

Arkansas Chapter of the Wildlife Society

Newsletter

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2017 Officers

President

Tom Risch trisch@astate.edu

Past-President

Allison Fowler allison.fowler@agfc.ar.gov

Secretary-Treasurer

Clint Johnson Clint.Johnson@agfc.ar.gov

Member-at-large

Craig Davis Joseph.Davis@agfc.ar.gov

Newsletter Editor

Blake Sasse Blake.Sasse@agfc.ar.gov

Arkansas Chapter Web Site

<http://www.wildlife.org/arkansas>

Weaver Named Refuge Manager of the Year

Longtime member of The Wildlife Society Keith Weaver was recently recognized as Refuge Manager of the Year after committing over 30 years to working with national wildlife refuges.

“When I look back at other managers that have won the award, I’m honored and humbled,” said Weaver, who is currently the project leader at the Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex. He received the 2016 Paul Kroegel Refuge Manager of the Year Award, which is sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

Weaver began his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1984 in different temporary positions after completing his master’s degree in wildlife ecology studying beavers under direction of Dale Arnerat at Mississippi State University. His first duty station was at the

Hillside National Wildlife Refuge complex in the Yazoo River Basin in Mississippi. Then, he took his first permanent position at Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge in northeast Louisiana as a forestry technician, where he oversaw logging contracts, participated in reforestation activities, dealt with nuisance beaver control and more.



Weaver later became the first Wildlife Biologist on Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. Here, he conducted the first research ever on the Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) population when they were first being petitioned for listing. “It’s very rewarding to think that the work that I did helped in some way for the bear to move towards recovery,” Weaver said.

Weaver then obtained a doctoral degree from the University of Tennessee and became a wildlife biologist and assistant refuge manager at the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Weaver became the first refuge manager for a new refuge, the Nulhegan Basin division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Vermont.

In 2007, Weaver took his current position as the project leader at the Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex. He’s responsible for managing six refuges in Arkansas, five of which are primarily managed for wintering waterfowl. One of the refuges he manages, Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, is designated a wetland of international importance and is deemed the most important wintering area for mallard ducks in North America.

Weaver said all of his management actions are based on biological objectives. Refuges also act as outdoor laboratories for environmentally based research, he said, such as the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, which serves as a good place to study summer habitat use for federally listed Indiana bats (*Myotis sodalist*) and northern long-eared bats (*Myotis septentrionalis*).

Managing refuges has a lot to do with partnerships with agencies such as the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission as well as numerous organizations including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy, Weaver said. "We simply can't do it alone," he said. But some say Weaver is just as responsible for the success of the refuge complex.

"[Keith's] strong work ethic, excellence in developing partnerships and passion for the mission of the Service is evident on a daily basis," said David Houghton, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association in a press release. "He is loved by the community, respected by colleagues and highly skilled in protecting wildlife."

Weaver, on the other hand, says it's his staff that makes everything possible. "Becoming refuge manager of the year speaks highly of the staff," he said. "They're the ones who do all the work that enables these accomplishments. It's easy to look good with the right staff."

Annual Meeting Minutes Clint Johnson, Secretary Treasurer

We had a wonderful meeting March 3-4, 2016 at the 4-H center in Little Rock, with more than 110 wildlife biologists in attendance. We heard talks from 28 presenters, including a very interesting keynote presentation from Dr. Jim Miller. The new two day format for our annual meeting (changing from fall and spring one day meetings in the past) was very well received, as evidenced by the high attendance. The attendance surpassed our expectations and almost surpassed the capacity of our venue, which is a good problem to have. We look forward to growing even more for our 2017 meeting.

Student presentation awards were presented to the students below for outstanding oral presentations. A special thanks to judges Keith Weaver, Dr. Virginie Rolland and Luke Naylor.

1st Place- \$100 award. Alix Matthews, Arkansas State University "Exploring Symbiotic Relationships Between Feather Mites and Warblers"

2nd Place- \$50 award. Lee Bryant, Arkansas State University "Impacts of Eastern Hemlock decline on a riparian obligate songbird, the Louisiana Waterthrush, in Great Smoky Mountains National Park"

3rd Place- \$25 award. Sam Schratz, Arkansas State University "Roost Tree Selection of the Southeastern Myotis and Rafinesque's Big-Eared Bat in the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, Arkansas"

During the business meeting, Karen Rowe brought up a proposal to develop an official ARTWS position statement on feral cats. There has been activity in Little Rock and other areas to develop feral cat colonies, a group of sterilized animals that are fed and cared for by the city. However, the feral cats would be free to kill and injure wildlife for the rest of their lives. This method of cat population control has been opposed by The Wildlife Society at a national level and Karen proposed ARTWS develop a similar statement. Becky McPeake brought up that even PETA supports euthanasia as a viable population control option for feral cats and Tom Nupp mentioned that research from ATU shows a high degree of disease in feral cats, a cause for pet owners to be concerned. Tom Nupp made a motion to allow Karen to draft the statement, which was supported by all members. Blake Sasse recommended the resolution be sent to the media when it was drafted and looked for volunteers to be the point of contact. Clifton Jackson volunteered.

