



# Tennessee Refuge Reflections

**Tennessee National  
Wildlife Refuge**  
3006 Dinkins Lane  
Paris, TN 38242

(731) 642-2091  
<http://TennesseeRefuge.fws.gov>

Refuge Manager  
John Taylor

Office Hours  
M-F 7:00 to 3:30

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## Presidents Page

Hello Friends.

First, my apologies for the delay in getting this newsletter written and in the mail to you. For some reason the Apr-Jun quarter has been very busy.

Thanks to Senator Alexander and Congressman Tanner for moving the Refuge Headquarters and Visitor Center a step closer to reality. Through their efforts and the work of their staff the Headquarters project has been included in both the House and Senate Appropriations Bills. Dollars are currently tight for projects like this and they are difficult to fund and we could see the project fall out later. We certainly hope not. This refuge is over 60 years old and is still waiting for an on-site Headquarters with Visitor Center. There have been many newer refuges see visitor center built and we think that we have waited more than long enough for ours.

We ask that those of you that have not renewed your membership please take a second to do that. Your membership allows us to continue our support of the refuge and environmental educational education programs within the community.

We have started a new program called "Lunch with Friends." It is a no host lunch in the conference room at the refuge office. It will be held the fourth Thursday of each month, with the next one on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June. Bring lunch from home or grab a burger or sub and come on by. It is an informal get together. We will be happy to discuss any questions you might have and take any suggestions for Friends projects and activities. Mark your calendar and come by for lunch.

We'll talk of invasive species within this newsletter. The Friends have applied for and received a grant to control Chinese Privet on the refuge. We hope to start that project as the weather cools in the fall.

The "Refuge Discovery Series" has enjoyed some great successes and had some classes that were not that well attended. This program is intended to inform the community and increase awareness of the wildlife that lives both on the refuge and right in our own back yards. We just put 53 people in the most recent class on snakes and reptiles and it was standing room only. Other classes have seen few attend but the average size is over 20. We ask for your help with suggestions for classes and programs. We'll be going to Duck River in late August to climb in the water and learn about mussels. This should be a great opportunity for the kids and the young at heart. Of course standing on the shoreline is an option for those less adventurous. We've got astronomy and star gazing coming up in September and bats have been suggested for next year. We'll do our best to keep it fresh and entertaining.

In early April, the Friends were invited to attend the Friends of the Future Conference hosted by the Fish and Wildlife service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association. The challenges faced by refuges and the outlook for the future were the topics covered during the conference. More of these details will be covered in a separate section of this newsletter.

Dan Dziekonski  
Friends President



# Manager's Corner

Hello from Stewart County!

Cross Creeks National Wildlife Refuge is just a few miles away, as the crow flies, and I would like to invite you to come on over & visit your sister station to the north, where a variety of things are afoot this spring.

Several new, or renovations of existing, visitor facilities have been taking place since the fall of 2007 and will continue throughout 2008. These exciting projects include a new walking trail and observation deck below the Headquarters area, as well as renovations of the interpretive trail located down in the river bottoms.

The refuge was selected as one of five sites across the southeast to initiate a Pilot Project for bird feeding stations around refuge Visitor Centers to help promote and educate the public about creating their own backyard bird feeding spots and wildlife habitat. Through this new venture, a series of five small feeding stations were set up around the Headquarters and Visitor Center buildings to attract songbirds to the area. Additionally, native plants or other flowers which attract pollinating insects are being incorporated into existing flowerbeds. The feeding stations were strategically placed to showcase different habitat types, and compliment the other visitor facility improvements.

A short, meandering trail is now in place just below the Headquarters area to serve as a link between the buildings and the rest of the refuge. A benefit of this trail is that it will be available to the public during the winter months, when the refuge is closed for the waterfowl season. Benches and a few informational signs will be installed along the trail to offer users an opportunity to sit and enjoy the view while learning about refuge wildlife. The new trail has been awash with color as many native plants have been blooming along its length, and the trail has already proven itself to be a great spot to view frogs, butterflies, deer, eagles, woodcock and wild turkey!

