



# Southern Illinois Audubon Society Newsletter

January 2024  
Vol. 31 No. 1

Southern Illinois Audubon Society (SIAS)  
P.O. Box 222  
Carbondale, IL  
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*Established in 1970*

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Details can be found at:  
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## Study of Red-headed Woodpeckers a Bird of Conservation Concern



Join SIAS at Carbondale Township Hall\* (217 E. Main St.) on Friday, Jan. 26th at 7:00 p.m. for a presentation on red-headed woodpeckers by Mark Vukovich, wildlife biologist with the Shawnee National Forest.

Mark will be presenting results from a long-term study on red-headed woodpeckers, a bird of conservation concern. The long-term study, conducted while he worked for the Southern Research Station in South Carolina, spanned 7 years (2002-2009). The work included effects of transmitters on behavior, adult survival, forest treatment, and responses by woodpeckers, fall migration, and nestling diets.

Also included in Mark's presentation will be preliminary survey results for red-head woodpeckers on the Shawnee National Forest.

The Shawnee National Forest is documenting positive and immediate responses from red-headed woodpeckers on several completed and ongoing timber projects. Preliminary results suggest that populations of red-headed woodpeckers are increasing on the Shawnee National Forest and will continue to do so into the future.

As stated last month, Mark's wildlife background has been mostly focused on birds and forest and grassland management but also game management and wildlife techniques. He's worked on a wide range of game and non-game species like white-tailed deer, wild turkey, wild pig, northern harriers, short-eared owls, golden eagles, red-headed woodpeckers, and bats but he has also investigated bird community-level effects on forest management.



**This is SIAS's annual meeting night with a potluck, silent auction, and election of officers.**

**Note: earlier potluck set-up time of 5:30 p.m. with earlier potluck starting time of 6:00 p.m.** SIAS will provide a main course and some beverages. Please bring an entrée to share and your own dinnerware and utensils. Masks are optional, but don't feel embarrassed if you wear one! SIAS will again hold a silent auction as part of the evening's events. Members are encouraged to bring new or lightly used items for the auctions. Folks providing auctions items are asked to suggest a value as a starting bid. Members are also encouraged to take part in the auction as this is one of SIAS's big fundraiser! The slate of officers to be re-elected is Conservation/Education Chair-Cathie Hutcheson. **\*Entrance to the Township Hall is from the rear of the building, of 216. E. Monroe St., where two parking lots are available for use.**

### SIAS Upcoming Calendar:

Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup> – Dr. Joy O'Keefe on bat boxes

Mar. 22<sup>nd</sup> – Dr. Nancy Garwood on botany and working with the Hauorani people in Yasuni Ecuador

Apr. – To Be Announced

Apr. 27<sup>th</sup> – The Birding Blitz

May – SIAS annual spring picnic, date and location are yet to be determined



**Nov./Dec. SIAS Program Highlights** It would be hard to find a more charismatic, engaging, and dedicated two-man team than Kevin Sierzega (IDNR Natural Areas Preservation Specialist) and Mark Vukovich (Shawnee National Forest wildlife biologist). Their efforts conducting playback transects surveys along creeks and floodplains in the Shawnee NF to elicit responses from male cerulean warblers in the summers of 2021-2023, are commendable and made for an information packed and entertaining program. The following is just a tiny bit of what they shared.

Mark began the program by stating there wasn't much available information on cerulean warbler use of the Shawnee NF so this was a project to survey for ceruleans on forest service lands to determine the population size and distribution on those lands. Kevin stated that it was important to find where they are, how many there are, and why they are using certain habitats. They're a hard species to study because they nest high up in the forest canopy but they are detectable and tractable by their vocalizations, by playing calls then listening for responses and visually confirming presence of males. To find where to start, the twosome used all available data they could find, including data collected during past forest nesting bird surveys and reports made on Cornell's eBird app program.

