

Friends Of Crab Orchard Refuge Quarterly Newsletter



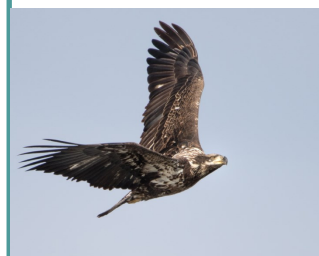
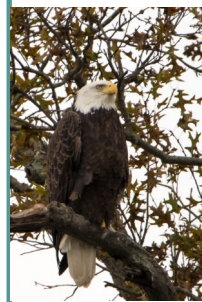
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January, 2023

Eagle Tours Return!



After several years of postponement (due to pandemic and Government shutdown), the annual Eagle Tours on Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge will resume. Participants, volunteers, and Refuge Staff couldn't be happier and appreciative.

The Eagle Tours occur in the winter, just before the Eagle begins nesting on the Refuge. The Bald Eagle became our National Symbol in 1782. In the 1960's this majestic bird was on the brink of extinction in the contiguous United States. With the banning of DDT and protection of this species, the Bald Eagle began a significant recovery. DDT in the Bald Eagle's food source caused the egg shells to be too thin for successful hatching. The Bald Eagle was declared an endangered species in 1973, allowing for their protection from illegal shooting and decreased habitat. Continuing on this recovery, the Bald Eagle was upgraded from endangered to threatened in 1995. As of 2017, the Bald Eagle was delisted from the Federal Registry of Endangered and Threatened Species.

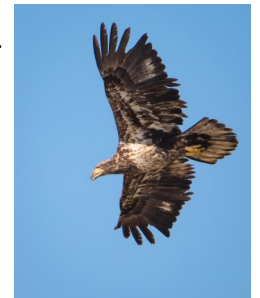
The Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge Bald Eagle Tours will include a van ride on the Refuge visiting some of the restricted locations, viewing an existing nest and areas of frequent Eagle sightings while learning about the Refuge, our National Symbol, and the Friends Of Crab Orchard Refuge. The Tours are free of charge and sponsored by the Friends. Spaces are limited, so call and reserve your spot today at 618-998-5933. Tour dates and times are:

Saturday, February 4:

8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, February 5:

8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Article by
Vicki Lang

Photographs
by
Jim Osborn

"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

A View from My Perch
January 17, 2023
By Rick Whitecotton
President, Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge



Another revolution around old Sol. We come again to a new year. We, along with so many close associates and friends have had a hectic time the last month, so we felt it best to put quality, not publishing time as a critical factor. We hope you enjoy the Newsletter this quarter. There is so much that has been going on and so much that is near at hand. The New Visitor's Center is really shaping up. Most of the exterior work is complete, the interior work is coming along. The target date for opening is March 1st, please note I wrote TARGET. Everything changes for the good on that date of opening. We will start a move to establish our Woodland Gift Shop in the new space. We will be seeking state approval to sell fishing licenses when we get settled.

This spring we may have an opportunity to attend a large Friends gathering at NCTC (National Conservation Training Center) along with 174 others. This will be the first such event since 2016, there will be lots of opportunity to exchange good practices. Eagle Tours are back! We are almost set up to conduct the first official set of tours on February 4th and 5th. We hope to see some of you then. Please say hello to a Friend! Inside this edition you will find a memorial letter regarding our dear Friend, Aimee Hemphill who left us on January 14. You will see an informative article on controlled burns at the Refuge. The Christmas Bird Count, and Eagle Tours. Also a few articles about opportunities for you, the body of 181 Friends members to help out. We need your input on our committees, and we need your help on the Refuge. Many hands make light work it is said. I say, come on in, the waters fine!

See you on the Refuge!

Aimee Hemphill, a Friend for All Seasons

By Rick Whitecotton

We lost our friend, Aimee Hemphill on January 14, 2023. Another life taken from our company by cancer. We have, and continue to mourn her. I felt it was appropriate to share with our Friends Members all the areas she impacted Crab Orchard. I called Sam Spiller, (her husband), and he recounted the many areas Aimee (and he) volunteered at Crab Orchard Refuge.

