



Southern Illinois Audubon Society Newsletter

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Southern Illinois
Audubon Society
P.O. Box 222
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*Established on the first
Earth Day, in April 1970*

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SIAS is the sponsor of
*The Birding Blitz of
Southernmost Illinois*

Details can be found at:
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Join SIAS on Friday, Jan. 23rd for a presentation on Rare Plants of the Natural Areas of southern Illinois by John Schwegman. This, our annual program, will be held in the meeting room at Carbondale Township Hall, 217 E. Main St., C'dale. ***John's presentation will start at 7:00 p.m.!**

We'll have a potluck prior to John's presentation. Details below.

*Entrance to the Township Hall is from the rear of the building where two parking lots are available for use. (216. E. Monroe St.)

John Schwegman is a lifelong naturalist who had a long career as a botanist with the IL Dept. of Conservation and IL Dept. of Natural Resources. John was instrumental in forming the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, and has served many years on the board of the commission. Since his retirement, John has continued to study wildlife, including dragonflies, birds, mussels, and plants. He also enjoys sharing his photography and stories. John's charming wife Martha always accompanies John, sharing all his adventures.

For this annual meeting night, we're bringing the potluck back! We'll also have a silent auction and our election of officers. Note: earlier potluck set-up time of 5:30 p.m. with potluck starting time of 6:00 p.m. Please bring an entrée to share and your own dinnerware and utensils. SIAS provide will some beverages. 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. Like last year, the proceeds will go to Free Again Wildlife Rehabilitation! Members are encouraged to bring new or lightly used items for the auction and their spending money. Folks providing auctions items are asked to suggest a starting bid value.

A few years back our elections got a bit off sync because of an Outings Chair vacancy. To bring it back in to sync, the slate of officers to be elected/re-elected this year are Outings Chair - Rhonda Rothrock and Conservation/Education Chair - Cathie Hutcheson. To be eligible to vote, SIAS members need to be up-to-date with their dues payment. SIAS Treasurer Judy Marshall will be present to accept 2026 payments.

Nov./Dec. SIAS Meeting Highlights- The December 5th program was uniquely different than those in the past. In those past many years, program director Vicki Lang-Mendenhall has excelled in finding exceptional speakers. I, for one, would be hard-pressed to pick out just one or two favorites. They've all been outstanding.

But Tom Caldwell's presentation was unique, somewhat of a first, in that it was like an art history class focused on art made by birds rather than humans. Unlike some art history classes, Tom's class was very fun and engaging.

It goes without saying that nature is an artful place. But seems we humans often miss seeing the forest for the trees. We occasionally make the mistake of assuming something we encounter was made by man when in actuality it was made by an animal. Tom provided an example of an 1872 expedition to New Guinea, where Italian Naturalist Odoardo Beccari, upon discovering a bower bird's nest (bower), considered it "a piece of workmanship lovelier than the ingenuity of any animal had ever been known to construct." He assumed it was made by a local tribe. An early example of what happens when we assume. As it turns out all species of bower birds create bowers as part of their mating ritual. They're used to attract a female. Once mated, the females leave and build their own nests and raise their chicks alone. The bower, some extravagantly and diligently decorated in natural plant material, rocks, and bones while others are adorned in colored objects (including plastic items), serve no permanent physical purpose. Tom provided life history of the bower bird and had images of various species and their artistic bowers.

Art for art's sake? If a bower is art, how do we view it and its makers in the bigger scheme of nature and the natural world. Should it have value? What is its value to us? These questions ignited lots of insightful questions and interesting conversations. Tom's conclusion was that nature is too often overlooked or taken for granted. We should take time to stop and experience the art in and of nature in the sights and smells it provides. His hope was that this time spent with bowerbirds had been a welcome diversion. Loud applause confirmed that the evening was time well spent.

We thank Tom for the wonderful lesson on bower birds. To read more about "The surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human," consider reading Noah Strycker's 2014 book *The Magic & Mystery of Birds*. (I wish it was in audio form.) *-Rhonda R.*



SIAS 2026 Meeting Calendar

February 27th- Kimberly Rohlig on Hummingbirds

March 27th- Speaker Clay Kolar, IDNR Retired: Forgotten surface mine tree plantings

April- Field trip replaces program; date, time, & destination TBA

April 25th & 26th- Birding Blitz weekend

May- Annual spring picnic, date, time, & destination TBA

June & July- No programs, enjoy your summer!

August 22nd- Mark Denzer: Reintroduction of Alligator Gar

September- Fall picnic; date, time, & destination TBA

October 23rd- Program speaker TBA

Nov/Dec combined mtg., Dec 4th- Program speaker TBA

A Request for Members to Help Provide Refreshments

In January we will pass around a sign-up sheet requesting members to volunteer for refreshments duty for our 2026 program calendar year. Phyllis Beck, our amazing Hospitality Chair, has happily carried the burden of supplying treats for quite a while. We are so very grateful to Phyllis, but we'd like to ease her responsibilities a bit. Your help would be appreciated.

