



Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative Newsletter

Working together to conserve bird populations and their habitats

Editor's Note Year of the Bird 100 Years of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act

by Allison Vaughn

Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative Chair

In early January, as I settled into bed on a cold night, I brought in the day's mail which included the latest edition of the National Audubon Society's magazine, *Audubon*. Known for its stunning photography and provocative articles, the magazine always includes incredible bird and landscape photos, and insightful articles and general bird conservation news. The cover of the magazine proclaimed "Year of the Bird: 100 Years of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act." I had previously read Jonathan Franzen's great article, *Why Birds Matter*, in *National Geographic* as they announced 2018 as the Year of the Bird. Franzen's article highlighted his passion and dedication to worldwide bird conservation. As a huge fan of his fiction and non-fiction, especially his book on growing up in and returning to Webster Groves, I felt an even closer kinship with him as I read more about his passion for birding and his efforts to support the conservation movement. Franzen's novel, *Freedom*, for example, focused on his protagonist's drive to protect the Cerulean Warbler with the dust

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jacket featuring a lovely illustration of this charismatic songbird.

But the focus of these and other January periodicals that stacked up on my reading table explained this monumental partnership between National Geographic, BirdLife International, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the Audubon Society to highlight the importance of and threats to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. In 2016, the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative hosted a confer-

ence celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty, one that the U.S. Congress codified with Canada in response to the impending extinction of multiple species that were being hunted for the millinery trade and for sport. In 1918, this treaty became the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, one that is among the oldest wildlife protection laws in the country. This pivotal piece of legislation that was spearheaded by the Audubon Society and the federal government has saved birds like Sandhill Cranes and Wood Ducks from extirpation. It saves bird lives and provides a measure of protection for all wild bird species. While we no longer have a thriving millinery trade that harvests Snowy Egrets, and with hunting regulations in place for measured bird takes, birds still face threats in the modern world. These threats range from overarching concepts like climate change, to feral cat infestation, industrialization, the interruption of natural ecological processes, fragmentation and the political climate.

This year's newsletter highlights some of the great actions Missourians are taking to protect birds in the state. We also feature an update on some of our MoBCI grant recipient projects with a photo essay, and highlights of the year from Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary.

If you haven't done so already, sign up for the annual MoBCI conference to be held August 24–25 with an optional birding field trip hosted by the Columbia Audubon Society at Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area on Sunday morning, August 26.

Happy Birding! 🐦



Photo by Allison J. Vaughn

Sandhill Cranes are among the many bird species threatened at the beginning of the century with local extirpation. With the enactment of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, their numbers have rebounded. Here, two Sandhill Cranes feed on a marsh edge in Baraboo, Wisconsin during fall migration.



Trumpeter Swans are North America's largest waterfowl with males weighing over 25lbs and a wingspan over 6.5 feet. Although once near extinction largely due to widespread uncontrolled market hunting in the 1800's, the interior population of Trumpeter Swans has rebounded largely due to both protection from hunting and conservation of habitats as well as Midwestern state reintroduction projects. Like this pair, many of the overwintering Trumpeter Swans at RMBS can be found on Heron Pond.

Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary

Meeting the habitat needs of birds on the Mississippi Flyway

by Jean Favara

Conservation Manager, Audubon Center at Riverlands



Audubon

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) turns 100 this year, and Audubon, along with other partnering organizations, is highlighting this milestone by celebrating the Year of the Bird. The Year of the Bird provides multiple opportunities to connect people to birds and their habitats, celebrate the many bird conservation successes, and reexamine the remaining conservation challenges. One success is the current understanding that birds are best protected when all their habitat needs are considered. Conservation science is now focusing on understanding how the entire year of a bird's life (migration, breeding, overwintering) impacts survival and can determine if a species will ultimately flourish or fail.

Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary (RMBS) provides food and shelter for over

325 migratory bird species and is designated as a Globally Important Bird Area (IBA). RMBS provides a mosaic of habitats throughout the 3,700 acre refuge including wet and dry prairies, marshes, mudflats, sand prairies and open water. These habitats helped support approximately 60 species of migratory water birds in 2017–2018 including Northern Pintail, Blue and Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Ducks, Common, Red-breasted, and Hooded Mergansers, Lesser and Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Canvasback, Snow Geese, White-fronted Geese, and American White Pelicans — just to name a few! The mudflats host shorebirds such as Great and Lesser Yellowlegs, American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts and multiple sandpiper species. Virginia and Sora Rails also migrate through the

refuge. And, of course, RMBS remains one of the most popular places to view both resident and overwintering Bald Eagles.

RMBS currently serves as one of the most important overwintering habitats for the interior population of Trumpeter Swans. This charismatic species is America's largest waterfowl and is an example of a conservation success story. The species was thought to be extinct by the late 1800's, largely due to market hunting. Remnant non-migratory populations were discovered in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming in the early 1900's. These populations then led to the establishment of Red Rock National Wildlife Refuge in 1935 specifically to foster the recovery of the species in the Rocky Mountain region. Forty Trumpeter Swans from Red Rock NWR seeded the effort to reestablish populations in the

Midwest. After the discovery of a thriving population of Trumpeter Swans in Alaska, states including Wisconsin and Michigan worked to establish their own breeding populations in the late 1980's by harvesting eggs from Alaskan nests and raising the young for release. These recovery programs have been largely successful and the interior population of Trumpeter Swans was estimated at 27,055 in 2015 ("2015 North American Trumpeter Swan Survey," compiled by Deborah J. Groves, USFWS, March 2017).