Sam notes that Aimee's appreciation of the Refuge goes back to 1966 when she got a driver's license. She regularly visited "her" Refuge and after a varied career including work as a Professor, as a Forest Service Employee, and a Veterinarian, she eventually retired back to Southern Illinois. She and Sam lived across the road from the Refuge in Carterville. Aimee volunteered in a wide variety of areas on the Refuge. It was not uncommon for her to visit daily!

She was a Director on the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge Board. She started work with the Bluebird Nest Box program at the request of Lorraine Wright. When Lorraine "retired" from the Board, Aimee took on her duties as the Blue Bird Nest Box Coordinator.

Soon, the Board wrote a grant for a Pollinator Habitat Program. Aimee agreed to support the effort, but she was firm to not become the leader. In short order, she was the Project Leader for this ongoing project. So, as the Coordinator and Project Leader she did not stop there.

She and Sam conducted spring Wildflower Hikes at Rocky Bluff Trail. She was always ready to deliver Environmental Education and Interpretation. Every Earth Day she had a presentation, the choices varied due to the broad background she had gained. She certified as a Master Naturalist, to further broaden her skills. In her spare summer time there was also a Butterfly Monitoring Route on the Refuge.

It is clear why Aimee was devoted to the Refuge, she was involved in a large number of projects all of which are still in place. All those areas and various volunteers, including the Refuge Service Staff will miss Aimee this year. Aimee was everywhere, at the point of activity, at the planning phase, doing research, purchasing, planting, weeding, sweating...and overall lifting everyone's spirits in the process in all seasons.



Photograph by Kathy Belletire

"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

Gift Shop Volunteers Needed

By Jim Osborn

In the next 60 to 90 days, construction of the new Visitor Center will be completed, and the Woodland Gift Shop will relocate into their permanent space. Being in the lobby of the Headquarters allowed the Gift Shop to reopen last February with assistance from Refuge staff, interns and volunteers. However, when the Gift Shop relocates, we will not be able to benefit from staffing assistance. The truth is that **we need more than double the number of volunteers than we have now.**

The Woodland Gift Shop will operate 7 days a week from 8:30am to 4:00pm. Volunteers are needed to work **a minimum** of one half-day shift per week, or one full day every other week. A shift is either 8:30am to 12:30pm or 12:00pm to 4:00pm. Two volunteers will work each shift, so in the case of illness or planned absence, there will still be someone to keep the Shop open. In late February we will schedule training/retraining for all volunteers, both new and current.

The Gift Shop is operated by the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge, Inc., a not-for-profit organization. Profits from the Gift Shop help fund educational programs each year including the Eagle Tours. Funds from Friends also support the Pollinator Gardens, eradication of invasive botanical species on the Refuge, and new habitat creation. In the past, funds from Friends have purchased kayaks, archery equipment, picnic tables and more for the Refuge.

If you feel you can commit to a shift or two each week, or if you would simply like more information, please call the Refuge and let us know at 618-997-3344 ext. 1.

*A Friends Of Crab Orchard Refuge Membership provides you with a Quarterly Newsletter, monthly Board Minutes, right to vote at our Annual Membership Meeting in October, and a 10% discount at our Woodland Gift Shop. Mark the Membership you desire and send this form and a check made payable to: **Friends Of Crab Orchard Refuge, 6987 Headquarters Road, Marion, IL 62959.** You may also join online, just go to: friendsofcraborchardrefuge.com and select donate.*

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

- Annual Single Student (age 16 and above) \$ 5.00
- Annual Individual \$ 10.00
- Annual Family \$ 20.00
- Annual Business \$100.00
- Lifetime \$250.00

Crab Orchard Christmas Bird Count

By
Vicki Lang

The Crab Orchard Christmas Bird Count was held on December 20, 2022 with great weather just before the snowstorm. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season occurs annually between December 14 - January 5 as a means of collecting data for the wintering birds in a specific area. The CBC'S have been in existence since 1900 and were established to increase awareness of wildlife conservation. The date for each specific count is chosen by the compiler so to not interfere with existing events, (such as a waterfowl season), and with an effort to recruit as many volunteers as possible and not overlap with other counts in the area. There are approximately 12 counts in Southern Illinois stretching from the Ohio to Mississippi Rivers. The count entails a 15 mile diameter circle including all of Crab Orchard Lake, a small section of Devil's Kitchen and surrounding area.