What's Happening in Southernmost IL...

...not (yet) the boreal species irruption expected, not (yet) the winter weather we expected either. Confused trees are budding.

Note to all: the events listed could be subject to change at any time or for any reason. For confirmation, please check with the contact listed in the event(s) description.

Plants of Concern Herbarium Mounting

Thursday, January 29th, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Are you interested in mounting herbarium specimens for the Plants of Concern Program and Southern IL University Carbondale? This session will be held at the Franklin County Extension Office, 1212 Route 14 West Benton, IL. Training and materials will be provided. Online registration required and will close on January 25th. Register at <https://registration.extension.illinois.edu/start/2026-plants-of-concern-herbarium-mounting>

Coffee on the Cache

Last Friday of the month, starting January 30th, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. A Monthly Community Roundtable at the Cache River Wetlands Center. Coffee on the Cache is a laid-back, welcoming monthly gathering, part conversation, part idea-swap, and part “show-and-tell,” with free coffee and time to connect with each other at the Henry N. Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center 8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress, IL. Free and no need to RSVP! For more details, call 618.657.2064

Bats and Forest Habitat, From Canopy to Understory

February 4th, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Bats play a vital role in healthy ecosystems, but many bat populations are struggling. They are essential to a healthy ecosystem, as they eat insects that are pests to trees, crops, and humans. Most bats use trees as their daytime roosts during spring, summer, and fall. Learn what makes good natural and artificial roost habitats for bats and other ways to support your local bat populations. Presenter: Joy O'Keefe, Associate Professor & Wildlife Extension Specialist. **This Online presentation** is hosted by the Illinois Forestry Association. Registration required. Register at <https://extension.illinois.edu/events/2026-02-04-bats-and-forest-habitat>

Annual Backyard Maple Syrup Production Workshop

Saturday, February 7th, 10:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

The tenth annual backyard maple syrup production workshop will be held at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, located at 354 State Highway 145 N, Simpson, IL. The program is free and open to the public. This free workshop will cover the basics of maple syrup production and allow attendees to see firsthand the entire process. Registration required at 618.695.2441 or at <https://registration.extension.illinois.edu/start/annual-backyard-maple-syrup-production-workshop-2026>

Eagle Tours at Crab Orchard NW Refuge

Saturday, Feb. 7th & Sunday Feb. 8th, 8:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m.

Friends of Crab Orchard NW Refuge invite folks to join one of the free Eagle Tours. Vans will be provided for approx. 2 hour tours. Expect some walking. Meet at the Visitors Center, 6987 Headquarters Road, Marion, IL. Reservations required! For more details or to register, call 618.997.3344.

Hiking the Appalachian Trail BC (before cell phones)

Thursday, February 12th, 7:00 p.m.

In 1975, a young enthusiastic hiker completed his dream to hike the Appalachian Trail (AT). He was the 282nd hiker to complete the 2,048 mile trail. Fifty years later, Robert Bristow, SIU Graduate and Professor Emeritus Westfield State University, will share the story of his trip and draw on the 100-year history of the world-famous AT. Program will be at Carbondale Township Hall Meeting Room, 217 East Main St. Park behind the Hall, off Monroe St. Enter through the back door. Sponsored by Shawnee Group Sierra Club, free and open to the public. For more details, contact Barb McKasson at 618.549.9684.

Recent Innovations at the SIU Herbarium

Tuesday, February 17th, 6:30 p.m.

Please join the southern Chapter of the IL Native Plant Society (SINPS) for this seminar. Drs. Nancy Garwood and Kurt Neubig will discuss recent innovations at the Southern IL University Herbarium. This program will take place in Life Science Bldg 2, 1125 Lincoln Drive, on the SIU Carbondale campus. For more details, reach out to SINPS at illinoisplants.org or www.facebook.com/southernillinoisplants

Snake Road Sentinel Spring 2026 Workshop

Saturday, February 28th, 10:00 a.m. – 12 noon

Shawnee National Forest (SNF) is seeking volunteers to assist with data collection on Snake Road during the spring season road closure. Snake Road Sentinels will be responsible for surveying the wildlife observed and monitoring visitor usage. This year's workshop will take place at the Mississippi River Bluff Ranger Station, 521 N. Main Street, Jonesboro, IL. Registration required. For more details or to register, visit go.illinois.edu/SnakeRoad Online training available.



Great Backyard Bird Count

29th Annual * February 13-16, 2026

<https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>

February Superb Owl Parties all the Rage!