Members voted for a new Member At Large. Karen Rowe ran against Craig Davis. Karen received 15 and Craig received 16. Craig's term as member at large will begin in 2017. Student Chapter reports were as follows:

University of Arkansas- Phillip Stevenson. U of A students worked as AGFC contractors at

several deer check stations this fall to raise money to bring in professional speakers to give talks to their students.

Arkansas Tech University- Bennett Grooms. This chapter raised \$2,000 to send students to Conclave. Recently, their Wildlife and Fisheries clubs were joined into one organization with a common interest. They have been engaging undergraduates and growing quickly, which allowed them to bring in professional speakers for a seminar series.

Resolution against Feral Cats and Free Ranging Cats

WHEREAS, free-roaming domestic and feral cats (*Felis catus*) are a non-native invasive predators in all habitats in which they occur, and

WHEREAS, A number of Arkansas municipalities and organizations are supporting, initiating and engaging in trap neuter and release colonies of feral cats, and

WHEREAS, feral and free ranging cats kill over 2.4 billion birds and over 20 billion small mammals, reptiles and amphibian in the U.S. annually, and

WHEREAS, cat predation by feral and free-roaming cats is by far the largest human-caused mortality threat to birds, and

WHEREAS, feral cats are disease reservoirs posing a threat to native wildlife, pets and humans, and

WHEREAS, government wildlife agencies are charged with the management, conservation, and preservation of native flora and fauna, and

WHEREAS, few government agencies have regulations, public policies or enforce regulations and public

policies that restrict, control or deter free-roaming domestic or feral cats.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that The Arkansas Chapter of the Wildlife Society adopts the Wildlife Policy Statement of our parent organization, The Wildlife Society, entitled "Feral and Free-ranging Domestic Cats".

This policy of The Wildlife Society regarding feral and free-ranging domestic cats:

1. Supports and encourages the humane elimination of feral cat populations, including feral cat colonies, through adoption into indoor-only homes of eligible cats and humane euthanasia of unadoptable cats.
2. Supports the passage and enforcement of local and state ordinances prohibiting the feeding of feral cats, especially on public lands, and the release of unwanted pet or feral cats into the wild.
3. Opposes the passage of any local or state ordinances that legalize the maintenance of "managed" (trap/neuter/release) free-ranging cat colonies.
4. Supports educational programs and materials that provide scientific information on feral cats and the negative effects on cats from living outdoors, and call on pet owners to keep cats indoors, in outdoor enclosures, or on a leash.
5. Supports programs to educate and encourage pet owners to neuter or spay their cats, and encourage all pet adoption programs to require potential owners to spay or neuter their pet.
6. Supports the development and dissemination of information on what individual cat owners can do to minimize predation by free-ranging cats, and to minimize potential disease transmission to humans, wildlife, cats, and other domestic animals.
7. Pledges to work with the conservation and animal welfare communities to educate the public about the effects of free-ranging and feral cats on native wildlife, including birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and endangered species.

8. Supports educational efforts to encourage the agricultural community to keep farm-cat numbers at low, manageable levels and use alternative, environmentally safe rodent control methods.

Passed this 4th day of March 2016

ASU Student Chapter Report

President- Hunter Adams
Vice President- Alex Gurley

We were able to send 16 members to The Wildlife Society's 2016 Southeastern Wildlife Conclave at Eastern Kentucky University. All of these members competed in individual competitions with one member winning first place in the fly casting competition and several others placing very competitively in their own events. The quiz bowl team had an excellent showing defeating LSU, UT Knoxville, and Virginia Tech before finally placing third overall behind only Murray State and UGA. The event was an enriching educational experience for the club and all of its participating members and we are already discussing ways to be more competitive and have even more fun at next year's conclave.

