

**FRIENDS
OF
NOXUBEE**
WINTER
NEWSLETTER
2023

**INSIDE
THIS
ISSUE**

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A recap of Refuge Day!

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Waterfowl season is upon us –
where are all the ducks?



Photo by: Dot Perro

TOP SIGHTINGS THIS SEASON

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

iNaturalist

1. American Alligator
2. Bald Eagle
3. American Beautyberry
4. Ring-billed Gull
5. American White Waterlily

eBird

1. Lesser Scaup
2. Swamp Sparrow
3. Sedge Wren
4. Pileated Woodpecker
5. Belted Kingfisher

LETTER FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT

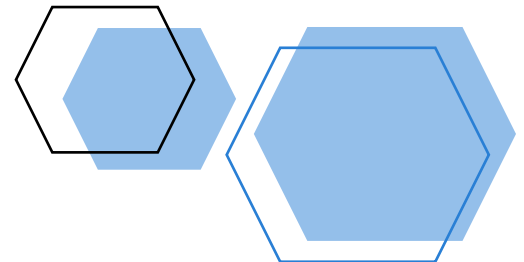
GREETINGS! We enjoyed a very active and successful 2023 as supporters of the Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee Wildlife Refuge. I thank you for your support in helping make this happen. I am looking forward to serving you as President of FoNR for the next two years. Many thanks to Susan Watts, for her leadership as she led us out of the Covid years.

2024 promises to be even more exciting and active. We will kick off the year with our annual Bluebird House Workshop on February 10th. Our first Nature Series will be March 7th. Please put these dates on your calendars. Detailed information will be available soon.

We are very lucky to have the Refuge in our area. Travis Carpenter and his crew do a magnificent job and I encourage you to come out and visit as often as you can. My personal contact info is: email—lmw.218@pss.msstate.edu and my cell phone number is (662) 769-7558. Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions or suggestions.

Again, it is my pleasure to serve as your President.

Sincerely, Linda

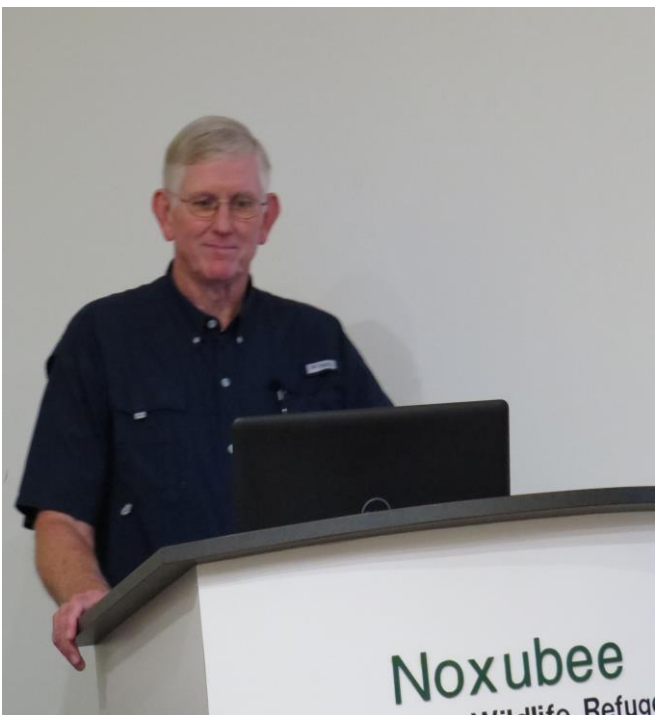


SEPTEMBER NATURE SERIES

Our guest speaker for the September Nature Series was Mr. Steve Prestridge, VP and Timberlands Manager for C. A. Barge Timberlands/ Barge Forest Company of Macon, MS. He has been with Barge Timberlands since 2009. Steve is a native of Liberty, MS and his family still owns a 125 acre place in northeast Amite County dating back to late 1800's. Steve presented an interesting and entertaining program regarding timber management and how important it is to the environment.