To complete the enhancements, a new observation deck will be constructed and the Woodpecker Trail will be renovated. Construction should begin in the coming months. The overlook will include two permanently mounted viewing scopes and informational panels about local wildlife. Two new bridges will take people across low water crossings on the Woodpecker Trail, and will be installed using readily available non-lumber alternatives to reduce damages from seasonal flooding on the Cumberland River, overall maintenance costs, and extend the useful life of these bridges.

Refuge volunteers have been instrumental in getting these projects off the ground. Resurfacing of the one-mile loop Woodpecker Trail was single-handedly completed by one volunteer. A second volunteer installed and maintains the bird feeding stations. Many activities on the refuge are successfully accomplished by the dedication of these folks who so generously give their time and talents to the refuge. They are greatly appreciated by staff and visitors, alike. Of course, new volunteers are always welcome.

Karen Pacheco  
Refuge Manager, Cross Creeks NWR

# Critter Corner

## King Rail



### Quick Facts

**Size:** 15 inches  
**Wingspan:** 24 inches  
**Weight:** 10-13 ounces  
**Sexual Maturity:** at 1 year  
**No. Eggs:** 8-11  
**Lifespan:** 5-9 years  
**Typical diet:** Insects,  
Aquatic Invertebrates and  
weed seed

A native to the Tennessee NWR, the king rail is the largest North American rail. This species is in decline because of loss of marshes and wetlands, with the declines being severe in the northernmost part of its range. Presently Tennessee NWR, Duck River Unit has the only active king rail nests in the state of Tennessee. King rail nesting activity has been documented in far west and east Tennessee in years past, but no recent activity has been documented. King rails are secretive marsh birds and can easily be missed unless one is familiar with their calls, which are mostly heard in the spring. No king rails have been recorded in the state during the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) or the Christmas Bird Count. The most common method of surveying them is to use a tape/CD to play their calls to stimulate a response. Based on our own surveying experience some birds will not verbally respond to the tape but will just sneak in.

A nest was documented on the Duck River Unit back in the 1970's but they were no additional observations until 1996 and then another long pause until 2001.

They have been seen/heard fairly regularly since then. The refuge did not have any confirmation of successful nesting until 2006 when an adult with 7 chicks were observed. In 2007, two nests were successful when broods of six and four chicks were observed. Unfortunately habitat conditions in 2008 are not looking favorable due to flooding in April. The habitat will recover; the question is whether it will recover in time for them to nest this year. Encroachment by non-native invasives such as alligatorweed, parrotfeather and woody vegetation is proving to be our greatest management challenge for this species.

Both sexes have the same markings and coloration with the male being slightly larger. The king rail is reddish brown in color with barring on the wings. They have long bills that are curved slightly downward. They are most often seen walking on mudflats and the shoreline and seldom fly. As a matter of fact, the adult King Rail molts completely after nesting and is flightless for nearly a month.

King rails are known to return year after year to the same nesting area. They are very similar to songbirds in the establishment of their territories. Their nest is built as a grass-lined depression on the ground or slightly elevated in the branches of wetland shrubs such as buttonbush. Ground nests are often concealed by green grasses arched over the nest. They lay 8 to 11 eggs that are pale buff, spotted with browns. Both sexes participate in building the nest, incubation and care of the downy young. Both adults incubate the eggs for about 22 days. The young leave the nest shortly after hatching and make their first flight in about 63 days.

The King Rail usually gets its food in aquatic habitats and prefers crayfish and amphibians. Away from water it will feed on insects and weed seeds. When it catches food on land, it often takes the item to water and dunks it before eating it. King rails regurgitate indigestible parts of their food in pellets similar to those of owls. During courtship, males present crayfish or small fiddler crabs in their bill to females, who readily accept the offered morsels.

