



Southern Illinois Audubon Society Newsletter

August 2026
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Southern Illinois Audubon Society
P.O. Box 222
Carbondale, IL
62903-0222

Established on the first
Earth Day, in April 1970

<http://www.siaudubon.org>
(website currently down
for maintenance)

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

The 2027 Blitz to be held
on April 24th.
Details and registration
forms can be found at:
[www.facebook.com/groups/
317666471615613/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/317666471615613/)

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Questions? Phone the Wetlands Center at 618.657.2064



JOIN US! THE BIG YEAR MOVIE NIGHT & FALL MIGRATION MINI-SIT KICKOFF

FREE POPCORN • PRIZES • BIRDING • CITIZEN SCIENCE



FRIDAY, AUGUST 28, 2026



6:00 – 8:00 PM



HENRY N. BARKHAUSEN
CACHE RIVER
WETLANDS CENTER

8885 IL-37 S. • CYPRESS, ILLINOIS 62923



COME FOR THE FUN!



Watch *The Big Year*
(Rated PG)



Win prizes provided by
Southern Illinois Audubon Society



Learn about the 2026
Fall Migration Mini-Sit



Register your team
and ask questions

ABOUT THE MOVIE

The *Big Year* is a birding comedy-adventure based on a true story. Three birdwatchers embark on a year-long competition to see more North American bird species than anyone else. Along the way, they discover that the journey is about more than birds—it's about friendship, adventure, and seeing the world in a new way.



NO BIRDING EXPERIENCE
NECESSARY – ALL ARE WELCOME!

Fall Migration "Mini-Sit"

Saturday, September 19th
9:00 a.m. 'til noon / choose your site
Bring lunch & share sightings at picnic
at 1:30 p.m. at the Wetlands Center

Questions? Contact Kim at kimrohli@illinois.edu



This "mini-sit" is an event where birdwatchers record as many bird species by sight and sound for 3-hours at an eBird hotspot in the Cache River Watershed. Participants are asked to register by Sept. 13th at go.illinois.edu/MiniSit or scan the code to take you to the registration site. Bring your binoculars, spotting scope, camera, lawn chair, and snacks. Sit back, relax, and enjoy fall migration!

SIAS 2026 Meeting Calendar

August 28th - SIAS is sponsoring the screening of *The Big Year* movie at the Cache Wetlands Center as our monthly program!

September 13 - Fall picnic at Lincoln Memorial (Park) Picnic Ground, Jonesboro, IL; details and directions*

September 19 - Fall Migration "Mini-Sit" at the Glass Hill

October 23rd - Mark Denzer: Reintroduction of Alligator Gar

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

Fall Migration "Mini-Sit" with SIAS

Sept. 19th, 9:00 a.m. until noon

Join Vicki and Rhonda as we (SIAS) sit back, relax, and enjoy fall migration at Glass Hill, an eBird hotspot on Pendleton Rd, north off Dongola Rd, Cypress.

Pack your binoculars, scope, camera, lawn chair, and snacks to enjoy the outing. Please register at link below.



After the count, you can bring your lunch and lawn chairs to the Cache River Wetlands Center 8885 IL-37, Cypress, for a picnic from noon to 1:30 p.m. to share your sightings.



Register your team at go.illinois.edu/MiniSit by September 13th.

In Memoriam - Joseph Merkelbach

On May 31st I received an email from Joe's daughter Anne Hudson, known to me by her nickname Libby, with the sad news that Joe had passed away the prior evening. She stated his sudden passing had followed a valiant but brief battle with a recently diagnosed, very aggressive Stage IV metastatic cancer.

Libby said that beyond his immediate family, his deepest passion and enduring joy lay with his Audubon and conservation communities. She added that he truly came alive when he was immersed in nature, observing birds in their natural habitats. His unwavering dedication to the natural world and his commitment to its preservation were central to who he was.

Joe was SIAS President for approximately 20 years, possibly 22, until he stepped down in 2023. He stayed on the board as Vice President until this year, resigning from the Board in January 2026.

Joe was an active and vital member of SIAS for all those years, faithfully driving down from Centralia to Carbondale to be master of ceremony at our monthly meetings. Judith Joy often carpooled down from Centralia with Joe, until her passing. He also participated in innumerable outings, some that he led, winter bird counts, and the Birding Blitz contest.

As a way to respect Joe's memory, we hope to engage his grandson Connor as a lifetime member of SIAS. Connor is said to have acquired Joe's love of birds and nature

-Rhonda R.

