

Bluffviews

a quarterly newsletter by Clifftop

July 2024

Vol. 14, No. 3

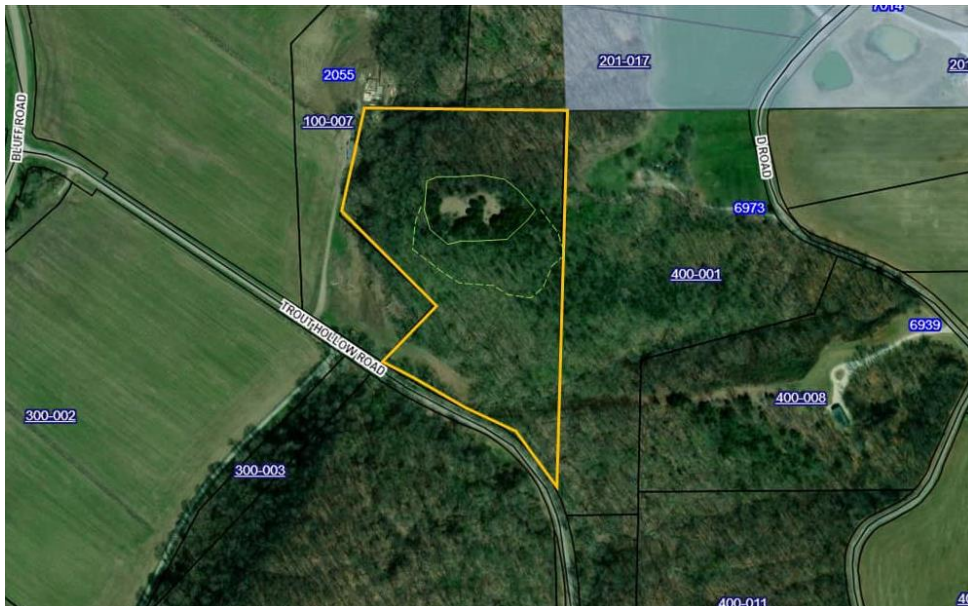
Help Save a Hill Prairie

Fewer than 600 acres of hill prairie remain in Illinois, the Prairie State. That is less than Central Park in New York City! Our colleagues at HeartLands Conservancy (HLC) recently stepped up to save a vanishing hill prairie in Monroe County. Located off of Trout Hollow Road near D Road, the 15-acre property contains what was once a four plus acre hill prairie.

An anonymous donor has pledged to match up to half of the purchase price. With a purchase agreement in place, HLC has until August 30 to raise the additional funds. Those wishing to help save this hill prairie to preserve habitat for pollinators and native plants and animals may make a donation online at:

<https://heartlandsconservancy.org/support/save-the-prairie/>

Funds raised for the hill prairie will go toward the fee-simple acquisition of the property, including the purchase price (\$150,000), closing costs, legal and title expenses, and the necessary staff time associated with preserving the property – coordination, communication and site assessment. Thus, the goal is \$175,000. Any funds raised over the goal amount will be used for future restoration, management, stewardship, access, and administrative expenses associated with the property.



HLC plans to protect this property in perpetuity and restore the prairie so that it will be a haven for people and wildlife.

Donations of any size are welcome and will make a difference.

For more information, please contact Mary Vandevord or Mallory Ketcherside at 618-566-4451 x10.

Protecting Caves Means Protecting Water Supplies

Photos and text by Aaron Addison

We often hear about needing to protect caves and sinkholes, but sometimes the discussion ends there. While many people believe that caves and the scientific study done in caves is important, it is understandable not everyone may be as passionate about where cave passages go underground or what manages to scrape out a living in this underground world.

