



Friends of Congaree Swamp News

Save the date

Great Backyard Bird Count

Join Friends of Congaree Swamp for a Great Backyard Bird Count walk at Congaree National Park on **Sunday, February 20**.

Great Backyard Bird Count activities at the park were initiated by the late Robin Carter and we are happy to continue Robin's tradition. Our observations will contribute to all observations made at the park Feb. 18-21 as part of the national count.

The hike will cover portions of the Boardwalk, Sims Trail and Weston Lake Loop Trail. The emphasis will be on engaging birders of all abilities—including beginners—in observing and identifying winter birds at the park.

The park is one of the best places in the Southeast to see winter residents such as Brown Creeper, Winter

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David Stahle visit

Park's cypress measure up

By John Cely

David Stahle, Distinguished Professor of Geography at the University of Arkansas, has become somewhat of a legend in my mind since he announced to the world some twenty years ago the discovery of sixteen- and seventeen hundred-year-old bald cypress in Eastern North Carolina's Black River.

Even us cypress aficionados who thought we knew something about this magnificent species were flabbergasted that they could live this long. And it only got better when a few years later Dr. Stahle documented

one ancient cypress in the same Black River that was 2,626 years old, making it the fifth oldest known tree species in the world.

Using a small cross section sample of the tree taken with an increment borer, Dr. Stahle specializes in dendrochronology, the science of studying the historic climate record through the examination of growth rings of ancient trees.

It was therefore with great excitement and anticipation when I learned that this man with an international reputation had agreed



From left, David Stahle, Graham Norman, David Shelley, Dave Schuetrum, Katie Ayers, John Grego, and Jason Johnson, rear, in front of the 24-foot circumference "Lost Cypress."

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President's Corner

Dr. John Grego

Congaree Research Symposium 2022

After the success of the Water/Ways Symposium in 2021, Friends of Congaree Swamp and Congaree National Park used the momentum to organize the park's third research-focused symposium.

The first research symposium was held in 2002 and there had been a too-long hiatus since the second symposium in 2008.

This year's organizing committee, comprised of Friends board members Neal Polhemus, Tameria Warren and myself, park staff Gregory Cunningham and David Shelley, and UofSC Department of Geography faculty member John Kupfer, chose themes related to the research contributions of Rebecca Sharitz and William Graf, who passed away in October 2018 and December 2019, respectively. Both Becky and Will were researchers with international stature who made significant research contributions to the park (see our Fall 2018 and Winter 2020 newsletters for memorials).

We initially chose a hybrid delivery for the conference, primarily to accommodate long-distance presenters, little anticipating the onset of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2. As registration progressed, more and more people chose to attend remotely, so that our two symposium sites—the UofSC Alumni Center and S.C. State Museum's Vista Room—could readily handle our in-person registrants

with ample room for social distancing.

The Thursday session at the Vista Room featured a welcome from Acting Superintendent Cunningham; a research overview by Dr. David Shelley, park chief of resource stewardship and science; and memorial tributes to Will Graf and Becky Sharitz from former students. Artist Pat Gilmartin, Will's spouse, attended.

On Friday, we reconvened at the Vista Room for sessions on Cultural History, Hydrology, Geomorphology and Ecosystems/Ecology; the symposium concluded with a closing panel on the future of research at Congaree National Park.



David Shelley gives a research overview

Video recordings organized by session are available at our website and Facebook page. The Facebook page also includes the symposium program with links to researchers' web pages, and the researchers' PowerPoint/PDF presentations as available.

We extend gratitude to sponsors Central Midlands Council of Governments and Congaree Biosphere Region. I would like to thank the organizing committee for all their hard work over the six months prior to the symposium.

We chose to manage the conference by ourselves rather than through a vendor, which proved nerve-wracking for those hosting sessions and managing speakers. John Kupfer and Tameria Warren deserve particular recognition for their roles managing speakers during Thursday and Friday sessions, respectively.

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



Annual Meeting and Oyster Roast Sunday, March 13, 2022

Friends of Congaree Swamp will hold its Annual Oyster Roast and Business meeting on Sunday, March 13, 2022, on protected private property near Fort Motte in Calhoun County. Share spectacular views of Congaree National Park with our host Dick Watkins.



Registration will begin at 2 p.m., followed by hikes to interesting sites nearby, including bluff views led by John Cely; Goodin Cemetery, an historic African-African cemetery, led by Jackie Whitmore; and the Revolutionary War battlefield at Fort Motte led by Prof. Steven Smith. We will reconvene for the business meeting, featuring a talk by Audubon South Carolina forester Tim Evans, who will discuss forest management activities at the site and other Audubon properties nearby. The Oyster Bar will serve roast oysters beginning at 5 p.m. Friends members will provide beverages, chili, vegetarian selections, and desserts.

