



by: Hal Hassall

March 1, 2026

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Hello Friends. What a tumultuous year we've had! Refuge operations were negatively impacted by budget cuts, staff retirements and a 43-day government shutdown. However, many positive events occurred as well. The Jackson Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Helping Hand of Henry County, Dana Corporation, Mid-America Bottling, Moody Realty, TVA and other organizations have stepped up in significant ways to help your Friends group fill the gaps.

These vital underwriters have helped fund university student interns and heavy equipment operators to work in the field managing habitat and wildlife, repairing levees, planting multi-acre pollinator patches at both visitor centers, replacing the pumping station at duck river bottoms, hosting the 30th annual Earth Camp at Cross Creeks, and ensuring student field trips and other visitors have rewarding and fun educational experiences at the Big Sandy visitor center.

You too have made significant contributions fulfilling our twin missions of protecting migratory waterfowl and making environmental education accessible for all. Thank you for your membership in the Friends Group, your volunteerism, your donations, and your participation in our second annual Experience Auction. Grant awards are awesome and yet, we are a bootstrap organization that survives and thrives through consistent support of friends and neighbors.

You will be pleased to know that our Friends organization was recently recognized by the Southeast Region of the USF&WS Refuge System as the Friends Group of the Year! This recognition of your support wraps up our year on a beautiful high note.

Looking ahead...student field trips, trail and garden cleanup projects, hummingbird and wood duck banding events, and other public events are being planned for 2026. Stay tuned for more details.

The Refuge Staff, your volunteer board of directors and I appreciate your continued support as donors, members, and volunteers. And as always, I want to hear from you (hal.hassall@gmail.com or 615-972-5119).

Thank You,
Hal Hassall, Board President



2025 was a rollercoaster year – full of highs followed by steep drops to low moments and sudden turns. Through these turbulent times we powered forward, and we have several successes to celebrate. The Federal Highway Administration completed the Big Sandy Road improvement project. This project included replacing all the culverts and installing a new box culvert just passed Lashlee Spring to prevent damage from heavy rain events. The entire 6-mile section was graveled with crush limestone for a smooth surface. Refuge staff completed phase 1 of the Cross Creeks Road project by placing 22,000 tons of limestone gravel on the South Cross Creeks Road. In the near future the Federal Highway Administration will solicit bids to install new culverts and spillways in areas prone to flood damage. Hopefully this work will save refuge staff time after Cumberland River flood events and allow the road to be reopened sooner. The new Duck River Intake pump was installed in the Upper Bottoms to replace the failing intake pump. This new pump has been running almost continuously since installation providing water to waterfowl impoundments during this exceptionally dry fall and winter.

Refuge staff improved the Pool 10/1 road by placing several loads of chert. This road has been impacted by severe floods over the years and was washed out in several locations. We want to thank the Tennessee Valley Authority for contributing funds to help with this repair. The contractor completed the mulching work in Pools 1 and 2 to open some habitat for future waterfowl management and refuge staff completed goose habitat improvements in the Upper Duck River Bottoms. The ten-acre future pollinator restoration project at the HQ Office was initiated with the spraying of the Johnson grass and preparation of the seed bed for planting in March 2026. The final projects we completed last year were the replacement of the boat ramps at Sunset Bay and Marina on the Tennessee NWR and the Iron Bridge boat ramp on Cross Creeks NWR. These are just a few of the many successes from 2025.

The lows of 2025 were the retirements of Joan Howe and David Gaskin – both long-term fixtures on Tennessee NWR, the loss of 80 additional refuge employees across the Region and the 43-day government shutdown in October and November. All these actions took a heavy toll on refuge staff.

I expect another rollercoaster year. We know the Service Directorate team met in early January to discuss priorities and reorganization plans for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Director's office is conducting a comprehensive review of the National Wildlife Refuge System with a final report due by May. Reorganization plans and the Refuge System review have the potential to greatly change supervisory chain of reporting, refuge complex organization boundaries, and possibly result in the elimination of additional positions across the refuge system. However, from the movie *The Outlaw Jose Wales* our motto will be to "endeavor to persevere". With our Friends and volunteers, we will keep striving for our goals through adversity and the difficulties that may lie ahead. Thank you for your continued support throughout 2025 and I look forward to your assistance in meeting the challenges of 2026. With your help and support we will accomplish great things for wildlife and the American public.