Overwintering Trumpeter and Tundra Swan numbers at RMBS are tracked by Trumpeter Swan Watch, a project started in 2011 that utilizes volunteer community scientists drawn from St. Louis Audubon Society and local Master Naturalist groups. Exceptional birder Pat Lueders organizes and leads volunteers

Virginia Rails belong to the secretive marshbird family and are often difficult to see as they spend most of their time well hidden in the vegetation of marshes. Rails such as Virginia Rails and Sora Rails migrate through the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary (RMBS). This Virginia Rail was with a group found in the Heron Pond area of the sanctuary this spring.




Photo by Fred Hennig

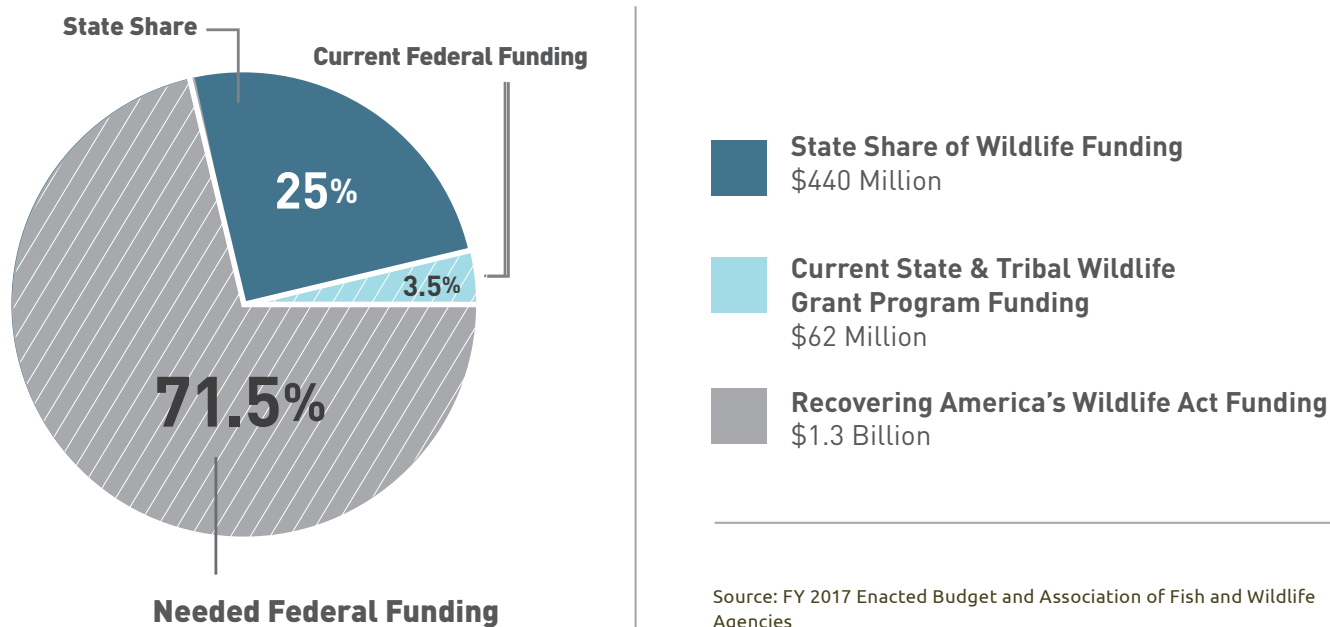


Trumpeter Swans rely on open-water habitat found at RMBS for shelter and food during winter. Trumpeters begin arriving at the sanctuary by late October and winter on the sanctuary through the end of January or early February. They are most easily seen in the early mornings before leaving to forage in areas surrounding the sanctuary, and when returning to the safety of open water in the evenings. Peak numbers of swans on the sanctuary often occur around Christmas or the New Year. In 2018, Trumpeter Swan Watch volunteers counted 1377 swans on January 2nd, the highest numbers counted on the sanctuary to date.

in this effort. They count both Trumpeter and Tundra swans on the refuge bi-weekly starting in November and continuing through the end of January. The volunteers record numbers of cygnets and adults and also any visible band information. Cumulative numbers of overwintering swans are increasing steadily from 2012 (~1400) to 2015 (~2800). Percentage of cygnets ranged between 13–20% during the same time period. Our peak swan counts generally occur in late December or early January. On December 20, 2017, our peak count tallied 1,022 swans. Our highest count occurred on January 2, 2018 with a total of 1,377 swans! Volunteers have identified 88 collared Trumpeter Swans over the last six seasons. To date, all of the collared swans are from Wisconsin,

and the oldest collared swan identified at RMBS was banded in Wisconsin in 2003. The banded Trumpeter Swans provide important information on where the reintroduced swan populations are spending their winters.

