



President's Pen

by: Hal Hassall

September 1, 2025

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Hello Friends. The hummers and songbirds are beginning their migration, and the Refuge staff is preparing for the upcoming "sanctuary season" for migratory waterfowl.

We recently welcomed over four hundred visitors and volunteers to the August Hummingbird banding event held at the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. School is back in session, and we will soon host student field trips from across our 10-county area. Volunteers are needed to help supervise and provide environmental education to these young learners.

Recently you board of directors added two new members: Ryan Fesmire is an avid outdoors person and Benton County landowner. As an entrepreneur he brings imagination and broad experience to our group.

Also joining us is Rob Goad. Rob works as the executive director of the Paris Henry County Industrial Committee. He brings important public/private insights and grant writing experience to our leadership team.

With financial support from you and the Jackson Foundation, five student interns worked at the refuge over the summer months and were a welcomed "force multiplier" during this time of adjustment to fewer USFWS staff. Through funding from your Friends Group, Ranger Samantha Marsh will continue to provide public access and educational programs at the Refuge Visitor Center. Refuge Complex manager, Barron Crawford, and a small but mighty team of dedicated refuge staff have been quite busy this summer resurfacing roads (after flood damage) at Cross Creeks; maintaining levees and replacing water pumping systems at Duck River Bottoms; finishing up road repairs in the Old 23rd; and beginning work on a new 10-acre pollinator patch at the Refuge Visitor Center in Springville.

We 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



This has been an interesting year full of uncertainty, retirements, and new challenges. As you all know Ranger Joan Howe retired the end of December and Engineering Equipment Operator David Gaskin retired the end of May. The retirement of these two exceptional employees has hampered refuge activities such as public use activities, field trips and facility maintenance.

However, with only nine full time employees and three seasonal employees across the Complex, we are still getting important habitat work completed, facility maintenance projects completed, and offering limited field trips and special events.

Our seasonal tractor operators Garrett Billingsby and Marty Cessna have been working hard to keep road shoulders mowed, preparing and planting wheat and millet fields, maintaining levees, and worked to spread 20,000 tons of gravel on the South Cross Creeks NWR Auto Tour Route. Without these seasonal tractor operators, we would not be able to accomplish these high priority projects. Thanks to your Friends Group for providing the funding to pay these two exceptional employees, which has allowed us to accomplish our priority work.

If you have been out to the Big Sandy Unit or Cross Creeks NWR you have noticed the road improvement projects. The Big Sandy Unit Road project is finishing up and should be completed by early fall. Federal Highway Administration contractors have been replacing culverts, armoring the lake shore along the road, and placing new gravel over the 6-mile route. Refuge Manager Rick Eastridge and Engineering Equipment Operator Fred Foster at Cross Creeks NWR are working hard to spread 20,000 tons of limestone on the South Cross Creeks Auto Tour Route to repair flood damage. This funding came from a storm supplemental package that was submitted by our Headquarters Office. Future improvements will include installing box culverts and low water crossings to mitigate some of the Cumberland River flood impacts.

The new intake pump for the Duck River Bottoms that was purchased through Ducks Unlimited should be delivered and installed in early fall. With another dry summer and early fall, this pump will be needed to flood habitat for the early migrating wintering waterfowl. Our Biologists Patrice Betz and Clayton Ferrell have been busy managing invasive species, planting millet and winter wheat, conducting various wildlife and habitat surveys and working on a special pollinator habitat improvement project around the headquarters building. Your Friends Group was instrumental this year in securing a Jackson Foundation Grant and entered into a contract with the University of Tennessee at Martin to fund 5 interns that provided vital services to all our programs this past winter and summer months. Without the Jackson Foundation and the Friends Group this vitally important program would have come to end and the students at UT Martin would not have the opportunity to gain valuable work experience.

Another kudo for your Friends Group for their financial support of Refuge Ranger Samantha Marsh. Sam has jumped in with both feet, keeping the visitor center open, conducting field trips, and planning special events for the public to enjoy.

As you can see your Friends Group and the refuge staff have had a very busy and productive year. I am amazed and very grateful to our Friends members that continue to step up in our time of need to support the refuge with your volunteer time and financial contributions. I am proud of all of you and your hard work and dedication is not going unnoticed.

I am proud to announce that The Friends of Tennessee NWR is being recognized by our Regional Director as the **Southeast Regions Friends Group of the Year!** I look forward to what you all can accomplish in 2026!

-Barron

UPCOMING EVENTS

FIND YOUR WILD

Join us Saturday, September 20, 2025 for popcorn and a movie!

FREE showing of the "Hidden Rivers" Documentary, which gives a sneak peak into the secret underwater world thriving all around us. After the movie, learn more from aquatic biologist Jeronimo Silva. The visitor center will be open from 6:30pm - 9:00pm.

The movie will start at 7:30pm.



