Spring - Summer 2026 Newsletter



Save the Date!

Friends of the Cache Annual Meeting: August 20, 2026

Please join us for our Friends of the Cache River Watershed annual meeting on Thursday, August 20, at 6 p.m. at the Carbondale Civic Center, 200 S. Illinois Avenue, Carbondale, Illinois. The program will be announced later.

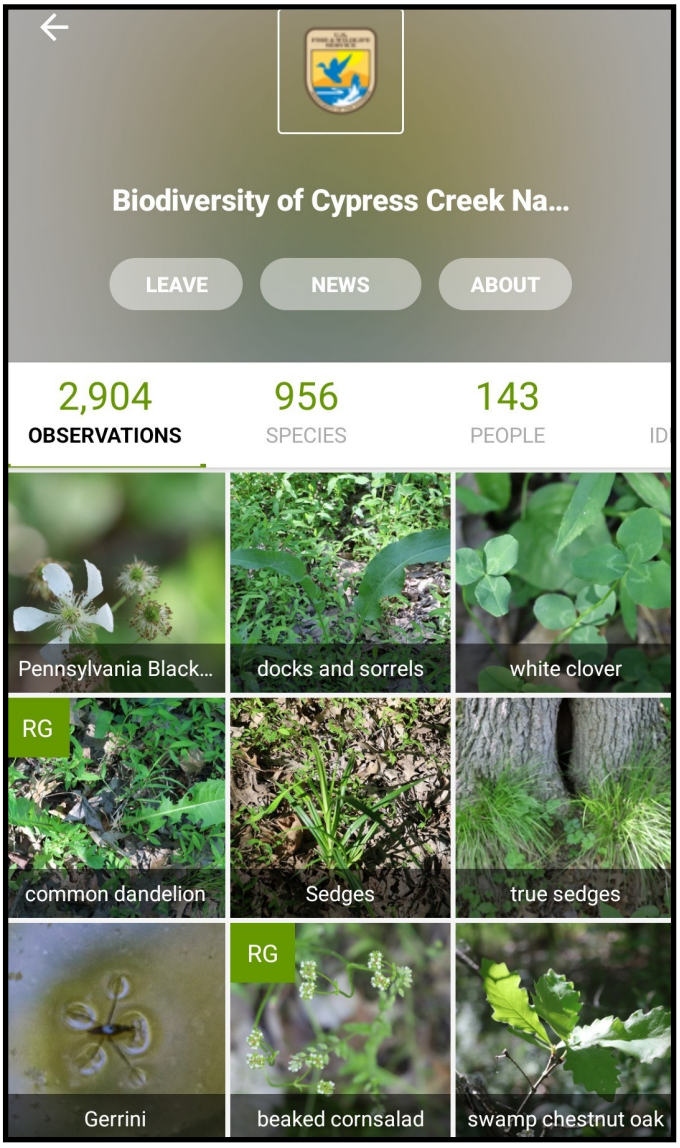
--We'll also have door prizes, merchandise for sale, and snacks.--

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

Cypress Creek Bioblitz

Our Cypress Cheek Bioblitz on the weekend of May 2nd added another 328 observations to the iNaturalist Biodiversity of Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge project for a gain of 63 new added species. See the chart on the right for totals. Thanks to everyone who helped.

Remember any time you make an iNaturalist observation within the refuge boundaries it goes directly to the project, so you can contribute any time, not just during a bioblitz.



Join Us

If you have not renewed your membership, please consider doing so at the annual meeting, by filling out the form on the last page of this newsletter, or on our website friendsofthecache.org. Also, please follow our Facebook page: Friends of the Cache River Watershed.

Friends of the Cache River Watershed Board Members:

Tony Gerard, President	Lori Armstrong, Treasurer/Friends Store
Sharon Voelz, Secretary	Shawn Gossman, Webmaster
Anne Parmley, Membership/Newsletter	Tammy Horn, Pollinator Gardens
Jonathan Voelz	John Wallace

All Board Members can be reached at friendsofthecacheriver@gmail.com.

John Irvin Retires





John Irvin has retired after 29 years working for the state of Illinois. Throughout that time, he worked at several locations, but for the last 10 years or so he has spent most of his time at Cache River State Natural Area. John says he really enjoyed his job. *I really got into it; I just loved the place.* John related with a chuckle, *I was putting in so much volunteer overtime it almost cost me a marriage!* When asked about what he liked best about his job, John related *planting, and talking with the hunters. They're the people who really appreciate my work*.

