

Friends Of Crab Orchard Refuge Quarterly Newsletter



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April, 2023

NEW VISITOR'S CENTER OPENING SOON!

Our New Visitor's Center construction is nearing completion! The target date for opening is April 28th. We will have a special Open House for Friends only. The date for the Open House is not set; but will probably be around the middle to end of May. Here are a few photographs I took of the New Visitor's Center still under construction on March 28, 2023. Enjoy!

Photographs by Ruie Whitecotton



Part of Exhibit Area



Classroom



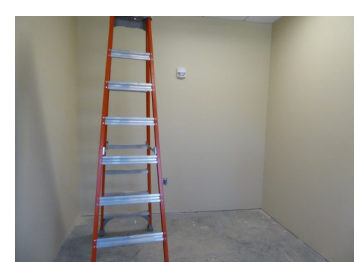
Porch



Woodland Gift Shop



Woodland Gift Shop



Gift Shop Storage



"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

A View from My Perch
March 27, 2023
By Rick Whitecotton
President, Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge



It is likely my age which made this winter feel like it would never end. There are plenty of signs now that the season has changed and the lethargy of winter has been shrugged off by nature, nature is fully awake, and it helps my outlook...it wakes me up to my favorite season as well. I heard a Phoebe on my farm 3 days ago, we lost one to that hard spring freeze a few years ago, I am pleased.

You know, I share my opinions here, and generally try to update you all about upcoming events and expected happenings. I have been given shifting dates on the opening of the new Visitor's Center. The TARGET date has been stable at April 28, 2023, for about a quarter now. The roofing is nearly complete, they are finishing the floor and working on trim work inside. It is clearly getting closer. We are guardedly hopeful that soon (realistically in May) to see it open. We are planning an Open House event shortly after it opens, just for you all. It is an offer from our Partners in the Service and is warmly received. This may come to fruit in May or June...we must have the room available first and need some furniture.

Our photography group continues to grow in numbers, please take a moment to check them out on Facebook at Friends of CONWR and Photography. So many wonderful photos of our great Refuge. We set a new membership record last year of over 200, this is thanks to the work of several officers and committees. Our Secretary and Treasurer keep the records and handle your monies accordingly, our Membership and Marketing and Media Committees keep adding opportunities to find new Friends. It comes down to the opportunity given and taken to support our Refuge.

You will find a recap of the Eagle Tours in this edition, it was tiring on some of us, but the outcome was gratifying. Many people, often in family groups, seeing "our" Eagles. It is heartwarming.

I spent 24 hours with Vicki Lang-Mendenhall on three days in February and March to reset our Bluebird trails. We needed to make some changes to accommodate land use at the request of our Partners. I went to places I had not been and saw some beautiful parts of this great refuge. You will find an article on this also from Vicki.

Our store operation is always seeking new goods that are appropriate to sell at the Woodland Gift Shop. That is a wonderful opportunity to serve also. It is simple enough that even I can successfully sell goods. The best part to me is what I express as the "You don't know who is coming though the door" experiences. Just last week, we had a lady from Arizona, with her daughter and granddaughter from Dallas that stopped by. Everyone has a story; some are willing to share theirs. All want a memory of quality family time in nature. That is what we provide, and you can participate as well.

Spring is here...finally and I am ready for it. It is a wonderful time to get out to your Refuge and enjoy it. I hope to see some of you out here!

Meet Our New Park Ranger !



Park Ranger Sarah Gentry hails from Owensboro, Kentucky. Earning a Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Biology from Murray State University. With previous experience in the Army Corps of Engineers, her primary focus at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge will be restoring our Interpretive Programs and improving them for our community.

Sarah loves birds and finds salamanders fascinating. She states she “enjoys teaching about wild places and wild things.”

Welcome Sarah! We are so happy you have arrived. We look forward to working with you to provide excellent interpretive programs for our Refuge and community.

