Friends of Congaree Swamp

www.friendsofcongaree.org

Winter 2007

Researchers Search for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in Congaree National Park

After the 2004 rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Arkansas, reassessments of historic occupied areas throughout the Southeast have begun. In an effort to document the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's presence in South Carolina, the South Carolina Ivory-billed Woodpecker Working Group was created. This partnership includes several nonprofit organizations and agencies, including The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and the South Carolina Forestry Commission. These agencies have contributed more than $180,000 to look for and document the presence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in South Carolina.

Congaree National Park contains almost 11,000 acres of old-growth bottomland forest, which is thought to be the preferred habitat of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Nowhere else in the Southeast can such a contiguous tract be found, thus the Ivory-billed Woodpecker Working Group decided to concentrate their search efforts in Congaree National Park in early 2006. From January to mid-April 2006 approximately 1/3 of the park was searched by volunteers. Data gathered in the 2006 search effort suggested that further searches should be conducted in 2006-07.

The South Carolina Ivory-billed Woodpecker Working Group decided to expand the search effort for the 2006-07 season. In late 2006 The Nature Conservancy hired Matthew Moskwik to oversee the search effort in South Carolina.

Matthew holds a M.S. in biology from Eastern Washington University, and has extensive field experience in the United States, Costa Rica, and Sierra Leone. After hiring Matthew, The Nature Conservancy also hired a four person field crew. Members of this field crew include: Zach Nelson, Amy Leist, Brett Hubbard, and Katie Martin. All have strong backgrounds in field research and have traveled to South Carolina from as far away as California. This field crew, along with seventeen volunteers from across the United States, makes up the team trying to document the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's presence in Congaree National Park. In addition, the Cornell Mobile Search Team out of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology visited Congaree National Park in December 2006 to search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. This team of scientists and researchers, led by world renowned woodpecker

Ivory-billed Woodpecker continued page 3

 ©2007 All Rights Reserved.

President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

Congaree River Trail

American Rivers recently received a $10,000 grant from the Richland County Conservation Commission to develop the Congaree River Blue Trail. Friends of Congaree Swamp has joined with American Rivers, Congaree National Park, Congaree Land Trust, SC DNR, and the River Alliance to help in initial phases of the project.

As a first effort, the River Alliance will produce a canoe/kayak map tracing the Congaree River from the Gervais Street Bridge all the way down to the Santee River. Inspired by the Broad River Blue Trail map, this map will have more extensive information about the landscape that paddlers will be passing through. The map will include access points, navigational landmarks, and information on historic, cultural and natural resources. We will also take special care to notify paddlers of any dangers paddling and camping on the Congaree and to respect the rights of property owners along the river.

In addition to the map, an event is scheduled for National Trails Day on June 2. Ideally, the event would put lots of people on the river and include a look at seldom-seen parts of Congaree National Park. Look for more details in the Spring newsletter.

US 601 Bridges

You definitely need a scorecard to keep track of developments on this project! As we prepared for a second final review hearing before the DHEC Board December 14, SCDOT requested that the hearing be cancelled since SCDOT had already appealed the DHEC Board's earlier remand decision to the Administrative Law Court. Shortly before the hearing, the court agreed to the stay. The day of the hearing, SC DHEC discussed its options and chose not to go forward with a final review.

At this point, SCDOT's appeal may proceed through the Administrative Law Court; Friends of Congaree Swamp, South Carolina Wildlife Federation, and Audubon SC have requested the right to intervene in the case to protect our interests in the project. In addition, we have filed our own appeal with the Administrative Law Court, though this appeal protests a somewhat different SC DHEC action than SC DOT's appeal. SCDOT appealed DHEC's September 14 decision to remand the project to DHEC staff for additional review. We are protesting the DHEC staff's October 12 recommendation to include a modest amount of additional bridging (490 feet), while replacing or leaving at least 9700 feet of causeway across the floodplain, It is unlikely that the Administrative Law Court will agree to entertain both cases, but we will have a prominent role in either case.

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, we also had filed a NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) lawsuit in federal court, primarily to protest an inadequate Environmental Assessment for the 601 project. While all cases are currently active, no hearings or testimony have yet been scheduled. Thanks again to Jimmy Chandler and the South Carolina Environmental Law Project for shepherding these cases through the appeals process.

Ivory-billed Woodpecker cont.

expert Martjan Lammertink, is touring the Southeast attempting to document the woodpecker's existence. They will be returning to Congaree National Park in April to provide additional support to the South Carolina search team. Currently, they are in Florida and Louisiana helping with regional Ivory-billed Woodpecker search efforts.

