

jul/aug
2016

friends

of the cache river watershed



photo: Michael Jeffords

Tour the Cache wetlands with Tony Gerard: go to <http://southernmostillinois.com/video/> and select Past Tours.

Field Notes

*Four questions for
Liz Hillard*

*PhD Student and Research Assistant
SIU Forestry Department*

How do swamp rabbits differ from eastern cottontails?

Swamp rabbits (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) are about twice the size of the more familiar eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*). They have cinnamon-colored rings around their eyes, and darker, rusty brown or black backs. While eastern cottontails inhabit upland open grassy areas and are distributed throughout the eastern and midwestern U.S., swamp rabbits are specific to bottomland hardwood forests in the south. Southern Illinois is the northernmost extent of their range. When I've trapped and handled both species, swamp rabbits fight fiercely and often vocalize, while eastern cottontails remain docile.

Do they actually live in swamps?

Swamp rabbits inhabit many communities within bottomland hardwood forests, including cypress swamps, canebrakes, floodplain/riparian areas

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For more information, see

www.friendsofthecache.org

e-mail friendsofthecacheriver@gmail.com

or like "Friends of the Cache River Watershed" on FACEBOOK.



Sunny skies helped bring more than 1,100 visitors to the Cache River Wetlands Center for 2016 Nature Fest. The Friends would like to thank Cypress Creek NWR, Americorps, IDNR, Shawnee Community College, Shawnee Audubon Society and our many volunteers for making the day a huge success!



Kids to the Cache,

sponsored by Friends of the Cache River Watershed, provides \$250 grants in the spring and fall to help local schools cover transportation costs for field trips to the Cache River State Natural Area and Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge. **September 1** is the deadline to apply for Fall 2016 grants. For information and application materials, please contact Jodie Delaney at jodied87@gmail.com



What's Next

Cold-Blooded Creatures of the Cache

Saturday, August 27, 1-4pm
Cache River Wetlands Center/Heron Pond Trailhead

Take a close-up look at the reptiles and amphibians native to southernmost Illinois, then join Tony Gerard for a herping hike at Heron Pond. Questions, call the Wetlands Center at 618-657-2064.

Friends of the Cache Annual Meeting

Wednesday, August 31, 6:30-8:30pm
Carbondale Civic Center
200 S. Illinois Avenue, Carbondale

Come one, come all! Complimentary dessert and beverages, door prizes and Cache merchandise for sale, updates on Friends activities, and the presentation **Amber: Window on an Ancient World** by Dr. Sam Heads, insect paleontologist from the Illinois Natural History Survey. Advance registration requested; contact Paula Havlik at phavlik@illinois.edu or 217-649-4326.



photo: Tony Gerard

Do you know who I am?

Answer on pg 4

Field Notes *cont' from page one*

and wetlands. They benefit from large, contiguous patches of ground cover (saplings, vines, shrubs, etc.) that provide concealment. Swamp rabbits also use water to escape from predators and are considered semi-aquatic. They are impressive swimmers, and I've seen them quickly cross even torrential and fast-moving streams.

Are swamp rabbits endangered?

Swamp rabbits are abundant in the core areas of their range (South Carolina, Arkansas, Louisiana), but have declined elsewhere due to habitat loss and fragmentation. Because they are a specialist species that evolved within bottomland hardwood forests, swamp rabbits can serve as indicators of ecosystem integrity and a tool to guide forest management objectives.

photo: Michael Jeffords



You never know

what treasures you might find during a summer night hike in the Cache. Fireflies punctuate the trail, and we watch for the male's signal and the female's response. In early July, the calls of bird-voiced and green tree frogs can be deafening. July and August are also prime months to look for nocturnal insects that are attracted to bright lights. During a night hike last July, I finally saw a "holy grail" insect for me. As a child, my favorite insect book was the *Golden Guide to Insects*. I would pore over that book, hoping to add

What are your key research findings?

Over the past three years, my research collaborators at the SIU Forestry Department, Dr. John Groninger and Dr. Clay Nielsen, and I have been monitoring swamp rabbit populations within selected areas of Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Preliminary findings indicate significantly higher populations of swamp rabbits in regenerating forest stands (young stands with little canopy cover) than in afforested stands (middle-aged stands with closed canopies). We will continue to study the impact of specific habitat variables, such as tree density and vertical and horizontal stand structures, in order to provide a framework to help guide management objectives within bottomland hardwood forest landscapes.