Trumpeter Swans at RMBS are part of a larger story of the importance of habitat in providing the food and shelter needed to insure that swans, and all birds, thrive throughout their life cycle. The Year of the Bird celebrates the many ways birds touch our lives. The future of birds depends on our ability to protect, conserve, and appropriately manage habitats like RMBS that support birds' needs throughout all the seasons of their life history. 



The Recovering America's Wildlife Act

Adapted from materials courtesy of the **Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife**

Today, we are facing an historic fish and wildlife conservation challenge that could alter future Americans' opportunities to benefit from these resources; a fundamental enhancement in how we finance conservation is needed.


Introduced by Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (NE-1) and Rep. Debbie Dingell (MI-12), the bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act establishes a 21st Century funding model for the proactive conservation of fish and wildlife. This legislation redirects \$1.3 billion in existing revenue annually from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to be dedicated to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program to conserve a full array of fish and wildlife.

As more species become threatened or endangered, all Americans will be saddled with the high cost of recovery, businesses will face greater regulatory uncertainty and important benefits like pollination, water filtration and recreation will be reduced.

Congress requires states and territories to develop a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) —

a proactive, comprehensive conservation strategy which examines health and recommends actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and costly to protect. SWAPs identify the more than 12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) whose conservation status warrants increased management attention and funding, as well as consideration in conservation, land use, and development planning, as well as reducing the need for future listings under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act ensures a modern solution to how we finance fish and wildlife conservation. This new funding model would provide states, those with the wildlife management authority and a proven track record of success, with resources to implement plans that are designed to conserve all species of fish and wildlife.


A lot is at stake if we don't act now. Our quality of life, outdoor heritage and prosperity are tied to the health and sustainability of our fish and wildlife. 

Bird from S.E. Coast Visits Swan Lake Refuge

by Myrna Carlton

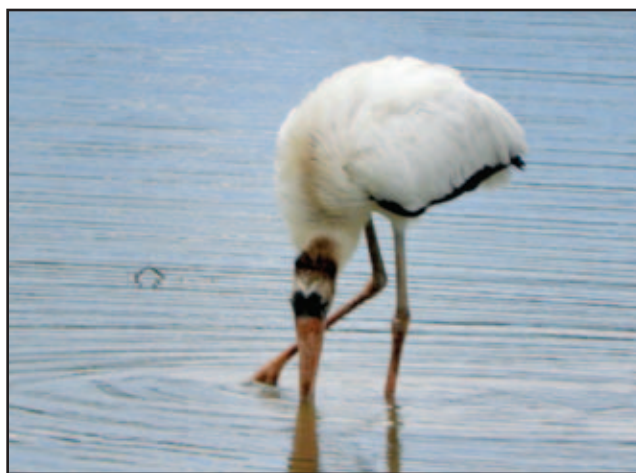
Grand River Audubon Society chapter (Chillicothe, MO)

If you were along the coast of Florida or Georgia and saw a large, white, rather ugly, wading bird with a grayish head and strange beak searching the water for food you wouldn't be surprised that you were seeing a Wood Stork. But if you were 70 miles from the Iowa line at Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Chariton County Missouri, and saw such a bird, you would be! That is just what happened to Ron Conner, volunteer work camper at the Refuge, on Thursday, July 26, as he drove by the Swan Lake outlet to south pool. This is only the second time Wood Storks have been recorded at the Refuge, which was established in 1937. The first record was on July 10, 2012, when Steve Kinder, Grand River Audubon member from Chillicothe, saw four at the northwest corner of the Swan Lake marsh.

As of Sunday, July 29, one of the Wood Storks was still there, actually feeding in the same area as Thursday. This is the time of the year when unusual birds may make an appearance in our area as young leave the nest and strike out on their own and sometimes end up in strange places. It's just a short trip to Swan Lake if you are interested in looking for this unusual Missouri visitor. 



Photos by Paul McKenzie



MoBCI Assists with Pilot Project Designed to Marry Agriculture, Wildlife and Alternative Energy



by Connor Woods

Conservation Coordinator, Roeslein Alternative Energy

Back in mid-May, an unprecedented gathering of business, agriculture, grazing, conservation, and government change-agents helped launch a market-based approach to reduce soil erosion and nutrient run-off on endangered landscapes. The Grand River conference was organized by St. Louis-based Roeslein Alternative Energy (RAE) and hosted by Smithfield Foods at its regional office in Princeton, Missouri. The Grand River Conference pilot project seeks to improve a watershed that contributes heavily to the expanding Gulf of Mexico ‘hypoxia zone’ and establish a model that can be implemented across the Mississippi River Basin. The ultimate goal is to affect 30 million acres in 30 years. Approximately 200,000 acres are being strategically selected to implement alternative land use practices that will improve the Grand River’s quality. A video report summarizing the conference is available at <http://roesleinalternativeenergy.com/grand-river-watershed/>