This year all Ivory-billed Woodpecker searches are using a new model developed by scientists at the University of Georgia to help find the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. This model has become the basis for searches conducted in the Southeast and at Congaree National Park. In accordance with the model, the park is divided into 500 acre patches which are searched for signs of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and the bird itself. The model also requires that vegetation data are collected. These data will inform a regional Ivory-billed Woodpecker habitat occupancy model.

Along with the model, Autonomous Recording Units, known as ARUs, are being used to help document the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's presence in South Carolina. ARUs are programmable devices that record all sounds in a forest. Later these recorded sounds can be analyzed for the presence of Ivory-billed Woodpecker vocalizations. In addition to ARU's, the search team is also using remote cameras to monitor areas thought to be used by Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. These cameras take photos automatically for a period of a few days. Then the cameras are taken down and the pictures analyzed frame by frame to look for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers.

In addition to looking for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, the search team is also documenting the presence of other threatened species such as Swallow-tailed Kites, Swainson's Warblers, and Rusty Blackbirds, which have shown declines throughout their ranges in recent years. Thus, the search effort is not only trying to document the Ivory-billed Woodpecker's presence in Congaree National Park, but also assessing other vulnerable species that are found in these bottomland forests. This effort and others like it help promote the preservation and conservation of these unique and important ecosystems.

Upcoming Field Trips & Events

NatureFest 2007

Harry Hampton Visitor Center
Congaree National Park
Saturday & Sunday
April 20 & 21, 2007

NatureFest 2007 is a three day celebration of springtime in Congaree National Park and of the park's 30th anniversary year. Nature walks, presentations, canoe trips and children's programs offer the opportunity for you to experience your new national park at its finest. Bring a picnic lunch with you and spend the day learning about the natural world. Programs are scheduled for Saturday, April 20th and Sunday, April 21st, 2007.

This annual event, based at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center will be held the third weekend in April. Programs led by biologists, park rangers and other professionals will give you the chance to explore the natural beauty of the park with the aid of knowledgeable guides.

NatureFest is held to celebrate National Park Week and Earth Day. National Park Week is an exceptional opportunity to share with the American people what it means to be keepers of the trust, the preservers and protectors of the best in American land and historic places. It also coincides with National Environmental Education Week.

Indoor presentations are approximately an hour in length. Outdoor programs generally last 1½ to 2 hours. All programs are free.

Upcoming Field Trips & Events

Dawn Chorus at Congaree National Park

Sunday, May 6, 2006, 5:00 AM (Yes, that's AM)
Visitors' Center, Congaree National Park
Leader: Robin Carter

One of the most important resources of Congaree National Park is its large numbers of breeding birds, including many so-called Neotropical migrants—species which breed in North America, but go south in the winter to Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, or South America. This is one of the main reasons Congaree National Park has been named a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy and
Birdlife International.

An excellent way to help this dry fact become a personal experience is to be out in the park at dawn during the main breeding season (late April through early June) and listen to the dawn chorus of bird song. This is easy enough to do. The one drawback is that you have to be in the park at dawn. Unless you are camping out this requires a bit of effort. To encourage you to get up at an unreasonable hour and come out to the park we are having a Friends of Congaree Swamp Dawn Chorus Walk on Sunday, May 6, 2006. This is the first year we will celebrate this event with the rest of the world on International Dawn Chorus Day.

We will gather at the Visitors Center at 5:00 AM. This will let give us a chance to listen to the pre-dawn chorus of Barred Owls, Whip-poor-wills, and Chuck-will's-widows before the main event, which begins about a half hour before sunrise, give or take a few minutes. We can reasonably expect to hear as many as forty species of birds calling—hundreds of individual birds. We may hear an impressive amphibian chorus as well. We will have bird song experts on hand to help you identify what you hear, or you can just listen and take in the experience.

As an additional incentive, the Dawn Chorus hike will be followed by an extravagant, yet free, breakfast at 7:30 AM prepared by Friends' board members.

Some things are worth missing a little sleep for.
Contact Robin Carter, rcarter@sc.rr.com

Congaree Big Tree Walk

Saturday, April 7th, 2007
1:30 – 5:00

As you've enjoyed the view from that wonderful overlook at Weston's Lake have you ever wondered what was in those big woods on the opposite shoreline? No? Well come along anyway and let's find out. There is a fine old growth forest worthy of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers between Weston Lake and Cedar Creek and bounded between the Weston Lake Loop Trail and Sims Trail. Despite being surrounded by trails, this area receives almost no public visitation. We will spend a beautiful early spring afternoon tromping around in this forest; though there are no record trees (that I'm aware of), and I can't guarantee an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, there are many near-record sweetgums, oaks, persimmon, ash, and others.

