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Spring 2005



*US 601 bridge over Congaree River.*

Photo by Virginia Winn

## US 601 Bridge Replacement Update

The S.C. Dept. of Transportation (SCDOT) is preparing to replace four structurally-deficient bridges on US Highway 601 between SC Highway 48 (Bluff Road) and the Congaree River. For background information, refer to the Winter 2005 newsletter of Friends of Congaree Swamp.

The Federal Highway Administration and SCDOT signed an Environmental Assessment for this project in March. A public hearing was conducted May 3 at St. Luke A.M.E. Church at Wateree, enabling citizens to view drawings of the planned bridge replacement, ask questions, and submit comments.

Approximately 40 persons attended the public hearing, including members of the church and personnel from Congaree National Park and the S.C. Dept. of Natural Resources. John Grego and Richard Watkins attended on behalf of Friends of Congaree Swamp.

SCDOT's preferred alternative would:

Construct new bridge #1 (near St. Luke A.M.E. Church) on the same alignment of the existing

bridge, thereby minimizing impacts to the church property.

Construct new bridges #2 and #3 (both over Bates Old River) and new bridge #4 (over Congaree River) approximately 45 feet west of the existing bridges.

The new bridges would be similar in length to the existing bridges, and they would continue to be connected by earthen embankments. The combined length of existing bridges #2, #3, and #4 is 0.75 mile. The width of the Congaree River and its floodplain is approximately 2.7 miles. So, SCDOT's preferred alternative would continue to utilize almost two miles of roadway embankments between the Congaree River and the floodplain's northern bluff.

Friends of Congaree Swamp submitted written comments to SCDOT on May 23. The Friends' recommendations will be described in greater detail in the Summer 2005 newsletter.

# President's Corner



**Dr. John Grego**

## **New Board Member**

Dr. Carolyn Hudson was recently approved by the Board to complete the unexpired term of our former Vice President Ann Kirkley. Carolyn earned her Ph.D. in Geology from USC; she has completed graduate work in Forestry at Duke and undergraduate work at UNC. She is an environmental representative on the Governor's Nuclear Advisory Council. Carolyn currently works as an Applications Analyst at USC and teaches Geology 103 (Environmental Geology) as a teaching associate in the Geological Sciences Department. Her students have helped with the Friends' trail maintenance as part of their service component for the course.

Carolyn has been active in environmental, professional, religious and school groups, including service in the Boy Scouts and as environmental representative on the SC Governor's Nuclear Advisory Council. In addition she has been active with the Friends since its inception. She attended the first organizational meetings of Friends and has served on the Education Committee. She has assisted Park Ranger Fran Rametta with the monthly Owl Prowls as a volunteer. In fact, our Dawn Chorus event takes place after one of the Owl Prowls and Carolyn plans to make a night of it in the Park's camping area. We hope that this dusk to dawn experience can become a regular Friends event.

## **Wetlands Settlement**

You may have read the April 5, 2005 articles in *The State* about the criminal prosecution of Crossings Development LLC for illegally altering or destroying over 44 acres of wetlands in northeast Richland County. If you did, you probably had the same question we did: Why would half of the \$1.1 million fine assessed against Crossings Development be donated to the National Park Foundation for land acquisition within Congaree National Park's authorized boundaries?

It turns out that the US Attorney's office originated the request. While \$550,000 from the settlement would go directly to the US Treasury, the remainder was to be spent to buy land in South Carolina. The US Attorney's office felt that the most opportune site to buy land would be at Congaree National Park, so the money was provided to the National Park Foundation for this purpose.

Though Congress recently appropriated \$6 million for land acquisition at the Park, this was intended for land within the newly authorized boundary expansion. There are still approximately 100 acres of land within the previously authorized boundary that have not yet been purchased, and we anticipate that the \$550,000 fine could first go toward purchase of these tracts.

Though the article in *The State* failed to emphasize this point, land can only be purchased from willing sellers whose property lies within the congressionally-authorized Park boundary. Further, property owners would have agreed to have their land placed within the boundary prior to congressional action.

We appreciate the US Attorney's Office and the Army Corps of Engineers' aggressive prosecution of this case. In future settlements, additional fines could be donated to the National Park Foundation for land acquisition at Congaree.

## **Upcoming events**

Though details are few, mark the following dates on your calendar. It looks as though the Annual Meeting will be held October 30, 2005 at Big Lake. In addition, we will have a special event on September 24 at Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve. After a walk down to the Congaree River, boats will ferry participants a short distance upriver to visit tracts of old-growth cypress. Details and sign-up will follow in the Summer newsletter.