What are John's plans after retirement? He won't be taking it easy; he'll be operating a mobile pizza truck!

So, here's congrats to John on his retirement and hope for success at his new job!

Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center

Event Schedule

MAY

May 29 – Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

JUNE

Jun 5 – Movie Night: Documentary: Main Brothers a Dynasty in Egypt (6:00–7:30 p.m.) — Ed and Diane Annable, local authors, will be available for questions.

Jun 6 – Planting Herbs for Pollinators (10:00–11:00 a.m.) — Kim Rohling, U of I Extension

Jun 13 – Irises, Lilies, and Orchids of Southern Illinois (10:00–11:00 a.m.) — John Schwegman, Conservationist

Jun 25 – Plantable Paper Lab Seed Workshop (10:00 a.m.– Noon) — Anne Townsend & Erin Garrett, U of I Extension

Jun 26 – Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

Jun 27 – Dragonfly Identification Walk (10:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.) — Pat Dunbar & Mary McCarthy, Master Naturalists

JULY

Jul 10 – Kids' Free Fishing Clinic with IDNR Division of Fisheries (9:00 a.m.– Noon) — IDNR Conservation Education Representative, Ethan Stephenson

Jul 17 – Discovering Bats - Nighttime Superheroes! (1:30 p.m.–2:30 p.m.) — U of I Extension Master Naturalists

Jul 24 – Magnificent Moths Event (10:00 a.m.– Noon) — U of I Extension & IDNR

Jul 31 – Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

AUGUST

Aug 7 – Craft & Story Hour (1:30–2:30 p.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

Aug 27 – *Which Grass Is Which?* Workshop (10:00–11:30 a.m.) — Erin Garrett, U of I Extension

Aug 28 – Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

SEPTEMBER

Sep 5 – Craft & Story Hour (1:30–2:30 p.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

Sep 12 – Bats of the Cache River Wetlands (1:30–2:30 p.m.) — James L. Grove and Selena K. Sasser, PhDs

Sep 19 – Fall Migration Mini Sit (9:00 a.m.–Noon) and Picnic (Noon–1:30 p.m.) — Kim Rohling, U of I Extension & Sydney Waters, IDNR

Sep 25 – Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

OCTOBER

Oct 25 – Boo at the Slough! (1:00–3:00 p.m.) —IDNR and U of I Extension

Oct 30 – Coffee on the Cache Roundtable (9:00–10:00 a.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

NOVEMBER

Nov 13 – Wooly Worm Presentation & Craft (10:00–11:00 a.m.) — Anne Townsend & Erin Garrett, U of I Extension

Nov 20 – Wild Turkeys and the Science of Sound (5:30– 6:30 p.m.) — Lucille Cheeley, SIU

DECEMBER

Dec 3 – Wreath Making Workshop (1:30–3:00 p.m.) — Anne Townsend & Erin Garrett, U of I Extension

Dec 12 – Craft & Story Hour (1:30– 2:30 p.m.) — Sydney Waters, IDNR

Please contact Sydney Waters with any questions about the above events.

Sydney Waters, Natural Resources Coordinator

Henry N. Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center

8885 IL-37, Cypress, IL 62923

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

618-657-2064 (office), 618-713-1163 (cell)

Sydney.Waters@illinois.gov

Regular hours for the Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center are Thursday through Monday, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., closed Tuesday and Wednesday.

Invaders! Western Cattle Egret by Tony Gerard

Could there be such a thing as a *nice* invasive exotic? How about a *natural* invasive exotic? If either would be possible, the western cattle egret probably comes closest to filling both titles.



Western Cattle Egrets are small, stocky herons. They stand under 2 feet tall and have a wingspan of about three feet. An adult has white plumage, a yellow bill and greyish-yellow legs. During the breeding season, adults of the nominate western subspecies develop orange-buff feathers on the back, breast, and crown of the head, and the bill, legs, and eyes (normally yellow) become bright red for a brief period.