Our members set up a booth at the A-State Campus Community Fair in the fall to talk to current students and incoming freshmen about the club and what we do. This was our first recruiting event of the year. We had around 30 students sign up for the clubs mailing list at this event.

Our members have been out twice during the fall semester to remove trash from the club's stretch of adopted highway near Craighead Forest Park.

Turtle Creek Clean-up

Turtle Creek Lateral is the stream receiving water from storm water runoff on the Arkansas State University campus. Members of the club volunteered to assist with removing trash and debris from this part of Turtle Creek.

Club members volunteered their time to assist with the clean-up of Lake Charles State Park near Hoxie, AR.

Members of the club set up a booth in the Lab Science building to talk with touring high school seniors about the club and what it is like to be a Wildlife major at A-State Senior Preview Day.

Club members operated three deer check stations for the AGFC at Cache River NWR. Club members learned to collect information vital to maintaining a healthy deer population including weighing, sexing, and aging white-tail deer.

The club took a tour of The Endangered Wolf Center in Eureka, Missouri. About 30 club members attended this event. Here members were able to see the rarest canid in the world, the Red Wolf, as well as African Painted Dogs, Mexican Wolves, and Fennec Foxes. This was a rare opportunity to learn more about the life history and future conservation efforts to save A-State's favorite endangered canid.

Upcoming Spring 2017: Screening of Red Wolf Revival and Red Wolf Conservation Workshop, Wildlife Society State Meeting, and 2017 Southeastern Wildlife Conclave

University of Arkansas – Fayetteville Student Chapter Report

President: Phillip Stephenson

The UA student chapter sent 5 members to the 2016 Conclave in Richmond, KY and had their best performance yet. They had three, top-10 finishes in the Art competitions, with a 3rd place finish by Diamond Bogle in the digitally enhanced category. The team also had multiple top-10 finishes in the team competition. They excelled at antler scoring and deer aging, tent pitching and packing, mollusk identification, trap setting, fire starting, and tractor part identification. The team had its best overall

finish in school history and is ready to build on that success for next year.

The chapter started the fall semester by participating in RazorBash, which is hosted yearly by the University Programs Committee to promote clubs and organizations on campus. We had 200+ students visit our booth and show interest in learning more about our chapter and wildlife in general. We hosted our first meeting of the semester in September and had 29 people attend. We added 21 new members for the year and have more that are expected in the spring (due to fall schedule conflicts). Our meetings this fall included: reptile and amphibian identification, how to age an array of common species of wildlife, the ins and outs of being an AGFC law enforcement officer, and how management is conducted on State Park lands to name a few. We were also awarded the Certificate of Appreciation from Hobbs State Park for our continued service and community outreach with our Birds and Breakfast program, where we capture birds and teach the local community about why research is important to wildlife.

Students from our chapter also collected biological data, including CWD samples from deer harvested at the McIlroy-Madison County Wildlife Management Area one weekend in November as a joint endeavor with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Our chapter is planning on sending students to the Arkansas State Chapter Meeting in Little Rock, AR and the Southeastern Wildlife Conclave in Starkville, MS this spring. We will also be hosting Birds & Breakfast once the winter and a few times in the spring. This event is usually well attended (100-150).

AGFC Recognized for International Waterfowl Conservation Efforts

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission received a special "Order of Conservation" award at its April 21, 2016 meeting from Ducks

Unlimited Canada for contributions to waterfowl habitat on an international level.

Jim Couch, president of DUC, presented the award to the Commission and stressed the importance of international partnerships in waterfowl conservation.

Many of the ducks and geese hunters pursue in Arkansas hatched in portions of Canada. Since 1968, Arkansas has provided much needed funding toward projects to protect that critical waterfowl nesting habitat.

"In just the last 10 years, Arkansas has contributed more than \$3 million to Canada," Couch said. "From this, DU Canada has been able to generate \$12.2 million in matching funds, so you can see this is an admirable investment in conservation.

"As I travel across North America, I am fortunate to meet many individuals, committees, organizations, corporations and government agencies that are truly inspiring in the field of wetland conservation," Couch said. "The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is more than deserving of this recognition."

In Memorium

Lou Hausman, AGFC Region 1 Habitat Biologist, passed away July 19, 2016.
George "Sonny" Howell, retired AGFC technician from Region 5, passed away March 13, 2016 at the age of 67.

Awards

Clint Turnage, USDA-Wildlife Services received the 2016 USDA Wildlife Disease Biologist of the Year Award.

