cache River Wetlands Center, and

2017 Friends of Cache Year in Review

maintained 10 demonstration/research garden plots (pictured at left)

- Purchased and installed solar light trap for insect study at Wetlands Center
- Published second edition of Cache Auto Tour map and brochure, featuring sixteen new historical sites
- Partnered with Village of Ullin to sponsor Nature Fest at Cache River Days
- Provided field trip grants for local schools via Kids to the Cache program
- With support from The Nature Conservancy, developed new signage for Wetlands Center front kiosk (to be installed this spring)
- Co-sponsored an intern for the Wetlands Center
- Provided support for an AmeriCorps intern at Cypress Creek NWR
- Hosted Friends of the Cache Annual Meeting
- Partnered with Shawnee Quilters of Southern Illinois on silent auction quilt fundraiser
- Provided two special outreach programs, the Annual Moonlight Paddle and a night hike for insect viewing
- Maintained Friends Store and developed new merchandise
- Produced quarterly “Refuge Report” for Cypress Creek
- Hosted booths at 2017 Indigenous Plants Symposium and Southern Illinois Alternative Gift Fair

With your help, let's strive to do even more in 2018, as we work to protect, enhance and share the unique landscape we all love – the Cache River Wetlands.

photo: Michael Jeffords



Birders, imagine the thrill of competing to identify as many birds as you possibly can in a 24-hour period, while experiencing the amazing diversity of birdlife in southern Illinois and raising money for a good cause! The Southern Illinois Audubon Society's Annual Birding Blitz checks all those boxes, as birding teams from throughout Illinois and neighboring states come together for a friendly competition that promotes

conservation in the Cache River Watershed.

The 17th Annual Birding Blitz will be held on **Saturday, April 28**. Teams of two or more members can search for birds anywhere in Jackson, Williamson, Saline, Gallatin, Union, Johnson, Pope, Hardin, Alexander, Pulaski and Massac counties. As Blitz coordinator Rhonda Rothrock points out, public lands in southernmost Illinois provide critical habitat for hundreds of resident and migratory bird species, offering a realm of birding possibilities that is truly remarkable.

Teams can choose to bird the full 24 hours across the complete coverage area, or restrict their efforts to one county. There is a dawn-to-dusk option, a senior category for teams 55 and older, and a "muscle-powered" category using non-motorized transportation only. Winning teams will be recognized at an awards brunch on **Sunday, April 29** at Crab Orchard NWR Visitors Center.

Teams gather pledges for each species recorded, and donations are used to support wetland preservation and restoration efforts in the Cache River Watershed. Registration, which includes the

awards brunch and a t-shirt, is \$25 per team member, \$10 for students. This year's registration deadline is April 21.

For regular updates, join the Birding Blitz of Southernmost Illinois on Facebook. If you have questions, please contact Rhonda Rothrock at woodthrusheola@hotmail.com

You can also call Rhonda at 618-684-6605 or 618-534-8659.

Happy birding!

Join the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network on Sunday, April 8 at the Cache River Wetlands Center for a free workshop open to anyone who would like to help monitor the butterfly population in Illinois. The 9am to 3pm workshop, sponsored by the Chicago Academy of Sciences, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, will include training on butterfly identification, field instruction and how to collect and submit data. Professional Development Hours are available for teachers. Please plan to bring a sack lunch and preregister by calling the Wetlands Center at 618-657-2064.

Calling All Volunteers!

The Cache River Wetlands Center is looking for wetland warriors willing to dedicate at least eight hours a month, primarily from March through October. To volunteer, please contact Molie Oliver at 618-657-2064 or Molie.Oliver@Illinois.gov

Special Projects

Waterfowl Wing Display: Mount and label wings for mobile display.

Waterfowl Mounts: Clean donated mounts for display.

Tree/Bush Seed Display: Collect and arrange seeds in shadowbox.

Frog and Toad Video: Update video used at Frog and Toad Survey volunteer orientation by creating a new program in DVD format

Ongoing Opportunities

Prairie Steward: Adopt one of the Wetlands Center's seven prairie patches and help keep exotic species at bay. Tasks may include supplemental planting, weeding, cutting and sapling removal.

Wetland Steward: Adopt one of the Wetlands Center's three wetland areas. The focus is removal of volunteer vegetation and thinning of other plants.

Hiking Trail Steward: Select a trail and walk it regularly to clean signs, control litter and report any downed trees or damage to trail signs or surfaces.

Bluebird Trail Steward: Clean nesting boxes at beginning of season and between broods. Build, install and repair nesting boxes as needed.

Animal Care: Clean aquatic amphibians' and turtles' tanks and filters.

Landscape Maintenance: Help thin and trim shrubs, pull weeds, mulch, etc.

photo: Cypress Creek NWR



In Memory: Les Honey

By Liz Jones
Assistant Director
Cypress Creek NWR

Les Honey (pictured above, helping to construct a school nature area) was a

dedicated volunteer and strong advocate for the Cache River Wetlands. A former president of the Citizens Committee to Save the Cache, he was also a founding board member of Friends of the Cache River Watershed. After retirement, Les was a tireless volunteer for Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, assisting with Stewardship Saturdays, river monitoring, frog and toad surveys, maintenance of public use facilities and special educational events. He received a Refuge Volunteer of the Year Award, and was looked upon as an unpaid staff member, due to the many hours he volunteered. All who knew and worked with Les would agree that he was a kind, generous and patient man always willing to help; his smile and laugh were contagious. He passed away on November 7, 2017.

photo: Cypress Creek NWR



Refuge staff have installed two boot brush stations at the trail heads of Limekiln Springs (located off Cache Chapel Road and Long Reach Road). The structures allow hikers to remove dirt, mud, and, most importantly, weed seed from shoes and boots. Check out the new sign and help stop the spread of invasive plant species. Thanks to AmeriCorps members Kelsey Woodcock and Katy Banning, and Shawnee College intern Callie Mowery for installation help.

The 24th annual Cypress Creek Christmas Bird Count in December was a success, thanks to dedicated Refuge volunteers. Despite single digit temperatures, 87 species of birds were observed. The Christmas Bird Count is an early-winter bird census sponsored by the National Audubon Society, involving thousands of volunteers throughout North America who count birds over a 24-hour period. More than 100 years of citizen scientist participation in this event has resulted in the longest-running database in ornithology, which is used by the Audubon Society and other organizations to assess the health of bird populations. If you'd like to be a part of this national bird conservation effort, mark your calendar now for the 2018 Cypress Creek Christmas Bird Count, to be held on December 17.



The Cache River Autotour

On your next visit to the Wetlands Center, be sure to pick up a free copy of the Cache River Auto Tour map and brochure, which now includes 16 new historical points of interest!

Become a Friend

- \$15 Individual \$50 Contributing \$250 Sustaining
- \$25 Family \$100 Supporting \$1,000 Lifetime
- New Member Current Member

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

To remain budget and environment-friendly, most communications are sent via e-mail.

Please let us know if you need to receive information via U.S. mail.

All contributions are tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to Friends of the Cache River Watershed and mail to: 8885 State Rt. 37 South, Cypress, IL 62923.