## Thanks to our New Members!!

Cynthia Guinn  
Robert and Jennifer Stevens  
Robert and Jan Carter  
Robert Griffith  
Helen Barker

Winston Richter  
Karen Harding  
Patricia Lancaster  
Jerry and Cathy Crouch  
Carolyn Moritz

Mitz and Sherry Bailey  
Patty and Scott Seward  
Gay and Laura Francisco  
Dottie Kendall

## Our Mission

Friends of Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. is an independent, non-profit corporation dedicated to supporting the primary purposes for which the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge was established and promoting the preservation of the natural and historical resources of the Refuge, foster its use and enjoyment by the public consistent with the protection and preservation of its environment, and engage in such educational, scientific and civic activities as will assist the management of the Refuge in carrying out its mandates.

## Membership Annual Dues

\$15 Individual  
\$25 Family  
\$100 Corporate  
\$500 Benefactor

### Mail to:

Friends of Tennessee  
NWR  
3006 Dinkins Lane  
Paris, TN 38242

## Invasive Species Removal

Almost every refuge within the system is faced with the growing problem of invasive species. Many are plants and shrubs that have been brought in by nurseries to brighten people's yards and gardens. The seed from these plants is then scattered by birds or the wind and begin to spread throughout the area. These plants often have no native food value because the local birds and animals have never seen them before and do not include them in their diet. The non-natives also out-compete the local plants and shrubs and then dominate the landscape.

Water gardeners often have pants that get out into the wild and clog lakes and streams. They can completely alter the waterways and kill off many native species. Fish, reptiles and animals have also been serious trouble.

Snakeheads in the Chesapeake Bay, jumping carp in Illinois and pythons in the Everglades are all examples of non-natives run amok. If you have seen the photo of the alligator and python that died in a struggle to eat each other you can understand just how serious this problem can be.

Here we have trouble with Chinese Privet. Privet is a hedge material that people used to adorn and border their yards. The berries are carried across the countryside and privet is soon sprouting everywhere. There is an extremely dense area of privet on the Duck River Unit and the Friends are going to attempt to eradicate it.

We will be looking for volunteers to assist in cutting and spraying the stumps to kill the privet. We will provide all of the tools and equipment but if you have a favorite bow saw or loppers you are welcome to bring them. We will also be paying for some people to attend training at the Extension Office to get their USDA pesticide applicators permit. This will allow us to spray the stumps and get a complete kill on the privet. Those that receive the training will also be able to use their permit to buy products for their homes or farms.

The good news about privet is that it is an evergreen. That means that we don't have to rush out into the heat and ticks to get this done. As a matter of fact, it is easier to see the smaller bushes when the rest of the trees and shrubs have dropped their leaves for the winter. More good news is that it is not a huge plant and easy to cut with hand tools.

When the weather cools we will be asking for your help with this project. Until then we ask that you review a list of invasive species and don't buy or plant them in your yard. There are many wonderful native plants that will suit your landscape just fine. Here's a link to TN Exotic Pest Council.

<http://www.tneppc.org/>

## **Have you renewed your membership for 2008?**

Is it time to renew your membership? If you signed up after the first of July last year, your membership is still current. Our memberships all expire at the end of each year. As a small group we did that to ease our record keeping. Following which seven or eight folks would see their membership expire in a given month and informing each of them individually would take time away from other project the board could be pursuing. Please take a moment to renew your membership for 2008.

*For more pictures visit our  
website at: [www.tnwrfriends.org](http://www.tnwrfriends.org)*

## FRIENDS FOR THE FUTURE CONFERENCE

By Ann Stapp

Recently a delegation from the Board of the Friends of the TN National Wildlife Refuge attended the National Friends for the Future Conference held in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Included were Dan Dziekonski, Connie McSwain, vice president, and Board members Laurien and Ann Stapp. The Tennessee Nat. Wildlife Refuge was represented by Ranger Joan Stevens. The conference was co-sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

The 3-day conference dealt with a future that will be quite different from anything we've known in the past. Seminars on a variety of subjects were offered, including Climate Change and the effects it is having on wildlife and the refuge system; Children in Nature - getting our kids off the couch and back into the outdoors; Land Conservation Tools and Techniques in this age of spreading urbanization; and a host of good, thought-provoking information geared to protecting and preserving our National Wildlife Refuge system, which is at the forefront of our nation's determination to protect our fish and wildlife resources. Our own Connie McSwain led a seminar dealing with local land use decisions and how to involve the local community. Our refuges provide not only a terrific opportunity for education, but are a wonderful resource for recreation for the entire family, offering opportunities such as hiking, hunting, fishing, birding, and even just a chance to get away from the hustle and bustle of the daily grind and spend a peaceful day in nature.

