

Friends of Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge

Quarterly Newsletter
ISSUE 04 April 2018

From the Friends

Spring is here !!! and many Refuge recreational activities and programs are swinging in to full activity. Be sure and check out the Refuge events calendar. Did you know that the Friends group provides funding and volunteer support of many of these programs? If you participate in events such as the Eagle Tours, the monthly birding outings, the upcoming wildflower hikes, the kids fishing derby, Hunting and Fishing Days, the Refuge photo contest, or the Becoming an Outdoor Family Programs (such as archery, bicycling the Refuge, kayaking, and outdoor cooking); then you've enjoyed a program the Friends help support and met some Friends volunteers. Much of our funding is provided by sales in the Visitor Center Nature Store, also staffed by Friends volunteers. Please consider becoming a Friends member. Your dues, and volunteer assistance if you have time, help us continue these efforts. Each of us have special reasons we value the Refuge, but whether its because we love to hunt, fish, boat, take photos, watch wildlife, hike trails or just enjoy the natural beauty; we accomplish the most by working together.

Judy Groskind, president, Friends of Crab Orchard Refuge

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VOLUNTEER of the QUARTER

Our quarterly volunteer is:
Rev Dr. Dave Estep



Dave is the Friends Website administrator and the Newsletter editor. He has served on the Board, worked in the Bookstore and volunteered for the Eagle Tours.

Submit your choice for Volunteer of the Quarter, along with photograph, by June 15th to:
admin@friendsofconwr.com

WATCHING THE SEASONS FROM REFUGE ROADS:

January, February through mid-March 2018

We definitely have had winter this year; it snowed and it was cold. As always, lots can be seen using the Refuge's roads, parking lots, and short nearby trails. From which, we can look for birds and other wildlife as they use the diversity of habitats found on the Refuge: lakes, ponds, and shallow wetlands or moist soil management areas; pastures, wheat, clover, and corn fields; prairie plantings, fencerows, and thickets, and mature woods.

Heron Flats a moist soil management area southwest of the Route 148 Observation Tower, initially was dry then covered with snow but as early February progressed it began to quickly collect water from the rains. Recently flooded areas were being used by hundreds of Canada and White-fronted Geese, many Mallards, Gadwall, Northern Pintail and Shovelers.

North Wolf Creek Road, starts at Old Route 13 and passes through many kinds of habitats, including fields, pastures, woodlots, thickets and fencerows. It also crosses Crab Orchard Lake providing good viewing for water birds. Near the Bogard Point parking area, White-throated and Swamp Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Northern Cardinals, a small flock of Eastern Bluebirds, Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, White-breasted Nuthatch, two Brown Creepers, and Blue Jays were feeding along a mowed, grassy area next to a fencerow. Nearby, Red-bellied and a Hairy Woodpeckers were seen along with three Yellow-rumped and one Pine Warbler, the warblers feeding on the ground. A Great Blue Heron was feeding along the shore, thirty plus Ring-billed Gulls were resting on the fishing dock, and Ruddy Ducks and Pied-billed Grebes were on the lake. About twenty Wild Turkeys were feeding along the road north of the Causeway, as snow began to fall on February 1. Later in March, Killdeer and a Wilson's Snipe were seen in a shallowly flooded cornfield. The burned prairie area south of the causeway had a Red-tailed Hawk, several Killdeer, and Eastern Meadowlarks singing.

Greenbrier Road and Parking Lot was especially good for larger birds in early February. Common Crows, Turkey and Black Vultures, Ring-billed Gulls, and a flock of twenty White Pelicans were flying overhead. Downy Woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice and Northern Cardinals were using the woodlot habitats that border the area.

Devils Kitchen Lake with its excellent stands of both oak-hickory and pine, had such species as Hairy, Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers, Carolina Wrens, and White-breasted Nuthatches. Plus, in late January, flocks of Snow Geese were migrating and Black Vultures were soaring overhead.