TRIM A TREE FOR WILDLIFE

A Natural Way to Celebrate the Holidays with
Christmas Crafts!

NOVEMBER 28 through DECEMBER 23, 2025
MONDAY through SATURDAY 8:00 am - 4:00 pm



of the month? **Ruby-throated hummingbird!**

by: Cyndi Routledge

In the tapestry of nature, few creatures capture the imagination quite like a hummingbird. With their iridescent plumage, impossibly rapid wingbeats, and boundless energy, these diminutive birds seem touched by magic. Yet, beyond their well-known feats of aerial agility and long migrations, a more subtle marvel has occurred in Dover, Tennessee, the record-breaking lifespan of an adult male ruby-throated hummingbird. This tiny bird, defying all odds, has rewritten the limits of longevity for its species much to the delight of the hummer's dedicated and longtime hummer host, friends and Southeastern Avian Research.

The story of this record-breaking male hummingbird began on a sunny summer morning in July of 2017 at the home of Mrs. Bonnie Crutcher. Southeastern Avian Research had been invited to band hummingbirds at her residence as part of our migration study because as we were told by other Stewart County residents, "Ms. Bonnie had lots of hummingbirds..."

So, on July 14, 2017, we set up our traps and we banded 78 ruby-throated hummingbirds including adult male ruby-throat K78219 at Ms. Bonnie's feeders. By all accounts a very successful first morning up on top of Crutcher ridge. We saw male K78219 again in 2018, 2020, 2021 and then not again until 2024. When we re-caught him in August of 2024, he was 8 years, 2 months old. Knowing the longevity record for ruby-throated hummingbirds was 9 years and 2 month and that bird was a female, our excitement began to rise, and we began to wonder if perhaps he was a male record? A quick email to the Bird Banding Laboratory and we were informed there were a few a 'bit older'.



We thought about K78219 all winter and again as I worked on the schedule for summer/fall migration banding with anticipation.

On July 22, 2025, we once again arrived at the Crutcher home. Ms. Bonnie had lemonade and cookies waiting for us and a sense of excitement filled the air. Family and friends began arriving, traps went up and shortly after 8am K78219 was 'in-hand'! At 9 years, 1 month, I held in hand the oldest known male ruby-throated hummingbird. Ms. Bonnie, herself a young, spry 96 years old, couldn't believe it. But there he was, itching to get loose and head back to the feeders. Which he did and was re-caught 2 other times that morning. But the story of this hummingbird doesn't end there. Four weeks later on August 20, 2025, we returned again to Ms. Bonnie's and much to our surprise caught hummer K78219! By our calculation he was 9 years, 2 months and 20 days old making him the **OLDEST DOCUMENTED RUBY-THROAT HUMMINGBIRD!** A day later the Bird Banding Lab confirmed our calculations and Ms. Bonnie's male ruby-throated hummingbird is indeed the oldest ruby-throat ever documented!



The reasons behind extraordinary longevity in hummingbirds are still being unraveled.

Hummingbirds face an array of dangers: predatory birds, inclement weather, habitat loss, collisions with windows, and the immense physical demands of their daily routines. For a hummingbird to survive for nearly a decade, every factor must align in its favor.

Genetics may play a significant role. Some birds may be born with naturally robust constitutions, superior immune systems, or metabolic quirks that help them weather the trials of life more successfully than their peers.

Habitat quality is another major influence. Birds living in locations rich in flowers, with abundant food and suitable nesting sites, are more likely to thrive.

Behavioral strategies might also contribute. Older, more experienced birds tend to become adept at avoiding dangers, finding the best territories, and timing their migrations to coincide with favorable conditions. The discovery of such a long-lived hummingbird is more than a scientific curiosity; it has practical implications for conservation. If some individuals can survive so much longer than previously thought, it suggests that under the right conditions, population longevity can be enhanced. Protecting critical habitats, ensuring connectivity across migratory routes, and minimizing human-caused dangers may make a profound difference. For SEAR, this remarkable bird, along with others, offers a living laboratory. By studying the life history—diet, movements, nesting success, migration patterns—we can gain valuable insights into the factors that promote avian longevity. This knowledge can then help plan strategies to protect not just hummingbirds, but a wide array of migratory birds facing similar challenges.

Beyond science, the story of this male hummingbird resonates on a deeper level. Across cultures, hummingbirds symbolize resilience, joy, and the triumph of spirit over adversity. The idea that such a tiny creature can endure and flourish through almost a decade of storms and migrations is a powerful metaphor. It also underscores the importance of long-term research and community science. It was the collaboration of an enthusiastic hummingbird host who for years created a wonderfully rounded habitat for her hummingbirds, dedicated SEAR volunteers, and years of record-keeping that allowed this discovery to be made. And as technology advances with the advent of light radio-tracking devices, who knows what else we might discover?