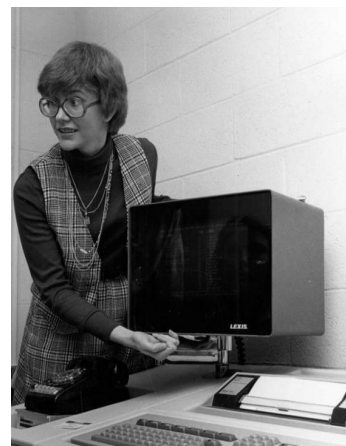
Photograph by Rick Whitecotton

LAUREL WENDT

Laurel Wendt passed away on January 19, 2023. Many will remember Laurel faithfully manning the front desk and working in our Woodland Gift Shop. She was a Lifetime Friends Member, former Board Member, Master Naturalist, and a loyal volunteer for the Refuge. Laurel worked on a history project with Neil Vincent. She retired as a Full Professor from SIU, as a Law Librarian.

She loved nature and filled her yard with flowers and trees. She also loved cats, and followed that passion to volunteer at the St. Francis C.A.R.E. Animal Shelter in Murphysboro and served on their Board of Directors.

Rick and I worked the desk with Laurel every Friday for several years. We will miss her smile, her laughter, and her many interesting stories she would share.



Articles by Ruie Whitecotton

WOODLAND GIFT SHOP EXPANDS

Article and Photographs By Jim Osborn



In anticipation of relocating the Woodland Gift Shop from the foyer of the Headquarters building to the new Visitor Center, the Merchandise Committee of the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge has been adding merchandise that



the store has not carried in a very long time (or ever).

Visit the Gift Shop and you will find puzzles, socks, kids' books, mugs, jewelry, reference books, stuffed birds (that make realistic sounds), hiking sticks, magnets, lapel pins, hiking stick medallions, hats, t-shirts (both long and short-sleeved), sweatshirts, frisbees, playing cards, butterfly nets, a bandana for your dog, seeds, and more. Unlike the Refuge, the Gift Shop DOES take credit cards...so if you need to buy something for a birthday or other special occasion, think of the Woodland Gift Shop and support Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge.



The relocation of the Gift Shop to new space means we will not be able to benefit from sharing volunteers who work the front desk for the Refuge—we will need to completely staff the store ourselves with volunteers. The store is open 7 days a week. Without adequate volunteers, the store will not be able to stay open. If you have a half day or more a week that you would be willing to commit, we will train you. Get more details on volunteering by calling the Refuge at 618-997-3344, Extension 1, and ask for Janie Pettigrew.



"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

BLUEBIRD MONITORING BY VICKI LANG-MENDENHALL

Spring has sprung and so has the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge Bluebird Trail. Following a request from the Refuge Manager, the bluebird trail has undergone some rerouting. Several boxes have been removed in preparation for planting fields throughout the Refuge.

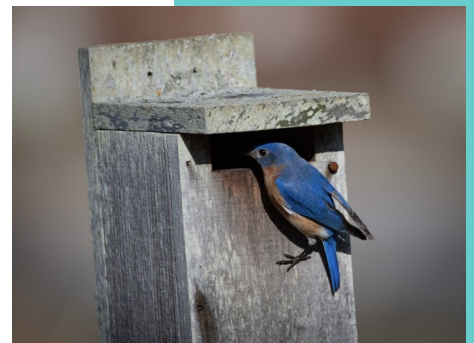
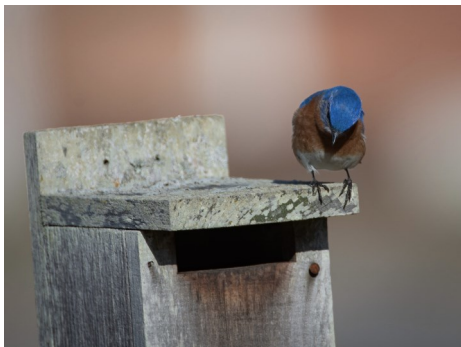
The Eastern Bluebird is a cavity nester occupying cavities in hollow trees or manmade structures as pictured. These boxes were developed as a recovery project in the 1980's for the declining population as well as data collecting through the North American Bluebird Society and the East Central Illinois Bluebird Society. Data over the years has proven success through the use of these structures.

The process for volunteers to monitor bluebirds involves a commitment weekly from March through August to check boxes for nest building, egg laying, and hatching, and hopefully successful fledging of the young. Bluebirds typically have 3 broods of average 4-6 eggs.