Other good areas included the **Parking Area at the Northeast End of Highway 148 Causeway**, where late in the day during the January cold spell, 5 bald eagles (four of them adults) were sitting on the lake ice feeding probably on ducks that were using an open water area further out in the lake. The **Spillway Road Boat Launching Area (north of the dam)** had large flock of Double-crested Cormorants, about 10 White Pelicans, and Bonaparte's and Ring-billed Gulls. The **State Highway 13 Causeway** had some 10-15 bird flocks of American Coots in the water just off of the riprap. Also, American Woodcock have been seen and heard preening, so they may be found along the roads that border open areas especially those bordered by thickets.

These Refuge habitats will be especially busy with spring migrants during April and May. If you have difficulty finding areas, just contact the Refuge Visitors Center on the east side of Route 148. Watch out for cars, cycles, joggers, hunters, and fishermen. Good birding.

Sam Spiller

Friends of Crab Orchard Get Their Heads Together

On Saturday, February 24, 2018 a dozen Friends members gathered to conduct a brainstorming session. The Friends had developed a strategic plan in 2015. The original plan was designed to take 5 years to complete, but we find ourselves finished with all goals in less than 3 years. Thus, we need a new plan. This brainstorming session is a tool to generate ideas. We created many ideas, and then sorted them into similar concepts (affinity groups), lastly the participants voted on their favorite affinity groups. The results are captured below.

These results will be turned over to a related committee chairperson to develop a goal or goals. In turn, these committee goals will be integrated into a whole strategic plan by the Finance and Planning Committee. The final product must be accepted by the Board before approval and implementation.



The process of the Brainstorming Session was as follows:

1. Briefing from Crab Orchard Refuge staff on: The mission and goals of Crab Orchard Refuge, US Fish and Wildlife guidance on fundraising by Friends organizations, and the results of a recent seminar on Visitor's Services.
2. We conducted the Brainstorming session where Friends members contributed ideas. We then collectively sorted the ideas into similar thoughts (affinity groups). The last step of this process was a "multi-vote" where all members could cast four votes on affinity groups of their choice. The results are captured below in the order of votes received.

The results are listed below, the affinity group titles appear as the titles for each table. The individual ideas are the contents of the tables.

Rick Whitecotton

Community Outreach – 9 votes

Bluebird Celebration Day	Kids art/Nature 1 day work-shops	Schedule information meetings about Refuge
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Nature Store – 8 votes

Consistent staffing at Nature Store	Pressed Flower notecards – a product	Enhance/Enlarge Nature Store
Stickers to give to visitors (children) saying “I visited Crab Orchard using our new image	BLANK	BLANK

Friends Membership – 7 votes

Have a logo (friends) design contest	Grow membership	New iconic image to represent Friends
Membership drive in December	Redo Friends brochure	BLANK

Environmental Interpretation – 7 votes

Use Pollinator project to increase environmental interpretation	Self guided Interpretive trail (pollinators) from Harmony trail thru Prairie to woods and lake by new HQ	Train members to be available to lead small groups on tour of refuge.
On refuge Emerald Ash Borer training for the public	BLANK	BLANK

Support Wetlands – 6 votes

Support wetland improvement	Maintain existing wetlands	Improve viewing site at Heron Flats
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Work Crews – 4 votes

Have groups of Friends do clean up often rather than 1 per year	Repair and fully re-open Harmony Trail	Add native wildflowers along base to fences to reduce trimming
Support invasive control	BLANK	BLANK

Visitor’s Center Enhancement – 3 votes

Support Visitor Center improvements	Transform Visitor Center Aquarium (Aquascape)	Feature a (different) native plant in a display each month at the Visitor Center
Fix water problem-we can do it for our businesses but not our visitors	BLANK	BLANK

Recreation – 0 votes

Get some way to have kayaks for rent and a specific place to use them	Maintain and upgrade Heron Flats for photo observation	BLANK
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Creature Feature

Photos courtesy of Missouri Department of Conservation

EARLY SPRING FROGS AND TOADS



Spring Peeper *Pseudacris crucifer*

First heard announcing spring in mid-February with high-pitched “peeeep” - about once per second

