

Winter 2021



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



The Pelican Scoop

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Message from the President - Winter 2021

May the New Year find everyone in good health and filled with a desire to be outdoors and enjoy the winter beauty and wildlife. The year 2020 was certainly a challenging year for everyone with the dangers of the Covid 19 outbreak severely limiting social contact and most public programs offered by conservation agencies.



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia.

Membership Dues are due by April 1, 2021. If you are listed below, 2020 dues have been applied to 2021.

New Members

Marc Scher
Joanne Perez
Angela Mosely
Mark and Paula Thoele

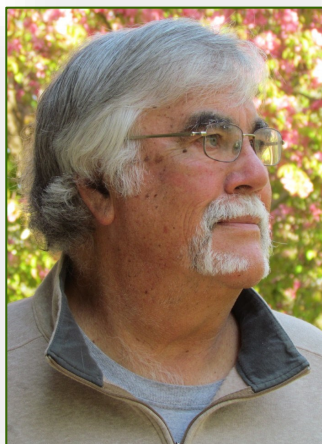
Renewal Members

Mary Blackmore

Sandy and I did experience a few bright spots during the pandemic dominated year of 2020. Having to “shelter in place” gave us the opportunity to enjoy our 20 acre, Otter Creek homeland. During short daily walks, we discovered new wildflowers and mushrooms and had a yearly property high of 150 species of birds. Our bird feeders have garnished a lot of attention from hungry birds this winter. We have been amazed at the beauty of as many as 20 male Cardinals in the frosty bushes and on the snowy ground around the feeders. Our most unusual bird feeding station is the rib cage from a deer that Sandy harvested during the muzzleloader season. I hung it in the crotch of a crabapple tree about 30 feet from our kitchen window. It immediately attracted Red-bellied, Downy, and Hairy Woodpeckers, and within minutes there were Cardinals, Chickadees, Bluejays, and even a Pileated Woodpecker feeding on the meat scraps and suet left on the ribs, but the biggest thrill came two evenings later when a large bobcat discovered the carcass and pulled it to the ground for an easy meal! Another bright spot has been the volume of people utilizing the local public recreation areas. Even on weekdays, the parks and preserves in Dubuque and Jackson County have recorded record numbers of visitors. People are discovering the hiking trails, and the fishing and birding opportunities close to home where they can safely socially distance while enjoying the great outdoors.

Meet the Executive Board

President Bob Walton of Zwingle, IA



Graduate of Iowa State University with a Bachelor of Science in Fishery and Wildlife Biology and a minor in Education. Also, received law enforcement certification from the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy

Bob spent 33 years working for the Dubuque County Conservation Board (12 years as a naturalist and 21 years as the executive director)

He is now happily retired and enjoying being a part of the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi Refuge, as well as the Dubuque Audubon Society, Dubuque Land Pheasants Forever, Friends of the Dubuque County Conservation Board, Friends of the Jackson County Conservation Board, the Dubuque County Conservation Society, and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.



Vice President Larry Thoren of Mount Carroll, IL

Larry Thoren, an Illinois native, is the current Vice President of the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge. Thoren joined the Stewards in 2013 after retiring from 43 years in public service. Larry and his wife, Bonnie, partner with Bob and Sandy Walton in conducting bi-weekly Bald Eagle Counts along with a woodpecker study at the Lost Mound Unit (the former US Army Depot) north of Savanna, Illinois. The Thorens also are involved in rescuing injured/sick Bald Eagles and other Raptors and transporting them to Hoo Haven in Durand.



Meet the Executive Board - Continued



Secretary Anne Swan-Johnson of Savanna, IL

Anne became a Stewards member in 2014. A local artist who has showcased her work at the Palisades Member Show and also at Clinton Community Colleges gallery. She enjoys bird watching, attending Stewards meetings and events, and also experiencing new things. Learning is another passion, especially when it comes to the many variations of art this world has to offer. from painting, to throwing pottery to writing poetry.



Treasurer Cindy Brown of Savanna, IL

My name is Cindy Brown. I am married to Bob Brown, who you may know from Manny's Pizza and I have an amazing son named Ethan. I have been involved with the Stewards since 2013 when my son joined the Jr Steward's program. It was such a fantastic program that I decided to do some fundraising and the rest is history as they say. This will be my 6th year as the director of ticket sales for our fundraiser as part of the Northwest Illinois Daily Drawing.

Before becoming Ethan's mom I spent over 20 years in the restaurant business, was the owner of TC's Cove in Apple Canyon Lake, the Lonesome Dove north of Savanna, and then was general manager for 6 years at the Riverside Supper Club (the old Black Angus) until it was sold in 2005.

