



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

www.friendsofcongarree.org

Fall 2015

Save the date

Christmas Bird Count

The Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count will be held this year on **Sunday, Dec. 20**, beginning at 7 a.m.

The Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count includes almost all the national park and adjacent areas from Gadsden in Richland County to Fort Motte and St. Matthews in Calhoun County.

Expert birders can accompany novices along the boardwalk and Bluff Trail, which are excellent sites for some of the park's most interesting wintering species and permanent residents.

Many participants stay for a few hours, but some will bird all day. Meet at the Visitor Center parking lot at 7 a.m. for this free event. If interested, email focs@gmail.com.

INSIDE

President's Corner	2
Annual meeting.....	3
Dedication ceremony	4
Butterfly count	5
Quail farm permit	6
Trail guides on website	6

Artist provides unique perspective of Cedar Creek

Mary Bentz Gilkerson's roots go deep into the soil of South Carolina's Midlands and Lowcountry.

Growing up in the Five Points area of Columbia and family homes near Congaree Bluffs in Calhoun County and on Edisto Island, she was a typical tomboy—outside at every opportunity, in love with nature and its constant transformations.

It gave her a “sense of place, a connectedness to the land,” and a passionate bond to landscape and the environment that she translates beautifully into her art.

So when Congaree National Park was looking for an artist-in-residence last year, she jumped at the chance. The result is a mural of the changing seasons along Cedar Creek. Tucked in an alcove at the Visitor Center, she hopes the mural will give people who are not able to walk on the trails an opportunity to experience the park.

Gilkerson describes her landscapes as abstract representations. “My work is much more about the experience of place than the reproduction of place,” she says.

She drew much of her influence from South Carolina women artists in the early 1900s, particularly Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, who incorporated “eerie light and reflections” into her Lowcountry landscapes.



Panel depicts transition from winter to spring

See *Artist*, page 7



President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

October flood—streams vs. rivers

The flooding of October 2015 did not transpire as the historic flooding event I had envisioned. Rather than floodwaters from a swollen Congaree River backing up local streams, we had historic rainfall and flash floods on tributary streams in the Midlands while rains in the Upstate were more moderate.

As a result, flooding on the main rivers did not reach the historic extremes experienced on our local creeks. The Broad River experienced at most a five-year flood, while releases from the Lake Murray Dam resulted in at least a 50-year flood on the Saluda River (both Lower Saluda gages stopped operating before peak flood stage). The Congaree River peaked at 185,000 cubic feet per second, somewhat less than a 25-year flood. While this was the highest flow since 1936, it has been exceeded at least 10 times in the historical record.

Congaree National Park could have been affected by both flooding from the Congaree River and the flooding on Cedar Creek, Dry Branch, Myers Creek, Toms Creek and other tributaries that caused so much damage to infrastructure upstream in Lower Richland County. As flood waters receded, it became

clear that the park had escaped with relatively minor damage. No buildings had flooded, roads and trails had not washed out, the portions of the boardwalk either under construction or previously undamaged were intact, all bridges on the major trails were initially passable, and only a handful of large trees fell. Effects on wildlife are not yet fully documented, though visitors to the park can vouchsafe that the flooding had at least some effect on the feral hog population.

The lack of damage to park infrastructure in some instances was no accident. After large portions of the low boardwalk detached in the months-long flooding of 2003, park staff used anchors on the boardwalk supports to prevent similar damage from later floods. Though a small portion of the low boardwalk near an area under repair detached, the rest of the low boardwalk was generally fine. The park had dedicated the Bates Ferry Trail only a week before, and all participants in that project were greatly relieved to find that the new trailhead survived its baptism by water so well.

Coincidentally, I have been reading “Southern Waters: The Limits to Abundance” in which Craig Colten describes the long history of requests for federal aid in the South after natural disasters, which served to “federalize” floodplain policy in general. Requests for aid immediately after disasters often take the form of increased flood control infrastructure, which can inadvertently encourage even greater development in vulnerable areas.