Starting in the summer of 2021, Kevin and Mark walked creek bed habitat in several locations on the Shawnee, walking 50+ miles covering 4,212 acres. They found cerulean density was 2.5 birds per 100 acres. Cedar Creek and Cave Creek (the Cave Creek Valley complex in Jackson County) were determined to be their two hotspots, with larger populations. Interesting populations were also located in an area of Hutchins Creek (Union County) and Big Creek (Hardin County). They started seeing trends: openness of tree stands (canopy gaps), composition of tree species in that there always seemed to be an oak component with a massive towering oak jutting above the canopy, and birds were found along hillside slopes rising from the creek. Ceruleans are considered users of both riparian (creek side) and upland habitat. And, written evidence suggests that some types of canopy manipulation can create habitat for cerulean warblers. Current selective tree removal management on Bean Ridge (Alexander County) is opening the canopy in a way that could attract ceruleans. But there's more data to collect and more studying to be done.

SIAS thanks Kevin and Mark for their efforts and presentation. Their enthusiasm for their work was contagious. -RR

**"Bird Count" by Susan Edwards Richmond** This charming picture book celebrates the 123-year-old holiday tradition of the Christmas Bird Count, the longest-running citizen science survey in the world! Ava and her mother are joining their fellow "citizen scientists" to identify and count the birds in their community as part of the Christmas Bird Count. This year is extra exciting for Ava: Big Al, their team leader, has given her the critical job of tallying the count! As Ava and the other birdwatchers travel their assigned routes, they use their eyes and ears – and their knowledge of local birds – to collect population data about local bird species that is critical for conservation work. Colorful illustrations of birds, their habitats, and the humans who watch them are sure to inspire kids to pick up their own pair of binoculars and see what feathered friends they find! The book's endnotes provide more information about the specific birds described in the book. Highly recommended for ages 4 to 8. "Bird Count" is available at <https://www.amightygirl.com/bird-count> For kids interested in birdwatching, consider the kid-friendly Kidwinz Binoculars for ages 3 to 8 (<https://www.amightygirl.com/binoculars>)



There is also an excellent bird field guide for kids, "The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of North America," for ages 9 and up at <https://amzn.to/3TAV7Q>

## Monthly Birding with SIAS at Evergreen Park - Saturday, Feb 10<sup>th</sup> & Mar 9<sup>th</sup>, from 9:00-11:00 a.m.-

Meet at the Red Oak Shelter that sets along Carbondale Reservoir lake in Evergreen Park on the south side of Carbondale. Weather permitting. Directions (from IL Rt. 51 a.k.a. South Illinois Avenue): Take IL Rt. 51 south from Carbondale to the stop-light intersection with Pleasant Hill Rd., turn west onto Pleasant Hill Rd., follow it to west most park entrance, turn south, follow road south then east to the small shelter near the water.

For more info call Kirsten Trimble, Membership Chair, at 618.521.4166

## A Christmas Bird Count Journal 2023-2024

The Christmas Bird Count season runs from Dec. 14th - Jan. 5th. Counts take place throughout the western hemisphere during that time frame. There are some current counts in southernmost Illinois that date back to 1950. This Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season started for me on Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 a.m. watching from the Wolf Creek Causeway Observation Deck as the sun rose over Crab Orchard NW Refuge. It was a breathtaking morning as I counted sparrows, listened for waterfowl flying over, and waited for Vicki Lang-Mendenhall, my best birding buddy and partner for the day. By days end, around 4:44 p.m., we'd tallied 68 species. Our bird of the day was a late migrant sedge wren that we'd located near the Causeway Observation Deck as we prepared to leave. We had to fill out a documentation form for the sedge wren. The Crab Orchard NWR CBC circle, which Vicki compiles, totaled 99 species. One count down, 8 more to go!



Vicki and I didn't catch the sunrise over the Rend Lake Christmas Bird Count Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>. It had already risen as we headed out to our assigned territory that encompassed south and southeast areas along Rend Lake. The morning was overcast and the sky threatened rain all day. We did catch a large lone sentinel herring gull perched on a structure at the Rend Lake Dam. Behind the sentinel (to the north), the lake contained many American white pelicans, mergansers, multiple species of other ducks, and common and red-throated loons. While there were plenty of gulls present on the lake, in the late afternoon Vicki and I encountered over 1300 ring-billed gulls, 375+ Bonaparte's gulls, and one more large herring gull in a recently plowed field a few miles east of the lake. We ended the day with 57 species as it started to seriously rain. Two counts down, 7 more to go!

