

JULY 2022



WHEELER WILDLIFE WATCH

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association



PHOTO COURTESY
OF
DAVID YOUNG

OBSERVATION BUILDING "RENO"

Construction Updates!

Renovation and construction work continue in full swing at the Visitor Center and Observation Building, and site prep is also underway for the outdoor classroom pavilion, the photo blind, and the 5 mile multi-use trails. We can't wait to share our "new digs"!

WHEELER NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE

Calendar of Events
July 9 & September 17, 2022

VISITOR CENTER
256.350.6639

CRANE POWER
CLEANUP FOR THE CRANES 2022

**SATURDAY
JULY 9, 2022**

**CLEAN UP
FOR THE
CRANES**

LOCATION:
Meet @ Ingalls Pavillion

TIME:
8:00am-12:00 Noon
(Meet back at Ingalls Pavillion)

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK...*Mary Lee Ratliff*

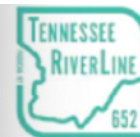
Dear Joe, Jim & David, This Article is for you and everyone else (including my sister Lisa and me) who found solace in nature. It didn't really matter what we did; we all darted outside to find reprieve from our chaotic household. And we all still do that—seek refuge outdoors. It's why I continue to fight so hard for our natural environment. Most of what plagues our entire world are human instigated inflictions, and if you don't use our natural environment as a mental and physical buffer, I surely don't know how you cope!

People who are disconnected from nature, consequently, don't care about it, tend to abuse it, and seem

to exist for themselves alone. They lose their bearing on what life in general is all about: caring as much as you can about each other and what sustains us, and then being grateful you can. It's a privilege. That's why all of us who know that never give up on trying to provide that experience as persuasion to show people that nature is your gift to enjoy, care for, and then pass on to future generations.

We actually have one of the best opportunities to federally support this through the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*. The House passed it and sixteen Republican

From the Prez... cont'd on page 4...



An official
Tennessee RiverLine
Event

Sponsored in Partnership:
Decatur Morgan County Tourism
& Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

Find your flow.



If you have questions regarding the Event, please call 256-350-2028.

Please register at
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/clean-up-for-the-cranes-tickets-339093085547>

This event will occur again on
Saturday, September 17, 2022.

BIRD BANDING ON WHEELER NWR

By Dwight Cooley, Refuge Volunteer & WWR Board Member

Bird banding is probably the most useful tool in the modern study of bird migration. In any bird banding program, wild birds are captured and



Photo Courtesy USFWS

marked with a uniquely numbered band placed on the leg. When birds are banded, the bander records when and where each bird is banded, its age, what sex it is, its condition, and any other information about the bird and sends that information to the Bird Banding Laboratory where it is stored. Band information reported to the Bird Banding Laboratory provides data on the aspects of birds' life history such as distribution and movements, their relative numbers, annual production, life-span and causes of death. It also increases our knowledge and understanding of birds and their habits and assists in their conservation and management.

Wheeler NWR was established in 1938 on Wheeler Reservoir after the construction of Wheeler Dam. The lake formed by Wheeler Dam created open water and wetland habitats that had not existed prior to 1936. Migratory birds in noticeable numbers started using the Refuge by 1940 and by the 1950's large numbers of waterfowl were using not only Wheeler Lake but many of the other lakes created when dams were constructed along the length of the Tennessee River.

It all started in 1941 when we banded four Black Ducks and two Ring-necked Ducks on the Refuge. During the intervening 80+ years, near 50,000 birds have been banded by Refuge staff and volunteers. As you might expect, waterfowl comprise the vast majority of birds banded on the Refuge. In 80 years of banding more than 21,000 Mallards, 9100 Canada Geese, 7500 Wood Ducks, 3300 American Wigeon, 3000 Black Ducks, and 2000 Northern Pintails were banded. These six species account for almost 95% of birds banded on the Refuge. Only in 1943 during the depths of World War II were no birds banded on the Refuge.

As with any conservation and management program, goals change with changing priorities and funding. Since 1993 efforts for the most part, have been limited to banding Wood Ducks in support of regional and national migratory bird priorities. We now band Wood Ducks each year from July 1 to September 30.

If you happen to recover a banded bird, please report it at: <https://www.pwrc.gov/BBL/bblretrv/>

They need the band number, or numbers, if the bird has more than one band. They also need to know where, when and how you recovered the bird. Your contact information will be requested in case there are any questions.

The U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Bird Banding Lab will send you a certificate of appreciation that includes on the bird and where and when it was banded. You can keep the band.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!