The 2022 Crab Orchard CBC allowed for 14 participants and 7 parties to attempt to count every species of bird and their number amount in a 24-hour period. A couple brave individuals were out as early as 4 a.m. to listen for our nocturnal species of owls. The Great-Horned Owl, Barred Owl, and Eastern Screech Owl were all heard prior to day break. Fortunately for some, both the Screech and Barred Owls were also seen during the day on the Refuge. A total of 99 species were obtained including a new species of Tree Sparrow. 99 Black Vultures were counted which is a record high for this southern species that has been shifting north due to climate change. The count included 19 Bald Eagle sightings along with 1,263 Canada Geese, 3,171 Greater White Fronted Geese, 6,741 Mallards, 34 Red-Shouldered hawks, 314 American Robins, and 41 Eastern Bluebirds (thanks to the bluebird trail on the Refuge).

I serve as the compiler and report the data as a citizen scientist and volunteer for the Refuge to the National Audubon Society who archives these records. For additional/more information please visit:

[https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count.](https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count)

THE FIRE TEAM - PRESERVING THE NATURAL HABITATS

Sometimes I can see it from miles away—white smoke rising from within the boundaries of Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. At first, a little panic sets in because the Refuge is such a special place. I pray that the smoke is from a prescribed burn and not from a wildfire. I take a detour in my car through the Refuge and finally find that the Fire Team is hard at work tackling a controlled burn.



Most people probably are not aware of the fact that Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge has its own Fire Team. David Jones, a 19-year veteran with the Fire Team, serves as the Fire Management Specialist. Although David is based at CONWR, his responsibilities and those of his small staff extend to all 9 National Wildlife Refuges in Illinois as well as to Mingo NWR in Missouri. Additionally, the Team frequently works with their counterparts in the Shawnee National Forest when more manpower is needed on burns or when the task is more complex than usual.

While the Fire Team does respond to wildfires, their primary role is to protect and preserve the land and the habitat for the benefit of both flora and fauna. This is done through carefully planned and executed prescribed burns (or controlled burns). In a nutshell, a prescribed burn can be defined as the **controlled** ignition of natural vegetation. The ultimate purposes of the burn are to assist in the propagation of native species; to provide appropriate habitat for wildlife; to eradicate invasive species of plants; to remove excess ground clutter that could provide tinder for a wildfire; and to restore a fire-adapted ecosystem. David pointed out that removing ground clutter allows the seeds of trees such as oaks (a native species) to get sunlight and have a greater chance of maturing.



The “burn season” runs from October 15th through April 15th. A comprehensive plan for the Refuge is created months in advance with input from the staff biologist and many others. Individual burns are scheduled for times that will have a minimal impact on wildlife. Each season, the Fire Team conducts approximately 15 prescribed burns on CONWR property, each of which can vary from 10 to 2000 acres and are completed in one day (although small flames and smoke may persist for a couple days). In deference to the endangered Indiana Bat, forested areas are burned first so that the smoke does not negatively impact the bats when they migrate into the Refuge. Typically, parcels of land that have been burned numerous times over the years may only need to be burned every 3 years. Other areas may require annual burning, or even biannual burning.

The amount of planning that goes into each separate burn is staggering. David shared with me an 84-page document that was created for a single burn that will take place in 2023. Each plan includes an assessment of the topography, the type of vegetation present, wildlife that might be impacted, the weather (wind speeds, usual wind direction, humidity), and proximity to private property, buildings, the airport, etc. The individual burns are put on a calendar, but the calendar is subject to immediate change as daily weather conditions dictate. Once the plan is approved by Refuge management, it is shared with county fire departments, sheriffs’ departments, city fire departments and anyone else

“The wild heart of Southern Illinois”



that may be impacted by the prescribed burn. Signs are placed on roads in the Refuge to notify visitors. Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge is approximately 44,000 acres and is home to numerous species of plants and wildlife.

The Fire Team works throughout the entire

year, either in planning or in executing the plan. David suggests that visitors to the Refuge observe the land after a burn, and revisit again a couple months or more later to see the changes in the flowers and wildlife. He commented that the Team frequently has noted birds flying away from the flames only to return as soon as the fire is extinguished. David says that the work at Crab Orchard is his priority. When that is completed, the team will do work for the other refuges in their area. So...if you come upon an active burn or just the smoldering remnants, know that the Team has things under control.



