



Quarterly Newsletter

CHANGING OF THE GUARD!

Due to the Government shutdown lasting past the scheduled date, we were not able to have our Annual Membership Meeting as planned. The Friends Board of Directors proceeded with business as per their duties to our Members, meeting at the Herrin Library on November 6, 2025.

HONORING RETIRING BOARD MEMBERS

Certificates of Appreciation were given to Colleen Bogard, Randy Osborn, Jill Adams, and Don Mullison for their commitment and service to the Friends of Crab Orchard



Refuge. Randy had served as Chair and Member of the Media, Marketing, and Membership Committee as well as leader of our Annual Kayak Event. Jill served as 1st Vice-President, Chair of By-Laws, and Member of Interpretive and Outreach Committee. Don served for many years as Chair of the Wetland Project and Photography Committee. The Board thanks them all for their service to Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge!

SPECIAL COMMERATIVE FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS AWARDED



Jim Osborn presented Colleen Bogard, in honor of her many years of service to the Board, with a framed, beautiful photograph of Bogard Point. The photograph was especially poignant for Colleen, as Bogard Point was named in honor of her husband. Having served the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge since its inception in 2000, she has volunteered thousands of hours to our Refuge. She served in almost every capacity, primarily working in the Interpretation and Outreach Committee. Jim also presented a photograph to Rick Whitecotton resigning from the Office of President, for his transformative service in that Office.

NEW OFFICERS ELECTED FOR A TWO YEAR TERM AND BOARD REALIGNMENT

Jim Osborn was elected President, Rick Whitecotton was elected 1st Vice-President, and Kevin Curran was elected 2nd Vice-President. Incumbent Board members appointed to a 2-year term: Kevin Curran, Maureen Curran, Jim Osborn, Mary Jo Osborn, and Suzanne Asaturian. Incumbent Board members appointed to a 1-year seat: Rick Whitecotton and Ruie Whitecotton.

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A View From My Perch on November 17, 2025

by 1st Vice-President Rick Whitecotton



So Long, Farewell, Auf Weider Shein, Goodbye...well, sort of. You may miss my ramblings in this column or not. I have switched roles with Jim Osborn, he is now our President, and I have returned to the role of First VP and Store Manager (a new endeavor).

We reopened the Woodland Gift Shop today; Ruie and I changed our day to volunteer a full day on Mondays. I feel a great need to speak on the shutdown. I do not care which party you are upset with in relation to this. The impact of the shutdown and thus upon us all as citizens is my main concern. I have chosen, since retirement in 2016 to “ruin my retirement” with fulfilling volunteer work primarily here at our Refuge. One thing I have seen in 9 years is nothing but a drop in staffing level here. This is due to insufficient budget and the goal of maintaining the same level of service to our citizens. Folks, these two things do not exist in the same space. This is Public Lands, and on steroids. Of the over 588 National Wildlife Refuges in our system spread from Puerto Rico to the Marianas Islands we are one of the top 10 Refuges visited annually. We currently have one full time employee in Visitor Services. Does that seem inadequate? It does to me. The problem is one of an appropriate budget. That problem lies within the halls of congress and the appropriations process within both houses. The Department of the Interior has been underfunded for a long time, and the outcome is a loss of personnel and services to us as citizens. The budget shortfalls have been occurring since 2010 (a benchmark year of full funding) This is just our story; it is repeated across that system. This is a chronic problem that has direct impact on the services Public Lands provides to all citizens, perhaps more so to those of us who live here and enjoy those services more frequently.

I will be around and on the Board for a few more years, I care about this Refuge, I care about its mission, I care about you, the local user, every bit as much as any visitor we have. This site has been an economic engine to our region since its inception in 1936, it supports a widely varied portfolio of recreation opportunities for all, and it directly links families and our youth with science based nature programming.

We need more volunteers here now than perhaps ever. The shutdown, similar to the impacts of Covid, will cause a brief downturn in volunteer activity here. Our Gift Shop, where we regularly meet visitors from across our great nation needs more help, we could use at least 4 more people. The same is true for several other functions of the Refuge. If you want to get out of your house, spend a few hours helping out, meeting new folks AND help a worthy cause, please contact our Friends Group. You can simply come by any Monday and find two friendly folks to palaver with right here in the Gift Shop.

I will see you on the Refuge!

Rick Whitecotton

Through My Lens

By Newly-Elected President Jim Osborn

November 16, 2025



First, my apology to all the members of Friends for the cancellation of our Annual Meeting in October. The Government's shutdown impacted not only Refuge operations, but all volunteer activities as well. We had hoped to simply reschedule the Annual Meeting but the length of the shutdown made that impossible. In the absence of a place to hold our meetings, the Friends Board met at the Herrin Library in November to honor retiring Board Members, elect new officers, and to start planning for 2026.

