



# Fall 2024 Newsletter



## Face Lift



A metal roof was completed in late spring 2024 on the Barkhausen-Cache River Wetlands Center at Cache River State Natural Area.

*(Photo by Molie Oliver, site interpreter, Cache River State Natural Area)*

The Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center is open Wednesday through Sunday, 9 to 4. Phone (618) 657-2064. Location: 8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress, Illinois 62923, 2 miles North of State Route 169; 9 miles South of State Route 14.

## Uncertain Future for the Cache River

Currently two different entities are entrusted with managing public lands in the Cache River watershed. The state of Illinois administers Cache River State Natural Area (about 18,000 acres) and Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge (over 17,000 acres) is administered by the US Fish and Wildlife service.

At the time of its creation in 1990, Cypress Creek National wildlife refuge was hailed as a model of habitat preservation and multiple organization cooperation. The Joint Venture Project (JVP) was formed, consisting of Cache River State Natural Area, Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy. Later the Natural Resource Conservation Service joined the

partnership. The Cache River wetlands were declared a Ramsar Wetland, a designation given to wetlands deemed of international importance. The Friends of the Cache River Watershed was formed as a support organization for both state and federal efforts.

At one time Cypress Creek NWR had seven full time employees. Several years ago, Cypress Creek NWR became part of the Crab Orchard NWR Complex but remained an independent refuge with 5 full-time staff that maintained the refuge office, on the campus of Shawnee Community College. When refuge manager Liz Jones retired, a replacement was hired with no experience with the USFWS or refuge management. He was dependent on management at Crab Orchard NWR. This summer that individual left abruptly. No effort was made to replace him. The maintenance worker at Cypress Creek had left prior to this and was not replaced. That left only one employee, the biologist, at the refuge office.

Next came word through the grapevine, without public announcement or public input, the Cypress Creek NWR office would be closing. The reason for the closure, *budget cuts*, surfaced only when inquiries were made. Many folks scrambled to intercede, contacting Illinois Congressional Leaders and the US Fish and Wildlife regional office. The closure sped forward, a done deal. Everything from the office (that was leased from Shawnee College for \$1 annually), all machines & equipment, and the last employee are all being moved to the Crab Orchard NWR. Closure was scheduled for Sept 29th. Cypress Creek NWR management is now fully in the hands of Crab Orchard NWR manager, Justin Sexton, who holds main responsibility for the dismantling of Cypress Creek NWR and the office closure.

The Friends of the Cache Watershed are unhappy (to say the least) about this closure and transfer of all personnel and equipment. The grounds of Cypress Creek NWR are already poorly maintained (due to lack of management) and drainage issues continue to cause problems for local farmers. Will moving all personnel and equipment 45 miles north actually HELP this situation?

This is a violation of the commitment USFWS made to the local community when Cypress Creek NWR was established. It is especially galling that this decision was made with no input from the local community and no official announcement to JVP partners or the Friends of the Cache Watershed. Three former refuge managers of Cypress Creek NWR have all written strongly worded letters to the USFWS protesting the office closure and transfer of all personnel and equipment. When the Friends wrote to the USFWS Regional Leadership in Minnesota, we were merely referred back to Mr. Sexton at Crab Orchard NWR.

It is always easier to fight to retain something worthwhile than to try and rebuild it once it is taken away. The Friends of the Cache River Watershed would like to see the Cypress Creek NWR office remain open, its equipment retained on site, and at least three full time employee positions (Manager, Biologist, and Maintenance) retained at the refuge.

Please help us. We need letters written to both USFWS and the politicians listed below. When you write to the USFWS be sure to ask the Regional Director what was the decision-making process to close the CCNWR office without any public input. Congressman Mike Bost has been the most active in our support. We hope letters to the other offices will encourage them to become more active.

Thanks,

Tony Gerard,

Chairman, Friends of the Cache River Watershed.

### **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Congressional Staff Contacts:**

#### **Will Meeks, Regional Director**

U.S Fish & Wildlife Service,  
5600 American Blvd, West Suite 990  
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458  
[Will\\_Meeks@fws.gov](mailto:Will_Meeks@fws.gov) Phone: (720) 541-0310

#### **Sarena Selbo, Assistant Regional Director, Refuges**

(same address as above)

[Sarena\\_Selbo@fws.gov](mailto:Sarena_Selbo@fws.gov)

#### **Bridget Olson, Acting Refuge Supervisor, Area 2**

[bridget\\_olson@fws.gov](mailto:bridget_olson@fws.gov) Phone: (715)781-4105

#### **Tammy Duckworth, Illinois Senator**

441 East Willow Street, Carbondale, IL 62901

Phone (618) 677-7000

Contact: Jim Kirkpatrick [Jim\\_Kirkpatrick@duckworth.senate.gov](mailto:Jim_Kirkpatrick@duckworth.senate.gov)

#### **Mike Bost, Illinois Representative**

1109 Chestnut Street, Murphysboro, IL 62966

Phone: (618) 457-5787 Fax: (618) 448-4233

Contact: Katie Main [katie.main@mail.house.gov](mailto:katie.main@mail.house.gov)