There was a lovely but chilly sunrise over the Cypress Creek NW Refuge Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>. Vicki and I started the day at 6:34 a.m. just east of Dongola where we've started the last three years, on a charming back road with a fitting name for a bird count: Swan Pond Road. While we found no swans there, with the rise of the sun came the rise of over 120 vultures from their roost in the hills ahead of us to the east. Their numbers were nearly 50% turkey vultures and 50% black vultures. Later in the morning I located a late migrant chipping sparrow, another species requiring documentation. We ended our count at about 4:30 p.m. with 54 species. My bird of the day was the great horned owl that eagle-eyed Vicki spotted, perched just inside a small woodland as we drove our last road for the day. Three down, 6 to go!

Another beautiful sunrise shown over the Arklands/Pyramid Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 27<sup>th</sup> as I straightened the hoodie on Bean, my junior bird-dog partner for the day. I'd put her in her blaze orange hoodie to keep her warm and easy to spot but she is not a fan of pet clothing so she wiggled partway out of it not long after we set out to our territory. This count is one of four that I compile. Bean enjoyed barking at deer more than watching for birds. Her bird of the day was our first crow. She spotted it before me as we drove just south of Willisville. Mid-day my van's Maintenance Required light came so we ended the day a bit early at 3:30 p.m. Our day was one of birding from roadside but we still tallied 46 species. Twice we encountered a strange occurrence, deer carcasses dumped over bridges into creeks. At two different creek crossings, I counted 5-6 deer carcasses in the creeks below. The species total for this count circle was 98. Plus, there was one count week species, a northern shrike, located by a birder the day after the count. The next count was to be at Horseshoe Lake in Alexander County the following day, the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the count, but I decided to forego that count so to address the van maintenance issue. So that made 4 down and only 4 to go.

There was no sunrise over the Union County Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 29<sup>th</sup>, in part because my junior bird-dog partner and I were surrounded by woodlands on Rhine Road where we started our day. And also, because the sky was trying to snow. Bean joined me again and her first bark of the day was to point out a red-tailed hawk perched in a tree ahead of us. I took her for a short walk on the trail at the Shawnee NF Bald Knob Wilderness area as the snowflakes got big enough to put an eye out. Then while driving further down along Rhine Road we found a tribute to Queen Bean! We also took a short walk at the Shawnee NF Kaolin Trail area, off Mt. Glenn Road. The area was still and quiet except for a lone red-bellied woodpecker and lots of smells that distracted Bean. We ended our day a bit early at 3:30 p.m. with a tally of 44 species. The total circle's species count was 94. Five down, 3 to go!



Sunlight was just peaking over the eastern horizon as Jean Sellar and I entered the Mermet Lake Christmas Bird Count circle on the morning of Dec. 30<sup>th</sup>. This circle is 2/3rds in Illinois and 1/3rd in Kentucky and it's a count I compile. Jean, who's developed the birding bug, joined me for the day. We officially started our day at Ft. Massac State Park, along the Ohio River, with the slightly less than fun moon still present in the western sky. Red-headed woodpeckers rattled at us from the moment we enter the Park. They rattled at us the whole distance from the main park to the far eastern end where we exited, nearly 4 miles of raucous red-heads. As we ate our lunch at the small Dorothy Miller Park on the south side of Metropolis, also along the Ohio River, a darling little ruby-crowned kinglet lit on the passenger side rear view mirror where he sat for nearly a full minute watching us. I was too entranced to think of snapping a pic. He then flew to the rear of the van, perched on the windshield wiper, and peered in checking out my birding gear. Watching the Ohio River gives me a different feeling than I get from watching the Mighty Mississippi but I can't put it into words. We ended our day with 48 species including a red-breasted nuthatch. We spotted an eagle's nest in a tree along the Ohio River shoreline but saw not one eagle all day. The count circle's total species was 100, with 87 species tallied in IL and 78 species tallied in KY. Six down, 2 to go!

