



Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

July 2013

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Picture This...

Early this year Clifftop and its members were offered an exciting opportunity. Bill Rebholz, Executive Director of Waterloo's Hamacher Street medical complex (the Southern Illinois Medical Development Corporation), approached us with an interesting idea. He was planning to upgrade and update artwork in the hallways of their primary care building. He was impressed with the beauty and quality of Clifftop's photographic imagery, nearly all contributed by our talented membership, and featured on our website and outreach media. He asked if we could provide five to ten photo images of the unparalleled natural beauty of Southwestern Illinois to adorn the walls of their facility.

We asked our willing members to each submit up to five images for the project. Twenty-one members submitted a total of 86 images. In March, we assembled two impartial judges to pick semi-finalists for the project. Pam Jacobs, Director of the Monroe-St. Clair-Madison County University of Illinois Extension Service, and Jane Huebner, Waterloo High School's art teacher, graciously served as judges, and, armed only with the anonymous imagery, choose 11 images to forward to Bill Rebholz and his staff for consideration. The semi-finalist photographers are: Chris Benda, Priscilla Bollinger, Paul Feldker, Eric Fries, Dennis FitzWilliam, Dennis Jacobsen, Celeste "Cindy" Nicolls, and Justin Polacek.

In June, Bill Rebholz and staff picked five finalist images and photographers. The finalists are "pictured" on the following pages, in no particular order. Congratulations to the finalists and a special thanks to all who submitted pictures. All entrants will be featured and recognized on Clifftop's website. Thanks to Clifftop's creative membership, many local residents will now see firsthand that the natural beauty of our beloved landscape is really good medicine.

A compilation of all 86 photos submitted will be available very soon on our website at:
www.clifftopalliance.org.



Salt Lick Point and Trout Hollow (Monroe County)

Photographer, Dennis FitzWilliam



Spicebush Swallowtail Butterfly Caterpillar (Randolph County) Photographer, Priscilla Bollinger



Harvesting Below Fults Hill Prairie (Monroe County) Photographer, Dennis Jacobsen



Mink at Bond Creek (Monroe County) Photographer, Paul Feldker



Piney Creek Ravine (Randolph County)

Photographer, Chris Benda

Upcoming events...

Chainsaw safety workshop:

Saturday, July 13, from 9 a.m. to noon. Learn basic chainsaw safety and operations as well as a review of working techniques and equipment. This program is co-hosted by Wm. Nobbe & Company and Clifftop and will be held at the B&D Club, 2903 DB Road, Waterloo. Pre-registration is required at clifftop@htc.net or 618-458-4674.



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop

Pollinator Conservation Seminar:

Saturday August 24th, 1 to 3 pm. Lesley Deem, Department of Entomology, University of Illinois-Urbana will present a program on protecting native bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, flies and beetles so they can help with bountiful farm and garden harvests, maintain healthy plant communities, and provide food for other wildlife. The seminar will be held at the Monroe County Annex, 901 Illinois Ave., Waterloo, and is co-sponsored by the Monroe County Extension Service and Clifftop. Pre-registration is required by August 22nd at clifftop@htc.net or 618-458-4674.

Seeing the Forest *AND* the Trees

By Bear Engbring

When people go on vacation they are usually drawn to places of significant natural beauty or natural resource. They travel great distances to experience the majesty of mountains, relax oceanside on an expansive stretch of beach, swim in the cool blue waters of a Great Lake, or float down a clear flowing river. Some folks prefer a wilderness experience like those found in the vastness of a northern boreal forest or in the jungle of a tropical rainforest. Whatever the location or the natural resource, one thing that I have observed in my travels, vacations, and working-vacations is that when you arrive at a place and mingle with the local culture, in many cases the local people largely take their natural resources for granted. This lack of acknowledgement can, and eventually does, lead to resource degradation and exploitation.