We have tried to convey to everyone the dire situation facing the National Wildlife Refuge System. The elimination of staff positions, the hiring freeze, and cuts to operating budgets have forced all Refuges to make drastic changes. Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge is not the exception. One of the top 10 most visited Wildlife Refuges in the Nation, with approximately 1,000,000 visits per year, Crab Orchard NWR now has only 1 ranger working in Visitor Services. With a mandate to operate the Visitor Center 7 days per week, the Refuge needs help from our Friends organization more than ever.

But the shutdown impacted our ability to support the Refuge as well. Profits from the Gift Shop are used by the Refuge for many different things that cannot be funded through the Refuge's budget. The Gift Shop stocked a lot of new merchandise to sell during our busiest time of the year, October to Christmas. We missed 6 weeks of sales during this vital period. The Gift Shop, in the Visitor Center did reopen November 17th and will be open 7 days a week, every day (except Thanksgiving) until Christmas. Please consider taking a short drive to the Refuge and shop for holiday gifts, birthday gifts, or just things for yourself.

Another way to help the Refuge is to volunteer. There are multiple ways you can assist by working only a few hours per week or month. Starting on the new calendar year, many of you probably have a membership in Friends that will be lapsing. Please consider renewing your membership as soon as possible and take advantage of the 10% discount in the Gift Shop.

Meet Refuge Employee Mike (Big Mike) Smith

By Rick Whitecotton

Mike, or as so many folks know him “Big Mike” was born and raised in Belleville, Illinois, lived in Trenton, Illinois, and briefly in Connecticut. He currently resides in Goreville, Illinois. When Mike first started employment with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service he was a part time maintenance worker. He was offered full time employment later and mechanic duties were added to his work. This is a PARTIAL list of typical jobs Mike does: Mowing, Sanitizing rest rooms, transportation of equipment to Cypress Creek, Trail Maintenance, Clean and Clear Roadsides, Clean Debris (post storm clean up), performs Visual Inspections of equipment, Installs data loggers for lake level measurement, Assembles Picnic tables and other outdoor furniture, Weir box inspection and maintenance, Road Repair, major event set-up and take-down. Whew, that’s a lot of different tasks! It could be why so many volunteers and visitors recognize Mike, and when you wave to him, he always responds!



Obtaining this Maintenance job was a convoluted path. Mike is an Army veteran, he entered the Delayed Entry Program in 1988 and was on active duty from 1989 to 1994, he was deployed through Operation Desert Shield/Storm in the Alpha Company of the 159th Aviation Regiment Airborne. He worked various jobs and was seeking full time work with the U.S. Government in some agency. He saw the part-time (seasonal) position posted as a Maintenance Helper and applied for it. He was initially denied, but two hours later he received a phone call from Kevin Reichart, Maintenance Supervisor. Kevin said to show up for an interview. Mike immediately knew things were changing. You see, he had worked for Kevin several years earlier on a project at Rend Lake, and Kevin remembered him and his work quality. After a brief interview, he was offered the job, that was 10 plus years ago, he eventually became a Wage Grade 6, Maintenance Mechanic, his current job. Mike honestly feels he received this job, at a time he really needed it, by the grace of God. I asked him what the best part of his job is...his response was “When I see a visitor enjoying themselves here at the Refuge!”

In his off time, he is a dedicated family man, he enjoys ocean fishing and elk hunting with his wife (Christina). They have been married 37 years and have one son and three granddaughters.

This is my experience with Mike, he is knowledgeable of the Refuge and his jobs, he is very friendly and extremely helpful. It is ALWAYS a pleasure to meet him anywhere on the Refuge. I consider him a friend indeed.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER SUZANNE ASATURIAN!

I am both excited and honored to join the Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge Board. My passion is to be outside observing all organisms in their natural habitats in order to better understand each unique ecosystem. As a retired biology teacher of 35 years, I continue to learn more science by immersing myself into nature daily. My favorite hobbies include hiking, kayaking, and photography. All can be accomplished just minutes from my home at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge's locations. Capturing subjects through my lens is my means of expressing and sharing my love of each organism with those who cannot get out to see it for themselves. I enjoy sharing my photographs in local galleries to showcase the richness and beauty of Southern Illinois. Taking students on hikes, teaching at John A Logan's Purdy School, helping 4H students learn photography, keeps me busy during retirement. I am looking forward to volunteering at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge to inspire people of all ages to get outside, become excited about local flora and fauna, and care for our natural resources.