Unfortunately, in the long term this serves to increase damage in future disasters. One takeaway is that good policy-making does not go hand-in-hand with the aftermath of a disaster. This is no reason to be unduly pessimistic about policy debates that will occupy our attention for months and years to come, but it does reinforce the idea that the water policy debates in which we participate year in and year out when not confronted with disasters can be just as important, if not moreso, as those that take place in reaction to specific events.

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Dr. John Grego, President Sharon H. Kelly, Editor

Annual meeting a success despite glitches

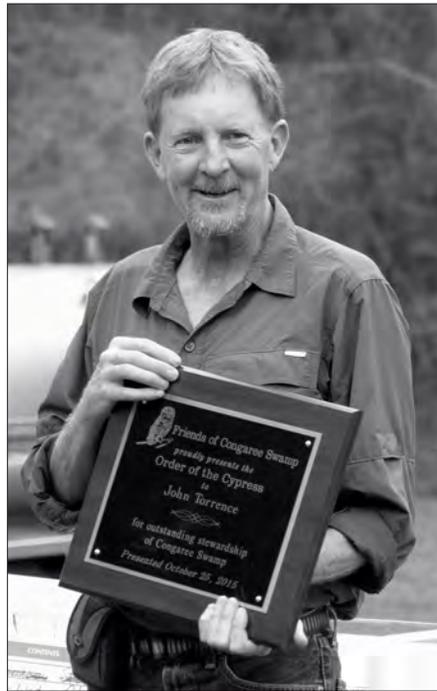
We were by no means sure whether we could hold our annual meeting at Belle Grove as planned since our host Kevin Asbill had suffered serious damage to his home on Shady Lane during the recent floods. We are greatly indebted to him for proceeding with our original plans.

We learned a few things about Belle Grove since our last meeting there in 2009 and were anxious to share them with members.

Lyn Howell, a Howell family descendant, brought a 1991 master's thesis by Mark Groover to our attention last year detailing an archaeological excavation of Thomas Howell's homesite dating to 1746. The homesite was only a couple hundred yards from our meeting site and provided an excellent opportunity to share Groover's findings on early Richland residents as well as Dick Watkins' research on Howell's Ferry.

The talks were run concurrently with nature walks led by John Cely to overviews of Mill Creek, which provided evidence of the recent flooding and a damaged beaver dam.

At our business meeting, we presented copies of "The Natural History of Congaree Swamp" to our hosts, then introduced our Congaree National Park guests John Torrence and Theresa Yednock, while Liz Struhar and her



John Torrence displays award

family were late arrivals.

Board members Andy Fiffick, Kevin Fisher, Kate Hartley, Sharon Kelly, Dennis Poole, and Dick Watkins were re-elected, and John Cely shared comments about our Order of the Cypress recipient, John Torrence.

Cely first met Torrence when he volunteered on Cely's migratory bird mist-netting project more than 20 years ago. Torrence eventually accepted a seasonal position with the park before working full-time in his current position in the Maintenance Division.

Cely noted that maintaining the boardwalks and trails at Congaree must present challenges present at few other parks under the best of circumstances. During Torrence's tenure at the

park, he has helped restore the boardwalk, roads and trails from unprecedented events, including Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and the February 2014 ice storm.

Lessons learned from the March 2003 flooding helped keep the low boardwalk firmly in place during the once-in-a-generation flooding the park experienced last month.

In his closing comments, Cely shared his belief that Torrence was one of few individuals who felt as deeply for the park as Cely himself. Torrence thanked Friends of Congaree Swamp for the award, while expressing his appreciation to Cely for his nomination and sharing his love of the park. Thanks again to John Cely for his thoughtful nomination.

With South Carolina oysters in short supply due to run-off from the flooding, we feasted on South Carolina white shrimp from Livingston Seafood in McClellanville instead. A special thanks to Kate Hartley and Jim Boylston for their epic shrimp run to the coast the previous Saturday.