#### **Dick Durbin, Illinois Senator**

250 W. Cherry Street, Suite 115-D, Carbondale, IL 62901

Phone: (618) 351-1122

## Visiting Professor



Distinguished Professor Emeritus Robert Mohlenbrock shows the netted chain fern, *Woodwardia areolata*, to Molie Oliver. This fern likes consistently wet acidic and organic soils. It is located near the rock cut at the south end of the tunnel of Tunnel Hill State Trail in the northern part of the Cache River Watershed. *(Photo submitted by Molie Oliver, site interpreter, Cache River State Natural Area.)*

Professor Mohlenbrock taught botany at Southern Illinois University Carbondale for thirty-four years. His life-long work with the flora of Illinois established him as the authority on the plants of Illinois.

### **Who Am I?** *(Answer on page 11.)*

I'm really private - so much so that most folks living in the Cache Watershed have never seen me. They may not even know I exist! There is one group of nature geeks (herpers) that are constantly looking for me, and they make a big deal out of it when we do meet. My habit of coiling into a tight ball and sticking out my pointed tail when I'm scared may have given rise to the old legends of hoop snakes.

I spend most of my time hidden away in the muck and debris at the bottom of swamps. Do you know me? *(Photo by Tony Gerard.)*



## ***Upcoming Events***

### **Guided Senior Van Tour along Tunnel Hill State Trail**

Thursdays: October 31, November 7, and November 14, 2024

Departure times: 10:00 am and 1:00 pm

Location: Tunnel Hill State Trail, Vienna

Contact: Site Interpreter, (618) 657-2064. Reservation required.

Cache River State Natural Area is offering a guided van tour for senior citizens of southern Illinois along Tunnel Hill State Trail on Thursdays, October 31, November 7, and November 14, 2024, with departure times of 10 am and 1:00 pm. Enjoy wildlife and history of the area as you travel between the communities of Vienna and Tunnel Hill on Thursday, October 31; Tunnel Hill past New Burnside on Thursday, November 7; and between Vienna and Karnak on Thursday, November 14, 2024. A reservation is required. Call (618) 657-2064 for information and to reserve your seat.

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### **Christmas Bird Count Training Workshops**

Various Locations. Week of November 10 from 1 to 3 pm

Register at: [go.illinois.edu/2024ChristmasBC](https://go.illinois.edu/2024ChristmasBC)

Program Description: Learn the ABC's of a CBC: Is this your first time on a Christmas Bird Count (CBC)? This workshop will set you on the path for success. Did you know most counts in southern Illinois are almost a 30 year tradition? As a CBC participant, you will coordinate with your local compiler prior to the count date. At this workshop we will go over National Audubon Policies, local count circles, and practice how to count. Attendance is recommended for first-time CBC volunteers. Get your questions answered from Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator, Kimberly Rohling, about this annual event! Registration for all workshops will close Thursday, November 7. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, please contact Kimberly Rohling.

Workshop dates and locations:

Sunday, November 10: Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, 8588 IL-148, Marion, IL 62959.

Wednesday, November 13: Rend Lake Project Visitor Center, 11981 Rend City Rd, Benton, IL 62812.

Thursday, November 14: Giant City State Park, 235 Giant City Rd, Makanda, IL 62958.

Friday, November 15: Cache River Wetlands Center, 8885 IL-37, Cypress, IL 62923.

## From my 3x5 notebook by Susan Post - September 10, 2023

Michael and I enjoy sharing the Cache with our friends and colleagues. One of them, Joe Spencer, a corn rootworm entomologist, enjoys visiting in the fall, spotlighting and seeking out entomological gems. Wildcat Bluff is a favorite for him as he says, *You never know what you will find.*



©Joseph L. Spencer

We find ourselves at Wildcat Bluff at 1:30 pm. Right away we spy a few butterflies, an eastern fence lizard, and an odd caterpillar. This caterpillar is puzzling as it has a long-curved horn, is feeding on catbrier and when you touch the caterpillar it quivers. Joe spends quite a bit of time with this creature, making sure he gets a perfect photograph. Once we get back to our car we check *Caterpillars of Eastern North America*. We look up the food plant, catbrier. The caterpillar is the larvae of the Curve-lined Owlet, a drab brown moth. In the book *Gardening for Moths a regional guide*, this caterpillar has been called a *holy grail for caterpillar hunters and must be seen to be believed*. This caterpillar looks like a combination of dead-leaf patches, briar tendrils, and even a bird dropping. If the caterpillar is disturbed, it twists and turns like a wind-blown dead leaf.