As climate change and habitat destruction threaten all bird populations worldwide, maybe the story of this remarkable little hummingbird will help remind us that even tiny measures, such as planting native flowers or preserving migration corridors, can yield outsized rewards. In the end, the hummingbird's story is one of hope—hope that with care, attention, and respect for nature, life can flourish in all its dazzling diversity and tenacity. And perhaps, as we watch these tiny jewels flit from blossom to blossom, we are reminded of the boundless possibilities that await when life is given the chance to endure.



Southeastern Avian Research Winter Hummingbird Research



Have you ever spotted a hummingbird at your feeder after 1 November or before 15 March??

Since November 1990, 315+ hummingbirds of 7 different species have been captured, banded and released here in Tennessee as part of a winter banding research program.

Please consider leaving out your feeder out year-round. Keep it clean, maintained and easily viewed and YOU might be one of the lucky ones to host a winter hummingbird.

If you do get a hummingbird...I WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU...Cyndi Routledge – routledges@bellsouth.net

ONLINE EXPERIENCE AUCTION

Oct 12 - Nov 2 2025

One of the items up for bid is Ducks Unlimited's 2024 **Rifle of the Year**, the Howa 1500 Carbon. This extraordinary bolt-action rifle is chambered in .300 Winchester Mag and is a pinnacle of performance and aesthetics. A Hogue Stock coated in black web featuring the DU logo combines comfort and style. The rifle's carbon fiber barrel not only adds a modern edge but also enhances accuracy. Its 24" barrel ensures precision shots and optimal performance. The rifle comes complete with a 3-9x40 Vortex Diamond Back scope, expertly mounted and bore-sighted, ready for action. Showcasing its affiliation with Ducks Unlimited, the floor plate proudly displays the DU logo. Safety is paramount, and the package includes a gun lock for secure storage. approximate value is \$1,250



Another item is a Private Hummingbird Experience valued at \$600. Join Master hummingbird bander and President of Southeastern Avian Research, Cyndi Routledge, for a morning (or happy hour) private banding session to take place either at your residence or a pre-arranged high volume regular host home location, within TN, KY or MS, within 100 miles of Clarkesville, TN. A standard hummingbird banding station will be set up for you and your guests to enjoy those brilliant little flying jewels up close and personal. You and your guests will also have the chance to learn about banding, successful hummingbird feeding tips and even release a hummingbird from your own hand! Each guest will get one adoption certificate for the hummingbird they release, and if the hummingbird is ever caught again, each will get an email saying where the hummingbird was captured. This private event needs to be prearranged with SEAR by June 30, 2026 and must take place during the 2026 banding season. (July to early September). All banding is conducted under a federally authorized Bird Banding Permit issued by the U.S. Geological Survey's BBL and the State of TN/KY.

BLUE HERON BOOKSTORE

What's new at the Blue Heron Bookstore... Earlier this summer we were able to order t-shirts, designed by one of our friends - Mickenzie Smith. We still have some shirts available for sale.

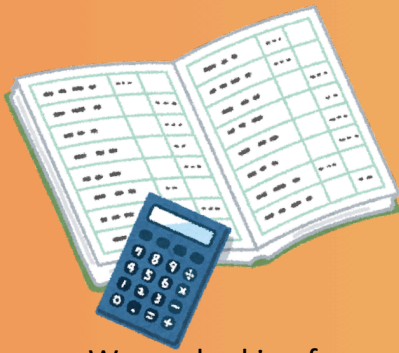


New items will be in stock soon, just in time for Christmas shopping! Just a reminder that members get 10% off (memberships under \$100) and 15% off (memberships \$100 and over) of purchases made in person and starting with 2024 memberships you'll receive a code for you to use at our online store also. As always, your purchases support the refuge and environmental education.

Visit the Blue Heron Bookstore at Tennessee NWR Visitor Center to get a jump on your holiday shopping!



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, you
can email Sheri Pyle at spyle@friendstnwr.org



We have a cadre of volunteers that continue to volunteer their precious time to support refuge operations. We are always looking to add to our volunteer cadre and we have an ongoing need for visitor center volunteers and volunteers to assist with facility maintenance.

We have an immediate need for a reception/bookstore volunteer in the visitor center several days of the week. Volunteers are an important component of refuge operations and we could not accomplish our mission without you. If you know of a high school/college student looking for a place to volunteer for their TN Promise scholarship, look no further, we have jobs for everyone!

We have the following field trips scheduled, which we need volunteers for:

- October 9th and 10th - Lakewood Elementary 2nd Grade, approx. 50 kids per day, topic: animal habitats
- October 23rd, 24th, 30th, and 31st - Paris Elementary 4th Grade, approx. 40 kids per day, topic: predator/prey relationships
- October 28th and 29th - Waverly Elementary 3rd Grade, approx. 50 kids per day, topic: animal adaptations

If you have some spare time, please reach out to me to discuss our many volunteer opportunities.

Rosemary Hehn at rosemaryhehn@gmail.com

