

# Spring - Summer 2025 Newsletter



## **Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center is now open!**

New hours for the Wetlands Center are Thursday through Monday, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., closed Tuesday and Wednesday. Jordan McBride has been hired in a six-month position as a Conservation Education Representative. It is hoped that a permanent replacement for Molie Oliver will be hired soon.

## **Friends of the Cache Annual Meeting: August 28, 2025**

Please join us for our Friends of the Cache River Watershed annual meeting on Thursday, August 28, at 6 p.m. at the Carbondale Civic Center, 200 S. Illinois Avenue, Carbondale, Illinois. The program will be announced later.

--We'll also have door prizes, merchandise for sale, and snacks.--

You don't have to be a Friends Member to attend; the public is invited!

*If you have not renewed your membership, please consider doing so at the annual meeting, on our website ([friendsofthecache.org](http://friendsofthecache.org)), or by filling out the form on the last page of this newsletter.*

## **Who Am I?** (Answer on page 5)



I'm not seen nearly as much as my more cosmopolitan cousin the Eastern Muck Turtle. In fact, when I am seen, I'm often mistake for him. He's got some jazzy neck stripes that I don't have, but I can do something he can't! My plastron (the official name for my lower shell) is hinged. I can't close up as well as a box turtle, but it does give me some added protection if things get really bad. My plastron is also much nicer and better developed than his! Do you know me?

(Photo by Tony Gerard)

## Invaders! by Tony Gerard

Most of us are familiar with many invasive species, from Norway Rats to Japanese Honeysuckle, but this particular species is staging a *silent invasion under the radar* for most folks. The Mediterranean house gecko (*Hemidactylus turcicus*) is believed to be originally native to borders of the Mediterranean but, most likely starting in the age of wooden sailing vessels, it started colonizing new areas. They are now almost worldwide in distribution in tropical and subtropical regions.



The Mediterranean gecko is a small lizard generally measuring 4–5 inches in length, with sticky toe pads, vertical pupils, and large eyes that lack eyelids. Color is light brown or grayish above, with darker spots and often darker tail bands. The dorsal surface has many tubercles. At night, especially when suddenly lit up in a dark area, they may appear completely translucent except for the spotting.



Mediterranean geckos are nocturnal and often seen around street and security lights where they prey on spiders, isopods, snails and just about any type of insect. Unlike the lizards we Midwesterners are accustomed to, these guys vocalize. They emit a distinctive, high-pitched squeak or chirp, possibly as a territorial message. Males produce clicking sounds to attract a mate, with the females responding in their own squeaks. Females can store sperm for several months after mating and typically lay two to five eggs.

While they can be found in completely wild habitats, Mediterranean geckos are VERY tolerant of humans and are often found in houses and urban environments. They even appear to have a rather high resistance to pesticides.

How do they impact the ecosystems they colonize? We don't really know, more study is needed.



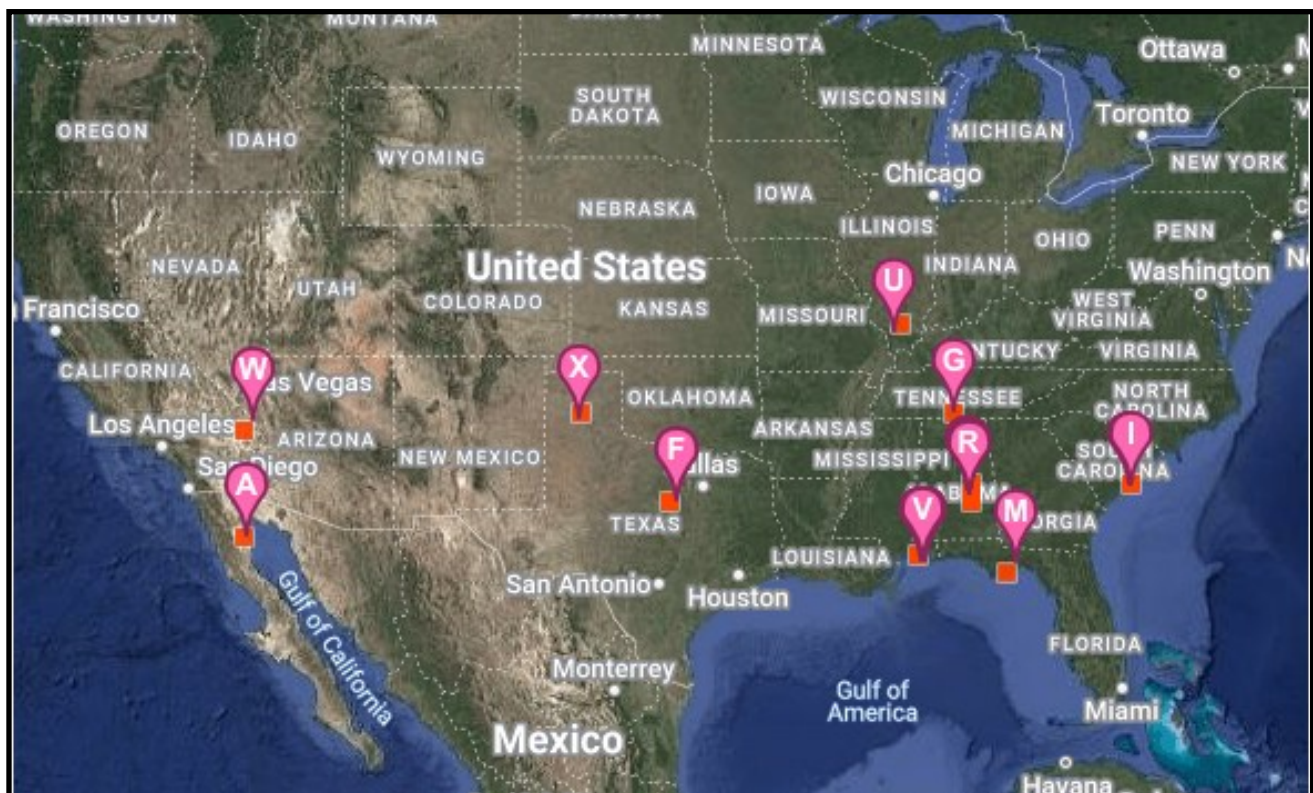
As a high school junior in 1976 I was thrilled to find Mediterranean geckos on a trip to Brownsville, Texas. The invasion was just beginning at that point. Nowadays I find them at almost every KOA I've camped in. They are abundant in Alabama and last year I saw them on a motel wall in Tennessee.