A woodland frog that breeds in vernal ponds and Wetlands

Nestles under leaves in winter and freezes solid;
Produces a natural antifreeze to protect them from damage



Crayfish Frog *Rana areolata*

Lives in prairies near small creeks or marshes

Shelters in crayfish burrows

Breeds in fishless ponds in spring

Heard after heavy, early spring rains;

Loud, deep, guttural snoring “whaaaaat” sound



Western Chorus Frog *Pseudacris triseriata*

Call is a rasping trill like a fingernail running down a comb

Secretive but common frog of grasslands, meadows and forest edges

Calls heard on warm, rainy nights February through April



Southern Leopard Frog *Rana sphenoccephala*

Call is a mixed series of short throaty croaks, Chuckles and groans - "chuck chuck chuck"

Sometimes called the grass frog; inhabits a variety of Wetland habitats

Breeds in early spring and lays from 3,000 to 5,000 eggs



Wood Frog *Rana sylvatica*

Call is a series of short, raspy "quacks" or chucking sounds

Small secretive frog of grasslands and forest edges

Breeds in early spring and lays 500 to 1000 eggs in vernal ponds of forested areas



American Toad *Bufo americanus*

Call is a sustained, high-pitched musical trill

Breeds in April-May in shallow waterfilled Depressions in forests and fields

Lays 2,000 to 20,000 eggs in long parallel strings

Toads eat earthworms and a wide variety of insects

Photo Club

FOCUS ON THIS!!!

If you've driven through the Refuge in the past year or two you have probably noticed a lot of visitors with cameras taking advantage of the diverse wildlife and natural beauty of Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. In October 2017 the annual Friends Photo Contest drew 30 more entries than the previous year. Attendance at the awards reception was standing-room only. The advent of affordable digital cameras and iphones with cameras have made it easy for anyone to take pictures...and Refuge management and the Friends of Crab Orchard want to support that recreational activity.

Two things of note are in the works for Friends in 2018: (1) there will be 2 family programs/workshops on photography, and (2) the formation of the Crab Orchard Photography Group. The first of the two workshops is scheduled for Saturday, April 7 at 10am at the Visitors Center. The second will be held on Saturday, August 4, also at 10am at the

Visitors Center. We are calling the first workshop "Birds and Blooms" and will focus on nature photography, particularly spring wildflowers and migrating birds. The August workshop will have an emphasis on choosing and preparing photos for entry into the annual contest. Learn from a judge what they look for and how to prepare and submit your best photos. Space will be limited for both workshops so call the Refuge early at 618-997-3344 to reserve your spot.

We are equally excited about the formation of a Crab Orchard Photography Group (COPG). This informal get-together of photo enthusiasts is intended to support individuals who actively photograph in southern Illinois and, in particular, in CONWR. Participants can share images taken, hear educational programs and caravan to areas in the Refuge to do photography. It is hoped that there will be enough interest in the COPG to schedule quar-

terly meetings. The organizational meeting for the group will be Wednesday, April 11 at 10am in the Visitor Center. Interested persons are encouraged to bring photos they have taken on the Refuge in the past year. Either print photographs or digital images saved on a flashdrive are acceptable. Please limit photos to 10 per person. Although reservations are not required, they are highly recommended as the room in the Visitor Center has an occupancy limit. Again, the number to call is 618-997-3344.

See you there!!

Jim Osborn

Upcoming Quarterly Events

April

Spring Nature Photography Course Becoming an Outdoors Family Program

April 7th Learn the basics of nature photography with the whole family. Learn from our certified instructors and then practice your new skills on a group hike! Program begins at 10 am Program meets at the Refuge Visitor Center. Reservations are recommended.

Wildflower Walks Becoming an Outdoors-Family Program

April 21st Join a knowledgeable guide at the Rocky Bluff trailhead for a hike and an in-depth program about spring wildflowers. Meet at the Rocky Bluff Hiking Trail, Tacoma Lake Road First program begins at 10 am Second program begins at 1 pm Reservations are recommended.

