

Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge

Quarterly Newsletter

ISSUE 19 January 2022

this issue

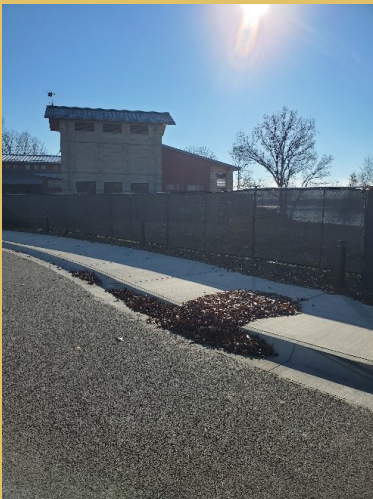
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A View From My Perch

Rick Whitecotton

Winter is upon us again, like autumn, it appears to be an odd one. I did not see a “killing” frost until November 2 this year, and we are flitting between the 40s and 60s currently. As, “they” say, the new normal.

As this year winds down things are getting quite busy at the Refuge, at least planning wise. 2022 should see far more acreage burnt with controlled burns. There will be more ducks and waterfowl due to the wetlands work that has been done and is ongoing. You can view the construction of a new Visitor’s Center that will be connected to the new HQ. You will see and be able to purchase from our Woodland Gift Shop soon. The lake level will be returned to its former state...and much more.



In the photo on the left you see the construction fence placed 2 weeks ago, on the right you see the new Visitor’s Center construction site, the HQ is in the background.

You will find articles on these and other Refuge related topics in this edition. Our Friends Board has added 3 Directors, they will be introduced to you as well.

What keyed my focus for my opinion column was simply being outside on my own property recently, just doing some of the numerous needful tasks. On my way to the worksite, I noticed the scenery is different. It is beckoning, I can see some portion of features or large trees that are hidden from view 9 months of the year. The same holds true for the Refuge, you can see features more clearly, not all is fully revealed though. It is an invitation for further exploration...just remember not all areas are open without permits. The view is free and the season is here to be enjoyed. I hope you do.

Happy holidays to you and your families, from the Board of your Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge, we hope you have a safe, healthy, and wonderful 2022.

I Can See Clearly Now...Almost

Opinion by Rick Whitecotton

I was reflecting recently while checking my property and note the same conditions at Crab Orchard. The seasons and recent storms have stripped most of the leaves from the trees. Sometime during winter I can see a portion of the roof of my neighbor's house and clearly see a farm house from my lower pasture. At this time of year you can regularly see features unseen at other times. While I love green, plants, and leaves; I also appreciate the break winter gives us from the onslaught of wildly growing green.

This all brought to mind Jeanne Dixon, author, and self-styled astrologer and psychic. Now, Ms. Dixon, may she rest in peace, had a regular syndicated column on astrology, but what I recall best are the predictions for the following year. Ms. Dixon built a career because she properly predicted a Democrat elected to the office of President in 1960 would be killed. This one prediction held true. So, regardless of the countless incorrect predictions, one good guess goes a long way! Yes, I am a bit jaded on these subjects, my personal opinion places such predictions somewhere between hokum and snake oil.

Given all that, I thought I would share my predictions for 2022 related to Crab Orchard Refuge and our Friends organization.

I predict that 2022 will bring:

- A completion of the dam work and a return to a typical lake level at Crab Orchard
- Construction of a new Visitor's Center. This will include a display area, training/meeting space and a full Woodland Gift shop where all our fantastic offerings can be on display.
- The 75th anniversary of Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge as an operating Refuge.
- The 50th deer hunt.
- Progress on the Greenway/bike trail

The spirits are working against me here, but I glimpse these promising events as well:

- A reopening of our Woodland Gift shop in Mid-January
- Restoration of more environmental training
- Earth Day activities
- Most events we are used to seeing and that have been absent or greatly modified over the last 2 years

As you can likely surmise, the first group are facts. The 75th anniversary is August 5, planning is underway within the Service Staff on celebration activities. The visitor's center had the contract set on December 7, within 24 hours a construction fence was in place. This is the same company who built the new HQ. We all hope that the building is functional by August 5! It is indeed possible.