In 2006 I became a stay-at-home, homeschooling mom and have loved every minute of it. I use a very hands on approach to learning so when Ethan is interested, we research then "go and do". Lucky for me most of his interests are in the science and nature field and through the years I have acquired several new hobbies. Thanks to my son I am now an avid birder and we have seen 293 species together. We participate in the Carroll County Spring Bird Count, the Lost Mound Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count. We take part in the JDCF Butterfly Surveys at the Wapello Land & Water Reserve near Hanover and before COVID would spend our fall weekends volunteering at the Sand Bluff Bird Banding Station near Shirland, IL. In the summer my kitchen counters are lined with milkweed and caterpillars because we raise and release Monarch Butterflies (our record is 122) and at night my backyard has white sheets lit up with bright lights to attract moths and insects to identify. I am a very lucky mom.



Refuge Update—January 2021



Ed Britton

Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Projects (HREP): We currently have five HREP projects ongoing that are funded under the Corps of Engineers Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program. This program receives \$33M in annual funding that is shared between the St. Louis, Rock Island and St. Paul Districts of the Army Corps of Engineers. Our HREP projects include: Stone Lake – Pool 12 (\$3M nearing completion); Beaver Island – Pool 14 (\$13.6M: 2/3 completed); Steamboat Island – Pool 14 (advanced planning stage: estimated \$30M); Lower Pool 13 (intermediate planning stage; estimated \$25M); Pool 12 Flood Forest (preliminary planning).

Upcoming Staff Retirements: Lost Mound Site Manager Alan Anderson is retiring March 27. Maintenance Mechanic Bill Davison is retiring July 3.

COVID: The closure restrictions for the Visitor Center will extend for several more months. At this time, there is no date set for re-opening our office to the public.

Spring Lake Levee Rehab: We have completed the placement of 23,000 tons of RR5 riprap on the west levee of Spring Lake. Maintenance Mechanic Bill Davison did an excellent job in placement of this large rock along 1.5 miles of levee. We have re-opened Spring Lake to public access. We are waiting on the tree cutting contractor to return and complete the removal of 400+ trees and limbs.

Visitor Survey Results: The National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Survey is a Refuge-System-wide effort to monitor visitor characteristics, experiences and satisfaction with their refuge experiences, as well as visitor economic contributions to local communities. The survey is a collaboration between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ohio State University and American Conservation Experience and conducted on a rotating basis every five years on wildlife refuges that have at least 50,000 visits per year. In 2019, the National Visitor Survey Team conducted two sampling periods of 14 days each at Savanna District. A total of 219 visitors agreed to participate in the survey. Only 110 visitors completed the survey online (40%) or by mail (60%) after their refuge visit, resulting in a 54% response rate. The report is very detailed and available upon request. Here is some of the basic information reported: ethnicity 94% White, 4% Hispanic; 31% high school degree or less, 51% at least some college, 19% advanced degree; median household income range was \$75,000-\$99,000; average group size of 2 people; 24% visited the refuge alone; 61% visited with a combination of at least 1 adult and 1 child; local visitors (less than 50 miles) made up 72% and non-locals 28%; 82% of locals and 77% of non-locals reported refuge was primary purpose of trip; modes of transportation to access refuge 23% foot, 31% boat, 10% bicycle, 36% vehicle; top 3 recreational activities were hunting 34%, fishing 31%, bicycling 14%.

Bald Eagle Trio Webcam: The trio webcam is once again streaming on YouTube thanks to Stan Bousson, Larry Thoren, Nate Williams and Pam Steinhaus. One of the cameras from the old nest was retrieved and repaired, then placed on the old nest tree trunk but focused on the new nest. The camera doesn't show the nest cup but you can see when the eagles are at the nest. Hopefully, this new nest site is successful and in fall 2021, cameras can be placed above the nest for a more intimate view of the nest cup.

“Other Birds of Interest” - Larry Thoren



Our survey team consists of Bob & Sandy Walton and Larry & Bonnie Thoren. Lost Mound is a unique and special place that offers habitat and refuge to many species. Consequently, beginning in 2017 we began logging our sightings of unique birds.



The Loggerhead and Northern Shrikes are unique hunters as they impale their prey on thorns, barbed wire or other sharp projectiles. The Northern is our winter visitor with 21 sightings during the past two years. We assisted with a study of Loggerhead Shrikes, which is a summer visitor. One Loggerhead was banded in 2017 and returned to Lost Mound in 2018. We have had 68 Loggerhead sightings.

The Northern Mockingbird (99 sightings) is fun to watch as it flies among the Cedar Trees imitating the call of other birds.

Cuckoos are frequently seen within the wooded areas of the refuge. We have sighted the Black-billed Cuckoo ten times and the Yellow-billed eight.



The Henslow's Sparrow is listed as threatened or endangered.

This sparrow has been spotted 47 times and is an occupant of the prairies. Its call sounds like “*se-lick*” and likes the aromatic sumac. After a controlled burn, the Henslow will avoid that field for a couple of years.

During the two years we had 8 sightings of the Blue Grosbeak, five sightings of the Townsend's Solitaire, and two sightings of a Bohemian Waxwing.

We have also observed of a Green Heron, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager, Yellow-breasted Chat, Common Loon, and a Partridge. We also saw a Mink and a River Otter.