There are currently 13 dedicated volunteers covering 7 trails on Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge monitoring around 80 bluebird boxes. Bluebird trail volunteers adopt their bluebirds and share in the excitement of their fledging successes while also dealing with losses through predation, inclement weather, and prolonged freezes that we have experienced in the last 2 years. A huge thank you goes out to these dedicated volunteers. For more information please visit: www.nabluebirdsociety.org



Nest Box Photographs by Jim Osborn



Bluebird Photographs by Matt Eisenhauer

"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

Crab Orchard's Spring Wildflowers

By
Sam Spiller

This Refuge is very special for many reasons. But one often is overlooked in Spring, is its wildflowers. They are often referred to as the ephemeral wildflower bloom due to the short flowering period of the different species. And the Rocky Bluff Trail presents this bloom from late February through late April for all to see along its trail just east of Devils Kitchen Lake.



The first species that often is overlooked is Harbinger of Spring or sometimes called Pepper and Salt. It is a member of the Carrot Family and is a little flower than you must look hard for as its only 1-3 inches tall. It's special because it often, if not almost always, is the first to bloom; often blooming 2-3 weeks after a late February snow with those first frog calls in the air.



Spring Beauty and soon Toothwort, Dutchman's Breeches and Bloodroot follow and if lucky you may find the Hepatica but will have to look hard for it. And, now the early April bloom is usually in progress: more Dutchman's Breeches, Yellow Corydalis and soon Squirrel Corn that looks very similar to Dutchman's Breeches.

Violets will be blooming; blue, white and yellow. As well as Anemone's and the foliage of Wild Ginger with its flower at leaf litter level and Rock Cress often on moist rocky outcroppings.



My favorite time is now say the 2nd or 3rd week of April. Yellow Dogtooth Violets, a member of the Lily Family, can be seen. The so special Blue-eyed Marys can be found on flats and Celandine Poppies on moist slopes below the bluff. Phacelia, Spiderworts, Solomon Seals, Jack-in-the-Pulpits, Mayapples, Purple and eventually White Trilliums, Wild Geraniums, Jacob's Ladders, and along stream banks that receive a bit of sun, Cleft Phlox. Later but shortly to follow, come Blue or Woodland Phlox that my Granny called Wild Sweet William and another she liked, Bluebells. Wild Larkspur soon follows.

And, before you know it; the main bloom of these special spring flowers that depend on moist, well-drained soil and trees above has passed. The leaves on the trees have come out and soon shade the spring bloomers out. What a special treat that is so special here in



Southern Illinois. If you're looking for a good field guidebook to help identify wildflower; Illinois Wildflowers by Don Kurz is good and is available at the Woodland Gift Shop. Hikes to see some of these species are scheduled for Saturday, April 8 and 15 and they begin at the Rocky Bluff Trail at 10:00 a.m., again just east of Devils Kitchen Lake.



Photographs by Ruie Whitecotton

"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

Crab Orchard Photo Group To Re-Start

By
Jim Osborn

Great news! Beginning April 19th, the Crab Orchard Photo Group will begin meetings on the Refuge again. Although the new Visitor Center is not expected to open until early May, the group will convene at the Headquarters building at 9am on the 19th.

During COVID, the group did not meet. To fill in the gap, the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge created a Facebook page/group entitled “Friends of CONWR and Photography.” That venue currently boasts of over 425 members. Following the closure of the old Visitor Center on Rt. 148, the group had nowhere to meet. Thankfully, arrangements were made with Giant City State Park to meet in their Visitor Center. The group held meetings there until December, then canceled further meetings until the new VC at the Refuge was completed.

For 2023, there will be a change in the schedule for meetings. The Photography Committee decided to hold meetings every other month rather than monthly and, once quarter, hold a meeting on a Saturday morning to encourage folks who work during the week and/or younger photographers to participate with the group. So...the schedule for the year, rain or shine, is as follows:

April 19th (Wednesday)—meet at the Headquarters at **9am**

June 24th (Saturday)—Meet at the Visitor Center at 8:30am

August 16th (Wednesday)—Meet at the Visitor Center at 8:30am

October 21st (Saturday)—Meet at the Visitor Center at 8:30am

December 13th (Wednesday)—Meet at the Visitor Center at 8:30am

As in the past, the group will convene at the Refuge and then car caravan to a location in the Refuge to take pictures together. Later in the morning the group will return to the Visitor Center for “Show and Tell” or a short educational program. If you have not joined us in the past, be sure to join us in 2023 (no reservations are necessary)!