The dam work is ahead of schedule and should be finished in February, thus Crab Orchard can start refilling with winter rains. The 50th deer season follows the 49th. The Greenway initiative/Bike Trail will progress, however this is a large project and will take many months/years to complete.

The second list is more aspirational, and likewise dependent on Covid variant activity in our area. The math on this is simple, more vaccinations/booster shots = more programming. We are indeed preparing to reopen the Gift Shop in a smaller setting within the new HQ. We hope that comes off without a hitch. I base my predictions related to environmental training and typical activities on site performance, and regional oversight. As I have reported in the past, Crab Orchard is FAR ahead of the majority of the refuges within the region. They are all following the same guidelines, from the Bureau of the Interior, and Regional guidance. Most of our refuges are not open to visitors (visitor centers are closed), and no programming is occurring at all. Crab Orchard on the other hand has employed some creative solutions to continue to provide as much environmental training and activities as possible. Crab Orchard is ahead of the pack in this regard.

I feel my “predictions” will have a much higher success rate than Ms. Dixon’s.

Let Me Introduce to You:

We have some new and returning Directors. I want to give all the credit for finding high quality Directors to our Nominating Committee. Don Mullison is the Chair he, along with Jim Osborn and Jill Adams; continue to offer up great candidates.

I am including the 3 Directors below, in their own bios. Gene Honn is a returning Director, we welcome him back! Randy Osborn joins us from his recent role with Goodwill where he works to find meaningful employment for clients, you may know him from his role as CEO of the Carbondale Boys and girls Clubs. Kathy Renfro was the long serving Director of Carbondale and West Frankfort Parks and Recreation. We whole heartedly welcome each of these Directors to the Board and have high expectations for the new views and voices they will bring to our work.

Gene Honn

Gene Honn recently retired after a long career in education with the University of Illinois College of Agriculture, and over thirty-five years of managing non profit organizations. Gene and his wife Diane reside in the Williamson County countryside, with the Shawnee National Forest at their backyard and the Crab Orchard Refuge at their front. Gene stated that, “we live amidst these wondrous gifts to our region and it is nice to be able to give back to preserve them through volunteering with the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge “ Gene enjoys bird watching and because of his exposure to the Friends of Crab Orchard has grown to appreciate learning more about wild-life, wildflowers and caring for the nature around us. He also volunteers at the SIH Cancer Institute, and is a member of the SIH Patient and Family Advisory Council. Gene will be chairing our Finance and Planning Committee.



Randy Osborn

Randy Osborn recently retired after 30+ years working in outdoor education, residential camp programs, therapeutic recreation, and youth services. He was the first Executive of the Boys and Girls Club of Carbondale from 2004-2017, and for 10 years directed summer camp programs for people with special needs, including Touch of Nature's Camp Little Giant.

Randy has a lifelong love of the outdoors and is an avid birdwatcher, hiker, bike rider, and kayaker. He is an active member of the Rotary Club of Carbondale Breakfast group, and former board member of Keep Carbondale Beautiful.

In 2021, he celebrated 60 years of frisbee play by competing in numerous local, regional, and national disc golf tournaments and leagues.



Kathy Renfro

Kathy Renfro retired in 2021 after 30 years in Parks and Recreation, serving as Director of both the Carbondale and West Frankfort Park Districts since 2002. She's been active in areas of public health, local government, family services, and special events. Carbondale's Super Splash Park was achieved by the community under her leadership. Kathy is passionate about preserving and promoting public lands and waters, and enjoys music, hiking, outdoor sports and games, and all things aquatic.



Woodland Gift Shop to Re-Open—Help Needed

After being closed for almost 2 years, Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge is preparing to re-open the Woodland Gift Shop. While our permanent home will be in the new Visitor Center currently under construction, the Refuge has made temporary space available to us in the Headquarters building. Starting in the latter part of January Friends will be selling books, plush animals, mugs, hiking sticks, hats, pins and more. We may even be able to squeeze some articles of clothing into our space. We HAVE the inventory, now all we need now are volunteers to help work the desk and handle sales.

In the past, because of COVID, there was cause for concern for volunteer safety. Since opening the Headquarters building the Refuge has installed glass above the long counter to protect employees and volunteers. Also, masks are still required for all who enter the building.