The Jackson County Christmas Bird Count took place on New Year's Day, Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. This count was started by the Southern Illinois Audubon Society in 1997 as a new, fun way for us to usher in the new year. First held on 01/01/1997, it has continuously collecting data on bird populations for 27 years. I've been compiler for most of that time. Christmas Birds Counts each take place within 15-mile diameter designated circles. Although I haven't always, I now happen to live in the Jackson County circle, near the circle's center. I can step out of our house and hit the ground counting. My new year pre-dawn is always spent owling (searching for owls), first at home, then I head south into our beloved Shawnee National Forest where I know of some reliable owling spots. This year as I made my way back home from owling, I was surprised to hear a great horned owl just south of the entrance to Little Grand Canyon. Earlier in the morning I'd heard both a screech-owl and a barred owl at the entrance of the Little Grand. I returned home at sunrise to start the first daylight hours counting on our place. Then my junior bird-dog partner Bean joined me for the rest of the day. She chose her less restricting red coat for this day's adventure. The first day of the new year turned out to be a robin-o-rama. In the winter, robins come together in large foraging flocks, working through the woodlands in search of hidden insects on the forest floor and cleaning the trees and shrubs of berries. The first flock I encountered was on our place, 166 robins accompanied by 86 cedar waxwings and a hermit thrush. By the end of the day I'd lost count of how many robin flocks we'd come onto. They always including some cedar waxwings and a couple hermit thrushes. Our day's total robins numbered over 1170 birds in all! Bean and I tallied 54 species, a wonderful way to start the new year. I have yet to finish this count's compilation but this count averages 90 species. My sincere thanks to all the folks who helped on this and all this season's CBC counts! Seven down, 1 to go!



The sun rose over Fountain Bluff as I stood solo on the Jackson County levee, not far from Neunert, within the Middle Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge (Middle Miss NWR) Christmas Bird Count circle on Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>. And it was a glorious morning. The sky was mostly clear with no noticeable wind, the temp was a brisk 24 degrees, and I'd already tallied 4 eastern screech-owls. The great horned owls and barred owls that I tallied in the vicinity of this area the last two years, if still here, remained silent. But within 30 minutes I heard an unexpected surprise, 4 high-pitched hoots of a northern saw-whet owl!

*(continued on page 3)*

(A Christmas Bird Count Journal continued from page 2)

The Middle Miss NWR is little known. Established in May 2000, it's made up of seven units located at various spots along the Mississippi River between Valmeyer, IL and Gorham IL. The Middle Miss NWR Christmas Bird Count circle was established in 2011 by a friend who worked for the US Fish and Wildlife Service at the time. I took over as compiler after he switched jobs. The circle has a center point in the middle of the Mississippi River, with half in Missouri and half in Illinois. Looking from my area, the Shawnee National Forest hills rise to the north. To the south, the Missouri Ozark



hills rise similarly high. The Middle Miss NWR Wilkinson Island Division peeks over the levee to the west. As far as I can see, the land is within the count circle. Anchor trees are noticeably outstanding in the surrounding fields. There's a kind of shared consciousness knowing other birders are making their way through those areas as I make my way through mine. At the end of the day, I picked up a barred owl, bringing my total species for the day to 46. While it was a perfect day for counting birds, the count's total species was only 71, with 63 species found in IL and 61 species found in MO. The day was slightly bitter sweet. Eight down, marking the end of another Christmas Bird Count season and the second most wonderful time of the year, second only to spring migration in southernmost Illinois.

-Rhonda R.

**Biden-Harris Administration Proposes First-of-its Kind National Forest Plan Amendment to Conserve and Steward Old Growth Forests**

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19, 2023 – Today, consistent with direction from President Biden in Executive Order 14072 to conserve and restore old and mature forests, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) announced a proposal to amend all 128 forest land management plans to conserve and steward old-growth forest conditions on national forests and grasslands nationwide. Healthy, climate-resilient old-growth forests store large amounts of carbon, increase biodiversity, reduce wildfire risks, enable subsistence and cultural uses, provide outdoor recreational opportunities and promote sustainable local economic development. Land management plans provide direction for how national forests and grasslands are managed for their many uses, including conservation. The proposed amendment will use the best available science, including Indigenous Knowledge, to provide consistent direction related to old-growth forest conditions across national forests and grasslands.