Winning Plant and Bird Photographs for July 2025



Suzanne Asaturian
"Purple Fringeless Orchid"



Suzanne Asaturian
"Great Horned Owl Taking Off"

Winning Photographs for July 2025

Pollinator

LaRita Nance
"Hummingbird Moth"



Sequence

Kathy Carstens
"Great Blue Heron Chasing
Off Black-Crowned Night Heron"



Most Unusual

Kathy Carstens
"Great Egret Catching 2 Fish At Once"



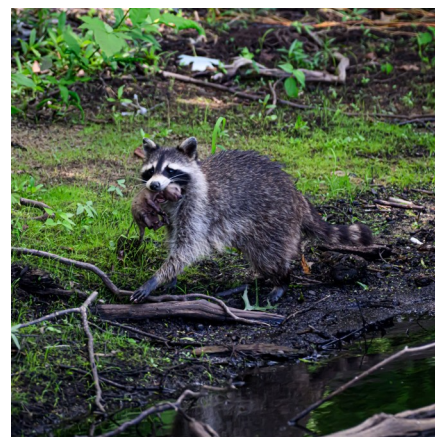
Landscape

Wanda Smith
"Lovely Sunset With A Canoe"



Mammal

Meaghan Quinlan-Krueger
"Mother Raccoon Carrying Her Baby"



Winning Photographs for August 2025

Most Unusual

Tauna Kobler
"Unexpected Flying Object"



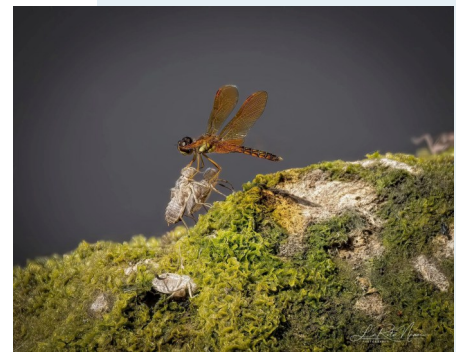
Plants

Steven Pierce
"Phlox"



Pollinator

LaRita Nance
"Dragonfly and Larvae Nymph"



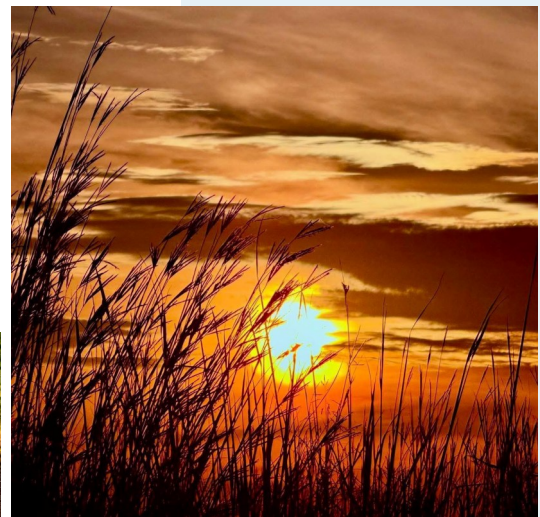
Birds

Andy McTaggart
"Heron Taking Off"



Landscape

Shanthi R. Blanchard
"Sunset at Crab Orchard"



Mammal

Julie McDannel
"Raccoon Washing Paws"



CELEBRATING OUR REGULAR VISITORS!

“I CAN’T STRESS HOW MUCH MY FRIENDS AND I APPRECIATE THE REFUGE. WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL THAT WE HAVE SUCH A WONDERFUL RESOURCE HERE IN OUR COMMUNITY.”—

PAM HENDERSON



Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge receives approximately 1,000,000 visits per year. This is the story of one amazing person who is a regular visitor.

Drive through the Refuge in the morning during the fall, winter, spring or summer and you may see a small group of women jogging along the road at a leisurely but steady pace. One of them is probably Pam Henderson. I have known Pam for many years, but it wasn't until recently that I learned about her true passion for running. Now retired from Southern Illinois Healthcare, Pam started running when she turned 40. Friends asked her to join them for regular morning runs in May of that year, and in November of the same year she ran the 10-mile Tunnel Hill Race. She was hooked! She found that she loved running, particularly long-distance running.

In 2005, Pam ran in her first marathon in Memphis, Tennessee (remember that a marathon is 26.2 miles!). Her time was 4 hours and 15 minutes. That race became the basis for a bucket list goal to run a marathon **IN EVERY STATE IN THE UNION!** To date, Pam has run a marathon in 42 different states including Alaska and Hawaii! She says the hardest ones to find are in the small states in the northeast. Pam has run the Boston Marathon 11 times and has already qualified for 2026....A couple months ago Pam even ran a marathon in Scotland!