So, what is a “Superb Owl Party” you ask?

It's a humorous, owl-themed party, that comes from a misspelling of Super Bowl. It was popularized by an episode of a comedic TV series featuring ancient vampires in the twenty-first century. The ancient vampires misunderstood their neighbors' invite to a Super Bowl party as an invite to a Superb Owl party.

Now, folks who aren't interested in football or the big game, are celebrating on that weekend with their own Superb Owl, owl-themed parties! They decorate with owl-themed items, serve owl (or bird) themed snacks like egg-rolls, offer owl (or bird) themed activities, and/or watch owl or bird-themed movies.

If you decide to hold a Superb Owl Party, here are a just few recommendations for some entertaining owl/bird-themed movies: *The Big Year* - Comedy. The best movie ever, but not as good as the book! *Listers: A Glimpse into Extreme Birdwatching* - Comedy. Just out. I haven't yet seen it but it gets great reviews from my birder friends. *Fly Away Home* - Family/Adventure. An endearing movie. A family finds an abandoned nest of Canada goose eggs, raises them, and teaches them to migrate. (Please don't try that at home!)

Winged Migration - An award-winning documentary. Follows several bird species and the obstacles they encounter as they migrate. A profound, very moving film. Rob and I cried nearly all the way through it.

Other party activities you might consider are bird-themed puzzles, board games, or a trivia contest. Owl/bird trivia can be found at various websites. Try www.britannica.com/quiz/owl-quiz Here are a couple to get you started.

What is a group of owls called? A parliament

How many degrees can owls rotate their heads? Up to 270 degrees.

How many eyelids does an owl have? Three! One for blinking, one for sleeping, and one to keep eyes clean.

Have fun at your Superb Owl party and don't forget to acknowledge the one who cooks for you all! -Rhonda R.



The 20th Anniversary of Big Muddy Wetlands - a few months late

August 25, 2025 was the 20th Anniversary of the dedication of the Big Muddy Wetlands. On that day 185.7 acres of land north of the Jackson Co. / Union Co. line and east along IL Rt. 3 was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service and became part of the Shawnee National Forest. A myriad of organizations worked together to make this happen, including Ducks Unlimited, the IL Clean Energy Community Foundation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the successful but now dissolved American Land Conservancy.

-Rhonda R

Redwood & Sequoia Trees Magazines Free To Kids of All Ages

Save the Redwoods League envisions vibrant redwood forests of the scale and grandeur that once graced the California coast and the Sierra Nevada, protected forever, restored to grow old again, and connected to people through a network of magnificent parks and protected areas that inspire all of us with the beauty and power of nature. They have made several publications available for free by just a download from their website.

Life in the Coast Redwoods explores the plants, animals, and people of the redwood forest from past to present.

Our Giant Sequoia Forests explores the plants, animals, and people of the giant sequoia forest from past to present.

Coast Redwood and Giant Sequoia Range Map provides for exploration of where California's Giant Trees are found.

Educators can request hard copies! Visit Save the Redwood League at <https://www.savetheredwoods.org/learning-center/educators/education-publications/>

Help Needed with Kid Crafts at the 2026 Eco Fest

For the 5th year, SIAS will be participating in the Family Eco Festival at Also Pass Vineyards to be held on Sunday, April 19th, from 1:00-5:00 p.m. It's a day of family-friendly fun and learning. Attendees will engage in hands-on activities focused on our beautiful yet complex natural environment with its unique animal and plant inhabitants.

This is a fundraiser for the nonprofit organization, Innovations in STEM Education; money raised from the event will fund grants distributed to local teachers needing science materials. The program offers K-12 educators assistance in developing effective classroom activities related to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), environmental sustainability, and environmental justice. In 2024, the fundraiser provided 10 teachers from six counties with grants that impacted more than 1,000 students.

SIAS will have our display up and will be offering a simple kids craft: making paper flowers and paper butterflies. Volunteers would help with the crafts and speak to folks about SIAS. Folks could volunteer in shifts. If you can help, please let me (Rhonda) know by our March 27 meeting. Email me at woodthrusheola@hotmail.com

Also, crayons wanted!! If you have an old box of usable crayons you no longer need, please bring them to one of the next couple SIAS meetings. -Rhonda R

Don't forget to Renew Your Dues Your membership is vital to SIAS!

We are nothing without you! If you receive a paper copy of the newsletter, check your mailing label for your 'paid to' date. If you receive it electronically, contact Judy Marshall 618.559.0147 to verify whether you are paid up. Thanks!! -RR

The Cache River Wetland Center is Open Again!

And it truly was a grand re-opening. For most of the opening there was a constant stream of visitors coming through. Everyone was glad to have the Wetland Center staffed and open again.