“Old-growth forests are a vital part of our ecosystems and a special cultural resource. This proposed nationwide forest plan amendment – the first in the agency’s history – is an important step in conserving these national treasures,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “Climate change is presenting new threats like historic droughts and catastrophic wildfire. This clear direction will help our old-growth forests thrive across our shared landscape.”

In June 2022, Secretary Vilsack followed through on President Biden’s Executive Order to conserve and restore old and mature forests and directed the USDA Forest Service to take action to address the impacts of climate change, restore forests and support forest resilience. These actions include defining and conducting the first-ever nationwide inventory of old-growth and mature forests across national forests and grasslands. Launched on Earth Day 2023, this initial inventory report shows that the Forest Service manages nearly 25 million acres of old growth and more than 68 million acres of mature forests on national forests and grasslands. The proposal USDA is putting forward today relates only to lands managed by the USDA Forest Service.

USDA has also released the Climate Risk Viewer, a tool to assess climate risks and vulnerabilities on national forests and grasslands. Additional actions to implement the direction from the Executive Order and the Secretary’s memo are forthcoming, including the finalization of a threat analysis on mature and old-growth forests and a proposed new national policy for monitoring the health of national forests and grasslands. The Forest Service will continue to advance strategies and engage critical partners to build resilience and ensure future actions are responsive to the significant climate stressors that forests face. The consistent management direction contained in the proposed nationwide forest plan amendment would direct place-based strategies for old-growth forest conservation and management, developed in partnership with Tribal communities and in collaboration with local stakeholders. These strategies will be adaptive and factor in the unique opportunities and challenges of a particular area, which will allow for more flexibility in responding to rapid changes in wildfire behavior, drought, insects and disease. The amendment would prohibit vegetation management within old-growth forest conditions when the primary purpose is to grow, tend, harvest, or regenerate trees for economic reasons. Scoping on this proposal was initiated today as a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register. During the amendment process, proposed management actions in old-growth forests will be governed by an interim policy, outlined in more detail in a letter from the deputy chief of the National Forest System to regional foresters. Public comments can be submitted via webform at [www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=65356](http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=65356) Submit hard copy letters to: Director, Ecosystem Management Coordination, 201 14th Street SW, Mailstop 1108, Washington, DC 20250-1124. **Comments are most valuable if received by February 2, 2024.**

For complete details, visit: <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/12/19/biden-harris-administration-proposes-first-its-kind-national-forest>



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Knock Knock!  
 Who's there?  
 Owls. Owls who?  
 Yes, they do!

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## What's Happening in Southernmost IL...

...winter has arrived but days are getting longer

### Winter Botany at Heron Pond Nature Preserve

Saturday, Jan. 27th, 10a.m. – 1p.m.

Join the So. Chapter of the IL Native Plant Society at Heron Pond Nature Preserve for a morning of dormant season botany at a Cypress swamp!

Bring sturdy hiking boots, warm clothing, water and snacks.

Directions: Take Karnak/Belnap Road from Karnak, Illinois, for 5 miles. Turn Left onto Heron Pond Road and follow the road for 1 mile. Trailhead will be well marked and pay attention to the signage for Heron pond and Little Black Slough Nature Preserve. For more details, email [southernillinoisplants@gmail.com](mailto:southernillinoisplants@gmail.com)

### SIU Journey to the Eclipse talk Series

First Friday of each month, 3:00-4:30 p.m.

(Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, March 1<sup>st</sup>, & April 5<sup>th</sup>)

At Guyon Auditorium, Morris Library, Southern IL University.