RAE is engaged in a large project to capture methane from hog manure at Smithfield’s nine northern Missouri farms and convert it to renewable natural gas using anaerobic digestion systems. “Through this initiative, multiple partners are coming together to improve the local landscape and waterways,” said Rudi Roeslein, President and Founder of Roeslein Alternative Energy. “Together, we’re creating a pathway that works — a market-based solution around nutrient



Roeslein Alternative Energy president and founder Rudi Roeslein at the Ruckman Farm pilot project.

losses, water quality, and clean air. I want to give farmers the opportunity to be in the energy market, a market that helps assure that we have clean water and healthy soil for our future generations, and habitat for wildlife,” explains Roeslein. “I didn’t invest \$50 million in this project because I needed to make more money. My real goal at this point in my life is to build habitat for wildlife and keep our water and air clean. Those are my altruistic goals, but I’m pragmatic enough to understand that if it doesn’t make money, other people aren’t going to do it.”

The Environmental Protection Agency has identified 8,200 potential anaerobic systems on swine operations in the U.S., says Roeslein. “Smithfield is the largest producer of pork in the world. My hope is to demonstrate success with them, and have other farmers take notice and want to try it as well. My goal is to have it sized to the point where it has application to many farms.


The Germans have more than 9,000 aerobic digestion systems and 25% of their energy is now produced through various renewable ways. It is possible,” Roeslein says.

During the 2017 and 2018 funding cycle, the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative (MoBCI) was directly involved with funding the initial pilot work at Smithfield’s Ruckman Farm. RAE converted a strategic 140 acre portion of a 200 acre project area of Ruckman Farm fields to native warm season grass and forb (NWSG) mixtures to validate a more sustainable, ecological, and economical option for utilizing marginal working lands. The project area will incorporate animal waste and varying mixtures of NWSG into anaerobic digestion systems creating marketable energy products while at the same time providing suitable wildlife habitat and ecological service benefits.

RAE is currently implementing monitoring activities in collaboration with Iowa State University (ISU) to capture baseline data to quantify benefits expected from this project. Proposed baseline data to be monitored include success of NWSG establishment, plant community composition (species, percent cover, and above ground biomass through

quadrat sampling), insect pollinators (occupancy and relative abundance through bee bowls), birds (occupancy and density through point counts and ARUs), and reptiles/amphibians (occupancy through cover boards).

Monitoring is vital to the expansion of these efforts beyond this initial 200 acres. The outcomes of this project will be pivotal in driving the future direction of our company and our ability to achieve our 30-30 vision. We will produce an accurate cost / benefit analysis, successfully implement management practices, and provide insight into opportunities for improvement.

Along with the Ruckman project, RAE is advancing their prairie restoration efforts, now targeting 1,000 acres across northern Missouri. To date, 640 of the targeted 1,000 acres were installed in Spring 2018 across five different farms. The overall plan focuses on watersheds and buffering ephemeral and perennial watercourses with native vegetation, and targeting erodible and marginal areas. Through continued effort and collaboration among various agencies, non-profits, and private landowners, we plan to restore 200,000 acres of native vegetation throughout the Grand River watershed. 



Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), planted in the prairie seed mix, is seen here growing in one of the vegetation monitoring plots as part of the successful MoBCI grant project.



Native prairie vegetation was planted in strips as buffer zones around crop fields to help with water filtration and an added benefit of helping birds.

World Bird Sanctuary's Bird Population Study

by **Linda Tossing**

Bird Banding Coordinator, World Bird Sanctuary



The World Bird Sanctuary (WBS), Valley Park, MO is the home to the WBS Bird Banding Team. The team is made up of volunteers who support the efforts of the Bird Population study. The number of volunteers involved depends on the project. Currently, our team consists of 28 volunteers. The experience level varies from very experienced banders to beginners who are just learning the “ropes” of bird banding.

The WBS property is 302 acres of forested area along the Meramec River across the river from Castlewood State Park in the St. Louis region. The sanctuary is also located in the Lower Meramec Hills and Valleys Important Bird Area.

Throughout the year, we focus our efforts on three events for our Bird Population Study:

Spring Migration Blitz

This year marked the completion of 10 years’ worth of bird banding efforts during spring migration. The purpose of our migration blitz remains to determine the migrant usage of the WBS ravine located in an undeveloped section of the WBS property. This study area, approximately 40 acres, is an oak hickory forest bottomland with a dry creek running through it. Our mornings are early, with the team meeting an hour before sunrise; it takes a very dedicated group of people to be willing to do that! Over the past 10 years, we have daily “run” 25–31 nets from April 21 to May 15. Our peak year was 2014 when we netted 853 birds during this time frame. In 2018, we netted 826 birds of 65 species (49 were migrants) ranging from

American Restart to Yellow-throated Vireo. A Brown Creeper was a special bird for this year — our first during the migration blitz. This year, we netted 155 Tennessee Warblers, the high count for the season.

Public Demonstrations and Outreach

During the summer months, the WBS Banding Team provides an educational public demonstrations for the WBS visitors along off-site demonstrations for MDC and other organizations. Along with the public demonstrations, we provide a Bird-in-Hand program to school groups and other interested groups.

World Bird Sanctuary volunteer Shelly Colatskie retrieves two Tufted titmice from the mist nets for banding.