“The wild heart of Southern Illinois”

THE RETURN OF THE BALD EAGLE TOURS!

By
Vicki Lang-Mendenhall



It was a long-anticipated wait for the return of the Bald Eagle Tours on Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. The 2023 Bald Eagle tours were held on February 4th and 5th, and were open to the public at no charge. The Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge sponsored this event by financing a rental van and other necessities.

The volunteer-led tours were a huge success based on the feedback from the participants. The six 2-hour tours were rewarded with eagle sightings on each of the tours and the opportunity to view 2 eagle nests on the Refuge. The date of the tours coincides with the courting of the resident adult eagles found on the Refuge.

These resident eagles rekindle their pair bond with seldom witnessed aerial courtship and the building or tending to an existing nest from previous year(s). Eagles mate for life and begin this process at the age of 4-6 years of age when they become adults and obtain their white head and tail. Up until this time, the juveniles or immatures have black/brown feathers mottled with patches of white feathers. During these years, the bald eagle could be confused with a turkey vulture, black vulture or other large hawks also located on the Refuge. I love that ahh-ha moment when someone spots that white head and tail and accurately identifies an adult bald eagle.

The sightings for this year's eagle tours included a flock of 56 wild turkeys and an armadillo looking for grubs for back-to-back tours on Saturday afternoon.

Specific numbers for bald eagles were:

- Saturday 8am: 2 adults; 3 Juveniles
- Saturday 11am: 5 adults; 3 Juveniles
- Saturday 2pm: 3 adults
- Sunday 8am: 4 adults; 2 Juveniles
- Sunday 11am: 3 adults; 2 Juveniles
- Sunday 2pm: 3 adults; 4 Juveniles.

Hope to see you at next year's eagle tours but even sooner on the Refuge!

Photograph by Jim Osborn



Butterfly & Dragonfly Monitoring Training April 29th & 30th

At Crab Orchard NWR & Barkhausen Cache River Wetland Center

Led by Doug Taron, Chief Curator and Allen Lawrance, Associate Curator

Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum

Do you enjoy taking nature walks and watching butterflies or dragonflies? This training is for you!

The Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network (IBMN) and Illinois Odonate Survey (IOS) are recruiting citizen volunteers to monitor these populations in Southern Illinois. Monitors are needed for several public land sites and may be given a trail already mapped by IBMN or IOS, with locations that are close to their home community. Volunteers pledge to turn in at least 8 surveys of their assigned trail between late May and early August. These trails can usually be walked at a slow pace in about one to two hours. It is strongly encouraged (but not required) that potential monitors register and view the "2023 Southern Illinois Illinois Workshops" online at IBMN (Website: <https://ibmn.org/>) April 25 before they attend these field events. Also, participants are asked to pre-register for the field training by calling the Refuge Visitor Center at 618-997-3344.

There is no charge for the training or the workshops. Bring binoculars if you have them, sack lunches, a water bottle and appropriate clothing for outdoor walking. Participants are welcome to attend both days. New monitors must attend at least the first day's session. Both days will offer information valuable for returning experience monitors. The workshop plan is:

Saturday April 29 Focus on Butterflies

10:00AM to Noon: Field Training

Meet at the CONWR Visitor's Center and we will walk to the Headquarters Prairie. This site will be used to demonstrate a monitoring walk using the Pollard protocol.

Noon to 1PM: Lunch at the Visitors Center patio (participants are asked to bring a sack lunch)

1PM to 3:30PM: Field Training

We will caravan from the Visitor's Center to East Bay

Sunday April 30 Focus on Dragonflies

10:00AM to 3PM: Field Training

Meet at the Barkhausen Cache River Wetland Center and we will walk behind the Visitors Center.

There will be a break for lunch (please bring a sack lunch) at the Visitor's Center picnic tables.