Unlike most herons, Cattle Egrets have adapted to drier, upland environments. As the name implies, they have developed a special relationship with cattle. The Cattle Egret feeds on a wide range of prey, particularly insects, and especially grasshoppers and crickets. Studies have shown that they have greater foraging success when hunting near cattle. As the cattle forage, they kick up grasshoppers and crickets that are quickly grabbed by the little herons. Farmers also report a decrease in the number of flies bothering their cattle when Cattle Egrets are present, as the little herons feed on flies and maggots also. It was the benefit to cattle that prompted ranchers and the Hawaiian Board of Agriculture and Forestry to release the species in Hawaii in 1959.

Cattle Egrets were originally native to parts of southern Spain and Portugal, tropical and subtropical Africa and western Asia. Within the last 200 years, it has undergone one of the most rapid and extensive natural range expansions of any known bird species. They were first sighted in the Americas on the boundary of Guiana and



Suriname in 1877, having apparently flown across the Atlantic Ocean, likely aided by northeast trade winds or storms. By 1941 they were seen in North America, pairs were breeding in Florida by 1953 and Canada by 1962. They also continue to expand their range in Europe and Africa.

Cattle egrets have been implicated in the spread of animal infections such as heartwater, and infectious bursal disease. They are classified as an invasive exotic because of their rapid spread, but little effect on native species has been noted where they now occur.

(Photos by Tony Gerard)

Who Am I? (Answer on page 13)

I'm an Amphibian, but I bet I don't look like any other amphibians you are familiar with.

With my elongate body, no back legs and external gills some people have said I look like a cross between an axolotl and an eel. My kind is relatively abundant in the backwaters of the Cache, but most folks in the area have never seen me because of my secretive lifestyle. Do you know me?

(*Photo by Tony Gerard)*



From my 3x5 notebook by Susan Post - April 2026

I would like to see a live armadillo in Illinois. A hundred years ago that would have been a hard wish to grant, but since the 1970s there have been numerous sightings in Illinois. According to Dr. Joyce Hofmann, in the newest edition of a *Field Guide to Illinois Mammals*, the Mexican Long-nosed Armadillo is now a common resident in southern Illinois south of the East St. Louis area. I figure the Cache may be the best place for me to see this illusive mammal as we spend quite a bit of time looking for things during the crepuscular period or after dark. This is also the favored time for armadillos to be shuffling about.



I have seen plenty of evidence— roadkill. So far, my favorite *dead* sighting has been on the road to Marshall Ridge Access where the carcass was visited by a rare sphinx moth. On April 19, Michael and I were driving the Karnak Road; we had just visited Sydney at the Wetland Center and were checking things out in the area. We passed a field with a bald eagle sitting in the middle. *STOP!* I shout to Michael. *What is that eagle doing?* Curiosity gets the better of us and we find a pull off and scan the area with binoculars and a camera. The bald eagle is intent on eating something, not sure what. The bird is spooked and takes off with its prize. The eagle was feasting on a fresh roadkill armadillo (one of my photos shows pink *meat*). Wow, what a sighting, and I feel one step closer to a live armadillo.

(Photo by Michael Jeffords)

Native Americans of the Cache River Watershed & Southernmost Illinois

Part I of 10 — 1540s–1840s by Mark Denzer

History does not occur in a vacuum, and the geography and historic inhabitants of southern Illinois are no exception. The Cache River watershed was shaped by countless influences that brought Native peoples into the region and, over time, caused many to leave. Colonial pressures from the Spanish, French, English, and later Americans, along with territorial disputes between Native groups, warfare, disease, and declining populations, gradually reduced Native occupation along the Cache River.

No historic account survives that records what the original inhabitants may have called the river. In 1702, a group of French Jesuit priests named it the Cache due to its nature of log jams and debris clogging the river's mouth. Father Jean Mermet remarked *ce crique est cache (this creek is hidden)* after being unable to see the running water due to heavy debris. Both prehistorically and historically, however, the Cache served as a natural highway through the wetlands of southern Illinois. Encampments and small villages once lined its banks, nearby bluff shelters, and the prominent citadel bluffs that define the region today. Many modern roads and highways also trace ancient footpaths that once connected villages, hunting grounds, and important cultural sites across the landscape.

Various tribal groups inhabited and utilized the Cache River for its abundant natural resources. White-tailed deer, turkey, fish, waterfowl, and beaver provided food and materials essential to daily life. The region’s massive ancient cypress trees were especially valuable, as they were used to create dugout canoes. These canoes, shaped by fire and carved with flint and greenstone adzes and axes, allowed Native peoples to travel the winding waterways for fishing, trapping, hunting, and trade throughout the year.