For more details on Liz Hillard's research, go to www.friendsofthecache.org and click SCIENCE.

Notes from My 3x5 Notebook

by Susan Post

each one to my ever-growing collection. On page 131 was the unicorn beetle, olive green and about 1.5 inches in size. The book noted that "collectors prize the curious adults." I looked and looked; with a name like unicorn, I wondered, "do they really exist?" It wasn't until fifty years after I first began my quest that I was finally successful. On that July night in 2015, we saw three adult unicorn beetles within a few minutes. One was a newly emerged female that still had dirt between her tarsi. Yes, they do exist—another hidden treasure from the Cache.



The Cache River and You

The pollinator demonstration gardens at the Cache River Wetlands Center are thriving, thanks to the hard work of Friends' board members and a cadre of dedicated volunteers. Supported by funding from The Nature Conservancy, we have planted 11 gardens and installed temporary interpretive signage. Check out the trail behind the Wetlands Center to monitor our progress!



Photos: John Havlik

You may have wondered about the unusual-looking contraption recently installed near the end of the small boardwalk at the Wetlands Center. This is a black light trap, used by entomologists to lure insects that are active at night. Site interpreter Molie Oliver operates the black light Wednesday through Saturday nights. During the day, the trap is emptied and the night's catch identified and studied.

Master Naturalist training will be offered at two locations in southern Illinois this fall:

**Dixon Springs Agricultural Center
State Highway 145 N, Simpson, IL**

Classes meet Tuesdays,
8:30am-4pm, Aug 23-Nov 8

Contact: Bronwyn Aly at baly@illinois.edu or 618-382-2662

**Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge
State Route 148, Marion, IL**

Classes meet Thursdays,
8:30am-4pm, Aug 25-Nov 10

Contact: Maggie Rose at mro@illinois.edu or 618-687-1727

This outstanding ten-week program sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension Service is designed to educate and train volunteers to provide support in the conservation, management and interpretation of the region's natural resources. The \$250 registration fee covers classroom sessions, field training, handbook and other printed materials. Space is limited: please apply no later than **August 1, 2016**.



Photo: CCWR

Staff from Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge

recently kicked off a bathymetry project within Limekiln Slough Swamp. In the same way that topographic maps represent the three-dimensional features of overland terrain, bathymetric maps illustrate the land that lies under water. Through June and July, staff and volunteers (pictured above) are geared up with measuring sticks and GPS units to collect bathymetric data. This data will be used to create a geographic image of the underwater surface of Limekiln Slough and help answer two main questions: 1) what controls the drainage affecting private lands

adjacent to and upstream of the slough; and, 2) whether modifications could be made to the mouth of the slough to improve habitat conditions.

Refuge staff, assisted by Youth Conservation Corps and volunteers, also continue to work on forest inventory plots. The goal is to cover approximately 200 acres and collect data on tree species, ages and forest structure, so we can better manage these areas for wildlife.

Special thanks to Refuge Manager Mike Brown, who led a lively group of Friends of the Cache on a members-only moonlight paddle through Buttonland Swamp on June 18!



Prescribed fire

is an effective tool for helping to control the spread of exotic and invasive species and encourage the development of native oak/hickory upland and bottomland forests. Earlier this spring, IDNR staff conducted prescribed burns over 438 acres at Boss Island, 591 acres at Wildcat Bluff and 17 acres at Cave Creek Glade Nature Preserve. Primary exotic species controlled include Japanese honeysuckle, autumn olive and bush honeysuckle. Native species such as sugar maple, eastern red cedar, American beech and sassafras can also become invasive when natural disturbances like fire and flood are changed by human activity. According to IDNR heritage biologist Mark Guetersloh, the three areas burned contain some of the finest examples of oak/hickory forest and glade/barren habitat remaining in Illinois. The long-term goal is, insofar as possible, to restore and manage the pre-settlement natural features and ecosystems of these rare and imperiled habitats.

Become a Friend

- \$15 Individual
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- New Member
- \$50 Contributing
- \$100 Supporting
- Current Member
- \$250 Sustaining
- \$1,000 Lifetime

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To remain budget and environment-friendly, all communications are sent via e-mail.

Please let us know if you need to receive information via U.S. mail.

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

Answer *from page two*

Do you know who I am?

Mississippi Grass Shrimp
(*Palaeomonetes kadiakensis*),

small but super abundant in the backwaters of the Cache River during the summer. Because of my transparent body, I'm sometimes sold in the aquarium trade as "glass shrimp."