Store hours will be daily (7 days per week) from 9am to 3pm. We ask volunteers interested in helping in the gift shop to commit to at least one 3-hour block or more per week. Of course everyone encounters times when they have conflicts with their volunteer schedule and that is certainly understandable and can be accommodated.

There will be training sessions for both previous and new volunteers on January 8th and January 15th (choose one of the 2 dates) at 9am in the Headquarters Building. Training will last no longer than 2 hours. If you are interested in volunteering or if you would like more information, contact Jim Osborn by email at giftstore@friendsofconwr.com.

Pollinator Partnership and Native Plant Seed Collection at Crab Orchard

Rick Whitecotton

I have been involved with this effort for 4 years now. At that time a group of us were trained in the project, goals, and process at the old Crab Orchard Visitor's Center. The organization behind this 7 state seed collection project is the Pollinator Partnership. At the start the project was called Monarch Wings Across the Eastern Broadleaf Forest...now that's a mouthful. We planted our 2 acre prairie with approved native seeds that January and were hoping to learn more and thus be more effective. The Pollinator Partnership and all subsequent iterations were initially funded by a US Fish and Wildlife grant and harvesting on federal land was pretty simple due to that. The Partnership is still grant funded. How it works, on a grand scale is this:

They obtained grant funding, developed a state administrative staff for each state, and developed needed systems to process the seeds.

Each of the 7 states involved are divided into 3 regions (North, Central, and South).

Collection Teams were formed for each region

When called to serve I try to find my way to a "Yes" response, thus when they asked for a Collection Team Lead I raised my hand. I have been in that role for 3 years now. We are Collection Team 6 or the ONLY Collection Team in Southern Illinois! Our team changes and evolves with each harvest season.

The reason I am writing this article is that we bring in most of our harvest from Crab Orchard and Cypress Creek. We, of course, have to be granted a special use permit to access areas and conduct a harvest.

This year we harvested in 2 areas. We gathered Dense *Liatris* in the field west of Pigeon Creek. We harvested all other species in the field and roadside strip south of Stringtown Road. Please see the photos I took of these "brown" fields 2 days ago. They do not reflect the abundance of nectar source and host plants at these sites throughout the growing season.

The Partnership started with a list of 32 "Target Species" these are all native plants that grow in some area of all 7 states involved. These species are proven as both high quality nectar sources, pollen sources and host plants for pollinators, especially Monarch butterfly and the Rusty Patch Bumblebee. I can assure you that the list then serves to provide habitat for all butterflies, moths and bees.

Once seeds are harvested they must be quickly (about 5 weeks) hand processed by the Collection Team and then sent to the Mason

State Tree Nursery in Mason, Illinois. We had such a large harvest this year we delivered the seeds to them via a day trip. My wife, Ruie, Pat Dunbar (member and co-lead), and I took a long trip on December 6. It was quite gratifying, Holly Franier (who operates the seed processing work) gave us a tour of the facility, process, and answered all our questions.

Most of the volunteers who gather seeds are members of Friends of Crab Orchard. This effort (and it does get tiring at times) includes harvesting, record keeping, and seed processing. The seed processing end has been quite hampered by Covid since we needed to do most of the work outdoors. This is much like an old fashioned husking bee or quilting bee. A time to sit at a table or chair in a circle, tell stories, fables, lies, jokes, etc. to keep the effort on pace. There are hundreds of hours donated by our small team. We may have 8 people gathering one day, 3 the next. We may have 6 different people processing each time or taking the seeds home to work on. It takes many hands to produce the end product.



Holly Franier surprised me when we arrived by giving me a small plaque. It says I am “Most Independent” Team Lead. I asked what that meant, she said, our Team always delivers an abundant high quality and highly diverse harvest each year, and I need no prodding to do such. For that I am gratified.

Below you will see what we harvested in a table. I hope you can imagine this harvest multiplied. We have the opportunity, we have access to high quality native plants, in abundance; we only need more people to join us next season.

None of this would be possible without support from the Crab Orchard U.S. Fish And Wildlife Service! I also, must note the support from our state Coordinator, Eleanor Schumacher who has been most helpful and patient with us. Very little would be of note without the help of volunteers, especially you all, the Friends of Crab Orchard!

This allows our work to impact a much greater area and source several pollinator projects throughout Southern Illinois. Thanks to one and all!