Pam and 3 other women are regulars at Crab Orchard Refuge, running 6 to 20 miles about 4 times a week. Unless Pam is training for a specific upcoming marathon, she and her friends will run 50 to 60 miles a week. The group runs year-round unless the roads are particularly icy or there is a heavy rainstorm. Pam says the main reason they like running in the Refuge is because it's beautiful, regardless of the season, and it's peaceful. The flat terrain and the Visitor Center are added bonuses.

So, if you see Pam and her friends jogging through the Refuge some morning, give them a wave!

President Jim Osborn

Winning Photographs for September 2025

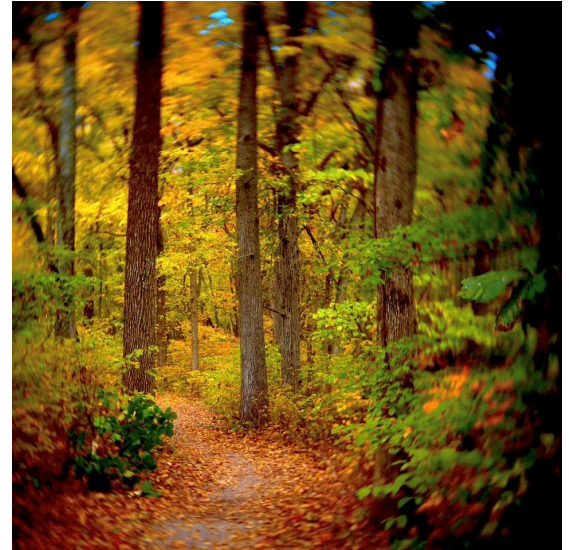
Birds

*Don Mullison
"Caspian Tern"*



Landscape

*Michael Sarver
"From A Walk"*



Welcome to our
new Co-Chairs of
the Friends of Crab
Orchard Refuge
Photography
Committee

Kathy Carstens and
Suzanne Asaturian.

They, along with
Jim Osborn, will
now judge the
Monthly Winning
Photographs.

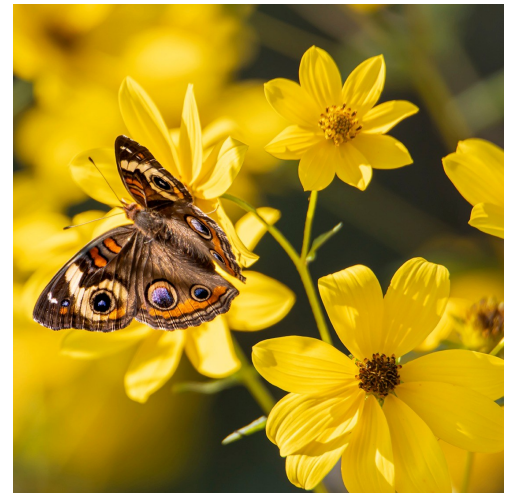
Wildlife

*Julie McDannel
"Albino Raccoon"*



Pollinator

*James Hancock
"Buckeye Butterfly"*



Winning Photographs for October 2025

Wildlife

Bill Davis
"Beaver Swimming"



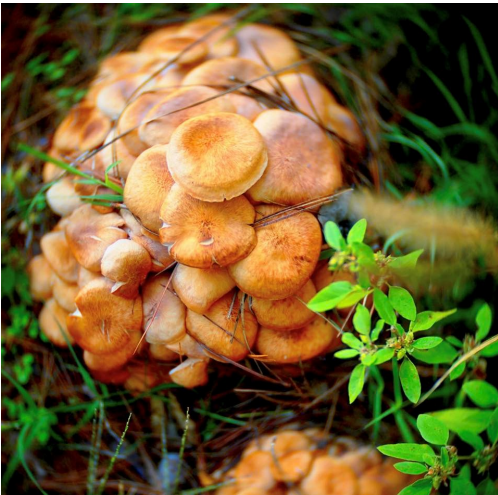
Landscape

Julie McDannel
"Fall Sunrise"



Plant/Fungi

Michael Sarver
"Mushroom"



Insect

Don Mullison
"Banded Garden Spider"





Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge

The Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the natural environment of the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge by working in cooperation with the Refuge staff to support its mission.

Annual Memberships Expire On December 31st, So Please Renew Now And Tell A Friend About The Benefits Of Membership!

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 become a member, or swing by the Woodland Gift Shop, fill out a bookmark with your information and join using cash or credit.

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

6987 Headquarters Road
Marion, IL 62959

Website:

⇒ friendsofcraborchardrefuge.com

Facebook:

- ⇒ Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge
- ⇒ Friends of Crab Orchard and Photography
- ⇒ Editor: Ruie Whitecotton



FRIENDS OF
CRAB ORCHARD REFUGE