But why am I writing about a tropical invasive lizard in the Friends of the Cache newsletter? Surely, they will never survive the winters here in the Cache River watershed, right?

They may already be here! I'm aware of a population that has existed in Carbondale since at least the 1990s. There is another in Marion, and a few years back a student showed me a picture of one taken in West Frankfort.

This map shows locations where I personally have observed Mediterranean geckos in the last several years. (Photos by Tony Gerard)



## From my 3x5 notebook by Susan Post - March 2025

Instead of our usual early spring foray to the Cache in March, we are headed to Borneo, Malaysia. This is an insect trip, and we are staying at an appropriately named Lodge, Entomology Camp. The lodge runs a dozen light traps nightly and as an entomologist each morning and evening



light check is like opening a present. While the camp's main visitors are entomologists, birders are beginning to visit the area. This is one of the few places where you can see Bulwer's Pheasant, a shy mountain pheasant, endemic to the forests of Borneo.

During the COVID lockdown a bird guide (Calvin) stayed here. He constructed a blind and began twice daily scatterings of food to attract the pheasant. He continues this practice daily, mornings when the bird comes down from the mountain to forage and then late afternoon when the bird heads back up the mountain. Calvin asks us if we would like to see the bird, I am an enthusiastic YES. Michael, NO. Michael's reasoning is he does not like to sit in blinds, they are cramped, and he does not like to wait.

It is a short drive and walk to the blind, which is good-sized and holds at least a dozen lawn chairs. Calvin has scattered grain, and we wait. The bird suddenly appears, its tail glowing in sunlight. I am struck, not just by the beauty of the bird, but how am I going to capture a photo of the bird? The bird is feeding in dark forest, and it is never still as it keeps pecking the corn. Where do I focus? And then a memory of the Cache comes back. This is just like the feeding wild turkeys I see along the fields or along the auto tour of Crab Orchard. Instead of a lawn chair, my car is the blind. Confidence regained, I take a multitude of photos and am able to show Michael what he missed. All thanks to lessons learned and practiced in the Cache.

(Photo by Susan Post)