David Jones' Frequently Asked Questions:

What does it take to be a member of the fire team? To secure an entry level position, candidates must complete about 40 hours of intensive training. At the conclusion of the training the candidates must demonstrate their fitness by completing a 3-mile hike with a 45lb pack in 45 minutes!

What do the seasonal employees do in the off-season? Gaining experience is key to promotions. Some of the Fire Techs elect to offer their services fighting fires in the western United States in the summer. Those "tours of duty" usually last about 2 weeks.

Why do you burn when the birds are starting to nest? Timing of the burns is determined with input from the staff biologist to minimize negative impact on wildlife. David commented that, without the burns, the habitats would deteriorate from invasive non-native plants. Brush accumulation also makes the areas more susceptible to wildfires.

Why do I sometimes see logs burning and smoldering with no fire personnel in the area? Prior to ignition of an area, the Fire Team creates a perimeter to contain and limit the fire. Based on the plan for the site, the team knows what the fire should do (flame height, what percentage of the vegetation will be burned, etc.). If the prescribed burn has gone according to the plan, the staff may leave the remains to extinguish spontaneously. If there is any danger of an unplanned re-ignition, fire personnel will stay on site.



Article and Photographs by Jim Osborn

"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

How the Gears Turn By Rick Whitecotton

The friends of Crab Orchard Refuge is an incorporated Non-Profit organization. Our sole purpose is to support the goals and projects at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. As a corporation, we have By-Laws which govern how we conduct business. The By-Laws dictate many of our functions. One area of governance is our committee structure. We have standing committees and ad hoc committees. Our standing committees (and Chairs), with brief description are:

Finance and Planning – Gene Honn, Chair: Develop and monitor annual plans, budgets, and lead fund raising efforts.

Education – Wesley Calvert, Chair: Work with Service Staff to deliver and support education efforts, from formal educational programming to interpretive nature training.

Merchandise - Jim Osborn, Chair: Maintain the Woodland Gift Shop, determine goods for sale, conduct inventory, develop and train store volunteers.

Marketing and Media - Ruie Whitecotton, Chair: Write and publish Quarterly Newsletters, develop and communicate through various media, Friends events, and projects.

Membership – Randy Osborn, Chair: Grow and maintain membership.

Hospitality – Janie Pettigrew, Chair: Ensure people have food and water at appropriate events. Work with Service Staff to develop needs through a calendar year.

We also have project oversight:

Blue Bird Program – Currently Vacant

Pollinator Habitat Project – Sam Spiller

Wetlands Project – Don Mullison

The Photography Group - led by Don Mullison and Jim Osborn

The By-Laws state that the Chair of a committee must be a Director on our Board. All members of such a committee must be members of Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge.

All members are eligible for any committee, if you see one which has your interest, please contact President Rick Whitecotton at pneumatron53@gmail.com.

The Friends Need YOU!



I am sure you have all seen that WWII recruiting poster, you know, Uncle Sam, finger pointing out at the viewer, The Army Needs YOU! We are in that situation. Your Friends organization needs help on many fronts. I will make a short list with only the most important areas noted.

Woodland Gift Shop – The Gift shop is getting its own space! Hooray! A separate room, with doors, walls, and windows. What an opportunity. What you may not know...our current group of volunteers is augmented by Campground hosts during the off season. Also, due to the wonderful move to our own space, those same Campground hosts are tasked to support Visitor Services at the desk. So, we will need more people. We are asking folks to donate 4 hours per week on a day that works for them. There are 2 shifts per day, 8:30-12:30 and 12-4. We aim to be open 7 days a week. Did you know we have over 1 million visitors per year to the Refuge, and around 40,000 enter the HQ. If you can support the Gift Shop, training will be provided. Please contact Jim Osborn at: jro320@yahoo.com.

Pollinator Habitat Project – This is an ongoing project that is continuous for 6 years now. We have a new project leader, Sam Spiller. If you want to be outdoors, create and interpret habitat, learn more about native plants and ecology this is the group for you! We are currently in a project to revitalize our demonstration beds in the prairie field. All help is appreciated, no experience or training is needed. Please contact Rick Whitecotton at: pneumatron53@gmail.com if you are interested. This is a fun group, and everyone is welcome!

Hope to hear from you soon!