Luke Naylor, AGFC Waterfowl Program Leader, received the George H. Dunklin, Jr. Arkansas Waterfowl and Wetland Management Award.

Bennet Grooms, ATU, won 1st place in the Biology Grad student oral presentation contest at the 2016 Arkansas Academy of Science meeting.



Ethan Massey of Vicksburg, Miss., a graduate student in the School of Forestry and Natural Resources at the University of Arkansas at Monticello, is the first recipient of the Dr. Robert H. Burch, Jr., Waterfowl Research endowment. The award was presented last week at the annual Drew County Ducks Unlimited banquet held at the Monticello Country Club. The endowment honors the late Dr. Robert H. Burch, Jr., long-time Monticello dentist and avid duck hunter. Pictured from left are Dr. Chris Sims, professor of biology at UAM, Katelyn Burch Busby, LeAnne Burch, Ethan Massey and Dr. Doug Osborne, assistant professor of wildlife

Personnel Changes

Rachel Norton and Richard Bowen came on board as biologists at the AGFC's Beaver Lake Office. Andrew Green was hired to be a habitat biologist at the Monticello Regional Office.

Bubba Groves was promoted to Assistant Private Lands Biologist Supervisor with the AGFC. JJ Abernathy, Rick Darter, Craig Davis, Mike Harris, and Andy VanHorn were promoted to Senior Technician with the AGFC.

Dick Baxter, AGFC Assistant Chief of Wildlife Management, left the agency in September.

Dr. Jennifer Ballard will be joining AGFC in the position of Veterinarian in the Research Division. Her Bachelor of Science degree was earned Magna Cum Laude at Arkansas Tech University, where she was the recipient of the AGFC Conservation Scholarship. Dr. Ballard received her D.V.M. from the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine and her Ph.D. in Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences (Population Health) from the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine. An Arkansas native, Dr. Ballard has twice been a participant in AGFC's Becoming an Outdoors Woman and has been a volunteer for Arkansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry.

She comes to the agency from the US Fish and Wildlife Service where she has served as

Veterinary Medical Officer. She will assume her new role with us at the beginning of 2017 on January 3rd.

Arkansas Publications

(send citations to newsletter editor)

Aycock, JE and CG Sims. 2015. Shorebird foraging habitat in southeast Arkansas. *Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science* 69: 25-28.

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Graves, GR and BL Tedford. 2016. Common denominators of Swainson's warbler breeding habitat in bottomland hardwood forest in the White River Watershed in southeastern Arkansas. *Southeastern Naturalist* 15(2): 315-330.

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Pittman, H. T., and D. G. Krementz. 2016. Impacts of short-rotation early-growing season prescribed fire on a ground nesting bird in the Central Hardwoods Region of North America. *PLOS One* 11:e0147317.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0147317.

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bats during the autumn swarm in the Ozark Highlands. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 40: 78-87

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Trevelline, BK, SC Latta, LC Marshall, T. Nuttle, and BA Porter. 2016. Molecular analysis of nestling diet in a long-distance Neotropical migrant, the Louisiana waterthrush. *Auk* 133(3): 415-428.

Tumlison, R. and A. Surf. 2016. Unusual food items from stomachs of American badgers in expanding range in Arkansas. *Southeastern Naturalist* 15(1): N1-N3.

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Tumlison, R. and M. Barbee. Recent history of mountain lion observations in Arkansas with notes on the individual killed in Bradley county, Arkansas in 2014. *Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science* 69: 149-152.

Tumlison, R. and DB Sasse. 2015. New records and life history observations of the American badger in Arkansas. *Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science* 69: 153-156.

Van Den Bussche, RA, DN Lee, ME Judkins, JE Dyer, DM Thompson, RC Stark, WL Puckette, and B. Fuller. Molecular dietary analysis of the endangered Ozark big-eared bat. *Acta Chiropterologica* 18(1): 181-191.

Wiley, S., R Kannan, DA James, and A Deshwal. 2015. Foraging behavior of Swainson's thrushes during spring migration through Arkansas. *Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science* 69: 124-129.

Upcoming Meetings

Arkansas Chapter TWS Annual Meeting. March 2-3, 2017. Ferndale 4-H Center, Ferndale, AR.

Arkansas Academy of Science meeting, April 7-8, 2017. University of Central Arkansas, Conway.
<http://www.arkansasacademyofscience.org/aasmmeetings.html>

National Cave and Karst Management Symposium, Eureka Springs, AR. October 16-20, 2017.
<http://www.nckms.org/2017/index.shtml>