Photo by Ron Colatskie



Photo by Ron Colatskie

Palm warbler after mist netting.




Photo by Linda Tossing

Spring migration in Missouri resulted in large numbers of Golden wing warbler like this one at the World Bird Sanctuary.

Northern Saw-whet Owl

In 2012, we discovered that Northern Saw-whet Owls were using the WBS property during migration and as a possible wintering destination. We were able to determine an optimum spot near the Meramec River to find them, so we established a study area. On the first night of our first run in the new study area, we captured an owl in our nets! Since then, we have run nightly sessions between October 21st and the first weekend of December. We have learned that the weather and amount of available moonlight drives the results. We have only seen low numbers of this species, with the highest count occurring in 2017 with 26 owls. However, some of the owls we banded were recaptured as far as New Liskard, Ontario and Whitefish Point, Michigan.

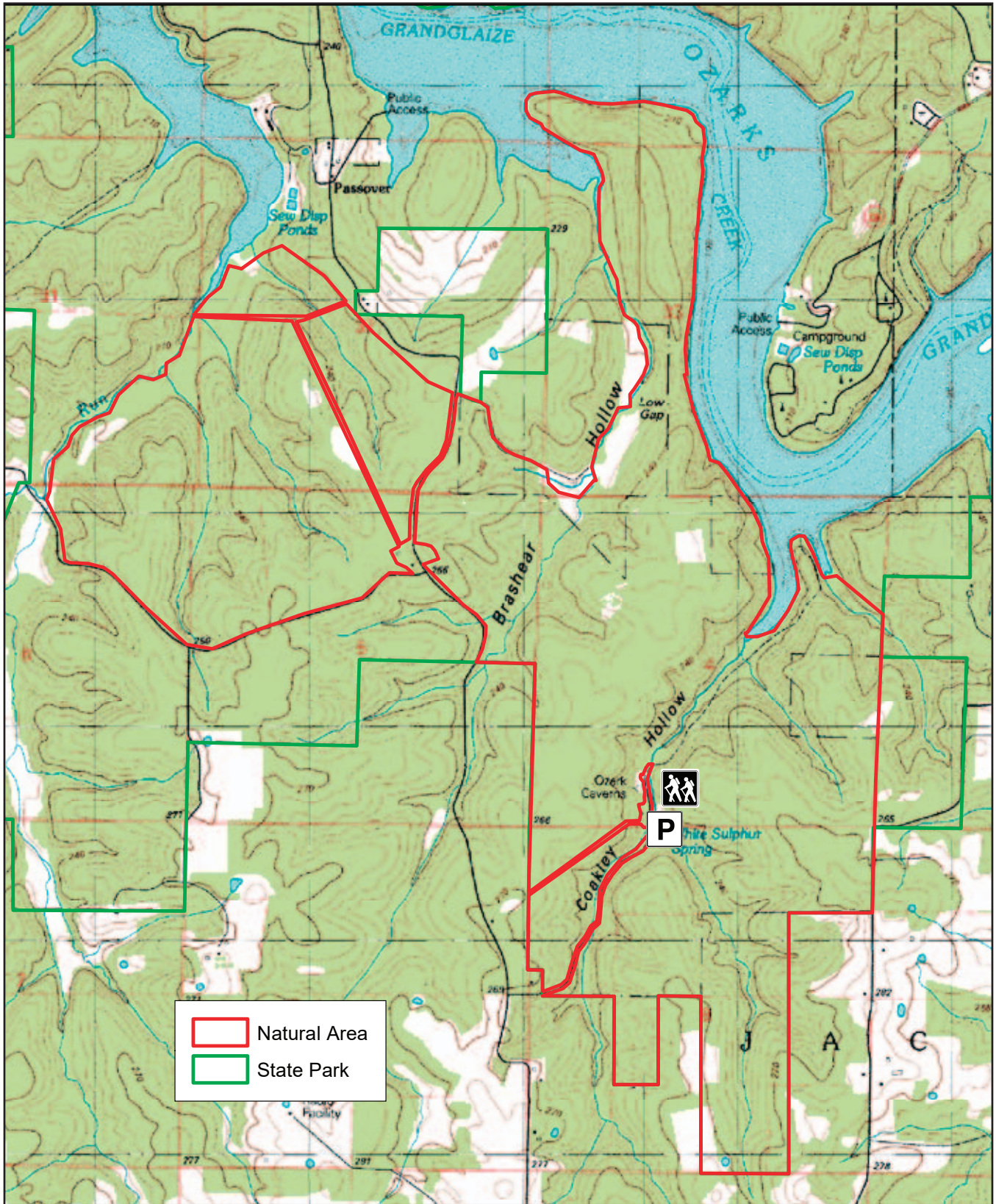
The WBS Bird Banding Team continues to explore to understand the life and behavior of songbirds and Northern Saw-whet Owls. We are always amazed to find birds that are the least expected!

If you have any questions or would like more information about our work please contact Linda Tossing, birdbanding@worldbird-sanctuary.org or phone 314.495.3063. 

