



Fall 2021 Newsletter



Please visit friendsofthecache.org for past newsletters and more information about the Cache River Watershed.

Upcoming Events

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16

Fall Migration Mini-Sit

9:00 a.m. to noon

REGISTER ONLINE FOR YOUR EBIRD HOTSPOT TODAY AT:
GO.ILLINOIS.EDU/MINISIT
 OR BY CALLING: 618-657-2064

PLEASE KEEP CIRCLES AT FEWER THAN 10 PARTICIPANTS TO FOLLOW SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES. IN LIEU OF A POTLUCK, BRING YOUR OWN BAGGED LUNCH AND LAWN CHAIRS TO THE CACHE RIVER WETLANDS CENTER: 8885 IL-37, CYPRESS, IL 62923 FOR A SOCIALLY-DISTANCED PICNIC OUTDOORS FROM NOON TO 1:30PM. SHARE YOUR SIGHTINGS: HOW MANY SPECIES CAN WE IDENTIFY?

You are invited to attend the 4th annual Fall Migration *Mini-Sit* on Saturday, October 16, from 9:00 a.m. to noon. A *mini-sit* is a bird watching event where our objective is to record as many bird species as we can by sight and sound for a set 3-hour period. Birdwatchers of all levels are invited to sit back, relax, and enjoy fall migration. Pack your binoculars or scope, camera, lawn chair, snacks and a lunch to enjoy the event. Each team will choose an ebird hotspot within the Cache River Watershed and sit in a 24-foot diameter circle, tallying all birds seen and heard within and from the circle. To comply with COVID-19 guidelines, please maintain 6-foot social-distancing measures within your circle. Groups are limited to ten participants per hotspot.

Following the *mini-sit*, bring your own bagged lunch and lawn chairs to the Cache River Wetlands Center, 8885 IL-37, for a socially-distanced picnic outdoors

from noon to 1:30 p.m. The picnic allows communication across teams, so we can share our sightings. How many species can we identify? Register online for your ebird hotspot today at: go.illinois.edu/minisit or by calling: 618-657-2064.

Teams must pre-register their locations by Sunday, October 10, and provide contact information of their participants (name, address, phone number, email address, team affiliation i.e.: Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Shawnee Chapter of the Audubon Society, Southern Illinois Audubon Society, etc. and preferred hotspot). Maps and directions to your hotspot will be emailed to you. If you have questions, contact Kimberly Rohling at kimrohli@illinois.edu. This will count as a volunteer opportunity for Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists since it is conducting citizen science work. This event is free and open to the public.



Event: Christmas Bird Count
Date: Monday, December 20, 2021
Location: Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge
Contact: Jeff Hoover for your assignment at:
hoover_jeff@hotmail.com

(Photo by William Parmley)

Monarch Butterfly Banding

The Annual Monarch Day at the Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center was Saturday, September 18, but there is still time to band monarchs on their migration to Mexico. Please stop during hours of operation Wednesday-Sunday, 9 am to 4 pm to borrow nets, take a walk, capture butterflies, and tag monarchs from now into October. Call 618-657-2064 for more information. (Photo by Jonathan Voelz)



A Review of Cache River Days

Swamp ecology tours were a hit at Cache River Days. Tours departed from the Lower Cache Access near the town of Perks. Friends of the Cache Board Members, Tony Gerard and Kim Rohling, led 30 people to the champion bald cypress tree and Eagle Pond with USFWS staff (Karen Mangan and Kyra Neal) and volunteers (McKenzi Shaede and Tony Dynek). Participants learned about site history, differences between cypress and tupelo trees, and about Asian carp. Paddlers were rewarded with views of great egrets and great blue herons standing tall among the buttonbush and flowering swamp mallow.



In Ullin, Friends of the Cache board members Lori Armstrong and Sharon Voelz set up shop encouraging membership with our organization. At the Kid's Corner, 10 children constructed fish puppets and 9 children made do-it-yourself recycled birdfeeders led by Master Naturalists Kelsey Woodcock and Jonathan Voelz. Extra kits were taken to the Wetlands Center for use in future programming. At the cold-blooded Creatures of the Cache tent, Jeremy Schumacher and Shawnee Community

College brought an assortment of reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates to teach the public about misunderstood creatures in the watershed. Master Naturalists Katie Carl and Mel Kasson assisted Jeremy with different animal ambassadors at the event to help families overcome their fears of cold-blooded creatures in the Cache.

At the Wetlands Center in Cypress, Illinois, families learned about frogs from site interpreter Molie Oliver. Nine children created puppets and went on a hike looking for metamorphs, adult frogs or toads, and the foods that these amphibians would snack on.

Friends of the Cache board member Shawn Gossman led a guided hike at Heron Pond Nature Preserve with 12 participants, including John and Martha Schwegman who were critical in assisting with protection of this site. Coincidentally the hike happened to be on the 50th anniversary of Heron Pond being dedicated as a nature preserve. Hikers got great looks at strawberry bush in fruit, various fungi, a cottonmouth along the boardwalk swamp, a variety of caterpillars, the champion cherrybark oak, and so much more. (Photos by Jonathan Voelz)



The Friends of the Cache want to thank all partners, staff, and volunteers who made this in-person event possible. It was great to be able to share our love for the Cache with the local community.