Talks are sponsored by the SIU School of Physics and Applied Physics and the STEM Education Research Center (SERC). For more details or to join via Zoom, visit <https://eclipse.siu.edu/talk-series/>

### CONWR Annual Bald Eagle Tours

Saturday, Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup> & Sunday, Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>

Tours each day at 8:00 & 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Tours begin at the Visitor's Center with a short talk on Bald Eagles. Then visitors will be driven around in the closed area of the Refuge to view active Bald Eagle nests. There will be some walking, although it is not required. Reservations required. Phone the Refuge at 618.997.3344 ext. 1 for more info or to register.

### Plant Blindness Presentation at Giant City State Park

Sunday, Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2:00-3:00 p.m.

All life as we know it literally owes its survival to plants, yet only a handful of people know how to identify them or can explain the importance of their roles in nature. This inability to see the plants that surround us is termed "plant blindness." This program, given by Illinois Botanist, Christopher David Benda, will challenge your perceptions about plants and teach you ways to inform others about their value to humans and nature and will be held at the Giant City State Park Visitor's Center, 235 Giant City Rd, Makanda Phone 618-457-4836 to register.

### Planting Clues: ow Plants Solve Crimes

Thursday, Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m.

Dr. David Gibson is an Emeritus Professor of Plant Biology at SIUC. For 30 years he taught courses in botany and ecology, including Forensic Botany - the focus of this presentation. He conducted ecological research, publishing 4 books including *Planting Clues: How Plants Solve Crimes*. His program will focus on the botany behind some famous criminal cases that includes plant evidence, such as the baby Lindbergh kidnapping, the Caylee Anthony murder, the arrest of serial killer Ted Bundy, and more.

## Southern Illinois Audubon Society P.O. Box 222 Carbondale, IL 62903-0222

Affiliate of the Illinois Audubon Society,  
the Illinois Environmental Council, & the North American Bluebird Society



### Birding Hike at Giant City State Park

Saturday, Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Join park volunteer (& SIAS President) Vicki Lang-Mendenhall as she guides participants on a birdwatching hike along the 1/3-mile accessible Post Oak Trail. This program is free and open to the public but space is limited and registration is required. Binoculars will be for loan to anyone who would like them. Registration required.

To register, phone the Visitor Center at 618.457.4836.

### What Frog is That? Find out at Giant City State Park

Saturday, Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Spring is just around the corner and the frog calls have started! Join Biologist John Palis as we get a jumpstart on warmer weather by learning how to identify our local frogs by sight and sound.

This will be a free indoor presentation with limited seating.

For more info or to register, phone the Visitor Center at 618.457.4836.

### Documenting the Biodiversity of the Cache - You can help!

As environmental changes create changes in the species diversity and distribution within our world, documenting the spread of exotics, the presence of rare or endangered species, and changes in the timing in the life cycles of various species becomes increasingly important. As resource management agencies are stretched increasingly thin with funding and personnel cuts, this job becomes increasingly difficult. You can help!

Several years ago, we set up a project within the iNaturalist website called "Biodiversity of the Cache River Watershed." At the time, the boundaries set for the project were just a "best guess" and the historic Cache watershed boundaries. We are currently working with folks compiling a more accurate map of the original watershed, so the project's boundaries will probably change in the future. This project was set up such that a person must join the project and add each observation individually to the project. This may also change in the future.

At the time of this writing, the Biodiversity of the Cache Watershed project has over 19,000 observations and has documented 2871 species within the watershed. If you attended the Friends annual meeting, you heard Cypress Creek refuge manager Ben McGuire speak about the need to further document the biodiversity of the refuge. We have now created a "Biodiversity of Cypress Creek NWR" project. Unlike the Cache watershed biodiversity project, the Cypress Creek project automatically adds any observation made within the refuge purchase boundaries to the project. If you go to the project page on iNaturalist there is a map of current observations showing the refuge property boundaries. So, looking for something to do this weekend? Check out the refuge map and go make some observations!

Link to Biodiversity of the Cache River Watershed project - <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biodiversity-of-the-cache-river-watershed>

Link to the Biodiversity of Cypress Creek NWR project - <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biodiversity-of-cypress-creek-national-wildlife-refuge>

If you wonder where all that wild bird seed is going:

The Burrow System of an Eastern Chipmunk

