

## Tennessee Cerulean Warbler Conservation topic of December 1 meeting

**O**n Wednesday, December 1, Melinda Welton (who has a MS in Zoology from the University of Connecticut) will present "The Challenges Of Cerulean Warbler Conservation In Tennessee." Welton is an active member of TOS and chairs the state-wide Conservation Committee. When she is not volunteering for TOS she works as an independent contract biologist. For the last five years, Welton has worked on projects related to Cerulean Warbler and Golden-winged Warbler status, distribution and conservation in Tennessee. Additionally, she manages a Red-cockaded Woodpecker habitat project in Florida.

Somehow Melinda also finds time to serve as a trustee for The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee.

According to the Defenders of Wildlife, the Cerulean Warbler, *Dendroica cerulea*, population has declined 70% since 1966. As with many neotropical migrants, Cerulean Warblers have been negatively impacted by habitat loss and fragmentation. These sky-blue birds breed in southeastern North America, including Tennessee, in mature deciduous forests. They prefer large forested areas with little undergrowth and nest high in the trees. Ceruleans winter in

*(Continued on page 3)*

📅 MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### Saturday, December 4, 7:30-11 AM

*Ft. Loudoun Dam and Hiwassee Refuge-Sandhill Crane Viewing Area, Birchwood, TN.*

### Saturday, December 4, 2-4 PM

*Friends of Operation Migration Open House-Hiwassee Refuge. See page 8.*

### Christmas Bird Counts

Norris • Saturday, December 18  
Great Smokies • Sunday, December 19  
Cades Cove • Sunday, December 26  
Hiwassee • Saturday, January 1  
Knoxville • Sunday, January 2

*For details and contact info see page 2.*

### Saturday, January 8, 7:15 AM

*Eagle Count-Different area locations. See page 2.*

### Saturday, January 15, 7:45 AM

*Wilderness Weekend trip. See page 6.*

## December/January field trips.

### Saturday, December 4, 7:30-11 AM

*Ft. Loudoun Dam and Hiwassee Refuge-Sandhill Crane Viewing Area, Birchwood, TN*

**Leaders:** Harold Howell (828-6302; howellh2@bellsouth.net); Marcia Davis (558-1458; tennwren@aol.com)

This trip will stop at Ft. Loudoun Dam and points in between to arrive at the Sandhill Crane Viewing Area about 1 p.m. We will prepare our lunch there and be ready for the program to be presented from 2 to 4 p.m. by Operation Migration. This program was organized by Ken Dubke of the Chattanooga Chapter of TOS. *(See page 8 for details.)*

Meet at the Stokley Building parking lot, 320 N. Cedar Bluff, Knoxville, at 9 a.m. for carpooling to the site, or meet at the site. The leader will bring a portable charcoal grill. Please bring lunch such as hot dogs and "fixings," drinks, water or anything else you might like. Come prepared for a

*(Continued on page 2)*

*"The caged bird sings, with a fearful trill, of things unknown, but the longed for still...the caged bird, sings of freedom."*

- Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird," published in *Shaker, Why don't you Sing?*

## December/January outings

(Continued from page 1)

long day. We will go to the Blythe Ferry Crossing or the Cherokee Overlook to watch the cranes come in at sunset.

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

- **Norris** - Saturday, Dec. 18, 2004  
Chuck Nicholson, compiler -  
Phone 865-494-8688 h; 865-632-3582 w;  
cpnichol@bellsouth.net
- **Great Smokies (Gatlinburg)** - Sunday, Dec. 19, 2004  
David Trently, compiler - Phone 865-531-1473 h;  
856-974-8664 w; dtrently@utk.edu
- **Cades Cove** - Sunday, Dec. 26, 2004  
Susan Hoyle, compiler -  
Phone 865-909-0792 h; hoyle@cs.utk.edu
- **Hiwassee** - Saturday, January 1, 2005  
Kevin Calhoun, compiler -  
Phone 423-821-6802 h; kac@tennis.org
- **Knoxville** - Sunday, Jan. 2, 2005  
K. Dean Edwards, compiler -  
Phone 865-560-9701 h; kde@angst.engr.utk.edu