In addition to pickled shrimp, we served a shrimp boil with andouille sausage and fresh corn, Andy Fiffick's roast chicken, chili, roast vegetables and desserts prepared by volunteers. South Carolina-brewed beer flowed freely.

See Annual Meeting, page 7

Ceremony dedicates ferry marker, trail

A couple of long-germinating projects along U.S. 601 came to fruition on Sept. 25 as staff members from Congaree National Park and the S.C. Department of Archives and History along with representatives from the Richland County Conservation Commission, Friends of Congaree Swamp, and local governments dedicated the Congaree Ferries historical trail marker and the Bates Ferry Trail.

As reported in our Spring, 2015 newsletter, the Congaree Ferries marker was part of a mitigation agreement between Norfolk Southern Railway Corp., the Department of Archives and History, and the



Bates Ferry Trail officially opens

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Friends of Congaree helped develop the marker text, while Richland County's conservation coordinator, Nancy Stone-Collum, oversaw the difficult coordination with the S.C. Department of Transportation to place the marker in a highway right-of-way.

The Bates Ferry Trail has

been in use by a handful of hikers ever since the park acquired the property in 2011, but visitation will increase greatly with the park's addition of a parking area, kiosk, trail markers and directional signs. Park staff completed the project with the help of a Richland County Conservation Commission grant awarded to Friends of Congaree Swamp.

Participants were greeted by an outstanding turnout of park staff at the historical marker site, located at the pull-out to Sampson Island. Just as the dedication ceremony began, a most-propitious bald eagle drifted overhead.

After ceremonial comments from Richland County Councilman Kelvin Washington, Eastover Mayor Geraldene Robinson, Friends members Dick Watkins and



Kiosk tells story of Congaree River ferries

See Dedication, page 7

Conditions ideal for butterfly count

The September North American Butterfly Association count at Congaree National Park was held under ideal conditions on Sunday, Sept. 13, after being postponed a day due to threatening weather.

Some participants showed up on Saturday, and Ron Ahle deserves a big thanks for organizing an impromptu and successful field trip. Those results were combined with the Sunday counts.

On the day of the count, the party led by Marty and David Kastner of the Carolina Butterfly Society added a new species to the count, and a new species for Congaree National Park and Richland County—a Tropical Checkered-Skipper! This species looks remarkably similar to the White Checkered-Skipper, which is always one of the most common species seen on the September count. Most counters would have identified the butterfly as a White Checkered-Skipper without a second thought, so it is very much a testimony to the Kastners' expertise and vigilance to have added this record to the park's list of butterfly species.

All three Sunday parties had remarkably consistent results, with 35, 36, and 36 species reported from the trails near the Visitor Center, the U.S. 601 corridor and Calhoun County, respectively. Combined, 51 species were seen on the count, along with a total of 1,475 individual butterflies!



Red-banded Hairstreak



Tropical Checkered-Skipper

The Carolina Butterfly Society, which has sponsored or co-sponsored the event since its inception in Spring 2004, compiled the count and shared it with park resource staff.

Participants were Ron Ahle, Bill Evans, Dennis Forsythe, Donna Forsythe, Carl Ganser, John Grego, Billy Hosa and two sons, Dale Hutto, Dave Kastner, Marty Kastner, Liam Reilly, Mabry Reilly, Veronica Reilly, William Reilly, David Schuetrum, and Angela Valvasori.