Having said this, I, myself, was greatly unaware of the beauty and diversity of the natural resources that we possess right here in Monroe and Randolph Counties. It was only after I moved back home to the Maestown area and started Big River Forestry, a land management and forestland consulting business, that I began to realize how fortunate we really are. Did you know that in our bluffland hillsides we have patches of native wild blueberries, scorpions, cacti, rattlesnake, and even a type of tarantula? These species are all typical of the Ozark Mountains and have been seen here. Did you know that we have deep hollows where only sunflecks penetrate to the heavily shaded forest floor and where ferns grow nearly waist high? We have mature foreststands of oaks, hickories, maples, and other native tree species spreading their massive interlocking branches to form a towering canopy a hundred or more feet overhead while their roots tap deep into fertile soil that was blown in and deposited by westerly winds whipping across the Mississippi River Valley. Did you know that in our bottomlands there is a stand of naturally regenerating bald cypress trees (some of which are large and mature) with above ground roots or "knees" lining a backwater river slough just like the forests of a delta swamp? These are just examples of some of the natural diversity that we possess right here at home.

Even after being raised in the Maestown area, fishing in the creeks, playing and camping in the forests, floating on the Mississippi River in various canoes and boats with my dad, and exploring (sometimes hanging from) the bluffs while at my grandparent's house, I did not yet begin to realize the extent of our local natural resources or their full potential. After all, I was just a local kid out to have fun with my friends and enjoy the adventures nature had to provide. Looking back, I can see that these activities did steer me into a career of Forestry and Natural Resource Management. Upon completing the requirements for a Bachelor's Degree in Forestry from SIUC, I scored a seasonal forestry job in Durango Colorado with the USDA Forest Service. It just so happened that summer wildfires started to break out all over the Southwest just as they are this year and my position helping the Forest Service Fire Ecologist conduct fire history research on the San Juan National Forest quickly turned into a firefighting position with the Durango Helitack. This firefighting unit was a national resource initial attack



Bear sharpens his chainsaw while cutting up a large oak tree he has just felled for a private landowner. Photo by Joann Fricke, Clifftop

helicopter crew with high capabilities and we were assigned to forest fires all over the western US, including southern California. For three fire seasons I stayed on with the Forest Service and it was a great adventure with much time flying in helicopters, wildland firefighting, and traveling to scenic locales where the smoke summoned. Near the end of what was to be my last federal fire season I received a call while managing prescribed fire up in Northern Wisconsin on the Bayfield Peninsula. It was the University of Arkansas wondering if I was interested in a full-expenses-paid research project in which I would receive a Master's Degree in Forest Resources, the University would get a publication, and the Forest Service would get the information they wanted on historic forest fires in the Ozark Mountains of North-Central Arkansas (near the confluence of

the White and Buffalo Rivers). I accepted the offer and spent an incredible two years exploring and researching some of the most rugged and beautiful parts of the Ozark Mountains. After this, family beckoned and I moved home to Maeystown and eventually started managing forestlands at the local level.

One thing that this experience and background in forestland management has done is open my eyes to our natural resources right here at home. We as private landowners, farmers, ranchers, local conservation groups, state agencies, federal agencies, consulting land managers, and any other natural resource stakeholders have a responsibility to maintain the native species diversity the best we can while fostering this land into its fullest potential. Whether the management objective is agriculture, timber production, wildlife habitat conservation, hill prairie restoration, threatened and endangered species preservation, or all the above, the richness of our local natural resources is a terrible thing to ignore. Active management is needed. In the next few days, as I finish up an active timber marking project on a dry and rocky Ozark mountainside on the Mark Twain National Forest of southern Missouri, I will once again be reminded of the rich and fertile soils we have back home.

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# Herp Blitz at Mill Creek Natural Area

By Dirk Stevenson

"SNAKE!"

Actually, it's two snakes. Northern Water Snakes. They are sharing a small pool along the trail. One snake is "periscoping." Motionless, her head pierces the surface, watching for trouble; her yard-long body trails into the deep. The other snake hugs the bottom, probing under rocks as it swims slowly, fishing. We are on board—the reptile and amphibian portion of the Mill Creek Natural Area BioBlitz has begun in earnest!

A wonderful May morning that welcomes prowling box turtles finds a cadre of herpetologists exploring the oak-hickory forests and sandstone canyons of Mill Creek Natural Area. Bob Weck, Biology Professor at Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC), is our team leader. Survey party members include Hugh Gilbert, John Palis, and Mike Marlin (also a SWIC Biology Professor) and his two children Clair and Cole. Rounding out the herps team are three of Bob's students, Jason Davis, Matt Stevens and Bryan Ross. Our mission is to inventory the reptile and amphibian fauna of the area.