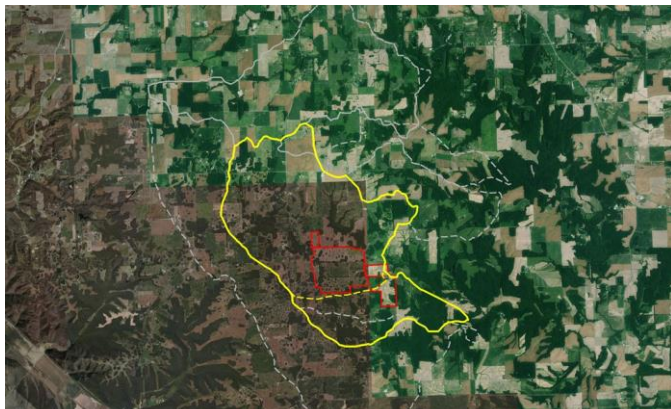
Often times cave life is characterized by small insects and other creepy crawlies that are no bigger than a pencil eraser. We are asked to protect them in the interest of preserving the biological diversity, sometimes unique to a single cave. I have attended many meetings over the years with families that live above the caves being discussed and have seen these families leaving the building scratching their heads on what to do. Let me say that I am in favor of protecting the biodiversity of all caves. I like to think that the world is a better place with all critters (well, maybe except for chiggers). However, I do respect that not everyone will hold the same views on protecting cave life for the sake of cave life.

This is where the connection comes together! If the cave bugs cannot live in the cave water, then there is something wrong with the water – wrong for the cave bugs and wrong for people or animals that may drink the water. That is not to suggest that drinking water wells are only drilled to the relatively shallow depths of Illinois caves, but it does highlight the importance of properly casing wells drilled in regions of limestone caves so that contaminants cannot flow down the well pipe and into the clean water supply. We also know that the water flowing through Monroe County caves resurfaces at the (numerous) and often beautiful springs found throughout the valleys and adjacent to streams with bedrock floors. That contaminated water is now on the surface and may have additional (and unintentional) impacts.



Well pipe intersecting a cave passage.

The conclusion I have settled around in my over 30 years of exploring and documenting caves is that there will never be better stewards of a cave watershed than the people who live on the land. Land owners do care deeply about their land and though they may not want to change their approach to land use because of a cave bug, they are concerned about clean drinking water. No one wants to get sick or have loved ones, like visiting grandchildren, ill from bad well water.



Fogelpole recharge area outlined in yellow, with PWSNP boundary outlined in red.

Clifftop is dedicated to protecting the watershed of Fogelpole Cave, as evident by their establishment of the Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve (PWSNP) to protect water finding its way into the cave system, but it will take all of us to continue protecting the world class resources entrusted to our community.

Editor's note: Aaron recently joined Clifftop's Board of Directors. He also serves as a board member of the Illinois Speleological Survey, which is dedicated to protecting, conserving, locating, recording, exploring and studying caves and karst in Illinois.

Wood Thrush Adventures in Monroe County

By Lauren Brunk

On May 3rd, 2024, five dedicated members from the Ward Lab of Ornithology (Dr. Mike Ward, Mike Avara, Chad Cramer, Dave Edlund, and Lauren Brunk) joined Mike and Joann Fricke at the Illinois Ozarks Nature Preserve to complete one tall mission – putting up a motus tower! This tower is just one of over two thousand others that comprise The Motus Wildlife Tracking System, an international network of radio telemetry towers. 'Motus' is a Latin word that means movement or motion, which aptly represents the type of data these towers collect. Using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, the Ward Lab and other researchers aim to track the movement of various wildlife species.



Putting up the tower.
Photos courtesy J. Fricke



From birds and bats to insects, these animals are fitted with Motus transmitters. These transmitters emit a unique radio signal that Motus towers can detect if the animal is in range. The size of the transmitter and how it is attached to the animal varies based on which species is being researched. For example, researchers attach Motus tags to monarch butterflies on their thorax using eyelash glue, whereas Motus tags are attached to small songbirds using a harness that fits around their legs and sits on their backs like fanny packs! These transmitters are always less than 5% of the animal's body mass to ensure it does not negatively impact it. Using this technology, researchers can study the habitat use, migration routes, and behavior of many small, flying species. This data can then be used for better understanding a species' life history, habitat requirements, and overall conservation needs.



Wood thrush wearing his motus transmitter "fanny pack." Photo courtesy L. Brunk.

