



Winter 2025 Newsletter



Molie Oliver Retires

Molie Oliver retired on December 31, 2024, after working for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for 30 years.

Her first position with the IDNR was as site superintendent for the State Tunnel Hill Bike Trail. After 12 years, she transitioned to the newly constructed site at the Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center, Cache River Natural Area. For the past 18 years, she worked there as the interpreter/NRC (Natural Resources Coordinator). While at this position, she made extensive efforts to do countless programs with local and regional groups educating them about the Cache River Wetlands.

Molie was almost always the first smiling face to greet the public when entering the visitors center. She also worked with countless volunteers and interns to ensure the site was well received and always in working order. She worked with Friends of Cache River Watershed to co-host numerous events such as Nature Fest, BioBlitz, and also hosted guest speakers. Additionally, she was instrumental in creating additional exhibits, wildflower gardens, and countless other projects at the site as well as working with area schools for field trips. She retires with great admiration from fellow IDNR staff, the general public, and her friends and family. Molie Oliver will be sorely missed. *(Photo by Jonathan Voelz)*

***Thanks Molie for your dedication and service to our state's wetlands
at the Cache River!***

An uncertain future for the Cache River- Update

Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge:

Despite our best efforts, the Cypress Creek NWR office on Shawnee College is now closed. All equipment has been moved 45 miles north to Crab Orchard NWR. The single remaining employee dedicated to Cypress Creek NWR, the biologist, has moved her office to Crab Orchard NWR. Things are poorly managed now; it's hard to visualize the situation improving with things as they currently stand.

The response from the politicians that we tried to involve was lackluster. Representative Mike Bost was especially disappointing, using a meeting about the refuge as a photo opportunity, but doing nothing to improve things.

On a more positive note, Crab Orchard Manager Justen Sexton attended the most recent meeting of the Friends of the Cache Board Meeting. He seems open to working with the Friends and shared some potential good news about federal funding dedicated for wetlands in southern Illinois. It is hoped that this funding will continue since so many environmental projects are currently on the chopping block!

Cache River State Natural Area:

The Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center at Cache River SNA has been closed since interpreter Mollie Oliver retired on December 31st. Plans are to reopen the center in April with a temporary staff member. It is hoped that the position will be filled by a permanent staff member by fall.

Who Am I? *(Answer on page 6.)*

I'm small and easily overlooked, about 2 inches is as big as I get. It's not just my size that's small, at 3 years old I've pretty much reached the end of my lifespan. I live among dense vegetation in slow moving swamps and creeks and feed mostly on small crustaceans and snail eggs. Do you know me?

(Photo by Tony Gerard)



From my 3x5 notebook by Susan Post - February 2025

February is associated with love and gifts. While humans might prefer flowers, chocolates, or jewelry, what about insects? Do any of them receive gifts of love? It is early September, and we are headed to the Cache. While Michael drives, I am reading snippets of *The Songs of Insects* by Lang Elliott and Wil Hershberger. Late summer is the perfect time to hear the symphony of sounds from the many mature orthoptera (crickets and grasshoppers). I am trying to decipher the difference between the many species of snowy tree crickets when I come upon a reference to their mating behavior.

The males *fiddle their tune* to attract a female. Once she arrives, he raises his forewings to allow her to climb on his back. At the base of his wings is a small gland that exudes a sweet liquid—a gift for the female. As she begins to consume the liquid, the male mates with her. The longer she feeds, the higher probability his sperm will fertilize her eggs. Humm, I thought, I would like to see this.



Tree crickets are delicate-looking insects with translucent green wings. The males produce pure-toned trills that enliven the nighttime soundscape. Some of their favorite habitats are goldenrod and brambles. We are exploring at night, searching the pollinator garden at the Bellrose Overlook. When we arrive, we

find another car parked there—they quickly leave when we hop out, spotlights blazing on the surrounding landscape. This was not the type of love we were looking for! Soon, I call Michael over, “Look, it’s just like the picture in the book. A female and male tree cricket with a nuptial gift.” We are voyeurs and take many photos. We spot several couples as we look through the garden and leave with smiles on our faces—the Cache always delivers.

(Photo by Michael Jeffords)

Invaders! by Tony Gerard

Asian Ladybugs, more properly *Harmonia axyridis*, Asian Lady Beetles or Harlequin Beetles, are invaders in every sense of the word. Many of you have probably experienced mass hordes of these beetles finding their way into your home in the fall.



(Some of the Diverse Appearances Among Asian Ladybugs, photo by ©entomartIn)

These small beetles are native to Asia but have been widely introduced across the world. They are now well established in North America and Europe and making inroads across Africa and South America. Unlike so many invasive exotics, their introduction into the US was not accidental. The first intentional introductions go back to 1916, when the beetles were introduced in the hopes that they would “naturally” control aphid populations. The first introductions failed to establish populations, but the attempts continued. In 1988 a wild population was discovered in Louisiana near New Orleans. From there the species rapidly colonized across the US.



The beetles do feed on aphids, a major crop pest. A 2001 study suggested they saved US farmers vast amounts of money due to their aphid population reduction. On a less positive note, they eat many additional native insects species; they have even been known to feed on out native North American ladybugs. Native ladybird species have experienced often dramatic declines in areas invaded by *H. axyridis*.

Another fact of note about *H. axyridis* is that it is one of the most highly variable insects on earth. They may be entirely black, or feature complex patterns of black, orange and red. The easiest way to identify the most common eastern US variety is to look at the pronotum (the area just behind the head) and see whether the black markings look like a letter *W* or *M*.

Large aggregations are often seen in autumn.

The beetles have pheromones to signal to each other. The beetles often overwinter in massive numbers. When indoors the beetles may occasionally bite people. This is normally just a minor irritation, although a small number of people are allergic to the bites. Additionally they produce a foul-smelling, bitter-tasting fluid from between the joints of their legs when irritated. This fluid may stain porous surfaces. When the beetles are inadvertently harvested along with crops, this fluid can impart a foul taste to wines, jellies, and other products.

Although many control methods have been tried, none are overly successful. It looks as though *Harmonia axyridis* is here to stay!

(Photos of Asian Ladybug laying eggs and of a small group of Asian Ladybugs overwintering in a water gauge cover on the Cache by Tony Gerard)





Answer to Who Am I?

(From page 2.)

I'm a Banded
Pygmy Sunfish
(*Elassoma
zonatum*). I'm so
different from most
sunfish (in the
centrarchid family)
that some

scientists class me in my own family of *Elassomatidae*. There are only seven species in my genus, but I'm the most widespread. We are found all along the southern gulf states and up along the Mississippi river drainage, but I don't get much further north than the Cache River. *(Photo 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 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.