Rick Whitecotton, President

*CRAB ORCHARD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
75TH ANNIVERSARY
NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS*

Most Unique



Matt Eisenhauer
"Narwhals Spotted"

Landscapes



Suzanne Asaturian
"Devil's Kitchen Boathouse"

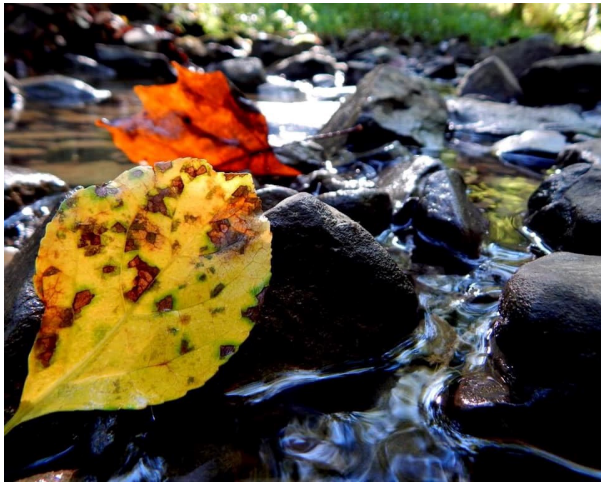


Matt Eisenhauer
"Icy Lake"

"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER PHOTO CONTEST

Plants



Rhonda Branum
"Fall Sparks of Color"



Steve Bailie
"Fungi"

Wildlife



Linda Bilderback-Hine
"Lunch Is Served"



Steve Bailie
"Otter Running"

Photographs judged by Photography Committee Members
Don Mullison, Miriam Mullison, and Jim Osborn

"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

Friends Of Crab
Orchard Refuge
6987 Headquarters Road
Marion, IL 62959

Website:
friendsofcraborchardrefuge.com

Facebook:
Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge

Friends of CONWR and
Photography on Facebook

Instagram:
friendsofcraborchardrefuge

Membership Matters

LIFETIME MEMBERS:

General Dynamics
Sou. IL Hunting and Fishing Days
Jill Adams - 1st VP - Board
John Brewster
Judy Groskind
Gene Honn - Board
Anita Hutton
Melanie Kasson
Paul Restivo
Cheryl Stein
Bill Thomas
Rick Whitecotton - Pres. - Board

Sou. IL Bass busters
Take Pride In America
Colleen Bogard - Board
Lewis Fosse
Dwight Hoffard
Rosemarie Howerton
Cathy D. Jennings
Nancy Nowak
Marlene Schaede
Kathryn Stevens
Laurel Wendt

CURRENT MEMBERS FOR 2023:

Lorie Allen
Sandy Anderson
Olivia Barragon-Velasquez
Kathy Belletire - Board
David Bork
Brandy Calvert
Kathy Carstens
Bonnie Cissell
Greg Cruse
Matthew Eisenhauer
Robin Girtman
Sharon Harvey
Angela Higgins
Dennis Holtzclaw
Josh Honn
Mary Margaret Kelly
Nancy Lane
Danell LeMasters
James Loeplar
Erica Marks
Sara Meyers
John Murphy
Don Mullison - Board
Kent Newton
Mary Jo Osborn - Treas. - Board
Holly Parker
Daniel Pogorzelski
Jennifer Randolph
Kathy Renfro - Board
Sharon Smaga
John Starrick
Ron Swafford
Michael Thompson
Judy Travelstead
Kirsten Trimble
Jenny Volkert
Anthony Webster
Laraine Wright

Rob Anderson
Steve Baillie
Barbara Becker
Steve Belletire
Angie Calcaterra
Wesley Calvert - Board
Curt Carter
David Cochran
Lisa Cruse
Chris Georgantis
Ron Hamberg
William Hesper
Randy Higgins
Jared Honn
Peggy Jarvis
Vicki Lang-Mendenhall - Board
Cassandra Leitzen
Vern LeMasters
Patrick Malone - Board
Ron Marshall
Steve Mueller
Monica Murphy
Miriam Link-Mullison
Jim Osborn - 2nd VP - Board
Randwick Osborn - Board
Janie Pettigrew - Board
Katherine Poulos
Jean Ann Ray
Seth Rose
Francine Snider
JoAnne Swafford
Rod Tally
Sandra Tigula
Will Travelstead
Janice Troutt
Jean Walton
Ruie Whitecotton - Sec. - Board



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