Summer Research Immersion for Teachers



In June, 20 middle and high school STEM teachers took part in a three-week Summer Research Immersion (SRI) workshop held by the SIUC River Region Master Teaching Fellows (MTF) program, a grant funded by the Robert Noyce Program at the National Science Foundation. This MTF program spans five years and includes coursework, research experiences, professional communication and leadership development. The focus of this year's SRI was biodiversity taught by Dr. David Gibson, a professor of Plant Biology and Distinguished Scholar at SIUC. During the SRI, teachers spent a week exploring the Cache River Wetlands, a Southern Illinois treasure, and engaged in field research led by Erin Garrett within the Cache River State Natural Area. The participants focused their work on mesophication, which is the shifting of oak-hickory forests to maple-beech dominated forests over time. After visiting Trail of Tears State Forest and Simpson Barrens, participants developed a research question and collected plant data to compare the diversity of understory plant communities of oak and maple trees. The forest understory is where the greatest amount of plant life biodiversity can be found in the forest; therefore, understanding the effects of mesophication and the resulting management practices to reverse the process on the understory plant life is crucial.

Teacher participants identified plants and estimated their percent cover within plots at Wildcat Bluff and near the Michael W. Wolff Memorial Wetlands parking lot. Within a few days, participants developed a project, collected data, analyzed data, and presented their results. From this training, the STEM teachers developed activities to implement in their classrooms in the ensuing academic year. Students will use problem solving, inquiry, and critical thinking skills to explore and learn about changes in biodiversity.

News Release from Illinois DNR: 2021 Fink Memorial Award Recipient

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Hannah Holmquist of Carbondale is this year's recipient of the Todd Fink Memorial Award, presented by the Illinois Conservation Foundation (ICF). Hannah Holmquist is a graduate student in the Department of Zoology at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). She will receive a \$500 stipend from the ICF for costs associated with her research.

Holmquist's research focuses on how the fish respond to water level fluctuations in Buttonland Swamp, a National Natural Landmark, Illinois Land and Water Reserve, and Wetland of International Importance located within Cache River State Natural Area in southern Illinois. Water levels in the swamp are managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Buttonland Swamp provides habitat for 12 state-listed threatened, endangered, or imperiled fish species. Holmquist's research objectives are to evaluate fish populations in the swamp across years with changes in aquatic habitat and hydrology. Data from the research will help inform, modify, and improve management of Buttonland Swamp.

The Todd Fink Memorial Fund was established to honor Todd Fink, a highly regarded biologist and ornithologist with the IDNR who died in 1995 at the age of 36. The award goes to recipients whose graduate research at SIUC focuses on threatened or endangered species of plants or animals. To

contribute to the Todd Fink Memorial Fund or to learn more about the ICF, which is an IRS 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization, check the ICF website at www.ilconservation.org or contact the Illinois Conservation Foundation, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271, phone 217-785-2003. Contact person is Steve Ettinger (steve.ettinger@illinois.gov).

From my 3x5 Notebook by Susan Post—July 27, 2021

As we head to the Cache River Area via I-57, our trip would not be complete without a stop at the Dongola Gas Station. While it has changed brands several times, to us it is still the 'gas station' just off the interstate. No, we do not stop for the fried chicken, fresh brewed sweet tea or the slots; instead, it is for the entomological treasures the lights attract. The gas station is a beacon for insects from the surrounding forest. While the lights are no longer super bright, we still hope to find something, so we always stop.



In early April we entertain the "smokers" table with our search under and on the sweet gum tree for Luna Moths. Most of the time all we find are remnants of wings and many cigarette butts. However, at times we have found green tree frogs, Tulip-tree Silk Moths, and even Elephant Stag Beetles.

The best time seems to be June, but that does not deter us. It is noon when we stop and while Michael fuels the car I walk around the station, looking up and down the walls. (It looks like I am casing the joint.) On the store's

rubber entry mat, appearing as if it is ready to enter, is a female Eastern Hercules Beetle. Wow, what a find! I scoop her up and race over to Michael, thinking I had found the prize of the day. Michael also takes a turn around the station, and hiding behind the outdoor ashtray he spies a male of the same species. These insects are never common and their larvae, which feed on damaged or rotten hardwoods, can take up to 3 years to develop. We have found a female or a male before, but never a pair. This is why we always fill up at the Dongola Gas Station; you never know what treasure might be in store for curious entomologists. *(Photo of Eastern Hercules Beetles by Michael Jeffords)*

Who Am I?

You might be familiar with my cousin's kids, but chances are you don't know me.

Do you know who I am?