Site	Date	Species
Crab Orchard	10-16-21	Liatris spicata
Crab Orchard	10-23-21	Liatris spicata
Crab Orchard	11-2-21	Asclepias syriaca
Crab Orchard	11-3-21	Asclepias syriaca, Vernonia gigantea
Crab Orchard	11-4-21	Vernonia gigantea, Cirsium discolor
My Farm	9-11-21	Monarda fistulosa
My Farm	10-18-21	Vernonia gigantea, Cirsium discolor

Species	Source	Weight
Liatris spicata	Crab Orchard	343.9 oz
Vernonia gigantea	Crab Orchard	21.6 oz
Vernonia gigantea	My Farm	16.5 oz
Monarda fistulosa	My Farm	5.1 oz (minimal processing)
Cirsium discolor	Crab Orchard	37.3 oz (minimal processing)
Cirsium discolor	My Farm	3.4 oz (minimal processing)
Asclepias syriaca	Crab Orchard	37.4 oz
	TOTAL	465.2

Christmas Bird Count

Tis the season, or as birders rejoice that it is the Christmas Bird Count season. This season takes place annually starting on December 14 and ending on January 5. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) started in 1900 from an increased awareness to conserve wildlife in the late 1800's. Birds were being slaughtered as a sport or to collect feathers for fashion. What was referred to as the "Audubon Movement", the National Audubon Society proposed to count birds instead of shooting them. In 1900, 25 counts were initiated with 27 participants. Currently there are 82,000 participants covering all 50 states, North America, South America, several islands in the Pacific Ocean and one in the Arctic Bay. Wisconsin has the highest number of counts in the US. Here in Southern Illinois there are approximately 13 counts south of Interstate 64 stretching to both the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. The counts make up a 15 mile diameter circle and occurs over a 24 hour period. A majority of participants will just be counting during the daylight hours, but ideally each count will have a few crazy observers braving the dark and cold hours before sunrise and after sunset listening for owls. Each count has a compiler, usually an experienced birder familiar with the territory of their circle. The compiler will choose a date and then assign a designated area to each participant complete with guidelines and regulations. Most participants usually have at least one partner to share in the driving, tallying and staying awake. Each bird species and numbers of each species is tallied. Unexpected birds are documented on a rare bird form and then submitted to the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee for approval. An example would include the Roseate Spoonbill that was observed in late August for a couple weeks on the shores of Crab Orchard Lake during the drawdown. The compiler will collect the data in a timely manner and submit the total number of each species, number of participants and parties, time starting and ending, miles and hours driven and walked, weather conditions and any rare bird documentation forms.

Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge is one of the first in our area possibly originated by a Refuge employee just a few years after the Refuge began. A sampling of the results from the 1st year in 1950 for Crab Orchard included 13,200 Canada Geese, 409 Mallards, 34 Eastern Bluebirds and 0 Bald Eagles. In 1954 results of the same species included 42,750 Canada Geese, 28,893 Mallards, 46 Eastern Bluebirds and 2 Bald Eagles. In 2015 results included 608 Canada Geese, 2221 Mallards, 36 Eastern Bluebirds and 7 Bald Eagles. Results from 2020 included 310 Canada Geese, 275 Mallards, 126 Eastern Bluebirds and 6 Bald Eagles. Species total for the previous 5 years included: 102 species in 2015, 96 species in 2016, 93 species in 2017, 94 species in 2018, 96 species in 2019 and 100 species in 2020. This year Crab Orchard's count was held on December 21 with results still being gathered and tallied. I have had the privileged task of compiling this count for over 10 years and plan to continue for at least another 10 years.

For additional information please visit: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

Vicki Lang

Ducks Currently Being Seen on the CONWR Refuge

Right now there are a number of diving ducks you might see on the refuge. Some of the diving ducks you are most likely to see are the Bufflehead, the Hooded Merganser, the Ruddy Duck and the Ring-necked Duck. These appear in the first picture. The first 3 of these are quite colorful and I would say could be described as beautiful or cute. These can be seen from Wolf Creek Causeway, Heron Flats or on some of the small ponds and lakes on the Refuge.