### ADDITIONAL FIELD TRIPS

Due to the busy Christmas Bird Count season, other field trips have not been finalized. We expect to have some other field trips in January including:

- **Saturday, January 8, 2005.** Marcia Davis will lead an eagle count trip. Met at parking lot at Westminster Presbyterian Church on Northshore at 7:15 a.m. Possible sites: Lake Shore Park, Craig Cove in Lyons Bend, Louisville Point Park and Ft. Loudoun Dam. Dress for muddy conditions. Call Marcia for details 558-1458.
- **January 17-20, 2005.** David Trently will lead a weekend trip to Arkansas January 17-20, 2005 (See page 6 for details.)

Do not forget the TOS Winter Meeting January 28-30, 2005 in Dayton, TN. Detailed information is on the web site at [www.tnbirds.org](http://www.tnbirds.org).

Detailed information for other field trips will be discussed at the December and January meetings, posted on tn-bird list serve, sent to the KTOS e-mail list and posted on the Knoxville TOS Bird Hotline, 865-577-4717, ext. 80.

If you have questions or wish to volunteer to lead a field trip, please call Harold at 865-828-6302.

- Best regards, Harold Howell, field trip coordinator

## Big Sit was big fun - By Janet McKnight

**O**n October 10, Kim Henry and I got up way earlier than usual to get to our 17-foot diameter circle at Kingston Steamplant. We arrived by 5 a.m. and immediately heard our first species, a Northern Mockingbird. It was a quiet and chilly start, but soon we began to hear the sweet sounds of the birds waking up around us. Just as the light began to show, a migrating Indigo Bunting came down from the night sky, making call notes for Kim's amazing ear to pick up, and landed in a tree just above us. A Red-shouldered Hawk sounded off, and we were treated to great scope looks as he perched in a snag to observe the dawning day. All morning the species showed themselves at intervals spaced just right to keep the count exciting. And then the birders began to show. We had many visitors throughout the day, and each birder to stop by our circle found us a species that Kim and I would have missed. Boyd Sharp spent several hours with us,

and stuck inside a 17-foot-diameter circle, how could we not get to know him—and he get to know us; it was a pleasure. And I'll never forget Charlie Muise trotting to the boat ramp to tell a rifle-armed hunter why he shouldn't harass a Black Vulture that was trying to feed on a big dead fish. What courage! My Hero!

What a fun day! Our last species came when we were packing up. I thought I heard a Chimney Swift, looked up, and saw dozens of them so high up that they were specks; somehow the sound of one made it down to us, giving us our 54th species. The spot was perfect except for the highway sounds, so next year we will select a new circle and do it all again. The visits we got made our day—thank-you to all who came by! And I especially want to thank Kimpossible, dear friend and most awesome birder, for being willing to join me on crazy birding adventures, running for dog meds, weighing puppies, etc. etc....(Steve too!)



## Presidential Perch

- By Charlie Muise

Hello KTOSers,

Those of us who couldn't attend last month's meeting missed a lot. A Tennessee Ornithological Society Distinguished Service Award was posthumously presented to Barbara Finney and accepted by her daughter Virginia. The Chapter Bylaws were passed and the Executive Committee started officially working according to those immediately.

This month we will also have a special event prior to the monthly speaker. Stay tuned...

Coffee sales are going well. Over 30 bags were distributed at the November meeting and members ordered over 20 bags to be delivered in December. We will take orders at the December meeting, to be delivered in January. Please bring cash or check. Every bag of shade-grown coffee sold means less support to clear-cut tropical forests to grow that other kind. Help the birds! Also, the KTOS general fund keeps about one dollar for every bag sold. In the past money from the general fund has been used for: hosting speakers, Sharps Ridge dedication, transfers to the JB Owen Memorial Fund, support of a local Girl Scout bird education program and many other good projects.