Historically, the Cache River stretched more than 94 miles across a diverse landscape inhabited by Native peoples for thousands of years. Long before highways crossed southern Illinois, the Cache River served as a major transportation corridor, linking the region to the larger Ohio and Mississippi River systems. Travel overland through dense swamp forests was difficult, but the winding channels of the Cache provided an efficient route for transportation, trade, communication, hunting, and seasonal migration. Using dugout canoes, often burned, scorched, and shaped with flint and

greenstone tools, Native peoples traveled these waters for generations with an intimate knowledge of the wetlands.

During the historic period, southern Illinois became a contested borderland influenced by several powerful Native groups. The region surrounding the Cache River lay between the Chickasaw to the south, the Shawnee moving westward from the east, and the Illinois Confederacy to the north. Control of river corridors, hunting territories, and trade routes made the region strategically important, while the waterways of the Cache connected broader networks of travel, diplomacy, and conflict throughout the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys.

One of the first major Native groups to leave a lasting footprint in Illinois Country was the Algonquian-speaking Illinois Confederacy. Their influence extended across much of present-day Illinois and into the Cache River watershed. The earliest written accounts of the Illinois Indians, dating to around 1639, indicate they occupied lands bounded by the Wisconsin, Ohio, Wabash, and Mississippi Rivers. Historical sources describe approximately 60 villages and a population numbering more than 20,000 people. The Illinois people referred to themselves collectively as *Inoka*, while French explorers and missionaries generally used the term *Illinois*. One winter village is recorded to have been near Horseshoe Lake (part of the Cache River watershed) in what is now Alexander county where Kaskaskias were said to come from up north in the wintertime to smoke passenger pigeons in the 1700s.

Historians believe the Illinois Confederation may once have consisted of as many as twelve tribes. By the close of the seventeenth century, however, several had vanished or been absorbed into neighboring groups, including the Chepoussa, Chinkoa, Coiracoentanon, Espeminkia, Maroa, Moingwena, and Tapouaro. Five major tribes continued into the eighteenth century: the Cahokia, Kaskaskia, Michigamea, Peoria, and Tamaroa. By the early nineteenth century, only the Kaskaskia and Peoria survived as distinct tribal communities.

Recent linguistic research has also provided new insight into the origin of the word *Illinois*. Early French missionaries, among them Father Marquette, believed the name meant *the real men*. Modern scholars now suggest a different meaning.

According to Berkeley Algonquian language specialist David J. Costa, the word likely developed from the Myaamia-Peewalia (Miami-Peoria) term *irenweewa,* later pronounced *ilenweewa,* meaning *he or she speaks in the regular or ordinary way.* Neighboring Ojibwa speakers eventually altered the pronunciation to ilinwe or ilinwek, which French explorers recorded as *Illinois*. English speakers later adapted the term into the modern name of the state.

Although French and English writers commonly used *Illinois* as a broad label for the Native peoples of the region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was not the name these communities used for themselves. French missionary accounts indicate that the most widely used collective name among them was *Inoka*, though the original meaning of the word remains uncertain.

Future articles in this series will explore additional tribes, local legends, archaeological discoveries, family histories and the continuing Native history of the Cache River watershed, including the Shawnee, Mascouten, Cherokee influences, mound-building cultures, woodland peoples and stories tied to places such as, Fort Massac, Mermet, and the ancient the headwaters near present-day Cobden.

Sources:

- https://www.fs.usda.gov/
- https://libguides.lib.siu.edu/sius-native-heritage
- *Six Years in the Illinois Territory 1812 -1818, When Johnson County Spanned River to River* by Ed & Diane Annable
- https://miamioh.edu/centers-institutes/myaamia-center/
- *It Happened in Southern Illinois* by John W. Allen
- *A History of Southern Illinois: Volume 1: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests* by George Washington Smith
- *Indians of Southern Illinois* by archaeologist and historian Irvin M. Peithmann

Critters of the Cache – Mudsnakes by Tony Gerard



You may have lived in the Cache River watershed all your life and never seen a Mudsnake (*Farancia abacura*). The name is appropriate because they spend most of their time buried in the mud along slow, swampy backwater areas. Although the name implies something ugly, they are a strikingly beautiful reptile, especially after a recent shed, glossy smooth black above and striking orangish pink below. The pinkish ventral color extends up the snake's side and, in some individuals, even meets forming crossbands on the back (although I've never seen this on individuals from the Cache watershed).