Family Fishing Becoming an Outdoors-Family Program

April 22nd Nothing brings families together quite like fishing. This program focuses on teaching the basics of fishing, all equipment provided to the younger (or less experienced) members of your family. Bring the whole crew, practice the basics, then end the day with a group bank fishing trip! Visitors will meet at the Refuge Visitor Center .

May

Outdoor Cooking Becoming an Outdoors-Family Program

May 5th Join us for a fun and delicious course! Learn from an expert how to whip up delicious meals over a hot fire and in a Dutch-oven.

Bring the whole family down, learn a few recipes, and end with a well earned lunch! Program begins at 10:00 am This program will be at Martha's Theater Reservations are required.

Birding Tour May 6th

Come and join us for a birding tour guided by Crab Orchard NWR Volunteers. Experienced birders will lead the tour. Binoculars are available at the Refuge Visitor Center for check-out. Program begins at 8:15 am at the Refuge Visitor Center. Reservations are required.

Bicycling the Back Roads of the Refuge - International Migratory Bird Day Becoming an Outdoors-Family Program

May 12th Everyone knows that bicycling is great exercise, a great way to spend time outdoors, and a great way to spend time as a family. But did you also know it can be a great way to explore parts of the refuge usually gone unseen? Bring the whole family and join us for a bike trip through some of the restricted parts of the refuge! Take in the sites and see how much wildlife you can spot along the way. Program begins at 9:00 am Reservations are required.

Kayaking The Refuge Becoming an Outdoors-Family Program

May 26th Come kayak Crab Orchard NWR's lakes with us! Get an interpretive tour of the land around you, view wildlife as you pass by, and enjoy the breeze as you kayak out with our rangers. Boats are limited so if you are not bringing your own be sure to reserve your space! Ages 15

and up only. First program begins at 9 am Second program begins at 1 pm Reservations are required.

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June

Kids Fishing Derby

June 9th The Kids Fishing Derby is a free event hosted by the Refuge and our many local sponsors. It is a wonderful opportunity for families to spend a day together on the Refuge fishing. The Derby is for kids 12 and younger. Free lunch will be provided for participants and their families. Registration begins at 8 am. Event runs from 8am - 12 pm, Prairie Creek Recreation Area

Family Archery Becoming an Outdoors-Family Program

June 23rd Bring out the Robin Hoods in your family. If you want to build your archery skills with all members of the family, come and join us in a basic introduction of archery. All equipment will be provided for all the members of your family. Program begins at 10 am Program meets at the Martha's Theater . Reservations are required.

BOOKSTORE NEWS

The Woodland Book Store located at the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center brings an understanding of the nature and history of the Crab Orchard Refuge. Books on wildlife, plants, fish, mushrooms, flowers, and a great selection for beginning and serious birders make up just a few of the many outdoor selections available at the book store. One of our most popular information books, Kaufman's *Wildlife of The Midwest*, is easy to use, featuring graphics on plants, trees, insects, birds, fish, even weather and stars. For the mushroom hunter, McFarlands *Mushrooms of Illinois* covers finding, identifying and harvesting the humble mushroom.

Hats, hoodies and expressive nature t-shirts in adult and kids sizes are also available. All the revenue from the book store aids the refuge in outreach projects for the public such as Kids Free Fishing Derby, January Eagle Tours, and area schools educational programs. The Woodland Book Store, located on South 148, is open each day from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and staffed by volunteers.

Linda May



REFUGE NEWS

Dear Friends Members,

As the refuge manager I am faced with making difficult decisions on a regular basis. Many of those decisions revolve around distributing refuge funds to the various programs associated with the management of the refuge and prioritizing projects those programs will pursue. Those programs include: maintenance, biology, visitor services, law enforcement, fire management, and administration.