Friends groups across the nation are instrumental in helping to continue the functions of the refuges in preserving nature and wildlife habitat so that our kids and grandkids, and future generations, will be able to enjoy the things we all enjoyed as kids. Our Friends of the TN National Wildlife Group offers monthly programs of interest to families and individuals covering a variety of topics, including a program about how to identify the birds at your feeder, how to identify poisonous and non-poisonous snakes, duck banding, birding, and many other topics that are extremely interesting to adults as well as children.

In this age of continuing budget cuts, the Refuge System is struggling to receive continuing government support. In that vein, the delegates spent the final day in Washington, D.C., visiting with our Congressional Staff and presenting information and facts which will hopefully help in the battle for continued funding. The TN Refuge has a big impact on our local community through educational programs offered to both children and adults, the very necessary wildlife and habitat preservation, the financial benefits of increased tourism, hunting, & fishing, and the benefits of many other forms of recreation. Can you imagine what it would be like without the opportunities our refuge provides? We encourage you to tell others about membership in the Friends of the Refuge and ask them to join. The refuge needs the support of every citizen of our community to continue the very valuable services that are provided.

## Spotlight on the Staff



This month we highlight employee **Clayton Ferrell**, Wildlife Biologist. Clayton is stationed at the Duck River field office and conducts most of the biological field work along with assistance from various volunteers, interns, and summer seasonal students. His work includes managing the water levels in 22 impoundments, vegetations surveys of the wetlands, wood duck nest box checks, wood duck banding, shorebird surveys, invasive plant management, king rail surveys as well as a myriad of other duties.

Clayton received his Bachelor of Science Degree in 1988 from Longwood University in his home state of Virginia. He took additional courses at Murray State University while working at Cross Creeks NWR.

In 1988 he moved to Tennessee as a summer intern with the Student Conservation Association working on Cross Creeks NWR in Dover, TN. Soon after returning to Virginia he was hired by Cross Creeks NWR to band and collar migrant Canada geese as well as to read neck collars. He continued to work at Cross Creeks NWR for 4 years as a part-time paid employee, full time volunteer and a combination of the two, accumulating just under 5,000 volunteer hours. In the middle of his stint at Cross Creeks he also made one trip back home to work as a summer Forestry Technician for the Army Corps of Engineers. In the spring of 1992 he was hired by Tennessee NWR as a full time Range Technician stationed at the Duck River Unit field office. He was later promoted to Wildlife Biologist in 2004.

Check out the new Friends Website at:  
www.invertfriends.org

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Friends Of Tennessee  
National Wildlife Refuge  
Board Members

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Connie McSwain - Vice Pres.  
Margarette Blanton - Secretary  
Joe Snow - Treasurer  
Laurien and Ann Stapp  
George Jackey  
Kim and Vickie Miller

## Upcoming Events

### Refuge Discovery Series

#### **Sat. July 12 9:00AM: Insects and Butterflies**

Come and bring the family as Glen Lee teaches insect and butterfly identification at the Britton Ford area of the refuge. Participants will be collecting using several techniques. (*open to public*)

#### **Tues. July 29<sup>th</sup>: Wood Duck Banding**

Come eat a dutch treat supper then go to the refuge to help band wood ducks as biologist Clayton Ferrell explains about the refuge banding and wood duck program. This is a great activity for kids and grandchildren (*members only event*)

#### **Sat. August 23<sup>rd</sup> 9:00AM: Mussels and Aquatics**

TWRA Biologist Don Hubbs will take us into the water at Duck River to learn about mussels and aquatics. Put on some cutoffs and old sneakers and join us in learning about our underwater friends. This is a great activity for the kids. (*open to public*)