When the Visitor Center reopens to the public, refuge rangers will be seeking friendly, customer-service oriented volunteers who are interested in: providing refuge information to the public at the Visitor Center desk, answering and fielding phone calls, selling *America the Beautiful* passes and nature store merchandise, and being an overall friendly face to refuge visitors. Regularly scheduled shifts are 3.5-4 hours each week, depending on the time of year. The refuge is looking to fill a few recurring weekly shifts and also find a few folks to serve as substitutes, as needed. Email david_r_young@fws.gov if you want to learn more and if you're interested in being considered for these important volunteer positions.

From the Prez... cont'd from page 1...

Senators have already signed on. Here's a great summation: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/20/opinion/recovering-americas-wildlife-act.html>

With renovations well underway in our Visitor Center, we are gearing up to provide our citizens and visitors an enhanced educational experience as well as continuing to protect the wildlife that brings delight to our neverending hike of a well-lived life. All of you who support our efforts, please don't ever stop caring and sharing. Hope to see all of you at our first *Clean-Up For The Cranes* on July 9th! We'll do it again on September 17th...

KAYAKING FLINT CREEK

By Tom Ress, Refuge Volunteer/WWRA Board

Any time is a good time to kayak on the refuge but spring and summer are hard to beat for good paddling. The lotus and lily pads are in bloom, songbirds are flitting through the trees and the morning temperature is perfect. Kayaking is a great way to experience the refuge and paddlers often get to spy osprey up close on their nests, egrets and herons hunting in the shallows and colonies of nesting swallows.



Photo courtesy Tom Ress

The refuge and the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association sponsor naturalist-led kayak and canoe trips on Flint Creek every year. These are easy three mile paddles over a couple of hours with a naturalist along to search for some of the refuge's wildlife. These popular trips are offered in May and June and they fill up fast. Our 2022 season is over so watch this newsletter next year for trip announcements!

Watching Sandhill Cranes

by William Stafford



Spirits among us have departed friends,
relatives, neighbors: we can't find them.
If we search and call, the sky merely waits.
Then some day here come the cranes
planing in from cloud or mist sharp,
lonely spears, awkwardly graceful.
They reach for the land; they stalk
the ploughed fields, not letting us near, not
quite our own, not quite the world's.

People go by and pull over to watch. They
peer and point and wonder. It is because
these travelers, these far wanderers,
plane down and yearn in a reaching
flight. They extend our life,
piercing through space to reappear
quietly, undeniably, where we are.

William Stafford, "Watching Sandhill Cranes" from *Even in Quiet Places*. Copyright © 1996 by The Estate of William Stafford, Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, LLC on behalf of Confluence Press, www.confluencepress.com. All rights reserved.



BEAVERDAM SWAMP BOARDWALK REOPENS

Entrance to the newly rebuilt boardwalk with NNL plaque in the foreground.

Photo courtesy Drew Wirwa



NNL program director and regional coordinator from the National Park Service came for a site visit.

Photo courtesy Ricky Ingram

The Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk in Madison is now back open to the public after being closed this past winter and spring while refuge employees replaced the boardwalk. Located off Old Hwy 20 south and west of the County Line Road I-565 interchange (Exit 7), the half mile trail provides visitors access to Wheeler NWR and the Beaverdam Creek Swamp National Natural Landmark (NNL). National Natural Landmarks are designated by the US Secretary of the Interior in recognition for a site's condition, illustrative character, rarity, diversity and value to science and education.



Cahaba Lily
Hymenocallis coronaria
Photo courtesy of USFWS

National Wildlife Refuge Associations are independent non-profit organizations whose mission is to conserve America's wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries that secure its ecological integrity. Won't you please join us?

YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS

Eleshea Jones has been busy keeping the high school age Youth Conservation Corps members busy on the refuge doing all sorts of work, including: fixing trails and fences, maintaining water control structures, cleaning refuge grounds, transplanting Cahaba lilies, and much more.



YCC members repairing fence at Flint Creek Day Use Area.
Photo Courtesy Eleasha Jones

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL PARK PASSES & FEDERAL DUCK STAMPS

Even though the Visitor Center is closed, you can still buy a Federal Duck Stamp or an America The Beautiful Federal Recreation Lands Pass. Refuge rangers are making appointments with people on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Call 256-350-6639 to make an appointment.



WHEELER WILDLIFE WATCH

WHEELER WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION

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DECATUR, ALABAMA 35603

VISIT OUR WEBSITES!

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

<http://www.fws.gov/wheeler/>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/WheelerNWRComplex/>

Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association

<http://www.friendsofwheelernwr.org>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/Wheeler-Wildlife-Refuge-Association-WWRA-1697491543825297>



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