Directions: Take Bluff Road east to U.S. 601 and turn right. Follow U.S. 601 south, cross the Congaree River and travel 1.9 miles. At the first paved intersection after crossing the river, turn right on Adams Road (S-9-80). Follow Adams Road east for 0.4 miles and turn right on Lang Syne Road. Follow Lang Syne Road north for 2.6 miles and take a sharp left at the intersection with unpaved Wise Road. Follow Wise Road for 0.5 miles then look for the unpaved road on the right (Moye Lane). Moye Lane will cross the railroad track (the crossing has no signals—be careful), then run parallel to the tracks before turning north along a hedge of cedar trees. Follow Moye Lane for 0.5 miles and look for parking signs.

2022 Annual Meeting Registration

Current members:

Name(s): _____

 Phone: () _____

Non-members (includes a one-year membership):

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: () _____ Email: _____

Payment:

Current member(s): \$20 x _____ = \$ _____
 Non-member(s): \$35 x _____ = \$ _____
 Children under 12: \$ 9 x _____ = \$ _____
 Children under 4 free
 Total \$ _____

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: () _____ Email: _____

Please register by March 6 by sending this form and your check to:

Friends of Congaree Swamp
 2022 Annual Meeting
 P.O. Box 7746
 Columbia, SC 29202-7746

Registrations will be accepted at the meeting.

Bird count sees lower species diversity

The Congaree Swamp Christmas Bird Count had its lowest species diversity in quite some time, no doubt due to gloomy conditions throughout the day.

On the other hand, the predicted morning downpour never materialized and all our floodplain parties were able to cover their territories, so that totals for many of our target species were strong.

The count continues to grow, including full coverage of the River Trail for the first time.

No new species were added to the count, but we tied high counts for less common species, including Osprey (1), Sora (1), Yellow-throated Warbler (1), Painted Bunting (2), and Henslow's Sparrow (3). Our new high counts included White Ibis (14), White-eyed Vireo (12), Blue-headed Vireo (51), Carolina Chickadee (254), Carolina Wren (272), Gray Catbird (15), Cedar Waxwing (299), and Black-and-white Warbler (29).

It is interesting to see counts for more southeasterly species, such as White-eyed Vireo, Gray Catbird and Black-and-white Warbler, continue to grow.

Red-headed Woodpecker were patchy this year, and Rusty Blackbird were scarce. Otherwise, most of the species commonly associated with the floodplain were present in abundance. Reviewing



Anhinga

species total, our counts for Barred Owl, Blue-headed Vireo, Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker and Pileated Woodpecker should be among the highest in the country, and counts for Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Hermit Thrush should rank high east of the Rockies.

In case you are wondering, even though chickadee and wren counts were high, those totals do not compete with counts for circles that include a lot of feeder watchers.

When all counts nationally have been uploaded at the end of February, we will share an update on any national rankings of interest.

Thanks to our many volunteers: Ron Ahle, Katherine Boyle, Andy Brady, Tre Bray, Mary Bull, Pete Bungay, Joy Chambers, John Cely, Brad Dalton, Bob Dellinger, Steve Dennis, Mary Desportes, Caroline Eastman, Hilda Flamholtz, Jon Flamholtz,

Dennis Forsythe, Lex Glover, Dave Gowans, John Grego, Kathy Gunther, Maina Handmaker, Mark Hopey, Matthew Johnson, Richard Joyce, Jay Keck, Courtney Love, Jon Manchester, Carl Miller, Catherine Miller, Julie Mobley, Ann Nolte, Graham Norman, Kathleen O'Grady, Bailey Slice Parker, Clay Parker, Dave Schuetrum, Nathan Senner, Hunter St. Germain, Hank Stallworth, Alice Steinke, Julie Taylor, Preston Taylor, John Tjaarda, Patricia Voelker, Dick Watkins, Scott Wietetcha, and Cynthia Worthington

Species

Pied-billed Grebe	1
Anhinga	2
Great Blue Heron	7
Great Egret	3
White Ibis	14
Black Vulture	85
Turkey Vulture	101
Canada Goose	71
Wood Duck	74
Hooded Merganser	2
Osprey	1
Bald Eagle	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Cooper's Hawk	3
Red-shouldered Hawk	21
Red-tailed Hawk	11
American Kestrel	10
Wild Turkey	8
Sora	1
Killdeer	12
American Woodcock	2
Rock Pigeon	12
Mourning Dove	191
Common Ground Dove	6
Eastern Screech-Owl	1
Barred Owl	47
Great Horned Owl	4
Belted Kingfisher	6

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Grego

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We are planning to organize symposia on a biennial schedule in the future. See you in January 2024!