A brief welcome address took place at 10:15 a.m., with remarks from the Site Superintendent Jay Massey, Chief of Parks Calvin Beckmann, and the site's new Natural Resources Coordinator Sydney Waters. Ms. Waters seems well prepared, comfortable and, adept in her new position. At least nineteen agency and volunteer organizations were there to greet and speak with visitors. Several provided activities to engage the visiting children and adults.

SIAS was one of the organizations invited to table at the event. By the end of the day we'd passed out dozens of newsletters and two dozen folks signed up to receive our complementary newsletter for three months. Rather than providing a kids craft, we had a mix of nature stickers to give to the kids.

Most impressive was the number of various state and federal agencies participating, including five from the IL Dept. of Natural Resources. Events like this should take place more often! -Rhonda R

The FrogWatch Community Science Project

FrogWatch is a community science program that empowers people to protect frogs, toads, and their habitats. By learning to recognize their calls, volunteers provide scientists with important information about where these amphibians lie and how their populations are doing. This helps guide conservation efforts.

Frogs and toads are nature's early warning system. Listening for their calls helps track local populations. Observations made by volunteers support scientists and conservations groups. Every sighting helps protect frogs, their homes, and our environment.

If you'd like to get involved, follow FrogWatch STL (St. Louis) Gateway Chapter, at www.frogwatchstl.com. Join FrogWatch's February-April trainings to learn frog call monitoring. For more details contact Mike Dawson, St. Louis Zoo, dawson@stlzoo.org or Jessica Mohlman*, National Great Rivers Research & Education Ctr., jmohlman@lc.edu.

*In August 2024, Jessica Mohlman presented a video and answered questions about her research on the state-threatened birdvoiced treefrog for the Friends of the Cache Annual meeting. This treefrog may be found in the southern tip of Illinois in cypress swamps, sloughs, and marshes. Jessica's study took/takes place in cypress swamps located in the Eastern Shawnee National Forest, the Cache River State Natural Area, and the Cypress Creek National

Wildlife Refuge. Her goal is to provide a more accurate assessment of population, abundance, growth, and survival of birdvoiced treefrogs in southernmost Illinois. -Rhonda R



Please don't forget to Renew Your Membership. We consider January our "renew by" date because it's when we hold our yearly elections. If you appreciate our newsletters & programs but are not a member, please consider joining! Fill in this form and return it with payment or renew at the next meeting. Thanks! Sorry, we don't have a digital payment option.

Individual Member	\$15
Family	\$25
Student Voting Member	\$ 5
Donation	\$ _____
Amount Enclosed	\$ _____

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I/We would like to receive our newsletter via email: YES / NO
If you receive your newsletter electronically, contact Judy M.. or Rhonda R. to check your dues status.

Help SIAS hit the New Year flying!



2025-26 Christmas Bird Count Season Over, all but the Compiling

The 2025-26 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season, as it relates to local counts, ended with the Middle Mississippi NWR on January 3rd. Now the work of compiling continues for some. While I had to put my compilation on hold to prepare this newsletter, there are some details to share from my counts and the Crab Orchard CBC, compiled by Vicki (Lang-Mendenhall).

Folks participating in the Crab Orchard CBC weren't able to access areas within the closed parts of the Refuge as in the past. Yet, they still managed to tally goodly numbers of waterfowl and multiple unexpected species. Both a palm warbler and an orange-crowned warbler were documented. Five red-breasted mergansers, 54 canvasbacks, 201 pintails, and 17 American black ducks topped the list of 6 duck species located. The count totaled 97 species.

Mermet Lake CBC compilation is a work in progress but a few highlights include a peregrine falcon at Mermet Lake but only six species of ducks were present. Duck hunting season coincided with the count date so counting time was limited as was lake access. Anne and Bill Parmley, who live within the circle found 12 northern bobwhite (quail) at the edge of their field and a loggerhead shrike just 2 miles from their home.

New Year's Day was clear and sunny, with nearly no wind and above freezing temperatures for the Jackson County CBC. Another orange-crowned warbler was documented. But what was unique for the day, were two separate sightings of pink flamingos!

More unexpected, one appeared melanistic, an overproduction of dark pigment. A second appeared orange. See photos. Flamingos are said to get their pink, sometimes orange, color from their diet of algae, crustaceans, and brine shrimp, all rich in carotenoid pigments that turn them pink and/or orange.

While I'm still in the tally process for the Arklands/Pyramid CBC and the Middle Miss CBC, both counts seemed less birdy than in past years. For what might be the first time in the count's history, no one located a short-eared owl or a great horned owl at Arklands/Pyramid.

-Rhonda R.



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*Affiliate of the Illinois Audubon Society and
the Illinois Environmental Council*