Northern saw-whet owls use the habitat in undeveloped portions of the World Bird Sanctuary.



Photo by Shelly Colatskie



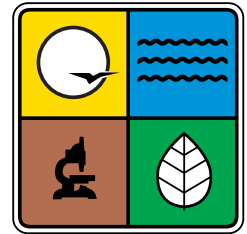
Coakley Hollow Fen Natural Area was expanded to include over 1700 acres of high-quality natural communities including an area positively impacted by a MoBCI grant.

MoBCI Grant Project Update

Coakley Hollow Fen Natural Area expands to include additional 1,771 acres

Allison Vaughn

Natural Areas Coordinator, Missouri Department of Natural Resources



Missouri Department
of Natural Resources

The southern half of the 17,600+ acre Lake of the Ozarks State Park, named Ozark Caverns for the park's primary geologic feature, possesses a rich matrix of landscape types ranging from open woodlands, Ozark fens, bottomland woodlands, upland flatwoods, and dolomite glades. The intact canopy and vast nature of this large state park provides home and a migratory stopover site for 197 species of birds. With a 30 year-long prescribed fire history, Ozark Caverns is a mecca of biodiversity, full of plant life that hosts valuable insects necessary for the life history of breeding birds and suites of other animal species.

In 2013–2014, Ozark Caverns received \$6,800 in MoBCI grant dollars (matched 1:1 by MoDNR funds of \$7,000) earmarked for hardwood thinning in two distinct locations, the Honey Run Management Unit (394 acres) and Coakley Hollow West Management Unit (432

acres). Both of these areas house a specialized natural community called upland flatwoods, which are ridgetop woodland communities with a perched water table and fragipan soils that allow for ponding and seasonal wetland formation. The upland flatwoods in the park house rare insects and signature woodland birds such as Wild Turkey and Northern Bobwhite Quail that thrive in these open, broad landscapes. Both areas have witnessed regularly occurring prescribed fire for at least 25 years, but the fire is not accomplishing the goal of creating breaks in the canopy to allow for a response in the herbaceous layer. For the MoBCI grant, Ozark Caverns partnered with the Columbia Audubon Society who provided in-kind match with two bird occurrence surveys, one before the thinning began and a survey after the area had been thinned and treated with fire.

Hardwood thinning can take on many

Restoration of the park's Upland Flatwoods has revealed a rich ground flora that includes warm season grasses, long-lived perennial forbs, and a suite of legumes, indicators of native integrity.



interpretations, but in the experience of Park Naturalist Cindy Hall who initiated the project, diffuse thinning and stump treatment of small diameter black oaks fit the bill for this project. Historically, the upland flatwoods were dominated by stunted, old growth blackjack oak, post oak, and scattered black oak and white oak. In the absence of fire and after a history of overgrazing, an even-aged stand of black oaks grew to block light to the woodland floor. Hall instructed her crews which included park staff and contractors funded by the MoBCI grant to cut a certain small diameter of certain species, then stump treat with chemicals to prevent resprouting. The results of the thinning, followed by a light intensity prescribed fire, resulted in gaps in the canopy but not enough light to the woodland floor to result in a flush of brush from aromatic sumac or oak sprouts.

The bird response as documented by CAS during that first season after the thinning indicated that the target woodland species responded positively to the thinning project. Granted, long term monitoring after successive fire events will prove more meaningful for viability and population counts. However, in the pre-treatment survey, there were few Blue gray Gnatcatchers and few other open woodland-occupying species. After the thinning and burning, the flush of flowering

perennial forbs created a veritable woodland café for birds. Field Sparrows, Yellow-throated Vireos, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers dominated the bird list during the surveys.

In 1982, the Missouri Natural Areas Committee voted to designate 5 acres of an Ozark fen in the Coakley Hollow East Management Unit as a natural area. With the park's ongoing dedication to ecosystem management on the Ozark Caverns unit, spanning over 1,500 acres of these woodland, glade, and fen natural communities of such high integrity, Lake of the Ozarks sought a natural area expansion of the Coakley Hollow Fen Natural Area to include the adjacent acreage. In late 2017, the designation of 1,772 additional acres of Coakley Hollow, Honey Run and four other management units on the south side of the park were deemed as the natural area. This landscape-scale designation will help provide protection for Ozark Caverns and will elevate the area's stature as one of the best remaining examples of these natural communities. Park staff are dedicated to continuing the ecosystem management work here involving fire, cedar removal and hardwood thinning. The Coakley Hollow Fen Natural Area is accessible by the Coakley Hollow Fen Trail at Ozark Caverns. Fall migration is a wonderful time to visit the area to see the flush of migrating warblers! 🗺️





MDC Staff, Volunteers, City and County Staff, Parks Staff, and Watershed Staff at the end of the first-ever burn in the savanna restoration area (January 2018).

