Happy August! The peak of the summer season is upon us. I hope all of you have had some time to get out and enjoy the beauty of nature that surrounds us. As you will read in Bob Walton’s “Backwater Birding with Bob’s” article, the start of the fall migration will be beginning soon. Hard to believe, isn’t it? It seems like summer just started. It will soon be time to say goodbye to some of our favorite summer visitors such as the Eastern Bluebirds, Indigo Buntings, Baltimore Orioles, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. It will be like saying goodbye to many old friends as they have provided many hours of entertainment and enjoyment this summer. We have a couple annual events coming up soon. Saturday, August 22nd is the 4th Annual Amazing Refuge Race. This year’s theme is “Pollinators”. Complete details can be found on page 10 of this newsletter. Please join us for a great morning, exploring various areas of the refuge. It is a fun family event, and a great way to connect with nature and your children or grandchildren. Speaking of children, you won’t want to miss “Kid’s Fishing Day”. This is also an annual event that is being held this year on Saturday, September 12th. Complete details and registration information is on page 11. In this issue you also will enjoy a great article by Refuge Manager Ed Britton. This month’s article is about one of everybody’s favorite insects, the Mayfly or to many of us locals, it is called the “Shadfly”. Every summer visitors along the Mississippi River are always amazed and shocked with the “Shadfly” emergence from the river. Ed’s article is on page 4. Also included this month is Anne Straight’s article on the Common Gallinule, some great photography tips from Connie Inskeep, and lots of wonderful photos that have been submitted from our Steward’s members. Until next time, enjoy your summer.

Formerly called the Common Moorhen, this duck-like bird is in the Rail family and is also called the Mud Hen by some. It has a black head and neck, red forehead and roundish bill with a yellow tip. The body is brownish-black with a white stripe on the side and some white under the tail. Common Gallinules can be found in freshwater marshes, ponds and other wetlands and brackish waters along the coast. It will walk on vegetation or land to feed on insects, seeds, other parts of plants and aquatic animals. It breeds year-round in coastal areas in the southern United States and south to South America. In the Midwest and northeastern United States it breeds in summer and migrates south for the winter. Common Gallinules are declining in the interior United States because of lack of habitat.
As we enter August it is hard to believe that summer is nearly over and the “fall” migration is already underway. Leading the parade of early migrants are the shorebirds that nested in the far north and are now making their return trip along the Mississippi, making short stopovers wherever suitable mudflat habitat exists. Shorebirds currently on the move include Godwits, Willets, Dowitchers, and Yellowlegs. After experiencing high water levels on the Mississippi for most of the summer, our river has quickly dropped to normal levels, leaving mudflats exposed along most of the backwaters and even the main river channel shoreline, making excellent feeding areas for these shorebirds. My favorite viewing areas in the Savanna District of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge are Spring Lake, Green Island, Pleasant Creek, and the Thomson Recreational Area.

Upon reviewing my field notes, I found that I have tallied a total of 232 species of birds since the first of the year. Notable species missing from my list, that I soon hope to observe, are Least and American Bitterns, American Avocet, Ruddy Turnstone, Virginia and King Rail, and over half a dozen warblers that managed to escape my detection as they quickly migrated through this spring. Besides great birding, a trip to the refuge in August will also catch the marsh and backwater vegetation in full color with blooming water lilies, lotus, marsh milkweed, and Joe-pye weed. With lots of bare soil areas exposed in most of the floodplain forests, it should be a banner year for cardinal flowers, one of my favorite backwater wildflowers. The Pleasant Creek Refuge can often be covered by hundreds of these bright red, flowering plants, which act as a major attraction for hummingbirds and butterflies, and paint the forest understory with color.

Sunrise is the best time to observe birds and other wildlife in our backwaters at this time of year. As dawn breaks, you will discover young waterfowl, Common Moorhens, Pied-bill Grebes and even a few Sandhill Cranes feeding in open pockets of water with a parent who will quickly lead them to thicker cover as the sun and temperature rise. On a recent trip to Green Island at 5:30 am, we saw a hen Wood Duck with 18 young and another Wood Duck with 4 young. Sunset is also a good time to visit the marsh and observe marsh birds, but unfortunately it also is a prime time for mosquitoes, so take plenty of repellent when you venture out.

I encourage everyone to visit their favorite Refuge this August and enjoy all the sights, sounds, and solitude these natural areas have to offer.

Coming attractions for August:
August 1-10: Shorebird migration is underway with Godwits, Willets, and Dowitchers in shallow muddy areas.