Photo by: Lana Grissom Taylor





NOXUBEE CELEBRATES REFUGE DAY

BY WAYNE WELLS

The annual Refuge Day activities were postponed the past couple of years due to the COVID but on a beautiful Saturday day this Fall the Friends of Noxubee Refuge hosted a very successful fun-filled day of free Refuge Day activities including free hotdogs and drinks. There were over twenty different exhibitors offering games, crafts, skills, face-painting, storytelling, music and learning experiences for the 250+ children and adults attending. A special thanks to the exhibitors, volunteers and donors who made this event possible through their time and donations.



DECEMBER NATURE SERIES

BY: STACY PARVIN

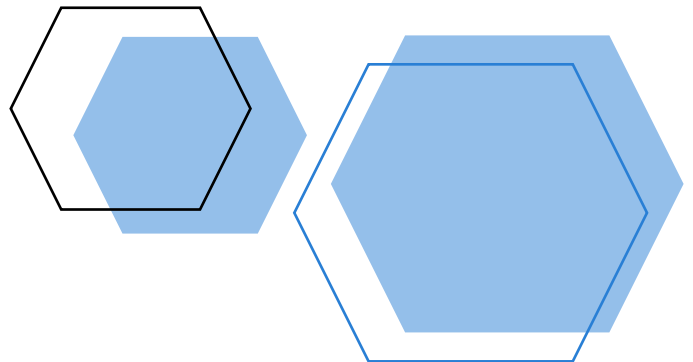
Allen Winters, a professional artist, engraver, and traditional Choctaw flute maker, spoke at the Friends of the Noxubee Refuge quarterly meeting. Winters has worked for the tribe in the Choctaw Cultural Preservation Program and is a pottery teacher for Choctaw Tribal Schools. He is the fourth great-grandson of Choctaw Chief Mushulatubi.

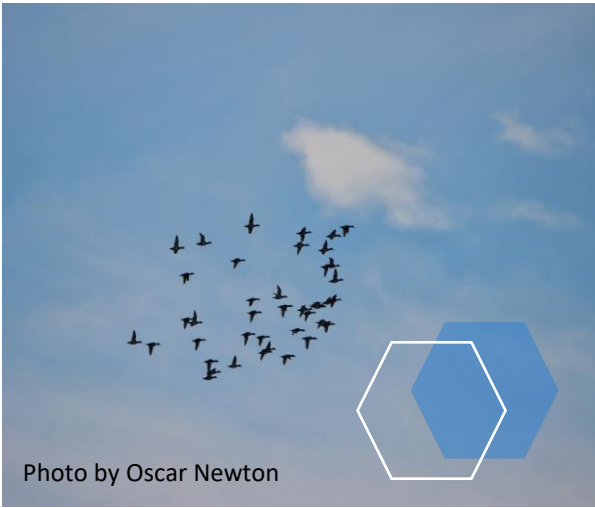
Participants learned about the history of the Choctaws, including the forced removal on the Trail of Tears. Allen pointed out that there were many Trails of Tears from many states leading to Oklahoma and that the government sent his people to Oklahoma because it was not good for farming, but it was good for oil and many other natural resources that ended up benefitting the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw people have persevered through so much and are still here. More and more tribal members are interested in their culture and heritage. There are 8 tribal communities that make up the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians: Bogue Chitto, Conehatta, Pearl River, Tucker, Bogue Homa, Crystal Ridge, Red Water, Standing Pine.

Winters shared that he was invited to become a flute maker. This is a great honor. He shared in depth about how a Choctaw flute is made, including that no reed must ever be cut to make a flute, you take what the earth offers. Winters demonstrated how the flute works and played a few tunes, like Amazing Grace. It was gorgeous!

Winters is very grateful that the Choctaw language has been saved and is once again being taught in the schools. He taught a few words and included how the common phrase, "OK" comes from a Choctaw word, "okeh" which means, "it is so". Mr. Winters was very gracious and asked for questions. He invited people up to look at the items he had brought. He was so interesting that people stayed long after the program was over to speak with him.

At this gathering, Travis Carpenter also presented Andrea Dunstan with her plaque for 36 years with the agency.