A couple of months later we notice Joe has a medallion hanging by his door. Joe had entered his photo of the Curve-lined Owlet caterpillar in the National Entomological Society's (ESA) Insect Salon. He won the Best Photo by an ESA Member. Like Joe says: *You never know what you will find at Wildcat Bluff.*

## Invaders! by Tony Gerard

I well remember the first time I ever saw a European Brown Hornet. The big aggressive looking wasp was giving me a hard look from beside the porch light, but that wasn't the most intimidating part! The scariest part was that he was there with 13 of his buddies (or probably family). At the time, due to their size, I assumed they were native Cicada Killer Wasps, but was intrigued because I thought Cicada Killers were solitary. After I investigated further, I learned their true identity. *(Photo of Native Eastern Cicada Killer by Judy Gallagher at right)*



European Brown Hornets were introduced early on into North America. They may have become established by the 1840s. As a kid I don't ever recall seeing them in the Cache watershed. That first time sighting for me occurred over 20 years ago, but I'm sure I would have remembered such an imposing insect if I'd seen one earlier. Today they are common where we live on Wildcat Bluff.



European Brown Hornets feed on other insects. They have even been documented to steal trapped insects from spider webs. They also feed on another abundant exotic, honey bees. This has made them very unpopular with beekeepers. The hornets also feed on sweet, sugary fruits.

The hornet nest is of typical paper wasp nest construction, although they may also include leaves and sticks within the construction. Although sometimes they construct the *out in the open* type nest typical of paper wasps, every nest I've seen is more cryptic. Typically, I see an opening in a hollow tree covered in *wasp paper* with several tough guy looking wasps standing guard.

For all their intimidating appearance, the hornets are not particularly aggressive. Usually, they only sting when handled or stepped on or in defense of their nest. During time of low food supply, they can become aggressive with hummingbirds, driving them away from a feeder or flower. I even had a friend recently describe a battle she observed between a hornet and a hummingbird. In looking online, I found references to European Brown Hornets even killing hummingbirds for food when they were feeding larva. I love hummingbirds, so after reading that I no longer feel guilty when I squash a European Brown Hornet.



*(European Brown Hornet Photos by Tony Gerard)*

## Dredging Project on Lower Cache



Illinois Department of Natural Resources has a multi-year project in Lower Cache River to dredge about 600 yards to the east and west of a temporary boat launch on south side of the swamp. In agreement with Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, the ramp and containment basin will be on federal land.

The first round of hydraulic dredging is complete. The team

performed about 40 days of dredging between April and July. Approximately 4,700 cubic yards of material was removed over a distance of approximately 200 yards of the Cache River main channel in Buttonland Swamp. This increased depth of the channel from 2 feet to 6 feet. The containment basin has much remaining capacity and the team expects to resume dredging next spring. *(Photos by Molie Oliver, site interpreter, Cache River State Natural Area)*



## Celebrating Smokey Bear



In September members of Karnak volunteer fire department helped Woodsy Owl and Smokey Bear celebrate their birthdays at Cache River State Natural Area, Barkhausen-Cache River Wetlands Center.

Smokey Bear turned 80 years old August 9 and Woodsy Owl turned 53 years old September 15, 2024. Congratulations!

## Acorn Roundup 1989-2005

The pictured patches were given to volunteers and several groups of Boy Scouts who collected hundreds of pounds of acorns and other tree nuts at Horseshoe Lake, Little Black Slough/Lower Cache River, Mermet, and Fort Massac State Park to be planted in a tree nursery or direct drilled into open fields. In about 1986 The Nature Conservancy (TNC) had purchased thousands of acres of Rose Farm establishing a five-acre nursery near Belknap north of what is now Grassy Slough/Jean Farwell

overlook portion of the land. The seedling trees from the TNC hardwood nursery were planted to give these fields a head start on reforestation.

The Grassy Slough preserve area once was mostly forested wetland and TNC took it on to restore the site to a more original state. The acorn roundup was part of this effort to restore bottomland hardwood forest along with TNC creating wetlands. This 2853 acres of this premiere site along the Cache River was sold to IDNR, Cache River State Natural Area in 2019.

TNC has been highly invested in the Cache River watershed and continues to own a natural area and is a Joint Venture partner along with Ducks Unlimited, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, and Natural Resource Conservation Service. *(Photo by Molie Oliver, Site Interpreter, Cache River State Natural Area)*



## Answer to *Who Am I?* (From page 4.)



I'm a Mud Snake! I spend most of my time either hidden or seeking out sirens, my favorite snack. The Friends even have a special T-Shirt featuring me!

(Photos by  
Tony  
Gerard)



As a Friend of the Cache, you'll receive our newsletter, invitations to members-only events, such as the popular annual Moonlight Paddle, a 10-percent discount on all Friends Store items at the Wetlands Center, volunteer opportunities, and more.

Please consider becoming a friend or renewing your membership by sending in the form below or going to our website: [friendsofthecache.org](http://friendsofthecache.org) and clicking *Join*.

## Become a Friend of the Cache River Watershed

☐ \$15 Individual

☐ \$50 Contributing

☐ \$250 Sustaining

☐ \$25 Family

☐ \$100 Supporting

☐ \$1000 Lifetime

☐ New Member

☐ Current Member

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

To remain budget and environmentally friendly, most communications are by e-mail.

☐ Check here if you need to receive information by U. S. Mail.

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