Lace-Winged Roadside Skipper 2
Least Skipper 6
Southern Skipperling 2
Dun Skipper 43
Fiery Skipper 25
Clouded Skipper 56
Ocala Skipper 4
Yehl Skipper 1
Zabulon Skipper 34

Crossline Skipper 1
Whirlabout 1
Little Glassywing 4
Byssus Skipper 1
Silver-spotted Skipper 10
Horace's Duskywing 5
Duskywing spp. 2
Zarucco Duskywing 11
White Checkered-Skipper 122
Tropical Checkered-Skipper 1
Long-Tailed Skipper 13
Summer Azure 4
Eastern-tailed Blue 17
Red-Banded Hairstreak 8
Gray Hairstreak 14
Gulf Fritillary 67
Hackberry Emperor 16
Tawny Emperor 10
Silvery Checkerspot 1
Variegated Fritillary 68
Common Buckeye 33
American Snout 7
Viceroy 38
Red-spotted Purple 74
Pearl Crescent 297
Eastern Comma 7
Question Mark 7
Red Admiral 5
American Lady 3
Monarch 3
Gemmed Satyr 4
Creole Pearly-Eye 12
Southern Pearly-Eye 2
Carolina Satyr 113
Appalachian Brown 8
Zebra Swallowtail 1
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail 27
Palamedes Swallowtail 13
Spicebush Swallowtail 4
Little Yellow 13
Sleepy Orange 96
Cloudless Sulphur 159



Common Buckeye caterpillar

Friends comments on quail farm permit

In our Spring 2015 newsletter we discussed existing sources of pollution in Lower Richland that could be resolved with the construction of the proposed Lower Richland sewage line running from the Hopkins area to the Eastover Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The Manchester Farms quail farm in Hopkins has been identified as another potential customer for the sewer line, but has not yet committed to connect.

Recently, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control requested public comments on the NPDES permit for Manchester Farms' spray fields. While reviewing the permit and permit rationale, we felt there were enough concerns to prepare public comments.

Manchester Farms presently treats waste on-site then sprays partly treated wastewater on two fields on either side

of Horsepen Branch to be filtered naturally before reaching groundwater. It plans to apply the treated waste to two additional fields to the east of Horsepen Branch. Horsepen Branch is a tributary of Myers Creek and has an existing NPDES site, Hopkins Elementary School, under consent order.

The permit and rationale note that the groundwater under one of the current spray fields is contaminated and the field has been inactivated, while the groundwater at the other spray field has a history of violations for nitrate. We noted that the permit allows land application within 200 feet of Horsepen Branch and requested a 300-foot buffer that would provide superior water quality protection to Horsepen Branch.

The draft permit held out the option of connecting to Richland County's

proposed sewer line, which will run along the edge of the property fronting Lower Richland Boulevard to the Eastover treatment plant.

The draft permit notes that a requirement to connect to the sewer line could be waived if compliance with total nitrogen standards in the permit can be met. Given current conditions at existing spray fields and existing problems with water quality discharge to Horsepen Branch, we asked instead that the permit require that land application cease and that Manchester Farms connect to the sewer line upon the line's installation.

With the sewer line not yet finalized, DHEC demurred on this last request. We remain hopeful the sewer line will proceed and Manchester Farms will eventually connect to the sewer line and retire the spray fields.

Weston Lake Loop, Bluff trail guides on website

The Weston Lake Loop Trail guide is finally available at our website. It features an introduction, a trail map and tabs that lead to text and photos for 18 different stops along the trail, keyed to important features such as trail intersections, bridges, overlooks and distinct natural features.

A GPS-enabled version of the guide was explored but proved too expensive and

technically challenging.

A Bluff Trail guide is posted on the website as well.

As part of a University of South Carolina Honors College service course last fall, student Erin Hamner produced a draft of the guide for her final service project. It is very much to Erin's credit that she handled this guide so expeditiously and so well.

Her trail guide needed only a

map and modest amendments to ready it for the website.

I continue to work with students on guides for the remaining trails with an eventual goal of a full complement of online trail guides for the park.

In addition, print-ready layouts of each guide are available should that alternative ever prove feasible.

—John Grego

Artist

continued from page 1

“I’m interested in the light, in the way that it reveals atmosphere, weather and the passage of time through the play of light and shadow,” Gilkerson says. “These can completely transform the natural forms of the environment, creating an entirely different emotional and visual response from the viewer.”

