



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

Seen and Unseen On the Refuge

Things have been happening at a rapid rate on the refuge some in plain view and others behind the scenes. Some of it is “hands on work” taking place now and some of the rest is setting policy and guidance for the future.

Two years ago the refuge staff began the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the refuge. This is a broad outline of the refuge goals for the next fifteen years. To begin the process public meetings were held in Parsons, New Johnsonville and Paris to collect comments from refuge users and neighbors that stated their desires for the refuge. Public agencies like TVA and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency were also closely involved in the process. The draft was approved and a final 30 day comment period just closed.

The average user will see no major changes in refuge operations. The primary mission will remain migratory waterfowl conservation, and of course the Headquarters and Visitor Center is included in the plan with its exhibits and environmental education programs. Hiking, fishing, small game and deer and turkey hunting will continue on the refuge as they have for years.

The plan calls for reinstating the forester position to allow management of those forested lands to resume. We had a great program, a success confirmed by a five year UT study that was lost to budget cuts years ago. Other changes proposed include the collection of data on plants and animals that reside here. The foliage and seeds of these plants and small creatures, like newts and frogs, make up the food chain for the larger animals that we see day to day and we hope to track how they are faring.

This spring’s flooding caused closures on many areas of the refuge and washed out levees and control structures. Repairs are underway, as are projects on levees and pumps at Duck River that will allow better management of water in the impoundments there. The flooding and construction has required that sections of the refuge be closed during these times.

The flooding also changed the King Rail Study being conducted by the University of Tennessee to a project to monitor shore birds. For the third time in recent years flooding had left king rail habitat underwater. To make lemonade from lemons, the study was changed to monitor the creation of shore line habitat as the refuge pulled down the impoundments and how shore birds reacted to this habitat management.

I hope you were one of those that were able to join us as we put 11 canoes and 2 kayaks into the refuge waters for our recent Discovery Series program. If not, come out for exciting programs on mussels and aquatics, astronomy and Monarch Butterfly tagging in the coming months.

Dan Dziekonski
Friends President

Manager's Corner

By Richard Hines

Hello Refuge Friends,

I wanted to catch everyone up on the latest Cross Creeks news. Although I have met many of the Tennessee NWR Friends, I still may be new to some of you. So let me give you a brief background. For the past ten years, I served as the Refuge Biologist at White River NWR. My primary job on the 160,000-acre bottomland forest was not only managing waterfowl but also providing oversight on numerous research projects. I worked on projects ranging from waterfowl ecology to black bears; Mississippi and Swallow-tailed kites; Swainson's Warblers, and even Alligator Gar. After ten years, my wife and I felt it was time to get closer to our families who live in Kentucky and Tennessee and the job at Cross Creeks gave us this opportunity. Right now, Pam and I live in Woodlawn, a midpoint between Cross Creeks and her job at Lowes in Clarksville. We have two boys; Shawn (29) is in the U.S. Coast Guard stationed in St. Mary's GA with his wife Ashley and our 2-year-old granddaughter, Avery. Our youngest son; Josh (24) is still in Arkansas.

We have had a very successful year but also a very trying year at Cross Creeks. Since February 2009, we were able to replace water control structures at Pool 13, Pool 9, Pool 1, and have completed a new diversion canal between Elk and Pool 6 that will allow us to send water into Pool 6 for the first time. The bad news; May brought a major flood event that washed out roads, pipes, damaged levees, and deposited sand across most of the refuge. In many locations, the sand was in excess of 4 feet deep and because of this, we did not get everything accomplished that was on the plan. The first mission after the flood was to open refuge roads before Memorial Day weekend. This was accomplished when refuge equipment operators Dale Welker and Dale Norris worked tirelessly for over two weeks clearing over 10 miles of sand and debris.

On another positive note you will be surprised if you make a trip to Cross Creeks because things are beginning to look a little different. For the last two months, contractors have been working on sections of our roads and as you drive into our office around August 1, you will notice a new black top road and parking lot. There is also a nice new parking lot at the Woodpecker Trail and last summer contractors completed a new observation deck immediately behind the visitor center.

This past winter was an extraordinary year for waterfowl with Cross Creeks waterfowl numbers reaching 90,000+ on several days and in early January, this number exceeded 110,000 ducks, plus, over 17,000 Canada Geese. During this time, visitors were able to see some of these large numbers at Elk Reservoir and Pool 3. As Troy Littrell, previously said, we had the table set right and the amount of habitat including un-harvested corn, Japanese millet, and moist soil along with the correct timing of water did its job. At this time, we are preparing for the winter of 2010-11 by planting one of the largest millet crops in several years and if there is any positive news from the flood it helped stimulate a tremendous crop of moist soil plants like smartweed; a favorite of waterfowl.