It should be noted the audio recordings as well as video and commercial photography are not permitted on refuge property.



Green Scene—Climate Change is a Four Letter Word

Record freezing conditions accompanied by endless snow fall events during these past two months have challenged our belief that Mother Nature is a kind soul. The hurricane force winds of derecho in August 2020 and the record flooding of the Mississippi River in 2019 are other recent extreme weather events that provide a clue of what we can expect in the future.



Ed Britton

People interpret climate change differently. It has been ongoing for eons and is simply the gradual changing of Earth's climate. Scientists have pieced together a picture of Earth's climate dating back millions of years. These studies have shown there were periods of climate stability and periods of rapid change. What's important for us locally is the question of what is the current trend? It's hard to imagine the glacial periods when ice covered significant portions of the Earth. The last glacier retreated from our area about 10,000 years ago. Upon thawing, an ice jam blocked the historic easterly flow of the Mississippi River near Albany and diverted it south to the Quad Cities. The historic Mississippi River path is now the Illinois River.

We recognize catastrophic weather events that directly affect us. The 2020 derecho toppled thousands of trees in our area and caused millions of dollars in damage to homes and buildings. The 2019 flooding on the Mississippi River killed tens of thousands of trees within the floodplain, adversely impacted many of the wetland natural resources and caused millions of dollars in damage to local communities. We are experiencing extreme weather patterns on a regular basis that affects us as a river community. The Mississippi River is one of our greatest natural resources. It supports two national scenic byways, is a nationally important navigation route, is a nationally important recreation area and is a national wildlife refuge. All of these attributes are impacted in some way. Flooding and sedimentation are major concerns in our area. The direct impacts of flooding are usually of short duration and are obvious. These include property damage and personal injury but also strong river currents that affect recreation and navigation.

The indirect impacts of flooding and higher water levels for extended periods are long term and not so obvious. The deposition of sediment in our backwaters is slowly filling in these once deep channels. In past years of normal water levels, we would accumulate less than one inch of sediment per year. During flood years, which are occurring more often, there may be several inches of sediment deposition each year. The backwaters are quickly filling in and growing land. We are challenged to understand and predict the uncertainties related to how climate change will affect us in the future. The protection of communities and the rich natural resources that support these communities will need a landscape scale plan for climate adaptation.

Last August's derecho toppled our local bald eagle trio's nest and the spying webcam that was enjoyed by thousands of armchair binge watching eagle enthusiasts. The trio quickly built a new nest in the same neighborhood that allowed a repositioning of the webcam but at a much greater distance. Recent observations of behavior at the nest indicated that the first egg was laid on February 15 and incubation is underway. We are hoping for another successful year for our world famous bald eagle trio.

Ed Britton is a wildlife refuge manager on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and volunteer at Bickelhaupt Arboretum.

Trio Nest Update—by Larry & Bonnie Thoren



The trio nest was destroyed by the derecho in August of 2020. None of the Eagles were on or near the nest at the time the tree limbs broke causing it to crash onto the shoreline. Fortunately, we were able to recover one of the cameras. The camera did need some repair.

The trio began rebuilding across the water to the east of the old nest and a little closer to the road. All three appeared healthy as they worked, cooperatively in building the new nest. The nest is in a dead tree which does not allow for the placement of a camera. Crossing another body of water with cables would present another dilemma.

During November we were able to mount the repaired camera on the trunk of the previous nest tree. We were able to focus on the new nest across the water. The video provides us an opportunity to view the Eagles as they come and go as well as work and eat on the nest. We will not be able to see inside of the nest. One will not see any eggs or eaglets until such time as they are bigger.

This is the best that the Stewards can do at this time. We will continue to evaluate the Eagle Cam Project. Our future progress depends on the Eagles, their nest and the stability of the tree. You can access the video via the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge website: stewardsumrr.org and clicking on the webcams tab. Our website also provides a history of the Eagles.

Please check Calendar of Events on the Website for new and upcoming events.

All events are free and open to the public but registration is required. Please call 815-273-2732 or email stewardsumrr@gmail.com



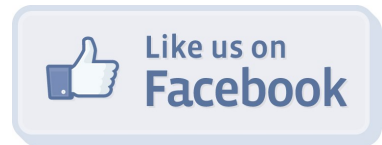
Photos by:
Ethan Brown,
Junior Steward



**Stewards of the
Upper Mississippi River Refuge**

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Check out our Website:
www.stewardsumrr.org

Membership Form

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email: _____

Membership Categories

- Blazing Star (Student) \$5
- Yellow-headed Blackbird (Individual) \$10
- Ornate Box Turtle (Family) \$20
- Sandhill Crane (Supporter) \$100
- Osprey (Corporate) \$250
- Bald Eagle (Lifetime) \$1,000

Mail completed form to SUMRR:

7071 Riverview Rd
Thomson, IL 61285
www.stewardsumrr.org



Make a difference and
Join today.