(Photo by Tony Gerard)



We Welcome New Staff to the Watershed



Olivia Barragan Velasquez graduated from Southern Illinois University in May 2021 with a Recreation major (Outdoor Recreation) and a minor in Environmental Studies. From Olivia: *I had my internship at Giant City State Park from January to May. In that time, I was learning and working with the best interpreter I've ever met, Jennifer Randolph. She inspired me to be passionate about teaching even though I am still learning, to be brave when I forget to be, and to stay positive despite the challenges. I began working for the Cache River Wetlands Center on July 15th and will be done by January 15th. After that I plan on moving to the west coast where I will be closer to my family. Olivia works full time at the Cache River Wetlands Center as Conservation Education Representative, sponsored by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.* (Photo by Anne Parnley)

Tony Dynek is a 2021 graduate of Illinois State University where he received his bachelor's degrees in zoology and conservation biology, while minoring in environmental studies. From Tony: *Growing up I was always interested in the natural elements and wildlife that help our planet to function. I am a big fan of outdoor activities and some of my favorites include birding, hiking, kayaking, biking, and nature photography. What I am most excited about accomplishing with the Friends of the Cache is public outreach as well as stewardship of the Cache River Watershed. I believe public outreach is important because it allows us to inform the public of the value of our native wildlife and lands as well as how we manage and protect them. Through land stewardship work with the Friends of the Cache, I hope to be able to improve native habitat and food sources for our local native species.* Tony works at Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge 3 and 1/2 days a week and for the Friends of the Cache River Watershed 1 and 1/2 days a week as an AmeriCorps Member, sponsored by the Friends of the Cache River Watershed. (Photo by Kimberly Rohling)



IDNR Activities at the Cache River

submitted by Christina Y. Feng, District Heritage Biologist, Illinois Department of Natural Resources



Sidecast dredging began in the Cache River channel at its confluence with Cypress Creek on 18 August 2021. The work is being done by Douglas Amphibious, Inc. out of Camden, TN, who owns and operates unique equipment for working in riverine environments. This machine – an aquatic track hoe – is capable of navigating down the channel to dig out the large quantities of accumulated silt in the river. Heavy siltation of the Lower Cache River channel has reduced the amount and quality of deepwater habitat available to fish and other aquatic organisms, and,

in some stretches, the riverbed now completely dries in most years. This project will restore this deepwater habitat and connectivity between pools throughout the approximately 4.5 mile reach between Cypress Creek and Karnak Road.

The project area has just moved past the IL-37 bridge and is now progressing toward Porterhouse Road by Karnak.

IDNR also completed registration of 1023.1 acres of the Cache River SNA as an addition to the Cache River Land and Water Reserve at the recent 239th Meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. This new designation will provide permanent protection for another 11 state-owned parcels and at least nine state-listed species and support the goal of creating a watershed-scale bioreserve. *(Photos supplied by IDNR)*



Summer Trash Blasts in the Watershed



Summer trash blasts got University of Illinois volunteers (Marie Emery, Joel Murray, Jonathan Voelz, Robert Wilt), and a community member (Katy Banning) moving in the Cache River Watershed. Over 150 pounds of trash was removed around the Cache River Watershed by this group of dedicated volunteers supervised by Extension Program Coordinator and Friends of the Cache Board Member, Kimberly Rohling. Sites were visited by participants for two hours during July and August mornings. This seems like good news; less trash in the Cache. However most of the trash that was encountered was microtrash which is not biodegradable, can cause mortality in wildlife if ingested, and is easily overlooked due to its size.

Different sites had their unique problems. At Ferne Clyffe State Park, confetti and glitter was a huge issue at the picnic pavilions after the 4th of July. Trash along Porterhouse/Urbana Road in Cache River State Natural area consisted of spent shot gun shells, beverage containers, a pile of hay bales, and a tire. At Horseshoe Lake Fish and Wildlife Area, roadside ditches near the campground contained Styrofoam drink cups and other beverage containers.



When you visit the Cache, please do your part to leave no trace and consider picking up litter to improve our public lands wildlife. These trash blast clean-ups were a partnership by University of Illinois Extension, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and The Friends of the Cache River Watershed.



(Photos courtesy of Kimberly Rohling and Jonathan Voelz)



Answer to Who Am I?

I'm an Eastern Spotted-Winged Antlion. You might know my cousin's kids. They dig conical pits in dry, sheltered soil to catch ants. I wasn't like that as a kid. I spent my time in a dry tree hole. Now that I'm all grown up, you might see me around your porch light at night. How do you like these stylish pink bands on my antennae? They're one of my distinguishing characteristics!

(Photo by Tony Gerard)

Annual Meeting Recap



Due to the Delta Variant of the ongoing pandemic, we decided to do a virtual annual meeting this time to ensure the safety of our members and supporters. We're all in this together, and we can't wait to see you IN PERSON again soon when we beat this thing, together!

For a first-time virtual event, we think it went well. Multiple people showed up to hear our President of the Board Tony Gerard give a talk on what we have accomplished and the news about our organization.

Afterwards, our board member, Shawn Gossman also known as *Hiking with Shawn* gave a nice presentation on where you enjoy outdoor recreation around the Cache River Watershed. We graciously appreciated the support from Shawnee Community College in hosting our virtual annual meeting. We want to wish you all a wonderful rest of the year and an even better next year – thanks for attending the meeting! (Photo by Shawn Gossman)

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.

OR go to our website: friendsofthecache.org and click "join" to become a friend online.