The watersnakes are captured and photographed (see photo at right). We admire the rusty-red and mustard-brown half-moons that pattern their shiny bellies. Blood and musk drip from herpers and *Nerodia sipedon*, respectively. The snakes swim rapidly over the bottom of the stream when released.

We get a hot tip from Carl. A xeric oak-hickory community forests the rock-studded slope of a south-facing ridge. One would expect the slope to be pictured in the dictionary next to "optimal habitat for the copperhead." We agree to indulge in a spirited contest of who can first spot an *Agkistrodon contortrix*. Of course, copperheads evolved to resemble leaf litter and hide in and under the same. Like many of their viper kin, they are masters of crypsis par excellence, and the prize goes unclaimed. This environment is also an ideal place for two gorgeous *Lampropeltis*, the speckled kingsnake and the red milksnake. These species, although undocumented by our surveys, almost certainly occur on-site.



Photo courtesy Dirk Stevenson

Commander Weck grants us 10 minutes for lunch. An indigo bunting pops into the sun, shining azure. The humidity has bumped up... it's pretty darn hot. My Grandfather, a profound influence (he ran trot lines on the nearby Kaskaskia River, landing giant catfish and buffalo, also monster eels and softshell turtles), referred to

such climatological conditions as "close." Whatever the case, looking at my tailgate-sitting teammate Hugh Gilbert, I note that the sweat running from his brow, the peanut butter oozing from his Bunny bread, and the ticks hustling northward up his calves all are moving at essentially the same speed.



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop

More snakes are discovered after lunch. A black racer escapes by slithering downhill. A four-foot, stout black ratsnake (similar to the one seen in the tree in the photo at left)--with more curves and kinks than the holler we drove up en route to the 'Blitz--is spotted on the floor of the canyon. Several small snake species (smooth earth snake, worm snake, redbelly snake), the "little brown jobs" of the serpent world, also are documented. Did you know that many of the nonvenomous snakes that comprise the Illinois fauna never bite humans? The earth snake, worm snake and redbelly snake are good examples here (as are the rough green snake, ringneck snake, mud snake, flathead snake, and brown snake).

Skinks have been described as lizards built for speed. And that sure seems true today. Despite numerous athletic dives and determined pounces, we remain skinkless. Again, Bob yells "*Scincella*," drops his camera, and makes a mad grab. I look on as he softly sighs, as two generous handfuls of skinkless leaf litter slip piecemeal through his fingers and float to the ground. He recovers to capture a fine adult ground skink a few minutes later, the first record of this species for Randolph County. We also record five-lined skinks and fence lizards, the latter sporting expressions of curiosity and/or wisdom.

You know you are afield with a tribe of herp-lovers when a frog briefly trills from a faraway tree and five oddly-dressed men croak in unison "*Hyla chrysoscelis*" (gray tree frog). I am fond of these engaging "tree-toads," and I can tell you that if you make an after-dark visit to a breeding pool, catch a mess of these tree frogs (thus applying their sticky and noxious skin secretions to your hands), and later rub your eyes or nose, well, you will wish you hadn't... We suspect that the pickerel frog, another anuran with toxic skin secretions that deter predators, will eventually be documented at Mill Creek. We do record bullfrogs and green frogs, as we observe the large tadpoles of both species polliwogging about in deeper pools of the stream, searching for something green and photosynthetic. Carl has observed the handsome yellow long-tailed salamander here.



Fence lizard photo courtesy Dirk Stevenson



Grey tree frog photo courtesy Dirk Stevenson

Mill Creek is a singular place, and I feel fortunate and honored to be a participant in this 'Blitz. Many times during the course of the day I ask myself, "*What did I do to deserve this, a day hike in paradise?*" I am enchanted by the weathered, pitted rockfaces that speak of time. A current of cool air drifts over me as I ponder a clear pool where darters prop on orange fins and fleeing chubs flash mercury. . . I peer down a streambed framed by cliffs hairy with ferns and bryophytes, enjoying a view bathed in golden-green light. Later this evening, I will admire a phenomenal painting by Bob's eldest son Patrick of one of the same scenic canyon views that I photograph today.





Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop

We tally a total of six amphibian and nine reptile species. It has been a successful BioBlitz, and we leave Mill Creek Natural Area reluctantly, carrying emotions unique to naturalists who dearly value natural areas.



Photo courtesy Tom Rollins, ThomasRollinsPhotography.com

*Dirk Stevenson is the Director of Inventory and Monitoring at The Orianna Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of imperiled Snakes around the world. The Society is headquartered in Clayton, GA; additional information and Dirk's "Naturalist" blog can be found at the website: <http://www.oriannesociety.org> Dirk grew up in Belleville, Illinois, where he first flipped rocks looking for snakes ca. 35 years ago and was graduated from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale in 1988 where he majored in herpetology. Prior to joining the staff of The Orianna Society, he worked for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the Department of Defense. Dirk has authored numerous technical studies and popular articles and his work has appeared in *Wildlife Conservation*, *Illinois Audubon*, *Herp Nation*, and *Georgia Backroads*. Many of his photographs appear in *Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia* (2008, University of Georgia Press).*

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## SEMO Conservation Camp

From May 20-24<sup>th</sup>, nine SEMO undergraduate and three graduate students along with Dr. Diane Wood, Professor of Entomology, at SEMO, descended on our blufflands to do conservation work. At White Rock Nature Preserve the SEMO crew: installed one mile of boundary signs over extremely difficult terrain; hauled and stacked dogwood and sumac brush that Clifftop's contractor, Rock Road Ecological Service, had cut from a 2-acre hill prairie; cast native grass seed and planted grass plugs at a glade undergoing restoration; and conducted a herpetological survey at two hill prairies.



Chain gang removing woody plant material from a hill prairie  
Photo courtesy Pen DauBach, Clifftop



Planting native grass plugs photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop



At Salt Lick Point Land & Water Reserve the students spent two days grubbing and hand-pulling bush honeysuckle on 82 of the most challenging acres of the reserve. After slipping and sliding down steep ravines the first day, Jim Pflasterer, of the Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee, led the students on a hike to possibly the most scenic overlook of the Reserve. Everyone was quite impressed that the Gateway Arch could be seen from Monroe County.



In a creek at SLP with one of the many bush honeysuckles pulled that day.  
Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop



At SLP scenic overlook with Jim Pflasterer (pointing)  
Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop

The Village of Valmeyer kindly allowed the students to camp at Borsch Park and the Monroe County YMCA graciously admitted all the campers for a hot shower and clean-up at mid-week. Clifftop's Board of Directors and the Salt Lick Lick Point Stewardship Committee hosted a mid-week barbeque for them at the park.



Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop



Photo courtesy Pen DauBach, Clifftop

We hope to conduct a Conservation Camp here annually as a summer school option and community service alternative for SEMO students pursuing conservation careers. To view an album of photos from the SEMO Conservation Camp, please visit our Facebook page at the following address:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.382715458500410.1073741833.162533970518561&type=3>



# Photo gallery from the Herps Hunt Field Trip...

All photos courtesy Paul Feldker, Clifftop



Bob Gibson turns a few rocks to see what critters might lurk along the talus slope; all rocks were carefully returned to their places.



Tom Sudholt enjoyed the herps hunt along the stream at White Rock Nature Preserve.



Everybody admired the approximately two-year old female box turtle that Hugh found near Madeline's Rest.



Hugh Gilbert introduced a few "personal herp friends" during lunch break; here showing a milk snake to the Gonzalez family.



We found a Fowler's toad along the South Ridgetop Trail at White Rock.





Photo courtesy Brian Allan

## Are you still “Ticked Off”?

Want to know just how many ticks live near you? Brian Allan gave a recipe for a “tick trap” during our April seminar on tick-borne disease. The trap is based on the simple fact that ticks sense carbon dioxide to detect and find host animals. The dry ice in Brian’s trap gives off carbon dioxide as it melts and the ticks get stuck on the double-sided tape as they rush towards the “scent” of a hoped-for next meal. His highest trap-rate capture from a honeysuckle-infested area was approximately 5,000 ticks in a 24-hour period. Since the average tick can self-locomote only about a 5-square meter distance (about 15 feet), that’s a lot of ticks!