Today I would like to focus on facility management which is accomplished primarily through our maintenance program. Crab Orchard NWR typically receives over 800,000 visits from the public every year, making it one of the most visited national wildlife refuges in the country. Part of the attraction of our refuge is the multitude of recreation opportunities available to visitors, such as fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, swimming, boating, camping, hiking, biking and picnicking. All of these activities require some type of facility to accommodate the use, such as access roads, parking lots, trails, boat ramps, restrooms, fishing piers, campgrounds, picnic areas, observation platforms, information kiosks, visitor center, and even a beach. All of these facilities require considerable maintenance to keep them in usable and safe condition for the public. This is a considerable focus of both our maintenance staff's time and our station funds. I often refer to this effort as "taking care of what we have".

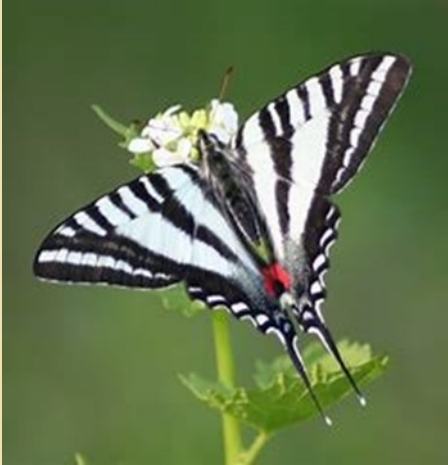
Sometimes we replace facilities as needed when repair is not an option. The refuge has replaced boat ramps, courtesy docks, fishing piers and other structures in recent years, due to the level of damage or wear to the structures. The future construction of a new headquarters building is another example of replacing a previously existing facility when repair was not an option. I still consider these projects as taking care of what we have.

I feel that it is important for me to share with you my direction and priority as the refuge manager and hope that you will understand and support that direction as a member of our Friends Group. I promise that my staff and I will do our best to "take care of what we have". We could not accomplish this effort without our Friends and volunteers. We are very grateful for the support and assistance that is provided by the Friends and refuge volunteers to help us make our refuge an enjoyable destination for visitors of all interests.

Richard Speer
Refuge Manager

Pollinator Habitat Project Update

With spring knocking on the door, the pollinator committee volunteers have kept busy this fall and winter. In addition to keeping our newly established plants watered and cared for throughout a very dry fall, we planted three Pawpaw trees in early November at the northeast corner of our pollinator project site and a Downy Serviceberry clump to beautify the parking lot entrance. We chose these trees for their importance as food sources for native pollinators. Of note, the beautiful Zebra Swallowtail and Pawpaw Sphinx moth feed exclusively on the leaves of the Pawpaw tree. In mid-spring the Pawpaw blooms with reddish brown flowers that produce a cluster of fleshy, edible fruits similar in flavor to a banana which are readily eaten by a number of mammals, including humans!



Zebra Swallowtail (Wikipedia)



Pawpaw Blossom (illinoiswildflowers.org)

The Downy Serviceberry is an important early source of nectar to a host of bees, flies and beetles. In addition, its leaves feed caterpillars of the Striped Hairstreak and Red-Spotted Purple butterflies and of numerous moths. The berries are attractive to both songbirds and small mammals. This small tree is one of the earliest to bloom in the spring and has lovely fragrant blossoms with 5 white slender petals occurring in racemes of 6-14 flowers.



Red-Spotted Purple
(pinterest.com)



Downy Serviceberry
(illinoiswildflowers.info)



Striped Hairstreak
(wisconsinbutterflies.org)

In early January a crew of hardy volunteers worked with Rob Rothrock to prepare native prairie plant seed for hand seeding 2 acres of prairie at our site. The seeds of varying sizes from 45 varieties of native grasses and forbes (wildflowers) were mixed with sawdust and hand broadcast on a very cold morning in early January. Seeding after the ground is frozen allowed us to take advantage of the natural freeze-thaw cycle to work the seed into the ground by spring. The 2-acre plot will be kept mowed at intervals this summer to control weeds while the slower growing prairie plants are establishing their roots. Part of the seed was generously donated by Rob Rothrock and part was purchased by NFWF pollinator grant funds.



The last of our NFWF pollinator grant funds are being used by the Refuge to purchase four new interpretive signs to be installed in various places at our prairie and demonstration pollinator garden sites.