WHERE ARE ALL THE DUCKS? EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF WATERFOWL MIGRATION

BY JAMES CALLICUT, EXTENSION – MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

As a waterfowl biologist, one of the prominent questions I hear each year is “Where are the ducks?”. However, this year the question seems to be asked much more frequently, prompting some pondering on the complex and dynamic phenomenon of waterfowl migration.

Aerial waterfowl surveys by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and surrounding states have shown much lower duck abundance than previous years. The same is seen for early migrants. The intricacies of waterfowl migration continue to be a subject of ongoing scientific investigation. While we may not have all the answers, it is apparent that weather patterns and habitat availability play pivotal roles in determining if ducks arrive in great abundance in Mississippi. I will briefly summarize factors driving duck migration and provide some speculation on our current lack of wintering ducks.

Habitat, particularly foraging habitat, is crucial for waterfowl during the wintering period. The main goal for ducks during the winter is simply to survive and “coast” through winter waiting for spring. However, while in Mississippi ducks have a few more needs, most importantly to find a mate and acquire much needed nutrients for other life cycle events such as molting into breeding plumage. Thus, having plenty of available wetlands for these birds to meet these biological demands is important and why habitat managers and conservation organizations make significant investments to protect, restore, enhance, and manage a diversity of wetland types across the state.

Waterfowl numbers typically peak in mid-late January here in Mississippi, but some ducks and geese begin arriving here as early as late October and early November. Many of these early migrants move south in the absence of severe winter weather. These birds may be triggered by the change in photoperiod, wintering ground location, etc. Early fall is typically one of the driest times of the year, so this makes managed-flooded and naturally flooded wetlands very important for these birds. Conversely, later migrants appear to be driven by winter weather (snow or freezing conditions) further north. These birds only move south when food and other needed resources are not accessible because snow covers them and/or wetlands freeze over. These later migrants typically find abundant habitat as winter rains begin to flood low-lying areas at southern latitudes.

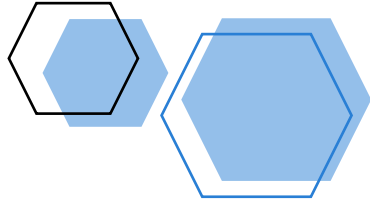
Earlier this year, forecasts for an El Nino year producing a cold and wet winter had waterfowl hunters, watchers, and enthusiasts optimistic for the coming season. However, this summer we experienced a major drought in many states across the Mississippi flyway which continued into fall. These drought conditions here, and to the north, created unfavorable wetland conditions for migrating and wintering waterfowl. Many naturally flooded wetlands were much drier than average, leaving only deeper water bodies and managed wetlands with water pumping capabilities as the only sources of habitat on the landscape. The drought-like conditions may have also stalled these birds at northern latitudes. If it’s dry to the north of us, then it might be drier south, making an energetically costly migration a risky endeavor. Colder weather events to the north have also eluded us up until Christmas, making current waterfowl abundance even more disappointing. I like to be optimistic, so with the recent rainfall in December and forecasts of colder temperatures I hope our luck changes so that those who enjoy hunting or viewing these birds experience more success in January!

Changes in the timing and extent of waterfowl migration are of major interest to waterfowl scientists, hunters, and enthusiasts alike. Researchers are actively investigating the impacts of climate change and other factors on waterfowl migration. Managing waterfowl in the face of changing landscapes and climate will continue to be a challenge. Despite these challenges, we will continue to learn more information and adapt management strategies with the goal of filling winter skies with migrating and wintering ducks!



Photo by Rob Snell

NEW MEMBERSHIP RATES 2024



Remember to renew your membership with the Friends of the Noxubee! All 2023 memberships expired January 1, 2024, with the exception of lifetime memberships. The board of the Friends of the Noxubee has revamped membership rates for 2024. A basic membership is \$25, although members can also choose lifetime options or opt to provide a fixed monthly donation. Membership dues may be paid at any time during the year, but all non-lifetime memberships will expire January 1st of each year. Members can either renew online at:

<https://www.friendsnoxref.org/membership/>

or mail in their membership fee with a printable membership form. All membership proceeds go towards maintenance and outreach activities on our beloved refuge.