-Barron

Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge



Tennessee National
Wildlife Refuge
1371 Wildlife Drive
Springville, TN 38256

REFUGE DISCOVERY SERIES 2026

For more program information,
call 731-642-2091
or visit www.fws.gov/refuge/Tennessee

Migratory Bird/Endangered Species Day

At Refuge Visitor's Center
Saturday, May 9th, 10:00-2:00
Live animals, games, and crafts!
Build a Bluebird Box—\$10
Friends Group Wood Duck Banding
At TNWR Duck River Unit
Date TBD

A special event for Friends of TNWR!
Become a friends member today
to join us for duck banding
Tennessee NWR
Hummingbird Banding Event
At Refuge Visitor's Center
Saturday, August 8th, 8:00-12:00
Adopt-A-Hummingbird - \$10
Ongoing Hummingbird Banding
Games and Crafts
Hot dog lunch for sale \$5

Find Your Wild

At Refuge Visitor's Center
Saturday, September 12th
Explore the many ways to get outdoors at
the Refuge!

Trim-a-tree for Wildlife

At Refuge Visitor's Center
Friday, November 27th
Holiday crafts, cookies, and hot chocolate
to celebrate the holiday season!

Free Movie Matinee!

Join us at the Refuge at 2:00 pm
every Second Saturday.

We look forward to seeing you
soon!





Free Movie Matinee

Every Second Saturday at 2:00pm
At the Tennessee National Wildlife
Refuge Visitor's Center



- ✓ Free Movie!
- ✓ Free Popcorn!
- ✓ Family Friendly Fun!



Join us for a different movie every month on the second Saturday of the month! Keep an eye on our Facebook to see what movie is coming up next!

1371 Wildlife Drive Springville, TN 38256 731-642-2091

April we will be showing Fern Gully
May we celebrate Migratory Bird Day with the Movie
Migration!
June we will be showing Hoot



Bird of the month?

American Pipit!

by: Cyndi Routledge
AmericanPipit(Anthrusrubescns)

The American Pipit is a small, slender songbird known for its unique behaviors and remarkable adaptability across changing seasons. With a subtle beauty, thin bill, lanky long legs and distinctive tail wag, this species excites Tennessee winter-time birdwatchers when spotted on Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge.

American Pipits select some of the continent's most challenging environments for nesting.

These birds breed in the far northern regions, including the Arctic tundra, as well as on remote northern mountaintops.

After the breeding season, American Pipits undertake long migrations, spreading out across North America. During the winter months, they can be found in a wide variety of open habitats in Tennessee but are commonly seen walking along mudflats, and in plowed fields, where they are usually found in groups as they search for insects and seeds.

Often heard flying overhead first, their characteristic 'pi-pit' call is a helpful clue in identifying them. However, one of their most recognizable behaviors is the constant wagging or up and down motion of their tails as they walk. This distinct behavior makes them stand out among sparrows and other songbirds.

The American Pipit's journey from the far north and high mountains to open lowlands across the continent is a testament to its resilience. Look for these fascinating birds during the winter months next time you're out on the refuge.



ONLINE EXPERIENCE AUCTION

UPDATE

Thank you to all who participated in our second annual online Auction. With your help we were able to raise over \$6,000. These funds help support the refuge intern program as well as the refuge ranger term position. We have several items that we will auctioning off on our Shopify site in the next few months. Stay tuned for more information!



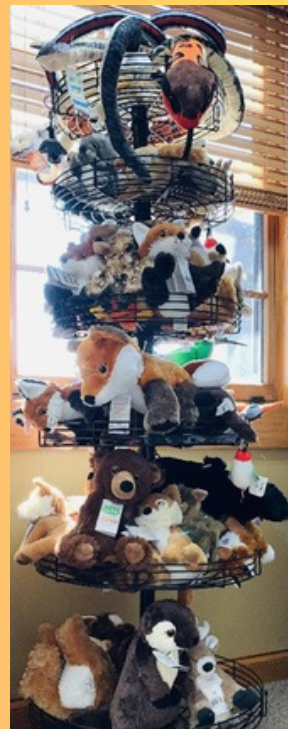
BLUE HERON BOOKSTORE

We still have a few of our t-shirts, designed by one of our friends - Mickenzie Smith available for sale.

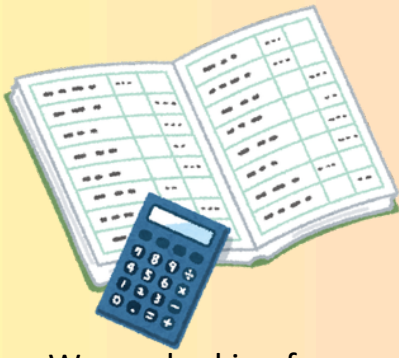


As a reminder, members get 10% off (memberships under \$100) and 15% off (memberships \$100 and over) of purchases made in person or online. As always, your purchases support the refuge and environmental education.