Speaking of the newsletter, I've received some good comments about the content. Thanks to all of you who have written articles this year! I found the 3-part series by Wayne Shacher to be especially

informative. If you have a story to tell, or some bird news to share, please send your contribution to our editor, Lyn Bales. His contact is on the back page. Please feel free to send comments about the newsletter or anything else, to any of the officers listed. This is YOUR club and we'd like to know what you think.

So far we have about 20 members who have chosen to read the newsletter online and not receive a paper copy. We would like more folks to choose this option because it saves the club money, reduces paper needs and energy consumption. If you would like to be added to this list, please email me at [cmmbirds@yahoo.com](mailto:cmmbirds@yahoo.com).



Barbara Finney's daughter Virginia (right) accepts a Tennessee Ornithological Society Distinguished Service Award posthumously on behalf of her mother. The award was presented by KTOS Vice President Tracey Muise (left) at the November 3 meeting.

## Cerulean warbler: December meeting

(Continued from page 1)

northern South America.

Efforts to identify and modify the threats contributing to the decline of breeding habitat are underway in Tennessee and have just begun in the winter. However, the mystery of where this bird goes and what habitats it needs during migration remains to be discovered.

In 2004, Melinda Welton led an expedition into a remote area of the Maya Mountains in Belize to the only forest known to harbor large numbers of these birds on migration. She will discuss the results of that project and some of the specific challenges that Cerulean Warblers face in Tennessee.

Come to Room 117 of the UT Veterinary building on December 1 to learn more about conserving Cerulean Warblers.

## January 5: Annual Member Slide Sharing

The January 5 meeting is our annual member slide/picture sharing. Everyone has a role—presenter, bird identifier or just plain appreciator. January's slide sharing gives you the opportunity to show off a few of your favorite pictures from the year. Maybe you have life birds, a few shots from your travels or an exciting sighting in your backyard to share. You can also bring slides of unidentified birds you would like help in identifying.

If you plan on sharing pictures, please note the following. First, please let me know: Tracey Muise, 977-8429, or better yet, e-mail at: [traceson@yahoo.com](mailto:traceson@yahoo.com).

There is a slide projector available but no slide carousel. Please bring a carousel, or let me know if you need one. In addition to the slide projector, we can borrow a laptop and projector; again I need to know this in advance, and you should bring your pictures on a CD.

- Tracey Muise, program coordinator

## 2004 Knox County Fall Bird Count

Sunday, 26 September 2004 • Dean Edwards, compiler

**T**he Knox County Fall Count was held on Sunday, 26 September 2004. Twenty-two observers in 13 parties found 106 species which is slightly above average over the past few years. Highlights included an adult Bald Eagle, 2 Loggerhead Shrikes, and early White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows at Seven Islands and a Peregrine Falcon and an impressive 25 Bobolinks at the UT Plant Science Farm. Brown-headed Nuthatches were found at two locations, 5 at the UT Plant Sciences Farm and 1 in Farragut. Marsh Wrens were found at UT Plant Sciences Farm and Forks of the River WMA. Two Red-breasted Nuthatches, 1 Red-headed Woodpecker and 2 early Golden-crowned Kinglets were also noteworthy. Big misses include Northern Bobwhite, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Blue-headed Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing and Prairie Warbler. Full details are given below.