Mudsnakes feed on amphibians, but most of their diet seems to consist almost entirely of an equally secretive amphibian, sirens. In the Cache watershed we only have one siren species, the Western Lesser siren (*Siren nettingi*).

When encountered by humans, Mudsnakes are unaggressive. I have never experienced, or heard tale of, a Mudsnake biting defensively. A typical response to a threat a Mudsnake can't immediately escape is to twist itself into a tight coil with its head protected underneath, or duck its head and bring up its tail in a coil, exposing the bright undersurface. In nature, bright contrasting colors typically mean one of three things. The animal may be poisonous to eat, as in Monarch butterflies. The animal may have a venomous bite or sting, as in bumble bees or coral snakes. Lastly the animal may have neither poison nor venom but is just trying to make a potential predator believe it does. That is the case with Mudsnakes.



Another curious habit may be related to this. Mudsnakes have a blunt tail tipped with a pointed scale. This pointed scale is not sharp enough to pierce human skin, but it is noticeable. If a defensively coiled Mudsnake is picked up, it may probe about with its tail tip, almost looking like it could deliver a sting with its tail. No known snakes have a venomous tail stinger, but myths of such appear in several countries.

In North America the legendary reptile is known as the *Hoop Snake*. The venom in its tail is deadly, and it has a unique attack. When threatened, or just feeling aggressive, depending on who is telling the story, the snake takes its tail in its mouth and rolls like a barrel hoop toward its prey or antagonist. Hoop snakes often hang out on hill tops to give them a downhill speed advantage in such attacks. When within range the snake launches itself tail first like a javelin at its target. A hit by its tail stinger is always fatal. Stories of hoop snakes in North America go back as far as the 18th century in various accounts. Many folks believe it is the Mudsnake that gave rise to the North American hoop snake legends. Longtime resident biologist Max Hutchinson even has a local hoop snake story.



So where to go to see a Mudsnake in the Cache watershed? Mudsnakes are where you find them. I've seen Mudsnakes in just about any area of the watershed that has appropriate habitat, backwater swamps with siren populations, but I've rarely found a Mudsnake when I was with friends searching for one specifically. Most of the Mudsnakes I have encountered have been on the crawl in bottomland flood plains during hot, dry times. My thoughts are that the Mudsnake had been inhabiting a muddy pool which dried out, and they were searching for another.

So, if you go looking for them this summer, here's to hoping the snake you find is a Mudsnake and not a hoop snake! *(Photos by Tony Gerard)*

Answer to Who Am I? (from page 6)

I'm a Western Lesser Siren. I live buried in the mud at the bottom of swamps and sloughs and usually only come out at night to forage for insects, crayfish and tadpoles.

Herons and Mudsnakes eat me, so I have to avoid those guys. I'm so different that I was once classified in my own order of amphibians, but now most scientists lump me in with the salamanders. There are other types of siren further south, but I'm the only kind found here in the Cache watershed.

(Photos by Tony Gerard)





The Good Guys - Native Plants by Anne Parmley



In the early spring of 2018, we planted 15 acres of former cropland with native plant seeds. This was a partnership with the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service in which we provided the land and labor, they provided most of the seeds and some help with the planting. Over the years we have been amazed by the number of new plants we see each year. This year our new plant is the Prairie Cinquefoil. This plant (according to the Illinois Wildflowers website) only occurs in the northern half of the state.

Whether the cinquefoil seed was in the original seed mix we planted or was brought in by animals is a mystery to us. It sprang up in three different spots within the six-acre section that was burned this winter.

The nectar and pollen of the Prairie Cinquefoil flowers attract small bees and flies, especially Halictid bees and Syrphid flies. The larvae of some small insects form galls or mine the leaves of cinquefoils. Other insect feeders include aphids and grasshoppers. White-tailed Deer and some other animals browse on the foliage and seeds of these plants occasionally. The seeds of cinquefoils often pass through their digestive tracts and remain viable, helping to spread these plants to new locations.



Information gleaned from Illinoiswildflowers.info.

(Photos by William Parmley)

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

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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.