Grant Update

Habitat Improvement Project at the Watershed Center and Valley Water Mill Park

by Caleb Sanders

Watershed Conservation Corps Program Manager, Watershed Committee of the Ozarks



In 2016, the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks received a MoBCI grant for \$25,000 to restore the native habitats at the Watershed Center at Valley Water Mill Park (located in Springfield, Missouri) through the implementation of the Forest Stewardship Management Plan. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) developed the plan that aligned with the organization’s mission “to sustain and improve the water resources of Springfield and Greene County through education and effective management of the region’s watersheds.” It also aligns with Mis-

souri Bird Conservation Initiative’s goals to “get people excited about birds” and pursue “integrated, all-bird conservation.”

The MoBCI grant allowed us to accomplish tremendous progress toward the actions and goals set forth in our *Forest Stewardship Management Plan*. In fact, it has been the most successful habitat project we’ve ever completed at the Watershed Center and Valley Water Mill Park. Not all of our goals were completely accomplished, but progress has been recorded. We initially underestimated the magnitude of the woody invasive species infestation we were experiencing (especially bush



Glade panorama, prior to thinning project (June 2017)

honeysuckle, Chinese privet, and winter creeper), leading to this shortfall.

An additional Community Conservation Grant from the Missouri Department of Conservation and the efficient use of volunteers facilitated by the MoBCI grant technician added more match funds and ultimately more progress toward our goals. In fact, this arrangement worked so well, we asked ourselves how we could keep it going to further our mission here and elsewhere in the region. To continue the momentum of the MoBCI project, we created the Watershed Conservation Corps (WCC) whose mission is “to engage and employ young people in hands-on watershed improvement.” The WCC summer pilot program solidified the niche for this type of work in the area and increased the likelihood that the WCC will be financially sustainable. The MoBCI project also dramatically altered the aesthetics of the park, and the representative habitats are now much

more apparent—our glade looks like a glade and our savanna looks like a savanna following significant invasive species removal and prescribed fire. As visitor and program participant numbers continue to grow, these physical improvements, coupled with interpretive signage and programming, are valuable educational resources as well as providing a healthier habitat for wildlife.

Volunteers from Missouri Master Naturalists and the Greater Ozarks Audubon Society compiled eBird sightings following the grant project and documented two new bird species for the site: Trumpeter Swan and Rufous Hummingbird. Over 100 species of birds have been documented from the site in recent years. This small nature preserve, through the hard work of invasive species removal, thinning projects, and prescribed fire, serves the local population as well as wildlife communities. 🐦

Glade following MoBCI grant-funded thinning project (February 2018)





(Above) Trumpeter swans on Valley Water Mill Lake—first recorded sighting!

(Below) This rufus hummingbird was another first for the Valley Water Mill area, recorded during the MoBCI project, and it was successfully banded.



Photo by Becky Swearingin



In Memoriam

Mike Huffman and Rochelle Renken

Mike Huffman, a forester, educator, and communicator died on June 22, 2018 doing what he loved (being outdoors), along with someone he loved (his wife Rochelle Renken), while backpacking in the Alaskan wilderness. Both were 62.

Mike was born in Washington D.C., and grew up in the D.C. suburbs. Mike spent most summers at his grandparents' farm in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia where he learned to love the outdoors. Huffman served in the U.S. Air Force as an aircraft maintenance technician before obtaining his bachelor's degree in Forestry Management with an emphasis in Business Administration from Utah State University in 1983. He worked as a forestry technician with the U.S. Forest Service in Utah and at Purdue University in Indiana before joining the Missouri Department of Conservation in 1985 as a resource forester assistant in Clinton. Over the next 25 years, he served as a resource forester, forestry regional supervisor, forestry programs supervisor, wildlife regional supervisor, and forest

management chief for the northern half of Missouri for MDC. The final four years of his career was spent as chief of the Outreach and Education Division for the Department. Mike's vision for O&E was that it "...will be the catalyst in telling both the Department's story and the story of Missouri's forest, fish and wildlife resources." His experience as an accomplished juggler facilitated pursuit of his vision as he managed the multiple statewide programs O&E leads such as Hunter Education, Discover Nature Schools, the *Conservationist* and *Xplor* magazines, and Missouri National Archery in the Schools Program; he also enhanced the Department's communication and marketing efforts, and expanded the use of social media to engage citizens in outdoor recreation. Mike was a proven communicator, and he cultivated positive working relationships within MDC and the public he served. His strong leadership skills, coupled with adaptability and enthusiasm, made him a 'go to' person willing to mentor staff and address issues in a fair and balanced manner.

Mike was a life member and on the Board of Directors for the Missouri Conservation Federation.

Mike has three sons, Jason, Joshua, and James; when they were young, Mike was Scout Master for Clinton Troop 430 where he assisted in leading groups to adventure bases such as Philmont, the Boundary Waters, and Florida Keys. He and his family enjoyed backpacking, canoeing, fishing, hunting, and numerous other outdoor activities; Mike was also known to enjoy single-malt Scotch, good bourbon, rye whiskey, dark beer, and dark chocolate. Mike's friendship, enthusiasm for life, and passion for the outdoors will be missed by all.

• • •


Rochelle (Ro) Renken, a wildlife biologist, researcher, and longtime member of The Wildlife Society, died on June 22, 2018 along with her husband, Michael Huffman, while backpacking in the Alaskan wilderness. Both were 62.