# Sweetgums, the Singer Tract, and Ivory-billed Woodpeckers

John Cely

April 28, 2005. For many of us, one of those days that you will always remember the precise details of what you were doing. In my case, getting packed up for the spring meeting of the Carolina Bird Club at Blowing Rock. As I was about to walk out the door, messages started coming across the answering machine: the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology had just announced to the world that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker had been rediscovered in an Arkansas river bottom. It didn't take long for the emails to start pouring into my computer. I looked at the video clips on CNN.com. I could not have been more surprised if they had just announced the discovery of a Tyrannosaurus rex in Borneo. Many thoughts rushed through my mind: how could the world's second largest woodpecker escape detection for 60 years then pop up in a second-growth swamp full of duck hunters and fishermen? How could a bird that needed a breeding territory of at least six square miles of virgin swamp forest survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century when there was almost no virgin forest left? How could such a small population of woodpeckers survive the genetic consequences of inbreeding?

Putting aside for a moment all the logic that made this discovery so unlikely, a flood of old memories came rushing in, some that went all the way back to the 1950s when as a young lad just getting interested in birds, I became fascinated with this magnificent woodpecker and its primeval swamp haunts. I became even more excited when my 1959 edition of Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds said... "close to extinction..... to be looked

for in Florida and *South Carolina*." I determined then to find this great bird and started poring over every map of the state I could get my hands on, looking for that big swamp that was the last home of the Ivory-bill.

While in college I purchased a Dover reprint edition of James Tanner's Ivory-billed Woodpecker monograph. It was such fascinating reading that I stayed up all night reading it and almost flunked the exam I was supposed to be studying for.

As a Cornell graduate student in the 1930s, Tanner studied the last known population of the Ivory-bill in a big bottomland forest in northeastern Louisiana called the Singer Tract, named after the sewing machine company that owned it. At 80,000 acres, the Singer was the largest remaining old growth bottomland forest in North America. Amazingly, except for the Carolina parakeet, at that time it still had intact all of its original fauna

including red wolves, black bears, panthers, and Ivory-billed Woodpeckers.

Tanner's research was the first ever to shed light on the basic biology of *Campephilus principalis*. Although usually thought of as a bird of cypress-tupelo swamps, Tanner found the Ivory-bill actually spent most of its time foraging on sweetgums and oaks in the bottomland hardwood community.

Tanner's research also had a sense of urgency as the chain saws had already started cutting on the margins of the Tract. Tanner concluded his dissertation with forest management recommendations that would allow for some



The state champion sweetgum at Congaree National Park. Measuring 159 feet tall and 17 feet in circumference, it may be the tallest sweetgum in the world. The national champion, located in North Carolina, is 23 feet in circumference (possibly one with a double trunk) but 23 feet shorter.

Ivory-billed Woodpeckers  
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## Ivory-billed Woodpeckers continued

timber harvesting yet would be compatible with woodpecker conservation. Sadly, his efforts fell on deaf ears and within the next few years, the entire tract was cut over - and with it went the red wolves, panthers, and the Ivory-billed Woodpeckers.

The loss of the Singer Tract was a tragedy that should have never happened. However, 30 years after the last big log had been hauled off, we got one more chance to redeem ourselves, and this time successfully saved the last stand of old-growth bottomland at the Congaree, a forest truly worthy of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers.

In April of 1974 I was fortunate in being able to accompany Dr. Tanner, and his wife Nancy, on a three-day tour of the Congaree. He was then the Chairman of the Ecology Program at the University of Tennessee. Tanner was in his early 60s, with a head of white hair, but he moved easily as we bushwhacked through the Congaree, and it didn't take much imagination to see him chasing after an Ivory-bill in the Singer Tract 40 years earlier. Although he was skeptical of any Ivory-bills still surviving, Tanner told me the best way to search for the bird is to look for its characteristic scaling feeding sign.

He also said the Congaree reminded him of the Singer Tract, except for scale, with the latter being a much bigger floodplain. And like the Singer, where one in five trees was a sweetgum, the Congaree was also a sweetgum-dominated forest. Anyone who has spent any time in Congaree can't help but come away impressed with the many magnificent specimens that rise straight up out of the ground like giant pillars. Years ago I tried keeping a record of all the Congaree sweetgums I found that were 12 feet or greater in circumference (a record size in most other forests) but soon gave up - there were just too many. Ivory-bills appreciated sweetgums too, as Tanner found they were twice as likely to feed on them in relation to their availability within the forest.