SIAS Fall Picnic September 13th at 1 p.m. at Lincoln Memorial Picnic Ground

The Annual Southern IL Audubon Society fall picnic will be held on **Sunday, Sept. 13th**, at Lincoln Memorial Picnic Ground (Park) at 521 N. Main St., Jonesboro, IL

Arrive to help set up and for socializing at 1 p.m. with dining at 2. SIAS will provide hotdogs, buns, condiments, and water. A veggie option will be available. Members are asked to bring a dish to share and their own beverages, utensils, and dinnerware. Grilling help needed. There is plenty of accessible parking and bathrooms but no drinkable water.

We need folks to help grill. Please let us know if you can help. Any questions, please contact Vicki at 618.697.9868 or vickil@siu.edu.

Directions: Take Rt. 127 or Rt. 146 to the Jonesboro round-a-bout. At the round-a-bout, turn north on Main St, go 1/2 mile then turn west/left into the park. Watch for signs directing folks to the pavilion.

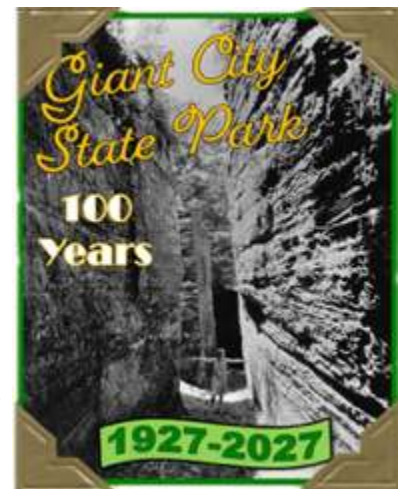
On September 15, 1858, 168 years ago, Lincoln Memorial Picnic Ground (Park) was the site of the third Lincoln-Douglas debate held during their run for the Illinois Senate that year.

Giant City State Park is turning 100!

In 2027 Giant City will be celebrating 100 years as a State Park and they want to hear from you! They'd love hearing your stories about Giant City! In 2027 they would like to share your Giant City memories with the public in a year-long Visitor Center display.

- Stories should be no more than 100 words long and should include a copy of an original picture
- Stories & pictures will be accepted August-November of 2026
- Stories & pictures can be submitted via email at this address: DNR.GiantCityloo@illinois.gov or, in person at the Giant City Visitors Center between 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. 7 days a week.

These can be funny stories, life events, or just favorite Giant City memories. For more details, call Jennifer Randolph-Bollinger at 618.457.4836. Thank you for helping them celebrate Giant City State Park!



Illinois Extension
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What's Happening in Southernmost IL...

...we've been having a heatwave, a late summer heatwave.

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.

Friends of the Cache River Watershed Annual Mtg.

Thursday, August 20th, 6:00 p.m.

At the Carbondale Civic Center, 200 S. Illinois Ave., Carbondale.

Join the Friends of the Cache for their annual meeting and a presentation by Susan Post and Michael Jeffords on "Hidden Worlds of the Cache and Beyond". Open and free to the public. You don't have to be a Friends member to attend.

Chatauqua Bottoms Site Tour Walk & Floristic Study

Saturday, August 22nd, 10:00 a.m. - noon

Join the IL Native Plant Society Southern Chapter for a site tour at Green Earth's Chatauqua Bottoms Nature Preserve. Meet at the main parking lot at 2100 W. Chatauqua Rd, Carbondale. This walk is in advance of a possible floristic survey of the site. Rain or shine. Dress appropriately for hiking in woodlands. Bring water as it might be a hot day.

The site possesses tall grass prairie, upland and bottomland forest, and a bottomland hardwood restoration area planted in 2005.

No registration necessary. Questions? Contact Kurt Neubig 352.284.3688.

Snake Road Sentinels

Saturday, August 22nd, 10:00 a.m.

The USFS Shawnee National Forest is seeking volunteers to assist with data collection on Snake Road during the fall road closure.

Come out to the Snake Road Sentinel Fall Workshop on Saturday, August 22 at 10:00 a.m. at the Mississippi River Bluff Ranger Station, 521 N. Main St, Jonesboro. Or instead, you can complete the training online.

All new community scientists are encouraged to attend the in-person training. To learn more or register, visit <https://go.illinois.edu/SnakeRoad>

Birding Walk with Lily Glaeser and Indigo Nathani

8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. > various dates & locations

Join Master Naturalists Lily Glaeser and Indigo Nathani for a leisurely walk to look at birds! All ages and experiences are welcome. Registration is required in case the event needs to be cancelled due to inclement weather. For more info or to register online for each event, go to go.illinois.edu/BirdWithLilyIndigo

Sunday, Aug. 30 – Giant City State Park Post Oak Trail, 460 Giant City Lodge Rd, Makanda. This event will be a sit. Please bring a lawn or camp chair.