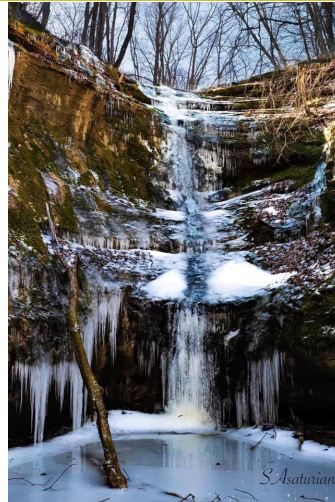
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*CRAB ORCHARD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
75TH ANNIVERSARY
JANUARY AND FEBRUARY PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS*

Most Unique

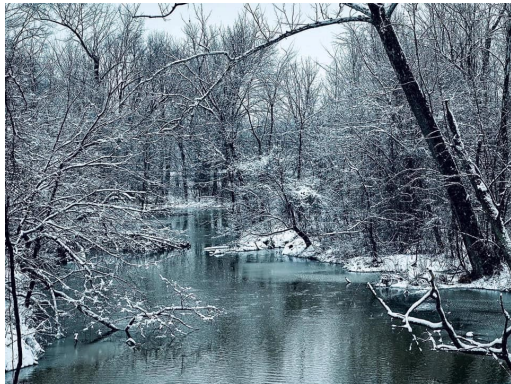


January
"Flowstone In Water Drop"
Suzanne Asaturian



February
"Rocky Bluff Falls
In Ice"
Suzanne
Asaturian

Landscapes

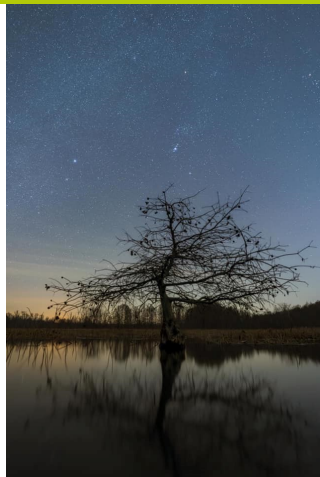


January
"Pigeon Creek
In Snow"
Tina Pryor

February
"Icy Sunset"
Michael
Bechtold

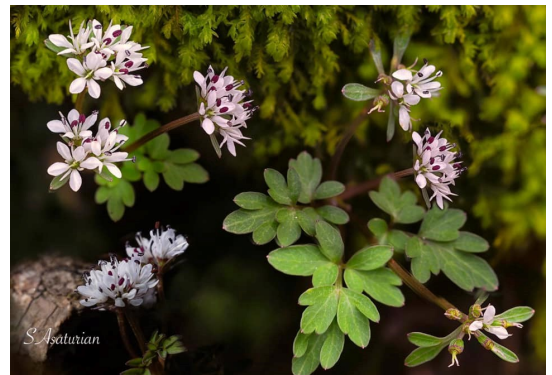


Plants



January
"Cypress
Tree"
John
O'Connell

February
"Harbinger
Of Spring"
Suzanne
Asaturian



"The wild heart of Southern Illinois"

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY PHOTO CONTEST

Birds



January
"Northern Flicker"
Michael Bechtold

February
"Sandhill Crane Stopover"
Erik Christy

Other Wildlife



January
"Nice Buck"
Michael Bechtold

February
"Cute, Little Mink"
Erik Christy

Photographs judged by
Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge 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

RENEW NOW!

Make sure to renew your Membership dues for 2023 soon to insure you continue to receive the Quarterly Newsletter, monthly Board Minutes, and a 10% discount in our Woodland Gift Shop. If you are uncertain if you have paid your Membership fee for 2023, you may contact me at:

SecretaryFOCOR@gmail.com.

You may return the form below along with your check to:

Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge, 6987 Headquarters Road, Marion, IL 62959 or stop by the desk and fill out one of our

handy bookmarks. You may renew your dues at our website:

friendsofcraborchardrefuge.com

Just select donate and then select the level of membership you wish to renew. Also, on the website you may donate to the New Exhibits fund. These funds will go toward some of the upcoming exhibits in our New Visitor's Center! All donations given to Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge are tax deductible.

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



FRIENDS OF
CRAB ORCHARD REFUGE

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