**Weather:** AM: Clear, PM: Clouds late

**Temperature:** High 80F, Low 62F

**Precipitation:** none, **Winds:** N, 5-10

**Notes:** 9th day w/o rain, TS Jeanne approaching

**Party hours:** by foot 49.25, by car 6.25

TOTAL: 55.50, feeder watching 11.00

GRAND TOTAL: 66.50

**Party miles:** by foot 31.25, by car 135.00

GRAND TOTAL: 166.25

**Start Time:** 7:15 **End Time:** 19:45

**SPECIES:** SWANS GEESE and DUCKS: Canada Goose 147, Wood Duck 7, Mallard 7. PARTRIDGES, GROUSE and TURKEYS: Wild Turkey 7. GREBES: Pied-billed Grebe 1. CORMORANTS: Double-crested Cormorant 13. BITTERNS and HERONS: Great Blue Heron 16, Green Heron 4, Black-crowned Night-Heron 1. AMERICAN VULTURES: Black Vulture 6, Turkey Vulture 20. KITES HAWKS EAGLES and ALLIES: Osprey 2, Bald Eagle 1, adult 1, Cooper's Hawk 4, Accipiter sp. 1, Red-shouldered Hawk 2, Broad-winged Hawk 1, Red-tailed Hawk 12. CARACARAS and FALCONS: American Kestrel 1, Peregrine Falcon 1. PLOVERS and LAPWINGS: Killdeer 88. SANDPIPERS PHALAROPES and ALLIES: Spotted Sandpiper 1, Wilson's Snipe 1. PIGEONS and DOVES: Rock Pigeon 104, Mourning Dove 259. CUCKOOS ROADRUNNERS and ANIS: Yellow-billed Cuckoo 2. TYPICAL OWLS: Eastern Screech-Owl 4, Great Horned Owl 1, Barred Owl 4. GOATSUCKERS: Common Nighthawk 11. SWIFTS: Chimney Swift 247. HUMMINGBIRDS: Ruby-throated Hummingbird 32. KINGFISHERS: Belted Kingfisher 14. WOODPECKERS and ALLIES: Red-headed Woodpecker 1, Red-bellied Woodpecker 52, Yellow-bellied

Sapsucker 2, Downy Woodpecker 40, Hairy Woodpecker 3, Northern Flicker 41, Pileated Woodpecker 7. TYRANT FLY-CATCHERS: Eastern Wood-Pewee 15, Acadian Flycatcher 1, Empidonax sp. 1, Eastern Phoebe 22. SHRIKES: Loggerhead Shrike 2. VIREOS: White-eyed Vireo 11, Red-eyed Vireo 8. JAYS MAGPIES and CROWS: Blue Jay 707, American Crow 239. TITMICE and CHICKADEES: Carolina Chickadee 147, Tufted Titmouse 119. NUTHATCHES: Red-breasted Nuthatch 2, White-breasted Nuthatch 23, Brown-headed Nuthatch 6. WRENS: Carolina Wren 103, House Wren 5, Marsh Wren 2. KINGLETS: Golden-crowned Kinglet 2. OLD WORLD WARBLERS and GNATCATCHERS: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 1. THRUSHES: Eastern Bluebird 127, Swainson's Thrush 23, Wood Thrush 8, American Robin 220. MOCKINGBIRDS THRASHERS and ALLIES: Gray Catbird 94, Northern Mockingbird 130, Brown Thrasher 57, STARLINGS and ALLIES: European Starling 2301. WOOD-WARBLERS: Tennessee Warbler 29, Orange-crowned Warbler 5, Nashville Warbler 2, Northern Parula 1, Chestnut-sided Warbler 11, Magnolia Warbler 87, Black-throated Blue Warbler 1, Black-throated Green Warbler 1, Blackburnian Warbler 3, Yellow-throated Warbler 1, Pine Warbler 8, Palm Warbler 13, Bay-breasted Warbler 2, Black-and-white Warbler 4, American Redstart 36, Ovenbird 3, Common Yellowthroat 55, Hooded Warbler 3, Yellow-breasted Chat 4. TANAGERS: Summer Tanager 2, Scarlet Tanager 6. NEW WORLD SPARROWS and ALLIES: Eastern Towhee 39, Chipping Sparrow 12, Field Sparrow 26, Savannah Sparrow 29, Song Sparrow 96, Swamp Sparrow 7, White-throated Sparrow 2, White-crowned Sparrow 1. CARDINALS BUNTINGS and GROSBEAKS: Northern Cardinal 195, Rose-breasted Grosbeak 40, Blue Grosbeak 2, Indigo Bunting 111. BLACKBIRDS and ORIOLES: Bobolink 25, Red-winged Blackbird 29, Eastern Meadowlark 44, Common Grackle 903, Brown-headed Cowbird 83. FINCHES: House Finch 100, American Goldfinch 59. OLD WORLD SPARROWS: House Sparrow 20.