Although there are no trails in this area, the ground is firm under foot in most areas and I promise there will be no wading or muck-swamp hiking. And compared to some of my past enduro-hikes, this one should be no more than three miles. That said, there are the usual off-trail swamp obstacles such as cypress knees, stump holes, vines, etc so hikers should be in good physical condition.

We will have to limit this walk to the first 30 members who sign up – contact John Cely at
jcely@sc.rr.com
or call 782-7450

Share your newsletter with a friend!

Bates Fork Field Trip Summary
12 November, 2006

More than 35 Friends got together on a Sunday afternoon this past November to get a first hand look at Congaree National Park's newest addition, the 2400 acre Bates Fork Tract. Stretching from the east side of Highway 601 to the Wateree River, Bates Fork is a strategic property that now links the Congaree National Park with the 16,000 acre publicly-owned Upper Santee Swamp. Except for about 2200 acres in private ownership on the west side of 601, there is now a near-continuous stretch of more than 30 miles in federal and state ownership along the east bank of the lower Congaree and Upper Santee Rivers.

After a short walk along a jeep trail that parallels 601, we came to a small clearing and the remains of a camp that was recently used by a hunt club. The hunt club presence was also evident in the many deer stands we passed along the road. We stopped briefly at one of the large clearcuts, a product of commercial logging prior to Park Service acquisition. The large number of pig tracks indicated that we weren't the only ones using the old logging roads and trails. We concluded our one-way hike at Sampson Island, a natural mound of sandy high ground covering about 25 acres. The Island is a quite a dramatic, and unexpected, piece of topography located within thousands of acres of flat bottomland. Friends of Congaree and the National Park Service are supporting an archaeological investigation of this interesting and unique area.

Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count Higher Than Normal

It was a crowded morning December 17, 2006 at 5 AM in Calhoun County. Three different parties looking for rails, woodcocks and owls kicked off a very successful Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count.

We initially thought we had 8 groups in the field at Congaree National Park, Lower Richland and Calhoun County, but found that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (IBWO) search team had 4 groups patrolling that day as well. The combined efforts led to a record number of species (89) and some very impressive species totals, particularly for Barred Owl, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Winter Wren and Northern Flicker. This is an effort we are unlikely to replicate in future counts, but it was fun to confirm the sheer numbers of woodpeckers and other winter species in the Park.

Outstanding individual birds included Baltimore Orioles found by Robin Carter on the Bates Fork tract and the IBWO team; an Ovenbird by Molly Bonnell near the beech tree by the Harry Hampton Visitors Center; a Yellow-throated Warbler on the Oakridge Trail by Steve Tracey and Jeff Mollenhauer; a Lapland Longspur by Alice Steinke. A single White-eyed Vireo would normally be an unusual winter bird in the circle—this year we saw 8!

The controlled burns by the Park Service staff really seem to be paying off—the field by the after-hours parking lot was full of sparrows, including Field Sparrows. Success with Field Sparrows was also replicated at the pine savanna off Garrick Road.

We made a special effort this year to visit lakes both inside and outside the Park to find waterfowl. John Cely hiked in to Old Dead River; Dan and Cindy Tufford and Jan Ciegler to Cooks Lake, and Sudie Thomas visited Calhoun County ponds. Though this is an effort that will eventually pay off, lack of waterfowl was perhaps our one disappointment.

A special thanks to all our participants this year: Robin Carter, Dennis Forsythe, Dick Watkins, Donna Slyce, Molly Bonnell, Sudie Thomas, Dan Tufford, Cindy Tufford, Jan Ciegler, Steve Tracey, Jeff Mollenhauer, John Cely, John Grego, Alice Steinke, Martjan Lammertink, Utami Setiorini, Nathan Banfield, Chris McCafferty, Amy Leist, and Zach Nelson.

Editors Note: Please understand that the photographs of the birds in this article were not necessarily shot at Congaree National Park. The images are just representatives of their species.