Don’t forget it is time to renew your membership!

Renewing Members
Cindy and Ethan Brown
Kim and Jim McLuckie
Marion Gieskecke
Elda Goodmiller
Georgia Parks
Dennis and Connie Zink

Backwater Birding with Bob

The monarch caterpillar is a voracious eater, capable of consuming an entire milkweed leaf in less than five minutes. They gain about 2700 times their original weight, and in the process, excrete an abundant quantity of “frass”.

Bob Walton - Zwingle, IA,

August 10-20: Orioles and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks will disappear from their backyard and upland forest habitats and they will congregate in the floodplains adjacent to water as they begin their southward journey.

August 20-30: The majority of shorebirds will be migrating. Yellowlegs, Sandpipers, and Plovers can be viewed in most marshes within the refuge. Warbler migration will be underway with around a dozen species in wetlands and floodplain forest. Mourning Dove migration will peak around the end of the month, and Blue-winged Teal will be arriving in good numbers.

Don’t forget it is time to renew your membership!
Saturday, July 11, 2015

At the Jr. Stewards July session, our planned canoe trip had to be canceled due to inclement weather. Our program’s director, Pam Steinhaus, had a backup plan: geocaching! Geocaching is like a treasure or scavenger hunt, which uses a GPS device, to receive coordinates or “waypoints” to locate caches. Biologists use GPS to track, study, and monitor wildlife, where and how they live, their habits and land usage, which better aids in conservation decisions. Jr. Steward members used GPS remotes and a list of clues to locate “caches” hidden around the grounds of Ingersoll Wetland’s Learning Center and the Prairie, which once found, were a series of activities or questions to be answered. Despite the rainy weather, we had a great time!

Wyatt Wollam, Fenton IL  4th grade
“Shadflies Are River Barometer” by Ed Britton

Shadflies are like old friends (perhaps unwanted friends) to those of us who live along the Mississippi River. Their emergence from the river depths may cause panic to unsuspecting visitors as swarms fly into people’s mouths, land on their clothes, crawl into hair and behind eyeglasses. Most folks are probably unaware they are an important barometer of a clean and healthy river system.

The shadfly, scientifically referred to as the mayfly, has an unusual life cycle that includes a long period of living underwater. They are sensitive to pollution and are a good biological indicator of water quality. Human encounters with the shadfly occur during the mating period that is called the honeymoon swarm. During this life event, they mate near freshwater, females drop their eggs into the water (eggs sink to the bottom), then the entire swarm dies within a few days.

Shadfly eggs hatch into nymphs that burrow into the river bottom and breathe through gills. The nymphs spend 1-2 years (depending on species) underwater feeding on algae and plankton and undergo several skin moults. They swim to the water surface and climb onto the shoreline to undergo another skin moult into an adult with wings. Often times, all of the shadflies in a population mature at once. These large swarms create an awesome but short-lived presence (only 2-3 days) and leave behind a foul fish stinch to remind us of their river origin.

Shadflies are an important food source in nature. Fish, especially catfish, bass and walleye, eat the nymphs and adults. Birds also eat the adults, especially when they begin to die and are readily available. There are over 600 species of shadflies in North America that live in freshwater systems. They are related to another ancient group of insects, the damselflies and dragonflies.

Shadfly swarms are an annoyance but they don’t sting or bite and don’t have mouth parts because they do not feed during their brief period out of water. The best action to prevent attracting shadflies if you don’t like their company is to turn off outdoor lights.

There were recent local massive swarms of shadflies on July 4th and 20th that forced a shutdown of the Savanna/Sabula highway bridge. Emergency crews used snow plows to remove the mounds of rotting carcasses that provided a greasy roadway surface and caused two motorcycle crashes.

There is a Mayfly Watch program that tracks the annual emergence of shadfly swarms along the Mississippi River. This information is used by biologists to determine annual fluctuations and abundance. If you are interested in more information about this program, see details at: www.usanpn.org/fws/user/register.