**Total species:** 106 + 0 CW

**Total individuals:** 7644

**Birds per party hour (CBC):** 137.7297297

**Birds per party hour (ALL):** 114.9473684

**Observers:** 22 in 13 parties

Jean Alexander, Lyn Bales, Frank Bills, Kathy Bivens, Sharon Bostick, Howard Chitwood, Gail Clendenen, Steve Clendenen, Marcia Davis, Dean Edwards (compiler), Carole Gobert, Tom Howe, David Johnson, Tony King, Dan Mooney, Laurie Mooney, Chuck Nicholson, Truett Patterson, Boyd Sharp, Allan Trently David Trently, Denise

## Clean up held on Sharp's Ridge

**O**n Saturday, October 23, the KTOS unveiled the new "adopt-a-spot" signs on Sharp's Ridge and held a litter pickup-invasive plant removal workday there. Sharp's Ridge is one of the premier birding spots in the Knoxville area. It is also the site of the recently dedicated J B Owen overlook, named after a long-term leader of the Knoxville birding community.

Although the City of Knoxville does not have a formal adopt-a-spot/adopt-a-road beautification program, chapter members have held litter pickups there in the past and wanted more formal recognition of these efforts. Chapter Conservation Chair Mark Campen made this request to city officials and the city accepted the request and provided two signs that were mounted on the ridge.

About a dozen chapter members participated in this litter pickup/invasive plant removal. They filled several bags with trash and removed graffiti from the display at the overlook. They also removed many ailanthus, mimosa, tree-of-heaven and princess trees, as well as lots of privet and bush honeysuckle. Plants were either hand-pulled or, if too big to pull, were cut and then had herbicide painted on the stumps.

Participants included Mark Campen, Allan Muise, Tracey Muise, David Johnson, Carole Gobert, Harold

Howell, Deedee Blaine, Carol Lammers, David Trently, Mia Trently and Tony King.

Chapter members will continue these efforts in the future. For information on participating, contact Mark Campen at [campen@tnike.com](mailto:campen@tnike.com).



*Chapter members gathered at the end of the workday.*

Photo by Charles Nicholson. For more photos of the event go to: [www.tnbirds.org/KTOS-SRadopt.htm](http://www.tnbirds.org/KTOS-SRadopt.htm)

## Muddy pen cleaned for passing student cranes - *By Lyn Bales*

**T**his is the fourth year of Operation Migration, a Canadian-based project designed to re-establish an eastern flock of migratory whooping cranes. As of this date, 35 cranes have completed the migration lesson and routinely make the flights on their own. This fall 14 juvenile cranes, the "Class of 2004," are following ultralight aircraft from Wisconsin to Florida. The flocks are taught one stopover in East Tennessee: the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge in Meigs County.

Along the way, a lot of volunteers help the effort in a variety of ways. Two years ago there was a problem when one of the "Class of 2002" got its bill stuck in a spent shotgun shell while probing the mud inside the pen at Hiwassee. Since then, KTOS member Vickie Henderson has recruited volunteers to rake though the mud after the temporary pen is set up.

This year's clean up—using rakes, hoes and a metal detector—took place on Sunday, November 14; a good thing since the traveling crane caravan made the risky flight over Walden Ridge and arrived at the site on November 18. Like last year, the muck-rakers

turned up a disgraceful pile of Tennessee Trash: parts of aluminum cans, shards of glass, pieces of plastic and other unnatural detritus. Any one of the items could have caused irreparable harm to one of the priceless birds. Shame on our throwaway society!