Visit the Blue Heron Bookstore at Tennessee NWR Visitor Center



by: Wendy Crawford



CALL for VOLUNTEERS

We are looking for someone interested in helping out with the Treasury and eventually taking over being Treasurer of the Friends group. This person should have an understanding of non-profit accounting and/or an accounting background. They should be available for monthly Board meetings either in person at the Visitor Center or via Teams online. This position requires about three hours of volunteer time per month and duties would include downloading bank information into our database, verify data is going into the correct accounts and creating monthly balance sheets, profit and loss and income statements for the Board.

If interested, email Sheri Pyle at spyle@friendstnwr.org



For more than 80 years, the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge has ensured the health of migratory birds and added to the distinctive beauty of West Tennessee.

But what has made this place enjoyable for visitors from across the region is the commitment of volunteers from throughout the area. From banding birds to managing the bookstore and gift shop to assisting the ranger on school field trips, this dedicated corps of volunteers is adding to the experience of a trip to Kentucky Lake.

And now, you can be one of those volunteers too. Imagine holding a tiny hummingbird just after it has been measured and banded, watching it rest still, and then releasing it to add its unique color and flight to this community. Or what about the thrill in joining a group of schoolchildren and watching as a 10-year-old, holding her binoculars on the edge of Kentucky Lake, spots a majestic bald eagle swooping over the water to capture a fish.

If you haven't visited the Refuge's Visitor Center, we encourage you to come by and see all that we do here. If you are interested in this volunteer opportunity, or if you are already interested and want to know to get involved, we encourage you to email rosemaryhehn@gmail.com. She'll reach out to explain the program, the schedule and how you can help. You can also sign up at FriendsTNWR.org.

Become a friend today and help us add to the 80-year legacy of the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge.

Friends of Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge Named a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Southeast Region Volunteer Group of the Year.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Regional Director announced that the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge Friends organization was selected as the Volunteer Group of the year. Over the past year, the Friends of Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge played a vital role in sustaining the refuge's visitor services and environmental education programs. Following the retirement of the career refuge ranger, the group launched a creative and successful fundraising campaign to underwrite cost of a ranger position which allowed ongoing staffing of the Refuge Visitor Center in Springville. This position was essential in delivering outreach and education to more than 5,000 people in 2024.

Through the community's volunteerism and financial support of the local Friends Group, the refuge has:

- Maintained public access at the Visitors Center (Mon.-Sat.)**
- Hosted twelve popular "Discovery Series" outreach events**
- Delivered dozens of educational field trips for school students drawn from a 10-county region**

USF&WS acknowledged that without the efforts of the Friends Group, the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge Complex would have been forced to drastically reduce or eliminate its public facing programs. USF&WS Regional Director Mike Oetker said, "this partnership highlights the indispensable role Friends Groups play in supporting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's mission. Through their leadership, the Friends have preserved vital public services, strengthened community connections, and fostered a deeper appreciation for conservation. Without their creative fundraising and unwavering support, the refuge would face the difficult reality of closing its visitor center and halting outreach and education."

Local board president, Hal Hassall, added, "We appreciate the recognition for our successful grassroots funding and volunteerism to aid the refuge. Even with service staff reductions and funding cuts from Washington, working together with the refuge staff we can stay true to our mission of protecting migratory waterfowl and engaging the public on the 60,000 acres of waters, wetlands, and woodlands that make up the refuge complex's 5-county footprint." Hassall also commented, "Our Friends Group is especially grateful for the financial support from Helping Hand of Henry County, Dana Corporation, the Betsy Ross Foundation, the Jackson Foundation, Pepsi MidAmerica, Moody Realty, and TVA for vital contributions and for the hours of service provided by community volunteers."

To learn more, visit <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/tennessee> or <https://www.facebook.com/TNrefuge/>

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY

You may fill out this form and send it back to us, or visit
<https://shopfriendstnwr.com/pages/become-a-member>

Name (please print) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone (_____) _____ - _____ Email: _____

Method of Payment: Cash
 Check (Make check payable to "Friends of TN National Wildlife Refuge".)
 Credit Card

Card # _____ Expires ____/____ CVC Code _____

Type _____ (Visa/Mastercard, etc.) Signature _____

Please indicate purpose of payment:

New Friend of the Refuge Renewal of current membership

Membership Level: Eagles \$500 Ospreys \$250 Wood Ducks \$100 Family \$30 Individual \$20 Other _____

Memorial or Honorarium Donation: \$ _____

"In Memory of" -or- "In Honor of" Name: _____

To whom shall we send notification of your Memorial or Honorarium?

Name _____ Relationship: _____

Address _____

Please direct my gift to:

General Fund Educational Programs Specific Project _____

Please send me information on the following:

Volunteer opportunities How to support the Friends of TN National Wildlife Refuge in my estate plans

Thank you for supporting Friends of TN National Wildlife Refuge

FRIENDS OF TN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
1371-C WILDLIFE DRIVE SPRINGVILLE, TN 38256-0300