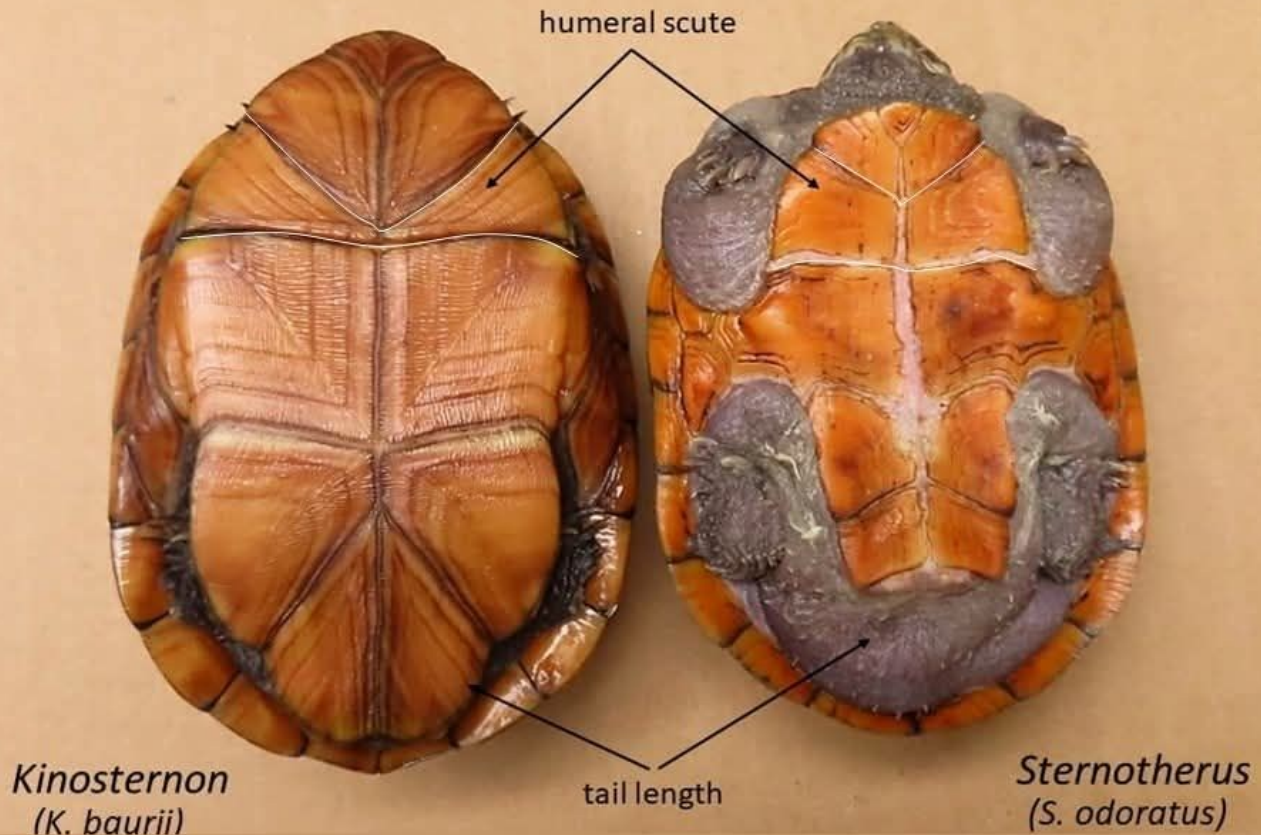
## ***Answer to Who Am I?*** (from page 1)

I'm an Eastern Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum*). Unlike my more common Musk Turtle cousin, who inhabits almost any permanent body of water in the Cache watershed, I prefer the shallow pools in forested flood plains. I'm an omnivore that feeds on aquatic vegetation, insects and other small animals and carrion. Depending on where I'm living, I may make seasonal migrations between different parts of my home range. That's the time you're most likely to see me out and about.

(Photos by Tony Gerard)



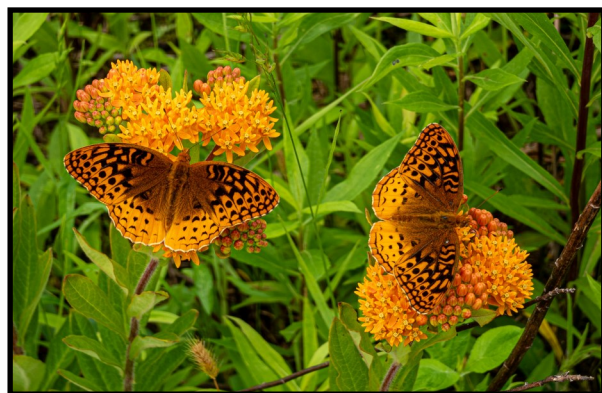
Mud turtles (*Kinosternon* spp.) differ from musk turtles (*Sternotherus* spp.) in plastron size (reduced in *Sternotherus*) and whether the humeral scute is triangular or quadrangular. Males of both genera (right) have much longer, thicker tails than do females (left).



## The Good Guys - Native Plants by Anne Parmley



Unlike invasive species, native plants evolved along with the wildlife that depend on them. I think at this point that everyone knows that Monarch butterflies need native milkweeds for survival, but did you know that each butterfly



has its own host plant? For example, fritillary butterflies depend on the many different varieties of native violets for food for their caterpillars. Pictured are the common blue violet, *Viola sororia soraria*, and the great spangled fritillary butterfly (on a native orange butterfly milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*). (Photos by William Parmley)

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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.

The Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center is open Thursday through Monday, 8:30 to 3:30, 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 146.

### 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.