The short legacy left by the shadfly leaves a memorable impression on many river visitors. It is truly one of the important biological indicators of a healthy river system.
Anything can make a good subject for a photograph

When you are out visiting your local refuge, make sure to take your camera with you and look for things that will make an interesting photograph. It doesn’t always have to be animals or birds to be an interesting subject. When we go to our local parks, we usually photograph all of the birds and animals that we come across. However, I am always looking for something different that may catch my eye. Everything is fair game. I will photograph buildings, bridges, signs, vegetation, reflections, the sky, and anything else that moves (or doesn’t). We are very fortunate that we have wild places that are set aside simply for us to enjoy. They are lush, green places that are maintained and preserved so our children and our children’s children will have access to them for many years to come. Get outdoors and enjoy your local parks and refuges and don’t forget your camera. You never know what you may see.
“Sightings Around the Refuge”

Eastern Meadowlark by Jr. Steward Ethan Brown

Male Eastern Bluebird by Michael Fitzgerald

Male Eastern Pondhawk by Michael Fitzgerald

Green Heron by Judd Stanislawski

Sandhill Cranes by Debbie Cram

Common Nighthawk by Connie Zink
“More Sightings Around the Refuge”

Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Michael Fitzgerald

Sandhill Cranes by Debbie Cram

Swallowtail Butterfly by Jr. Steward Ethan Brown

Song Sparrow by Connie Zink

Mayflies/Shadflies by Judd Stanislawski

American White Pelican by Andrew Elgin
“Even More Sightings Around the Refuge”

Painted Turtles by Wade and Connie Inskeep

Cedar Waxwing by Michael Fitzgerald

Sandhill Cranes by Debbie Cram

Pied-billed Grebe by Wade and Connie Inskeep

Pileated Woodpecker by Jr. Steward by Ethan Brown
Schedule of Events

Thursday, August 6th, “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am
Saturday, August 8th “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00 am– 11:00 am (Meet at Ingersoll Center)
Saturday, August 15th, “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am
Sunday, August 16th “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:45)
Thursday, August 20th, “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am
Friday, August 21st, Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00 am - 1:30 pm
Saturday, August 22nd, “Amazing Refuge Race” 9:00am - 1:00pm
Thursday, September 3rd, “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am
Saturday, September 12th, “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00 am– 11:00 am (Meet at Ingersoll Center)
Saturday, September 12th, “Kid’s Fishing Day” 9:00am – 12:00pm
Thursday, September 17th “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am
Thursday, September 17th “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 12:30pm – 4:30pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:15)
Friday, September 18th, Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00 am - 1:30 pm
Saturday, September 19th, “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am

Please Note Date and Time Changes for Lost Mound Unit Tours.
All events are free and open to the public but registration is required. Please call 815-273-2732 or email stewardsumrr@gmail.com

Check out our Website:
www.stewardsumrr.org

Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

815-273-2732
Primary Business Address stewardsumrr@gmail.com

Membership Categories

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Mail completed form to SUMRR:
7071 Riverview Rd
Thomson, IL 61285
www.stewardsumrr.org

Membership Form

Name
Address
City
State
Zip
Phone
Email

All members receive a 10% discount at the Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center Book Store.

Make a difference and join today.
4th Annual

THE AMAZING

REFUGE RACE

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge
Saturday, August 22

Armed with GPS units, teams, will “race” by attempting to complete a series of challenges located on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Teams will be given a set of coordinates for a specific location which they will find using a handheld GPS unit. Once at that location, teams must work together to complete a task. When that task is successfully completed, teams will receive the next set of coordinates for the next location. Those who finish all tasks and arrive at the finish first, win!

Sound like fun? You may bring your own GPS unit or borrow one for the day. The event will begin at the Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center located at 7071 Riverview Rd, Thomson, IL 61285. Prior to the race, we will hold an introductory GPS course at 9:00 a.m. to learn how to use the unit. The race will then begin at 10:00 a.m. and conclude around 1 pm.

Registration is required for the race! A team is comprised of a minimum of 2 people and a maximum of 6. Teams will be driving and walking to get to their designations. Fun for all ages.

Registration deadline is August 20th. Call 815-273-2732 ext. 116 or email pam_steinhaus@fws.gov to register or receive more information. There is no cost to enter and is open to all ages.
Get Hooked on Fishing

September 12th, 2015
9 am to 12 pm

Who: Local area youth, ages 5-12 can preregister by calling the Upper Mississippi River NW&FR Office at 815-273-2732. Children 6 and under must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Where: Frog Pond (located 1.5 miles south of Savanna on Hwy 84) (Look for the banner along the road)

What to bring: fishing pole (if you want to use your own) and enthusiasm.

The Refuge will provide poles, bait, lessons and some good ole fishin' fun! (Listen to WCCI FM 100.3 for cancellation notice)

Registration ends September 10th at 4pm

Space is limited, Please call and register your child. (815) 273-2732.

There will be a "shore lunch" hot dog cookout for all participants!

Websites:
www.fws.gov/refuge/Upper_Mississippi_River
www.Stewardsumrr.org