Rochelle was born in 1955 in Fort Dodge, Iowa, and grew up in rural Manson, Iowa. She graduated from Iowa State University with a bachelor's in fisheries and wildlife biology in 1979, and master's degree in animal ecology in 1983. She earned a Ph.D. in wildlife biology from the University of Missouri Columbia in 1988. Rochelle was a wildlife biologist for the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Unit from 1981-82, arctic wildlife biologist for the USFWS in Alaska in 1983, fellow of the Delta Wildlife Research Station in 1984, and a biological scientist for the Florida Fish and Game from 1988-89. She started her career with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) as wildlife research biologist in 1989.

During her 28-year career with the MDC, Rochelle played numerous important roles for the agency. Her first big project was as a researcher for the Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystem Project (MOFEP), a 100-year, landscape-scale experiment evaluating the effects of forest management on plants and animals

in the Ozark oak-hickory forests. Her work included numerous vital management driven projects examining nongame and public use of the Missouri River. Her contributions to the Division and to the resources and public of the state earned her the Resource Science Division's Award of Excellence in 2004. She was promoted to Resource Science Field Chief in 2010 and served this role until her retirement in February 2018.

Rochelle was active with the Missouri Chapter of The Wildlife Society, serving as treasurer in 1997 and 1998, president in 2009, and past president in 2010. A major achievement during her presidential tenure was the Missouri Chapter being acknowledged as national chapter of the year. She was also active with the North Central Section of The Wildlife Society, serving as president elect in 2012, president in 2013, and past president in 2014. One of Rochelle's biggest contributions to the wildlife profession was serving as co-advisor for the University of Missouri Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society for 10 years, providing encouragement, guidance, and insight to future natural resource specialists. Rochelle was well-published, covering a breadth of popular and peer-reviewed journals, including the *Journal of Wildlife Management* and *Wildlife Society Bulletin*. She was working with various colleagues on three peer-review publications even as she retired from MDC. Lastly, she was presented the E. Sydney Stephens Award, the Missouri Chapter's highest honor, in 2014.

In her free time, Rochelle enjoyed hiking, biking, canoeing, and birding. Spending time with family and friends was also an important priority in her life. She especially enjoyed birding and enjoying dawn hikes to watch the "world wake up." Rochelle's always-available-to-listen personality, laughter, work ethic, critical thinking, and friendship will forever be missed. 

MoBCI Member Organizations

As of August 2018, the following 72 organizations have signed a Memorandum of Agreement to participate in the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative:

Academy of Science of St. Louis
American Bird Conservancy/
Central Hardwoods Joint Venture
Audubon Missouri
Audubon Society of Missouri
Audubon Society:
• Chariton Valley Chapter
• Columbia Chapter
• Grand River Chapter
• Greater Kansas City Chapter,
Burroughs Audubon Society
• Greater Ozarks Chapter
• Midland Empire Chapter
• River Bluffs Chapter
• St. Louis Chapter
Avian Conservation Alliance
Bellefontaine Cemetery & Arboretum
City of Des Peres Parks & Recreation Department
Clay County Dept. of Parks,
Recreation & Historic Sites
Coldwater Outing and Game Preserve
Conservation Federation of Missouri
Ducks Unlimited
Eleven Point River Conservancy
Forest Park Forever
Forrest Keeling Nursery
Greenbelt Land Trust of Mid-Missouri
Kansas City Wildlands/Bridging The Gap
LaBarque Watershed Stream Team Association
L-A-D Foundation
Litzsinger Road Ecology Center
Mark Twain National Forest, USDA Forest Service
Massasauga Flats, LLC
Missouri Army National Guard
Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation
Missouri Department of Conservation
Missouri Department of Natural Resources,
Division of State Parks

Missouri Department of Transportation
Missouri Falconers Association
Missouri Master Naturalists:
• Boone's Lick Chapter
• Hi Lonesome Chapter
• Osage Trails Chapter
• Springfield Plateau Chapter
Missouri Native Plant Society:
• Hawthorn Chapter
• Osage Plains Chapter
Missouri Native Seed Association
Missouri Park and Recreation Association
Missouri Prairie Foundation
Missouri Quail & Upland Wildlife Federation
• Grouse Chapter
Missouri River Bird Observatory
Mussel Fork Legacy Marsh LLC
National Wild Turkey Federation, MO Chapter
North American Grouse Partnership, MO Chapter
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
Ozark Regional Land Trust, Inc.
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Sierra Club, Ozark Chapter
The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Field Office
Truman State University
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:
• Big Muddy National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Ecological Services
• Great River/Clarence Cannon National Fish &
Wildlife Refuge
• Mingo National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Missouri Private Lands Office
• Squaw Creek National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Swan Lake National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
University of Missouri-Columbia
Watershed Institute, Inc
and The Watershed Land Trust
Webster Groves Nature Study Society
Wild Birds for the 21st Century
Wildcat Glades Conservation & Nature Center
Wings Over Weston
Wild Bird Rehabilitation Inc.
World Bird Sanctuary

To find out more about the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative and how you can participate as a member organization, visit our website: www.mobci.net 