Thursday, Sept. 3 – Green Earth Oakland Nature Preserve, 1319-1321 N Oakland Ave, Carbondale.

Sunday, Sept. 13 – Giant City State Park Indian Creek Trail

Coffee on the Cache

Friday, August 28th, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Coffee on the Cache is a monthly gathering, part conversation, part idea-swap, and part "show-and-tell," with free coffee and time to connect with each other at the Cache River Wetlands Center, 8885 State Route 37 South, Cypress. Free and no need to RSVP! For more details, call 618.657.2064

Events at Giant City State Park -Registration Required

Saturday, Sept. 26th – 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Jennifer Wharton: Forage for Art, Nature Mandala photography at the Giant City Visitor Center 1-245 Giant City Rd, Makanda
Phone Visitor Ctr. at 618.457.4836 for all details or to register.

Brown Bag Birding and Socializing

Second Tuesday of the Month, 11:30 a.m.

September 8th & October 12th

Meet at Red Oak Pavilion located in Evergreen Park, Carbondale.

We sit under a pavilion, so lunch happens rain or shine.

Directions (from IL Rt. 51/ South Illinois Ave.) Take IL Rt. 51 south from Carbondale to stop-light intersection with Pleasant Hill Rd, turn west onto Pleasant Hill Rd, follow it to western most park entrance then turn south next look for Red Oak Pavilion on right.

There are restrooms in Evergreen Park. Pavilion has picnic tables, if you would be more comfortable with a folding chair, then please bring one. Please bring your lunch, drink, binoculars and conversations. Please invite family, friends and neighbors. Everyone is welcome. For more details contact Kathryn Jenkel at katjenkel@yahoo.com or 618.559.2908.

The I66 Corridor Threat is Back Again



The "dead horse" formally known as I66 is back on life support. A group of Cape Girardeau business folk are again attempting to revive this dead horse under a new name: the TransAmerica Corridor. I became aware of this a year ago, hoped it would fail but no. They're proposing a 40-mile interstate (could be from 150-300 feet wide) from Paducah to Cape Girardeau, directly through the Shawnee NF, the Cache River Watershed, and the MS river floodplain. The revamped proposal offers (insane) "wildlife" overpasses.

They also propose a route that continues through southern Missouri west from Cape. This proposed section thru Missouri is meeting with opposition from farmers and citizens along the proposed route who recognize their lives will be completely destroyed. <https://transamericacorridor.com/about>

If you go to the website, you will find their "Corridor History". Conveniently, it omits any mention of IL Gov. Ryan passing on inclusion, the resistance from southernmost IL residents, or the fact the proposal through Illinois failed to pass the scrutiny of the Army Corps of Engineers, the USFWS, or the USFS. They do reference that a KY route directly from Paducah to Missouri is unfeasible as it would require a new bridge over the Mississippi River. (That would put the point of entry south of Cape, not across the Emerson bridge, basically defeating the reasons Cape business folk want it so badly.)

Under their NOW section there is a statement, "The organization has garnered many letters of support from across Missouri, Illinois, and Kentucky including municipalities, counties, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, and elected officials." But I find no links to identify those Illinois related supporters. Recently, I and others who opposed the route were cold-called by a Cape gentleman in a failed attempt to sway our opinions.

Folks, please contact Bost, Durbin, Duckworth, and local politicians in opposition of this new attempt to destroy quality of life in southernmost IL. It would provide no economic gain to Illinois and is also a way for Cape to usurp the river traffic that is destined for a proposed river terminal in Cairo. -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	\$ _____

Your Name	_____
Street Address	_____
City, State, Zip	_____
Phone Number	_____
Email	_____

**If bird is the word,
SIAS is the steward.**

**Mail to: Southern Illinois Audubon Society
Attn: Membership
P.O. Box 222, Carbondale, IL 62903-0222**

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



Let me tell you 'bout the Birds and the Bees Butterflies

Mississippi kites have been nesting on or adjacent to our Hickory Ridge home for a number of years. As per my eBird account records, it was in the summer of 2016 that I first documented the possible nesting on our property of Mississippi kites, or MIKIs as I refer to them. (MIKI is the 4-letter code for Mississippi kite, used when collecting various types of field data or banding). To me, their high, 2-noted, wolf-whistle-like vocalization sounds like they're saying their code name: *Mik-eee*.