*Whooping crane pen muck-rakers (left to right) Charlie Robinson, Vickie Henderson, Soggy-Bottom Bales, Suzanne and Doug McNabb. Not pictured: Doug Geren.*

## Hoff to led Wilderness Weekend trip, Trently to Arkansas

**R**on Hoff, local KTOS member, will be leading a birdwalk as part of the 15th Annual Wilderness Wildlife Week in Pigeon Forge, TN.

The Wilderness Wildlife Week runs from January 8-16. Ron's walk will be January 15. It will start at the Music Road Hotel and Convention Center on Henderson Chapel Road at 7:45 a.m. and run until about 1 p.m. Turn right at stoplight #1 to get to the hotel.

We will be carpooling from the hotel and stopping along the way up the road to Newfound Gap at Sugarlands visitor center and at Alum Cave trailhead.

Bring something to snack on and drink. Dress appropriately. While it may be comfortable at the visitor center, it can get quite cold at the gap if any wind is blowing.

Target birds will include ravens, winter finches and maybe crossbills.

## Winter Birding Weekend Planned in Arkansas

Avian Pursuits Nature Tours Birding trip to Arkansas, January 14-17, 2005

Want to see some of the birds that winter in our neighboring state to the west? Sign up for this mid-winter weekend to central Arkansas.

We will visit several sites around Little Rock, with targets including Rufous-crowned, Harris's and American Tree Sparrows, Greater White-fronted Goose, Greater Roadrunner, Long-eared Owl (rare), Bewick's Wren & Rusty Blackbird. Sunday we will spend part of the day birding around open water areas. Monday we head home after a few hours of birding for sparrows, including LeConte's and Lapland Longspurs, plus Short-eared Owls.

For more information, contact David Trently at [avianpursuits@yahoo.com](mailto:avianpursuits@yahoo.com). Also see: <http://web.utk.edu/~dtrently/AvianPursuits.html>



OF NOTE!

## Cardboard boxes needed

Bring your used **medium** and **small** cardboard boxes (microwave sized and smaller, folded down but still intact) to the next KTOS meeting. The company Marcia Davis works for, Ace Distributors, will reuse them for their UPS shipments and donate 10 cents each to KTOS. For details call Marcia: 558-1458.

## KTOSers add to lists in South America

Ron Hoff and Dollyann Myers just got back from a trip to South America, where Ron checked off about 80 lifers. That brings him up to 5567, while Dollyann is about 200 ahead of his life list, she's pushing 5770.

## Special thanks

To Madeleine Hassil for getting this and other newsletters folded and mailed while Cindy is away.

## Don't delay! 2005 Dues due NOW

The KTOS dues for 2005 are due now, the treasurer needs to send the state's portion in on December 31, 2004. So please don't delay, do it today!

Membership fees are \$18 for an individual and \$20 for a family. Sustaining memberships are \$28 and a Life membership with TOS is \$200 with an annual fee of \$8 to the local chapter. Send payment to: **Marie Oakes**, 18 Rockingham Lane, Oak Ridge, TN 37830.