A visit to our gardens this early spring should give you glimpses of bluebells, celandine poppy, Dutchman's breeches, corydalis, shooting stars and blueeyed grass. Blooming trees will include serviceberry, redbud, whiteflowering dogwood, pawpaw and black cherry.

A little later in spring watch for blooms of Jack-in-the-pulpit, wild ginger, trilliums, wild bergamot, purple and white prairie clovers, butterfly milkweed, yellow and purple coneflowers, golden alexanders, hoary vervain, rose vervain and Culver's root.

As you can see, we are aiming for diversity and a succession of blooms to provide nectar, pollen and caterpillar forage for a wide variety of native butterflies, moths, skippers, bees, wasps and flies. Our hope is to continue to add to the collection to include even more species of wildflowers and to add important native shrubs and trees in the future.

Aimee Hemphill

Crab Orchard Volunteer Recruitment Day 2018

Dana Maleve-Miller set up the Volunteer Recruitment Day, it was held March 10, 2018. There was excellent advertising, even a mention on WSIL, regardless we had two participants. The same event in 2017 drew many more. We cannot figure why the difference, regardless there are some things to note about the effort.

First, Dana did a top notch effort at setting up the event. She contacted representatives to talk about many of the major volunteer areas. We specifically contributed to "Patrol" or Public Use Survey, Trail Crew, Bluebird Trail, Kayak Tours, Pollinator Garden/Prairie Restoration, Nature Book Store, and Photography. We had six volunteers speaking to an audience of two. Regardless, we put all our efforts into the two. The results were that we have two new volunteers. Vern McMaster has taken on a brand new specific project to design and create wooden covers for the fishing line tubes around the refuge. Ray Adams is supporting by creating a map of all the locations. We also gained Laura Lindsey as a new Book Store Volunteer. Laura is trained already by Linda May and me and will work for a few weeks with Dennis Gibbons on Tuesday afternoons before taking her own spot.

The second thing I want to point out is that both of the new volunteers joined our Friends organization. Hooray!

The third thing on my mind is how many folks does it take to pull off an event well? It almost sounds like a joke is coming here, but it is not a joke. Let's take Deer Hunter Sign In, a specific project of 4 days length or is it just 4 intense days? The trail crew and some specific volunteers start repairing the handicap deer blinds and areas well in advance. For several weeks in advance 2 or 3 volunteers patrol the grounds on a daily deer survey developing a good estimate of the herd and locations. Staff typically collects and collates the data; The event has to be advertised. Then on the day of the event (four actually) there is a day of set up in advance, a short brief, then sporadic high levels of work to perform the check in, a specific team handles the Handicap and Youth areas. Someone staffs the book store for the duration and of course the hunter sign in process itself. Almost all of this is performed by us, the volunteers. This same background and preparatory work goes into all events. I have seen it on Earth Day, specific group educational/interpretational events, Fishing Derby, Refuge Clean-up, Eagle Tours and such like. Yes, the number of volunteers may vary and the length of preparation may vary but there are two standards. One, it takes a lot of volunteers to successfully pull off an event or a project. Two, there is a varied skill set that is needed with many different tasks to perform. There is also one prerequisite, the willingness on your part and mine to give of our time and talents to support the goals and mission of Crab Orchard through our Friends organization. Thank you all for all the many and varied tasks you perform!

I also want to note the presenters who gave their time to speak with the new volunteers about the aspects of their volunteer work at the Refuge. Willie Walker, Jonathan Lake, Ray and Pam Adams, Jim Osborn, Jim Hancock, and me all contributed, we thank you all so much!

Rick Whitecotton

MEMBERSHIP

Each year, members should renew their membership dues.

Please fill out the form below and mail it to : Friends of CONWR, 8588 Route 148, Marion, IL 62959. Please send this form along with your payment of \$10.00 per person or \$20.00 per family.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

AMOUNT PAID: _____

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO SERVE ON A COMMITTEE: YES _____ NO _____

COMMITTEE NAME: _____

FRIENDS of CONWR

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