This summer we have one STEP student, Kaleb Stratton and intern Josh Felkner, both of which will be seniors at UT-Martin this year. Our second intern; Amanda Whitley recently received a Masters degree in Aquatic Biology from Austin Peay. All three have accomplished a wide range of projects and they have taken a big load off the staff, allowing us to spend more time on repairs and habitat projects. One of their projects has been assisting Volunteer Mitz Bailey who has single-handedly picked up and erected many of the bluebird and wood duck boxes knocked down or washed away during the flood. Right now, they are overseeing the summer drawdown in several of our impoundments to create habitat for migratory shorebirds.

As you can tell things are busy at Cross Creeks and if you get a chance, we hope you will stop by, visit the refuge and check out some of our projects.

Richard Hines
Refuge Manager
Cross Creeks NWR

Birders Corner

By Richard Graves

The spring of 2010 has now passed and Mother Nature has performed another unique cycle. Spring is when a new generation of birds is born. It is a great time to watch the bird houses and feeders in the yard or other places. As I watch the various species of birds go through the annual process, starting with the courtship, then nest building, incubation, hatching and raising, I get amazed at their discipline and how the caring and rearing of the young is very close to the human family. Mix in the external elements of weather, predators and Human interference; luck and survival of the fittest come in to play as the young quickly grow to be adults.

This last spring was especially tough on birds nesting along Kentucky Lake and in our refuge which is adjacent to Kentucky Lake. Coincident with the nesting process was the disastrous flood. Kentucky Lake is a flood control lake and lake levels rose very quickly, more than 10' above summer pool. Our local population of ducks and geese were in various stages of nesting along the lake. My personal observation at our dock is that very few local Mallard, Wood Duck and Geese were successful in hatching their young. Only 2 liters of Geese were born, while there are at least another 12-15 pairs of adults swimming around with nothing to do. There were only 2 liters of Mallards and no Woodies, but plenty of adults were around. I have not confirmed whether the flood had a similar impact on the local water fowl population in the refuge. I did visit Cross Creek after the flood and only saw one liter of Woodies. The Mother Wood Duck and very new young were swimming in a pool out in an open field, a long way from any woods or bushes. I did not see any new born Wood Ducks in expected areas along the wooded shoreline.



A very devastating impact for me caused by the flood was with the Purple Martins. The Martins arrived and started the nesting process in the houses that I have attached to the walk way to the dock. At the peak of the Lake level rise, I could look down on the Purple Martin House while standing on the floating dock. The Martin Houses were about 1.5' above the water; Martins were still nesting there, (see picture above), despite the water level. A day later I visited the dock and checked on the Martins. One dead male was found and no Martins in sight... On looking around I saw a rope hanging from the ceiling on our dock. Further examination of this rope turned out to be a long snake that had hung itself in the bird netting we have in the dock ceiling. I am sure this snake cleaned out the Martin houses, something it could not have done under normal lake level conditions. Once the lake returned to near normal level, the Martins returned, and started over. The young are doing fine but will leave the houses later than normal.

The spring flood impacted the refuge in many ways - too many for this article and author to name. The King Rail project, an especially exciting program in documenting the behavior of King Rails in The Duck River Refuge, was canceled indefinitely, replaced with a survey of shorebird activity. Many acres of crop land used to raise food for the fall migratory birds were also flooded. Extra work and a secondary crop plan were established. Many of the refuge road ways had to be cleared and repaired. In closing, I would like to welcome Joe Casey back to our board. Joe is a friend, a fellow birder and, yes, takes very nice pictures of birds, as well as doing some very special wood carvings.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE STAFF

MICHAEL F. HECK



This time our spotlight is on Michael Heck, Engineering Equipment Operator based out of our office at Duck River. Mike graduated from William Junior Senior High School in Tioga, Pennsylvania in 1978 and enlisted in the U. S. Navy where he learned the operation of heavy equipment. On the refuge when there is heavy equipment needed, Mike is the man for the job.

He retired from the Navy as an Equipment Operator Chief Petty Officer in 1995. His deployments were primarily from Gulfport, MS and his tours of duty included NAS New Orleans, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 62, 74, 7, 4, Naval Construction Brigade Equipment Staff Caribbean Site REP, Amphibious Construction Battalion Two, and Naval Weapons Station in Yorktown, VA. He was also deployed to foreign countries in support of construction efforts with the Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force Facilities. His performed tasks in the following areas included blasting and quarry operations, asphalt plant operations and asphalt mat lay down, as well as numerous road building projects. He also performed Advanced Base Construction building of contingency airfield and ammo supply depot facilities. Mike was a participant in operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield.