Although there are no old growth bottomland forests of any size remaining in the Mississippi Delta where the Singer Tract was located, there are a few scattered remnant stands. One that caught my eye years ago was a 40-acre tract located on the Delta National Forest north of Vicksburg, Mississippi, called the Red Gum (the forester's term for sweetgum due to its reddish heartwood) Natural Area. The large sweetgums here were reported to be up to 300 years

old. I had always wanted to visit this site to see how these sweetgums compared to Congaree's and finally got the chance in November of 2004. First impressions were that the Delta sweetgums were 20-25 feet shorter and more crooked and "limbier" than Congaree's. They also had more of a buttress. Most were in the range of 12-14 feet in circumference, with the largest I measured being 16 feet, 4 inches. Like Congaree, the Delta sweetgums were scattered throughout the stand with a few growing near each other.

The Delta sweetgums are impressive and no doubt would make fine foraging habitat for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, but Congaree's sweetgums are taller and straighter, and I'm convinced that Park Superintendent Martha Bogle is the manager of the finest sweetgum forest in the world. Here's hoping we may one day see an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, its white beak gleaming in the sun, scaling away big chunks of bark at the top of a giant sweetgum in the Congaree National Park..



# Events in Review



Photo by Scott Zengel

*Longleaf pine savanna*

## The Bluff Trail and Garrick Road Hike

On March 19, a group of Friends met at the after-hours parking lot for a hike along the Bluff Trail to the Garrick Road longleaf pine tract. A recurring theme of the hike was wildland fire management; this area of the Park has had controlled burns in 1999, 2001 and 2004 and it's interesting to see the success of the Park's efforts.

West of the old entrance road, the canopy of loblolly pines has opened up but clumps of little blue-stem grass, the dominant natural groundcover in the Park's longleaf-loblolly forests, were few and far between.

We stopped at the Learning Center, and John Torrence of the Park staff gave us a tour. The classroom space has not received a lot of use yet, but the living area has proven invaluable to visiting scientists. Research in the Park has always been difficult; being able to stay at the Park overnight for free with access to a kitchen, shower and washer/dryer makes visits much more practical and productive.

After sharing stories with John, we headed across the old entrance road. We found some early yellow-throated warblers and blue-gray gnatcatchers as we

passed through the recovering forest to Dry Branch. Dry Branch is a small stream that feeds Weston Lake; we found an easy crossing, then passed through a dense pine plantation before reaching the 230-acre loblolly-longleaf pine savanna south of Garrick Road. The pine plantation wasn't completely bereft of activity—we watched for almost a minute as 2 large feral hogs trotted across our field of view toward the muck swamp.

After the May 2004 burn, the little bluestem formed a dense, waist-high, but easily passable undergrowth to the well-spaced pines—it's a model for what much of the Park's uplands could look like. We took a long stop at a former red-cockaded woodpecker colony. Interestingly, this small colony nested in loblollies rather than the readily-available longleaf pines. Of course, one of the goals of the Park's wildland fire management plan would be to increase suitable red-cockaded woodpecker habitat so that perhaps they will nest in the Park in the future.

After a stop at a vegetation research plot, we deferred the rest of our itinerary to another day and retraced our steps back to the parking lot.

# Events in Review

## Harriott Hampton Faucette's Annual Big Tree Hike

Harriott Faucette and Sharon Kelly

It was a quiet spring Sunday afternoon. A perfect day for the second annual Harriott Hampton Faucette Walk commemorating her rescue after a night in the swamp two years ago.



Photo by Virginia Winn

*Mardie, Harriott, and Carol Jaworski.*

About 25 of us, including Harriott and daughter Mardie, gathered at Bannister Bridge to begin the off-trail trek to see the champion overcup oak and the Shumard oak. With John Cely in charge and John Nelson along as botanical consultant, we headed down the Western Boundary Road toward our first destination, which awaited us in the wilderness.



Photo by Virginia Winn

*John Cely shows off the overcup oak acorn.*

The overcup oak was majestic, as promised. Then we were off cross-country to the Shumard oak, which had literally fallen on hard times. Rotten at its core, it had broken about 10 feet from the ground in a windstorm last fall and lay like a fallen giant. It was still impressive. Up close, you could see its 22-foot girth and marvel at the height it had once achieved.



Photo by Virginia Winn

*The shumard oak was quite impressive.*

By this time, we were starting to flag. What was billed as a four-mile hike was beginning to feel like 10, so a break was welcome.