Pat DeCoursey passage

Pat DeCoursey, long-time



Pat DeCoursey

member of University of South Carolina’s Department of Biological Sciences, passed away on January 1 of this year.

Many of you knew Pat through her herculean efforts restoring the W. Gordon Belser Arboretum. During morning bike commutes to work, I would often find Pat’s car pulled alongside Bloomwood Road outside the arboretum and would chat with her about the wonderful work she accomplished there.

I first met Pat through the Stat Lab, providing some statistical assistance on her studies of circadian rhythms in mice. I used her examples of “surgical controls” in my Stat Consulting class for years afterwards.

Later, she approached Friends of Congaree Swamp to fund projects at Congaree

National Park. Her first generous contribution led to the installation of Carolina fence gardens (since dismantled) and plantings at Longleaf Campground in 2006 (see our Fall 2006 newsletter).

Later, another donation contributed to the installation of the current system of markers on the Cedar Creek paddling trail (Winter 2009, Spring 2010 newsletters).

Pat’s contributions to the park extended much earlier—perhaps you noticed Pat’s name among the contributors to the May, 1979 “Research Bibliography of the Congaree Swamp National Monument Area” during David Shelley’s research overview at the Congaree Research Symposium. We will sorely miss Pat and all she did for Friends and the park.

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Bird Count

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Red-headed Woodpecker 58
 Red-bellied Woodpecker 178
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 80
 Downy Woodpecker 104
 Hairy Woodpecker 13
 Northern Flicker 270
 Pileated Woodpecker 123
 Eastern Phoebe 112
 Loggerhead Shrike 4
 White-eyed Vireo 12
 Blue-headed Vireo 51
 Blue Jay 90
 American Crow 176
 Carolina Chickadee 254
 Tufted Titmouse 190
 White-breasted Nuthatch 13
 Brown-headed Nuthatch 18
 Brown Creeper 12
 Carolina Wren 272

House Wren 30
 Winter Wren 46
 Sedge Wren 1
 Golden-crowned Kinglet 204
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet 466
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 4
 Eastern Bluebird 102
 Hermit Thrush 108
 American Robin 1578
 Gray Catbird 15
 Northern Mockingbird 45
 Brown Thrasher 25
 American Pipit 7
 Cedar Waxwing 299
 Orange-crowned Warbler 6
 Yellow-rumped Warbler 196
 Yellow-throated Warbler 1
 Pine Warbler 106
 Palm Warbler 2
 Black-and-white Warbler 29
 Common Yellowthroat 4
 Eastern Towhee 91

Chipping Sparrow 276
 Field Sparrow 24
 Henslow’s Sparrow 3
 Savannah Sparrow 14
 Fox Sparrow 12
 Song Sparrow 236
 Swamp Sparrow 50
 White-throated Sparrow 367
 Dark-eyed Junco 10
 Northern Cardinal 346
 Painted Bunting 2
 Red-winged Blackbird 105,006
 Eastern Meadowlark 52
 Rusty Blackbird 2
 Common Grackle 279
 Brown-headed Cowbird 3
 Purple Finch 1
 House Finch 32
 American Goldfinch 96
Total Species 88
Total Count 112,551

Cypress

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to come to Congaree National Park for a “Lunch and Learn Presentation”, sponsored by Friends of Congaree Swamp and the National Park Service. And better yet, stay over the next day for a field visit to look at the park’s old-growth cypress in the “East End.”

Nearly all the park’s old-growth cypress was removed at the turn of the last century by the Santee River Cypress Lumber Company. Although scattered old-growth cypress specimens are still standing in sloughs and guts throughout the park, there is one particular spot bordering the park’s 1976 old-growth eastern boundary that, for whatever reason, the ancient trees, dozens and dozens of them, were never logged and are still proudly standing.

It’s a long way in by foot to the East End. The best way to get there is by boating up the Congaree River which is

what a small party of us did with Dr. Stahle (pronounced “Staley”) as our guest on Friday, December 10.

I had learned by now that Dave, as he goes by, is a down-home, informal kind of guy who relates to a variety of people and has the enthusiasm of a graduate student. He is also in excellent physical shape.

I wasn’t sure what to expect as far as his impressions of Congaree’s cypress since he has probably seen more of the remaining stands of old-growth bald cypress scattered across the South than anyone. But I think he was suitably impressed.

As he told John Grego, he usually needs a boat for most of his cypress work, so I think being able to walk right up to them with dry feet was a nice change. Since it was overcast and threatening to rain most of the day, he carried a three-foot umbrella that he used to thump on the base of the tree to see if it was hollow; most were not.

For many of the old cypress

he has aged, it meant using an extension ladder to get above the hollow base of the tree and into sound wood where a core sample could be extracted.