Pied-billed Grebe	2
Double-crested Cormorant	3
Anhinga	3
Great Blue Heron	1
Black Vulture	51
Turkey Vulture	79
Canada Goose	16
Wood Duck	100
American Wigeon	59
Northern Harrier	4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6
Cooper's Hawk	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	39
Red-tailed Hawk	14
American Kestrel	9
Wild Turkey	25
Virginia Rail	2
Killdeer	58
American Woodcock	5
Ring-billed Gull	1
Rock Pigeon	2
Eurasian Collared-Dove	11

Woodduck Photo by Joe Kegley

Red-shouldered Hark Photo by Casey Szocinski

Wild Turkey Photo by Joe Kegley

Downy Woodpecker Photo by Casey Szocinski

Mourning Dove	101
Eastern Screech-Owl	7
Barred Owl	45
Great Horned Owl	8
Belted Kingfisher	6
Red-headed Woodpecker	13
Red-bellied Woodpecker	204
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	146
Downy Woodpecker	123
Hairy Woodpecker	25
Northern Flicker	366
Pileated Woodpecker	137
Eastern Phoebe	142
Loggerhead Shrike	4
White-eyed Vireo	8
Blue-headed Vireo	20
Blue Jay	30
American Crow	212
Fish Crow	1
Carolina Chickadee	108

American Goldfinch Photo by Casey Szocinski

Eastern Bluebird Photo by Casey Szocinski

Blue Jay Photo by Casey Szocinski

White-throated Sparrow Photo by Casey Szocinski

Piliated Woodpecker Photo by Joe Kegley

Tufted Titmouse	140
White-breasted Nuthatch	36
Brown-headed Nuthatch	18
Brown Creeper	17
Carolina Wren	246
House Wren	17
Winter Wren	121
Golden-crowned Kinglet	143
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	489
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	2
Eastern Bluebird	117
Hermit Thrush	174
American Robin	283
Gray Catbird	4
Northern Mockingbird	34
Brown Thrasher	23
European Starling	65
American Pipit	235
Cedar Waxwing	35
Orange-crowned Warbler	7
Yellow-rumped Warbler	185
Yellow-throated Warbler	1
Pine Warbler	45
Palm Warbler	2
Black-and-white Warbler	14
Common Yellowthroat	19
Ovenbird	1
Eastern Towhee	72

Chipping Sparrow	92
Field Sparrow	5
Savannah Sparrow	6
Fox Sparrow	22
Song Sparrow	247
Swamp Sparrow	112
White-throated Sparrow	1072
Dark-eyed Junco	77
Lapland Longspur	1
Northern Cardinal	175
Red-winged Blackbird	7583
Eastern Meadowlark	10
Rusty Blackbird	24
Common Grackle	2572
Brown-headed Cowbird	7
Baltimore Oriole	2
House Finch	24
American Goldfinch	183
House Sparrow	30

Barred Owl Photo by Joe Kegley

Brown Thrasher Photo by Casey Szocinski

Carolina Wren Photo by Casey Szocinski

Post Office Box 7746
Columbia, SC 29202-7746

www.friendsofcongaree.org
Winter 2007

Advocates for Congaree National Park and its unique environment.

Be a FRIEND: Get a Friend to Join Today!

Yes, I would like to support conservation of Congaree Swamp for future generations. Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution of $ _____ . Please make your check payable to Friends of Congaree Swamp.

_____ $ 15.00 Individual _____ $ 50.00 Advocate _____ $ 500.00 Benefactor _____ $ 50.00 Nonprofit Org.
_____ $ 35.00 Family _____ $ 100.00 Partner _____ $ 1000.00 Patron _____ $ 1000.00 Corporate

_____ New Member _____ Renewal

Name(s): _____
Mailing Address: _____
City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____
Hm Phone: (___) _____ Wk Phone: (___) _____
E-mail: _____

I would like to work on the following committee(s):
_____ Field Trips _____ Fundraising
_____ Public Relations _____ Membership
_____ Education _____ Advocacy
_____ Events _____ Newsletter
_____ Research _____ Other: _____

In addition to my membership, I would like to give $ _____ as a donation to Friends of Congaree Swamp:
In Memory of: _____
In Honor of: _____
As a Gift Membership to: _____

Please provide contact information so we can inform the person or family:
Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

I would like to order the following items (proceeds benefit FCS projects): $_____ enclosed.
_____ copies of the beautifully detailed ***"Map of Congaree National Park and Vicinity"*** @ $12.95 each/plus $3.50 s/h
_____ copies of ***"Images of Congaree Swamp,"*** a 64-page, full color, photographic book of the park @ $10 each/plus $2.50 s/h

Thank You For Supporting Friends of Congaree Swamp!
Friends of Congaree Swamp, PO Box 7746, Columbia, SC 29202-7746
FCS is a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation, EIN: 56-2057087.