Following his Navy career he worked supervising Asphalt Plants Operations for two different companies, as well as operating backhoes and track hoes for a city public works installing water and sewer systems. In 1998 he entered civil service for the U. S. Navy in Gulfport, MS. Following Hurricane Katrina he moved to Columbus, MS and worked as a Maintenance Mechanic for base housing at Columbus, MS for the U.S. Air Force. In 2007 Mike reported to work at the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an Engineering Equipment Operator for Tennessee National. He is married to Patricia and they have 5 sons: Christopher 28, Brandon 24, Matt 23, Nick, 22, Michael 18.

JUST A FRIENDLY REMINDER!

Many members have not yet paid their annual membership which became due January 1st. You can renew your membership by stopping by or mailing your checks to the Refuge Office. Your membership makes things like the Refuge Discovery Series possible. It helps with habitat enhancement and research projects, as well as providing teachers with environmental education grants for cooperative projects with the refuge and much more. We value your membership and hope you will renew! If you aren't sure if you're current...call Joan at 731-642-2091.

*Friends of
Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge*

Summer Wood Duck Banding

“Fun Festivity for All Ages”

***Tuesday, July 27, 2010
Duck River Bottoms
6:30-8:00 pm***

Must RSVP 731-642-2091



For Friends Members only of the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge

(New members can sign up at the event)

- 4:45 pm** * Carpool leaves from Paris headquarters
- 5:30 pm** * Meet at Country and Western Steakhouse
on Hwy 189 Extension in Camden
- 6:30 pm** Meet at parking lot on corner of Hwy
70 and Long St. in New Johnsonville
- 6:45-8:00 pm** Wood Duck Banding at Duck River Unit

*** Optional**

See reverse for more Information/Map

AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...
where wildlife comes first!



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Claude D. Falls Linda Fields
Glenn Lee

Donations

THANK YOU to Bob and Susan Smart of Wilmington, DE for their \$100 donation in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Owen of Waverly, TN on their 50th wedding anniversary.
And Congratulations Mr. and Mrs. Owen!

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

Friends of Tennessee
National Wildlife Refuge
3006 Dinkins Lane
Paris, TN 38242



**Friends Of Tennessee
National Wildlife Refuge
Board Members**

Dan Dziekonski - President
Connie McSwain - Vice Pres.
Vickie Miller - Secretary
Joyce North - Treasurer
Laurien and Ann Stapp
Rhonda Compton
Kim Miller
Joe Snow
Richard Graves
Ski Witzofsky
Joe Casey

Upcoming Events

Call the Refuge Office at 731-642-2091 for information about any of these events.

Tuesday, July 27th Annual Wood Duck Banding for Members Only

6:45 – 8PM at Duck River Bottoms See times and details on attached flyer... We usually catch several hundred ducks, so there are more than enough for you to get your hands on. This is a great activity for all ages. **New members can sign up at the event.**

Saturday, August 28th Aquatics and Mussels

10:00 am at Duck River Bottoms This activity, led by TWRA mussel biologist Don Hubbs is a favorite each year. If you have not done this one and you like a little adventure, consider it this year. After a short lesson about mussels, we will take a short hike to a mussel bed where you will get a little wet and muddy looking for mussels. You will need to wear a bathing suit or "getting wet" clothes. A towel and wading shoes are also recommended. Or you can sit on the levee and watch! This is great fun for kids and adults!

Saturday, Sept. 18th Members Picnic

5:00 pm at Britton Ford Trailhead Join us for good food and fun before the Astronomy program. All you'll need to bring is an appetite, your lawn chairs and some bug spray!

Saturday, Sept. 18th Astronomy and Star Gazing

8:00 pm at Swayne Point Led by Don Partain, Planetarium manager at LBL, this is the only night time activity for the year. Don and friends will bring their portable, but large telescopes to interpret the night sky. This activity will follow the Friends member cookout, in which you are all invited. What a great way to spend an evening with your family!

Saturday, Oct. 9th Monarch Tagging

10:00 am at Duck River Bottoms Join biologist Clayton Ferrell in the height of Monarch migration in the bottoms. He will explain these fascinating butterflies, their life cycle and migration patterns before turning you loose to see what you can catch with a net. Each butterfly will be recorded and tagged before release. He has done this program for school groups before and does an excellent job!