The Ward Lab of Ornithology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign study a variety of migratory birds using Motus and maintain 20+ towers throughout Illinois and Mexico. Some of these species include Northern saw-whet owls, Kirtland's warblers, sora, Virginia rails, and most recently wood thrushes! Although this Motus tower in Illinois Ozarks will be able to detect any species with a Motus tag, it was purposefully put up to track wood thrushes as part of a collaborative research study that spans much of the eastern United States, Canada, and Mexico. Wood thrushes are a priority species in 25 U.S. states and Canada, meaning they are threatened in terms of their long-term survival. For this reason, there is a great need to study their migration patterns between where they breed and where they overwinter to better understand their conservation needs and habitat requirements. The goal of the project is to deploy 600 Motus tags on wood thrushes throughout their breeding and nonbreeding range!



Most of the wood thrushes tagged were male, but this female was caught at Madeline's Rest at White Rock NP. Her pink protruding belly indicates she has an egg inside. Photo courtesy Lauren Brunk.

With the help of Mike and Joann Fricke, Mike and Lauren were able to catch and tag 11 breeding wood thrushes between the Illinois Ozarks Nature Preserve, White Rock Nature Preserve, and Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve. Since these birds are in range of our tower, our lab can study activity patterns and migration departure timing, as well as migration routes. The battery on these Motus tags will last over a year, enabling our lab to discover both the fall and spring migration routes of our tagged birds.

The Ward lab has successfully tagged 45 birds throughout Illinois and have even more tags for birds in Mexico where they overwinter. Combining the data we get from our tagged birds with that of birds throughout their breeding range, the project will uncover the movement patterns of wood thrushes and what conservation actions are needed to help them.



Photo courtesy Lauren Brunk.

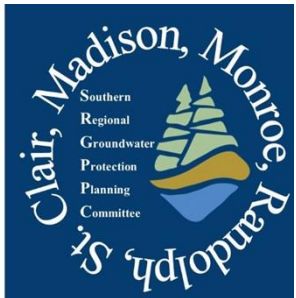
Studying large-scale wildlife movement across continents is a daunting task but the Motus Wildlife Tracking System allows for the collaboration of researchers from across the globe. However, maintaining Motus towers is only possible due to the hard work and dedication of a variety of different groups ranging from universities, non-profits, state and federal wildlife units, and individuals like the Frickes. The Ward Lab is extremely thankful for all of the help and generosity from Mike and Joann!

Upcoming events...



Sunday, September 15, 10:00 am, The Corn Crib, 107 MAR Court, Valmeyer. Natural Areas Preservation Specialist, Debbie Newman will present "Southwest Illinois' Old Growth Treasures: The Race to Save Our 8,000 year-old Hill Prairies." Less than 600 acres of loess hill prairies remain and we are losing more each year. Join us to learn how we all can help. After the presentation, everyone is invited to a walking tour of the hill prairies of the Illinois Ozarks Nature Preserve at 1522 State Route 156, Waterloo (near Valmeyer). This is a **MEMBERS ONLY** event and is **limited to 30 attendees**. To reserve your spot email cliffmbr@htc.net or call 618-340-1772.

Friday, September 20, 8:30 am, Monroe County Annex Building, 901 Illinois Avenue, Waterloo. Groundwater Field Day 2024. Information will be disseminated through presentations, demonstrations, resource information and networking. Afternoon sessions will continue at Clifftop's Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fults. **Free and open to the public.** Watch our Facebook page for more information.



Sunday, September 22, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm, Members' Day at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve, 3325 G Road, Fults. Please join us as we celebrate our loyal members. Refreshments will be served. Enjoy a hike or just sit and talk with like-minded folks.

Saturday, October 12, 1:00 pm, Monroe County Annex Bldg, 901 Illinois Avenue, Waterloo. Josh Holbrook will present "Fish in Sinkhole Ponds." Josh is a PhD student at Clemson University studying fish in isolated ponds and their effects on amphibians and macroinvertebrates once they colonize. In June 2023, Josh conducted trapping surveys of 8 ponds at Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve. His presentation will reveal the results of these surveys. **This event is free and open to the public.**