Her art is of places that inspire her—rural Charleston, Edisto Island, the Edisto River, Cowasee Basin, Congaree Swamp and Columbia’s Three Rivers Greenway.

Her mother’s family is from the Stateburg-Sumter area and

Annual meeting

continued from page 3

A special thanks to all our volunteers, especially the enthusiastic clean-up crew that left Belle Grove spotless and no task undone upon our departure: Ron Ahle, Brusi Alexander, Mary Balbach, Pete Balbach, Jim Boylston, Mary Bull, John Cely, Andy Fiffick, Carol Gist, John Grego, Rhonda Grego, Kate Hartley, Lyn Howell, Sharon Kelly, Stephen McInnis, Susan McInnis, Jim Osborne, Roberta Osborne, Miriam Oudejans, Dennis Poole, Jean Prothro, Claire Schuetrum, Dave Schuetrum, Warren Steckle, Alice Steinke, Ted Steinke, George Teague, Lynn Teague, Angela Valvasori, and Dick Watkins.

the Lower Richland area is dear to her. A favorite subject is the land along Minervaville Road, a tiny byway between Air Base and Cabin Creek roads.

“It’s 300 acres of open farmland—wide open, flat, bounded by creeks on both sides,” she said. In her hands, changing weather, changing light and changing seasons dramatically affect an identical landscape so it becomes an entirely different place.

She has loved the swamp since the 1970s, when it was named a national monument. “I grew up hearing stories about the swamp as a place of safety” for Revolutionary War heroes like Francis Marion and Nathanael Greene and later, for runaway slaves. “The whole Cowasee Basin was a place of safety.”

She hopes her landscapes of the swamp will attract people



Mary
Gilkerson

who are not familiar with the park and “get them curious enough to get out and look.

“There’s an awful lot of beauty really, really close by,” she said.

Gilkerson holds an MFA in drawing and painting from the University of South Carolina and teaches painting at Columbia College. Her work is exhibited at the if ART Gallery in Columbia’s Vista, and galleries in Greenville, Arizona, and Portland, Maine, as well as on the Internet.

Dedication

continued from page 4

John Grego, and Dr. Ehren Foley, coordinator of the Department of Archives and History’s historical marker program, the marker was unveiled. Everyone then drove a couple miles up U.S. 601 for inauguration of the Bates Ferry Trail. After remarks from park Superintendent Tracy Stakely, Mayor Robinson cut the red ribbon to officially open the trail.

After photos were taken, a large group of the participants took an impromptu hike down the trail to visit the General Greene tree—a

bald cypress more than 29 feet in circumference with an eight-foot tall knee.

With the addition of the prominent highway signs for the Bates Ferry Trail, travelers along U.S. 601’s transit of the Congaree River floodplain now know they are driving through a national park. We plan to add highway signs for the historical marker as well, which will bring further attention to the corridor.

In case you are curious, visits to Bates Ferry Trail after flooding receded confirmed that the trail was in excellent shape, and none of the park’s recent hard work on the trailhead had been affected.



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Individual \$15 Name(s) _____
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 Advocate \$50 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Partner \$100 ** Phone _____ Email _____
 Benefactor \$500
 Patron \$1000
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Please keep your information current to receive special notices about field trips, events, scheduling changes and acknowledgements in addition to a quarterly newsletter.

*For a contribution of \$35 or more, you may choose one:

Baseball cap maroon _____ tan _____

Tan visor _____

Bandana with map of Congaree National Park gold _____ blue _____ red _____

**For a contribution of \$100 or more you will receive a copy of "The Natural History of Congaree Swamp."

In addition, I would like to donate \$ _____ as a gift.

Thank you for supporting Friends of Congaree Swamp!

Friends of Congaree Swamp, P.O. Box 7746, Columbia, SC 29202-7746
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