## KTOS Financial Report • December 2004

Compiled by Marie Oakes, Treasurer

	November	October	YTD
<b>Income:</b>			
. Dues	\$200.00	\$170.00	\$2,024.00
. Mugs & Patches	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$44.00
. Shade Grown Coffee	\$212.00	\$217.00	\$429.00
. Interest	\$0.00	\$40.45	\$160.82
. Dividend	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$26.38
. Owen Memorial	\$25.00	\$0.00	\$600.87
. Fuller Memorial	<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>
Total Income	\$437.00	\$427.45	\$3,285.07
<b>Expenses:</b>			
. Newsletter	\$79.75	\$264.19	\$1,303.04
. Supplies	\$0.00	\$89.02	\$293.86
. Shade Grown Coffee	\$177.26	\$0.00	\$177.26
. DAF Application	\$0.00	\$75.00	\$75.00
. Member Dues to TOS	<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$1,578.00</u>
Total Expenses	\$257.01	\$428.21	\$3,427.16
<b>Other:</b>			
. Foothills Conservancy	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
. Friends of UT Gardens	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
. Fuller Memorial	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
. Owen Award	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00
. Transfer to J.B. Owens	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00
. Memorials	<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$100.00</u>
Total Other	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,100.00
<b>Account Balances</b>			
. KTOS Checking & Savings	\$3,143.27	\$2,988.28	
. J.B. Owen Memorial	\$6,426.37	\$6,401.37	
<b>Memberships</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>175</b>	

## Seven Islands: If you plant it, will they come?

By Wayne H. Schacher • whschacher@natreserv.com

*Author's note: This is the fourth in a series of newsletter articles on Seven Islands Wildlife Refuge. KTOS has actively supported the concept and development of SIWR, and its membership is providing invaluable information on avian fauna usage of the refuge, and other technical assistance. The partnership with KTOS at SIWR is most gratefully appreciated.*

In earlier articles, we've examined the purpose behind the establishment of Seven Islands Wildlife Refuge, the field assessment to characterize previous land use and project its potential for native species diversity, and the planning process to carry the project toward its ultimate objectives. We've also presented the emphasis placed on maintaining early successional and old field habitats where they previously existed, but why not leave them in the fescue we found there originally? Why expend the considerable investment of money, manpower and time to bother converting the fescue to native warm season grasslands at all?

The easy and obvious answer is that fescue is not a native species, and therefore falls outside one of the basic project objectives. The better, more complete answer comes in comparing the wildlife benefits of a fescue-dominated, old field versus an old field or prairie composed of a mixture of native warm season grasses (NWSG) and forbs. To be sure, the earliest field work at SIWR indicated that many avian species were using the variety of fescue old fields. You could hear northern bobwhite quail whistling, indigo buntings flitted about, meadowlarks used areas in the moist, hayed bottoms, several sparrow species were to be found, even grasshopper sparrows in the closely-cropped hayfield in the bottoms along the river.

It's news to no one that an established fescue field is tightly packed sods with very little bare ground or open area at ground level. Left uncut or ungrazed, the previous year's dead vegetation continues to mat and becomes even denser at ground level. These characteristics provide little value for nesting or cover, and very few forbs or other beneficial plants can pierce the fescue mats and compete effectively. In addition, the food value of fescue to avian wildlife is poor to nil.

The NWSG being planted in differing compositions on SIWR have much different growth characteristics. The NWSG species are clump or bunch grasses. Once established, they form clumps at ground level, and the stem vegetation can grow to heights of 10 feet. The clumps can be 2-3 feet across, but between adjacent clumps there is open, frequently bare ground sheltered by the over-canopying stem vegetation. These characteristics provide greatly improved nesting cover, greatly

improved 'bugging' and foraging areas for young chicks and adults, greatly improved cover from overhead predators, and improved chances of escape if detected. At SIWR, most of the NWSG species are being planted at a wildlife density (versus a forage density) to ensure that open areas between clumps are abundant. Of note too, is that plantings at wildlife density allow other desirable forb and herbaceous plants to become part of the old field, and provide patch variations in structure, food and cover. An additional attribute of several of these NWSG species is the production of seed, valuable as forage for a variety of animal species.

A couple more important points were considered in the decision to establish NWSG at SIWR. The 325 acres of early successional habitats are being established using different NWSG compositions over several years. This time interval builds in habitat diversity for grassland species that differ in their optimal habitat requirements. Once established, the NWSGs are being maintained and managed primarily by rotational, controlled burning at one to three year intervals. Here, too, burns will leave a patchwork of variation even within a single field, to provide habitat diversity. With fields of varying composition to be burned in different years, optimal habitat for some species may be shifted in location, but should always be present at some location within the Refuge.