I got the impression that Dave has not worked much with the so-called red (or brown) river cypress—those trees found along large coastal rivers such as the Congaree, Wateree, Big Pee Dee, Santee, Savannah, and others with origins in the mountains and foothills a state or more away. The clay sediments that give these rivers their color names also provide fertile silts that result in fast tree growth.

So our Congaree cypress may not be as old as those trees found in less fertile blackwater environments such as North Carolina’s Black River and Audubon’s Beidler Forest Sanctuary where he has done work for some years, but hopefully we can get David Stahle back for a more in-depth look at Congaree’s unique old-growth bald cypress and the stories they are waiting to tell.

Grego

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Bluff Trails Guide

That’s right—trails with an “s”. In order to bring a semblance of order to the many informal names for the Bluff Trail and its spurs and connectors (dog trail, firefly trail, trail to Longleaf Campground, etc), the park has assigned new names to various portions of the existing loop network.

The Longleaf Trail (Trail #8) will travel the western portion of the Bluff Trail and its spur to the Longleaf Campground. The Firefly Trail (Trail #10) follows the dog trail at first, then continues along the bluff to Bluff Campground. The Bluff Trail (Trail #1) will use the parking lot connector funded by the Friends’ 2019 Conservation Commission grant to form a central loop.

All these revisions required an update to our original trail

guide developed by UofSC Honors College student Erin Hamner in 2014. The original guide pre-dated the intense public interest in the park’s synchronized firefly display, so the fireflies had to be featured along with new photos and a revised map and introduction.

The guide will be posted under the Visit tab at our website. Our next project will be to publish a guide for the lower section of the Cedar Creek paddling trail.

Save the date

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Wren and Hermit Thrush. Many birds will be high up in the canopy, but we can always count on great looks at some favorite species, including Pileated Woodpecker, Black-and-white Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

We'll meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center. Participants should bring binoculars and wear a good pair of walking shoes or boots and weather-appropriate clothing. Water and snacks are also recommended.

Adopt-a-trail workday

Our next adopt-a-trail workday will be held **Sunday, Feb. 27**, on the Weston Lake Loop Trail and the Oakridge Trail, or whichever of the park's trails needs the most attention.

While out on the trails, we should be able to hear our mascot for the winter trail clearings, the Yellow-throated Warbler, always the first migrant to return to the park.

We will meet at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center at 9 a.m. and finish in the early afternoon. Work gloves, light hiking boots, water and a snack are recommended. Bring loppers, long-handled shears or bow saws, if you have them. Park staff can also provide gear.

Atamasco Lily hike

Enjoy one of the highlights of a spring visit to Congaree National Park on **Saturday, April 9**, as we go in search of the Atamasco Lily, found in



Atamasco Lilies

only a few places in the park.

We will hike to an unusually large patch of lilies in a rarely visited portion of the muck swamp. Keith Bradley, a botanist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and an affiliate faculty member of the University of South Carolina, will share his knowledge of the Atamasco Lily and other early spring flora on this short hike.

Meet at the Visitor Center at 9 a.m. and we will carpool to Garrick Road. The hike will take us entirely off trail, mostly through pine uplands with occasionally heavy understory.

Regular hiking boots will be sufficient for the wetlands we will visit. We will take care to avoid damaging the lilies.

This outing is only for members of Friends of Congaree Swamp and will be limited to 25 participants.

Dawn Chorus

The Robin Carter Dawn Chorus Walk will be held **Sunday, May 1**, on

International Dawn Chorus Day.

Robin, who passed away in 2008, started the dawn chorus event at Congaree National Park in 2005. It was one of many birding events he originated at the park and that we work to maintain through the present day.

We will meet at the Visitor Center at 5:30 a.m.. This will provide an opportunity to

listen for the pre-dawn sounds of owls, nightjars, and migrating thrushes before the dawn chorus starts in earnest.

Bird song experts will be on hand to help you identify what you hear, or you can just listen and take in the experience.

Birds observed during the Dawn Chorus will be included as part of the North American Spring Migration Count Day at the park. Stick around if you would like to help out!

The Dawn Chorus hike will be followed by a free breakfast at 7:30 a.m., organized and prepared by Friends members.

The breakfast menu changes slightly from year to year, but should include shrimp and creamy grits, scones, biscuits, a breakfast strata, fresh fruit, juice and coffee.

To sign up for any of these activities, contact John Grego at friendsofcongaresswamp@gmail.com or 803-331-3366.



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Join Friends of Congaree Swamp today!

Yes, I want to support conservation of Congaree Swamp for future generations. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____. (Please make checks payable to Friends of Congaree Swamp.)

Individual \$15 Name(s) _____
 Family \$35 * Mailing address _____
 Advocate \$50 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Partner \$100 ** Phone _____ Email _____
 Benefactor \$500
 Patron \$1000
 Nonprofit \$50
 Corporate \$1000

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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