The next group of divers are less easily seen; but, are a real treat to see if you can manage it. All have been seen on the refuge in the last few weeks/days. These include the Canvasback, Redhead, Red-breasted Merganser and Common Merganser, also pictured below. These can sometimes be seen from Wolf Creek Causeway. The Redhead and Canvasback can also be seen at Heron Flats at times.

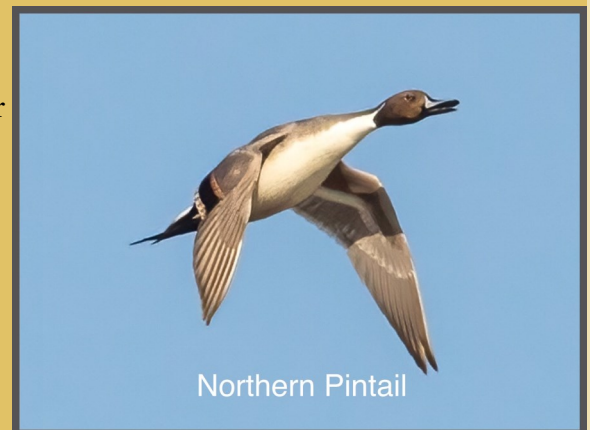


The Mergansers all eat fish; of the mergansers, only the Hooded will also eat aquatic insects, mollusks and crustaceans.

Like the Hooded, Buffleheads eat aquatic invertebrates, crustaceans and mollusks; but, they do not eat fish.

The Ruddy Duck, Redhead, Canvasbacks and Ring-necked Ducks are omnivores and eat a wide variety of aquatic plants and animals. As a result you can find them in shallow water eating plants or somewhat deeper water diving for aquatic animals.

The final duck pictured is not a diver; but, I am featuring the American Pintail because it is a beautiful duck and is being seen in record numbers on the Refuge right now. This appears to be due to the lower water levels of the lake and the current management of the refuge providing extra cover and food for these wonderful ducks. They can be seen behind the new Headquarters and at Heron Flats.



I hope you enjoy these photos and I wish you luck in finding these ducks on the Refuge.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

LIFETIME MEMBERS:

General Dynamics	Southern Illinois Bass Busters
Southern Illinois Hunting and Fishing Days	Take Pride In America
Colleen Bogard - Board Member	John Brewster
Lewis Fosse	Rosemarie Howerton - Board Member
Anita Hutton	Cathy D. Jennings
Melanie A. Kasson	Nancy Nowak
Paul Restivo	Marlene Schaede
Cheryl Stein	Kathryn Stevens
Bill Thomas	Laurel Wendt

NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR - 2022:

Jill Adams - Board Member	Kathy Belletire
Steve Belletire	Allen Carstens
Melissa Carstens	Bonnie Cissell
Kim Conley	Tricia Conley
Donna Denson	Patricia Dunbar
Rev Dr, David Estep - Media	Sandie Estep
Steve Gariepy	David Gray
Ron Hamberg	Darlene Hancock
James Hancock	Liz Gersbacher
Angela J Higgins	Randy Higgins
Jonathan Lake	Vicki Lang-Mendenhall - Board Member
Carolyn Loving	Ken Loving
John O'Connell	Laura O'Connell
Lucy O'Connell	Jim Osborn - 2nd Vice-President - Board
Mary Jo Osborn - Treasurer - Board Member	Kathy Renfro - Board Member
Ernest Scott	JoAnne Swafford - Board Member
Ronald E. Swafford	Rick Whitecotton - President - Board Member
Ruie Whitecotton - Secretary - Board Member	

**MEMBERSHIPS RUN FROM JANUARY 1ST THROUGH DECEMBER 31ST EACH YEAR,
SO RENEW OR JOIN NOW FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR!**

If you did not see your name on this list please mail your dues to listed address.

(Fill out this form and send it along with your check made payable to: Friends Of Crab Orchard Refuge, 6987 Headquarters Rd, Marion, IL 62959).

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

Mark the Membership you desire and send a check made payable to: Friends Of Crab Orchard Refuge, 8588 Rte. 148, Marion, IL 62959.

- | | |
|--|----------|
| <input type="radio"/> Annual Single Student (age 16 and above) | \$ 5.00 |
| <input type="radio"/> Annual Individual | \$ 10.00 |
| <input type="radio"/> Annual Family | \$ 20.00 |