Let's go back to the question in the headline. With the establishment of NWSGs on SIWR underway, which grassland avian species will be found on SIWR in the future, as these prairie grasslands mature? Will we ever attract short-eared owls? What about wintering or nesting usage by Henslow's sparrows? Can we induce loggerhead shrikes to nest, rather than just visit? Will the sandhill cranes that now fly over SIWR ever stop to rest and forage in the wet bottoms along the river?

There is no way to know if these or other 'wished-for' species will, at some point, honor SIWR with their presence. Continued work to establish habitat diversity and quality on the Refuge will give us a chance. What is becoming obvious, though, is that many avian species that utilize grassland and early successional habitats for a variety of reasons, or at different times of year, are already finding the Refuge to their liking. Ongoing efforts to record, track and survey vertebrate species usage, with assistance from KTOS, other groups and individuals, should provide some very exciting answers and observations, far into the future.

*[Next Article – The LMP and Strategy to enhance and diversify woodland, riparian, fencerow, wetland and other habitats present on SIWR.]*

## KTOS Membership

Join or renew your membership in KTOS by mailing your annual dues to: **Marie Oakes**, 18 Rockingham Lane, Oak Ridge, TN 37830.

Membership fees are \$18 for an individual and \$20 for a family. Sustaining memberships are \$28 and a Life membership with TOS is \$200 with an annual fee of \$8 to the local chapter.

**DEADLINE** for February issue is **January 22**. Due to cost and space restrictions, please limit your articles to 600 or 700 words.

For a color version of this or past issues go to "local chapters/Knoxville" starting at the TOS Home Page:

**HTTP://www.tnbirds.org**



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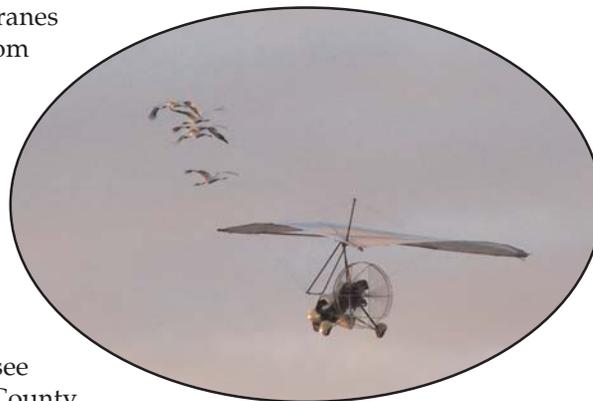
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## Whooping crane class pass through state -By Lyn Bales

**B**y the time you read this, the fourth group of whooping cranes being taught to fly from Wisconsin to Florida will have passed through our state. They spent one night in Cumberland County before their flight over Walden Ridge, the most risky part of the entire journey. Afterwards, they spent several days at the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge in Meigs County.

This unprecedented project, teaching birds how to migrate, has been called the "environmental equivalent of putting a man on the moon." But unlike that endeavor the crane project receives no governmental funding. It depends heavily on donations from people like you. To learn how you can help go to: <http://www.operationmigration.org>



## 'Friends of Operation Migration' plan Open House

To learn more about the whooping crane project, the "Friends of Operation Migration" will host an Open House at the Special Activities Building (next to the gazebo) at Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge. The event will be Saturday, December 4, 2-4 p.m. Geoffrey Dixon of Operation Migration will be on hand to answer questions. There will also be information about "Watchable Wildlife" and TWRA's role in the crane project; plus an update on the Cherokee Removal "Trail of Tears" Memorial Park near the refuge.

Ken Dubke and Chris Mahoney of the Chattanooga Chapter of TOS are two organizers of the event.

*through the biKNOXulars*

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