Cely assured us it was not far to the road, and hence, to the cars, so we set out with renewed enthusiasm.

## Events in Review

But we've had a really rainy week and we weren't exactly where Cely thought we were. It wasn't long before the swamp lived up to its definition. The dilemma: backtrack two miles on dry ground or slog a mile-plus through knee-deep water to get to the road?



Photo by Virginia Winn

*Harriott cross a stream at the start of our "water" adventure.*

We slogged. A little way in we came to a bit of high ground just before a gut. Two fallen trees provided a bridge across, but muddy boots don't have much traction and Carol Kososki demonstrated how easy it is to fall off a log. Our guides graciously stood in the water to hand most the rest of us across, although Harriott, who was very sympathetic to Carol's experience, took the water route.

Dry land soon disappeared again, so back into the water we went, with the road getting farther away with every step and the stragglers getting further behind.

In fact, the last straggler was Harriott.

"This was a complete humiliation," she said when we'd returned to the parking area. "I was huffing and puffing and I came in dead last!"

In fact, the woman for whom the walk was named said this off-trail hike was far more difficult than her night in the swamp alone and a day and a half lost in the wilderness.

"At least I could set my own pace when I was by myself," she said.

Harriott admitted that there were several times when she doubted that she would come out alive from this particular swamp experience. She credits her salvation to an experienced hiker from North Carolina who realized her plight, gave her some much-needed water and insisted that she borrow his very sturdy walking stick.

"I already had a stick in my right hand," she said, "so I staggered out with two sticks—sort of like being on crutches."

We finally made the road and started gratefully toward the cars. But then Cely and Nelson took off into the woods on the other side of the road. Any other time, we would have been delighted to see the antebellum dike (c. 1839) built by James Adams in a futile attempt to cultivate the rich bottomlands of the Congaree. This day, however, it took real effort.

Again back to the road and probably another mile to go to the cars. We successfully negotiated the first gate, because we could go around it. The second gate, however, required that one go over it or under it. Harriott bent to step over a bar and fell flat on her face on the other side.

"It took the combined strength of Mardie and Robert Ariail to hoist me to my feet," she recalled. "I thought of that old TV commercial 'I've fallen and I can't get up!'"

In the words of Mardie, granddaughter of Harry Hampton, "There's not a tree in the world worth going through that to see!"

Harriott said after her 2003 swamp ordeal she felt downright cocky. She said several people commented that she had more of her father in her than they'd ever suspected.

But, as Mardie reminded her, "Not everything is due to genes."

Should there be another Harriott Hampton Faucette annual walk, she suggests a much shorter, much less strenuous "swamp stroll."

### Friends Take to Bates Old River

On May 15 a dozen Friends members joined Guy Jones of River Runner on an afternoon canoeing and kayaking trip on Bates Old River located just south of Congaree National Park. Starting at the park, we carpooled to Bates Landing to launch our trip. As we arrived, we noticed a grader parked at the pull-off to the landing. Sure enough, the road, almost impassable earlier in the Spring, had just been graded. We took this as a good omen. We paddled most of the length of the “river”, which is actually an oxbow lake (a former bend in the Congaree River that was cut off when the river migrated elsewhere).

Spanish moss draped cypress and hardwoods line the uninhabited shores that are home to a variety of birds and waterfowl. We spotted Mississippi Kites, ospreys, cormorants, anhingas, and barn swallows flying over the water; in fact we saw every single species promised in the trip’s newsletter write-up. A few alligators rested near our path. Fortunately, cool weather kept the mosquitoes away.

Our return trip was hastened by thunder and a light rainstorm, but everyone thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Thanks go to Guy for organizing the trip.



Photo by Carolyn Brauer Hudson



Photo by Carolyn Brauer Hudson



Photo by Carolyn Brauer Hudson

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See ordering information at the bottom of page 10.

Photographs of many of the park’s creatures and their habitats offer a window into the unique environmental treasures the park preserves.



**Prothonotary Warbler**

Photo by Doug Gardner



**Luna Moth**

Photo by Allen Sharpe



**Lower Boardwalk**

Photo by Nicholas J. Moore

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**Consider making a contribution on their behalf to Friends of Congaree Swamp.**

**A special letter of appreciation will be sent from the Friends acknowledging the occasion.**

**Please see Memorials/Honorariums/Gift Memberships at the bottom of page 10.**

**Send contributions to:**

**Friends of Congaree Swamp  
PO Box 7746  
Columbia, SC 29202**



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**Advocates for Congaree National Park  
and its unique environment.**

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