In subsequent years, upon the MIKIs' return, it's been as if our property and adjacent land was their true summer home. As soon as they arrive, they act like they own the place. While I call them MIKIs in general, I refer to a pair that use our place for their summer home as Mickey and Minnie. And it has appeared that, at least, one MIKI has fledged each year since 2016. This summer the pair looks to have fledged two chicks, Millie and Morty. Fledglings always sound like they're crying "feed-me" and they cry non-stop, all day long, keeping Mickey and Minnie busy!

There are 3 ponds on our property. Two of them are fish free. I assume that's one reason why we always seem to have a reasonable number of dragonflies cruising around the fields. It's this situation that likely makes our property MIKI friendly. Although I've never witnessed it, I've worried the MIKIs might be eating hummingbirds. Because of my hummer feeding compulsion, we have a reasonably large number of hummers around. I refer to them as my miniature, flying, overlords who constantly demand their sugary tribute.

Butterfly numbers on our place seemed to have dropped over the years. We've assumed this coincided with what seemed to be a regional decline. That notion held until a late spring EZGO ride. (We acquired a golf cart turned field work truck, the EZGO. It has a partial roof to shield users from the sun. Sounds like a senior citizen propulsion system? It is! And it's delightful to drive around the field edge observing nature without the loud sound of an infernal combustion engine.)

Late this spring we were in the EZGO creeping along the wood/field edge southwest of the house when we saw our season's first tiger swallowtail flitting low over the field. Nearby was a dead tree the MIKIs love to perch in. Because of the EZGO's roof, we didn't see that a MIKI was present until it swooped down, snatching the swallowtail. Nor did we see that the MIKI flew to perch in the dead tree. But in less than 1/2 a minute we saw a yellow swallowtail wing slowly drifting down from above to the ground. Stupefied, it never once dawned on me that MIKIs ate butterflies. -Rhonda R.

To read a nice 2020 article about a study of Mississippi kites in southern IL, conducted by Ren Hendrickson when he was a graduate student in the Dept. of Zoology at SIUC, visit <https://www.southernillinois.edu/zoology/mississippi-kites>

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



A book that tells the true story about 3 guys who set their careers and personal lives on hold for a quest to see as many birds as they could in North America in a year.

Fewer Butterflies are fluttering by & Dragonfly numbers are draggin'

This year, news is not good with regard to butterfly and dragonfly numbers around southernmost IL. Master Naturalists, and SIAS Secretary, Mary McCarthy reports that the year started out good in April for these two insect groups. But the cool May and then the unbearable heat seems to have decreased numbers of both species substantially.

Mary says that the Green Earth Stan Harris Prairie site, is looking very nice. It's worth a visit to see such a nice prairie in such a little pocket of land. The Oakland site seems to be doing not so well, but has been good in the past.

The good news is that new volunteers have joined the ranks of butterfly and dragonfly monitors. Mary adds, "I don't know if it is worth saying that we should pray for a cooler summer in 2027."



FROM THE PAST, August 2015 SIAS Newsletter: IDOT Nixes Corridor 66

In July the Illinois Dept. of Transportation (IDOT) announced that the 66 Corridor project was being discontinued. This, they said, was due to the lack of a state-to-state agreement between IDOT and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. IDOT made their decision to nix the 66 Corridor Project nearly a year after the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet notified IDOT that Kentucky was terminating their participation in the 66 Corridor Feasibility Study. But IDOT also stated that this discontinuation did not preclude any future 66 Corridor studies from occurring.

In their press release, IDOT wrote that the data collected to date and input received from the region during the 66 Corridor study indicated a need for improvements in the east-west direction in southern Illinois. This, they said, has led to the determination to focus a new study on a smaller area within the region where they identified the greatest need: between IL Rt. 3 / IL Rt. 146 and I-57. This new study is slated to begin within the next year.

The announcement of the 66 Corridor study termination was welcome news to many of us who supported the no-build option. But IDOT's statement that the collected data supports a need for improvements in the east-west direction, has many of us questioning IDOT's interpretations and intentions. In an article about the project termination, SE Missourian newspaper referred to the new study area as the "Shawnee Expressway."

It's true that much of the road infrastructure in southernmost Illinois is in great need of repair but spending money on an "expressway" rather than repairing existing roads, will not resolve our transportation problems. View their press release at <http://www.66corridor.org/doclib/docs%5C2015-07-09PressRelease.pdf>. -Rhonda R.