Additional information on tick-borne disease – the subject of our April seminar -- can be found in the CLIFFnotes article posted on our website at this link: <http://clifftopalliance.org/2013/05/ticks-honeysuckle-deer-another-reason-to-remove-invasive-bush-honeysuckle/>

### **How to construct and use a CO2 trap for collecting ticks (as seen in the photo above):**

Equipment needed to construct a CO2 trap:

- 1) lunch-size cooler
- 2) plywood board cut to the same dimensions of the footprint of the cooler, plus an additional 2.5” on each side
- 3) two screws and bolts to attach cooler to the board
- 4) drill
- 5) deck sealant & brush
- 6) double-sided carpet tape (I recommend 3M 345PQ Scotch brand carpet tape in 2” x 36 yard rolls)
- 7) dry ice & food scale

Instructions to construct a CO2 trap:

- 1) Cut the board to the appropriate size. Apply a coat of deck sealant to all sides of the board (especially the edges) to protect from the elements.
- 2) Drill holes through the vertical walls of the cooler (near the bottom) to allow CO2 gas to escape.
- 3) Drill two holes in the bottom of the cooler and through the board.
- 4) Attach the board to the bottom of the cooler using two screws with bolts (just one screw will loosen and the cooler will spin on the board getting stuck in the carpet tape).

Instructions to use a CO2 trap:

- 1) Apply double-sided carpet tape to the board around the outside of the cooler using the 2.5” of board protruding on each side. Use fresh carpet tape for each trapping event.
- 2) Measure out an appropriate quantity of dry ice (I like to use 1 kilogram of dry ice for a 24 hour period of trap deployment) and place inside the cooler.
- 3) Place the trap in the desired location for the desired period of time. Try to place the trap on level ground, and make sure that no vegetation allows ticks access to the trap while bypassing the carpet tape.

## More upcoming events...



### Meet the Mast:

Saturday, September 21st, 10 AM- 2 PM, at White Rock Nature Preserve. A healthy forest is a well-stocked larder, full of food for wildlife at all seasons. Mast – a term known from Old English and derived from the Western Germanic word *maest* – refers to nuts and acorns and to soft fruits, such as dogwood berries. Join us for this slow-paced hike to learn about and identify mast: nuts, acorns, and berries and their importance to wildlife. This interpretive hike will be led by former IDNR botanist and INPC Commissioner Bill McClain and IDNR's District Forester Mark Brown. Meet at the White Rock Nature Preserve parking area on Bluff Road. Participants should wear weather-appropriate clothing, sturdy boots or hiking shoes, and bring drinking water and a snack and/or lunch for themselves. Pre-registration is required by September 19th at [clifftop@htc.net](mailto:clifftop@htc.net) or 458-4674.

### A Good Day at White Rock:

Saturday October 12<sup>th</sup>, 11 am – 2 pm, at White Rock Nature Preserve. All Clifftop members are invited to this annual rendezvous for the membership.

**Please join us for membership day at our Nature Preserve and help create another**  
*Good Day at White Rock*

Plan to attend a fun-filled day to renew acquaintances, meet new friends, reminisce about what our bluff lands means to each of us, and enjoy our Great Outdoors. Clifftop members, of course, are welcome to hike the trails and take in the splendors of fall foliage, late blooms, and wonderful vistas. Clifftop's Gator – fondly known as "Clifton Gator" by stewardship volunteers -- along with a few borrowed Gators will be available for transport for those who do not care for strenuous hiking. *Food and drink will be served and "comfort" facilities will be provided.*



The most recent addition to Clifftop's Board or Directors, Jim Hill, invites all to attend a *Good Day at White Rock*.  
Photo courtesy Joann Fricke, Clifftop

Please let us know if you plan on attending, so that we can sensibly plan for food and drink – several Board members have pledged homemade good stuff – and RSVP by October 10<sup>th</sup> to Membership Chair Joann Fricke at [cliffmbr@htc.net](mailto:cliffmbr@htc.net) or by calling her at 618-935-2542.