



# NEWSLETTER



## Eagle Days at Smithville Lake

The spillway area below Smithville Lake dam was the viewing location for another outstanding Eagle Days event. Although the weather was cold and windy, it was no deterrent for the many enthusiastic spectators who braved the conditions to enjoy watching

Chapter President  
Dan McCann (left)  
looks on as viewers  
use spotting  
scopes

the numerous Bald Eagles that were perching and flying along the dam's outlet.

Multiple spotting scopes were provided to the public for use in closeup viewing of the birds perching in the trees.

Members of the US Army Corps of Engineers, Missouri Department of Conservation, and Loess Hills Chapter Missouri Master Naturalist were present to discuss and interpret eagle information with the public. It's always a pleasant opportunity to talk to people, especially excited youngsters, and to support interest in observing our national bird.

Meanwhile, back at Smithville Lake's nice and warm Paradise Pointe Golf Course clubhouse, several members of our Loess Hills MMN Chapter operated an information table for people attending the Eagle Show.

**Written by Gerry Crawford & Cliff Amos**

**Photography by Bill Blackledge**

## *Jan 2018 Eagles Soar at Smithville Lake*



## McGee Conservation Area Milkweed Planting

**By MaryJo Ostenberg**

On a warm, beautiful summer morning in early July Loess Hill Missouri Master Naturalist members Kim Lafolette, Sue Knight, Hayley Howard and her husband Dallas, Chris and Rick Fulker and myself gathered for the first milkweed planting on McGee Family Conservation Area (CA).

Thanks to the generosity of Kansas City businessman Thomas F. McGee Jr., who died in 2010 and bequeathed his farm in Clinton County to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) McGee Family CA was opened to the public for fishing, hunting, hiking, birding and nature study on Sept. 15, 2012.

The almost 1,000-acre upland area is south of Plattsburg

Chris and Rick Fulker plant milkweed on the McGee CA hillside site prepared by the 2017 Loess Hills MMN class



and can be accessed off Route C or County Road 240. In the area's northeast corner there is frontage on both sides of the Little Platte River. The land was originally mostly in pasture with 5 ponds on the property and riparian forest along the river flood plain. It is thought that approximately 125 acres on the property may be an original prairie remnant.

Thanks to the leadership of Kim this CA was selected by the recent 2017 class as the site for their capstone project. Members spent several hours clearing honey locust stumps and sprouts from a 5 acre meadow located south of the Little Platte. On August 25<sup>th</sup> chapter members met at McGee for a pot luck dinner to celebrate the completion of the capstone and tour portions of this beautiful CA.

This milkweed planting was only the first in what will be an ongoing project in partnership with MDC to restore native habitat to large sections of McGee. Kim was able to secure 2 grants, one from Monarch Watch for the July planting of 130 Sullivan milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*) plants and a second from MDC for 600 more milkweed plants. Some of us remember when large numbers of monarchs would visit this property and surrounding pastures during their migration. Kim commented "I remember watching hundreds of monarchs fly in and roost in the trees. It was so beautiful, something you remember all your life and everyone should have the opportunity to see this. We have to try to bring them back." The first delivery of milkweed was planted in the meadow cleared as part of the capstone project.

Dallas, Hayley, Sue, Maryjo, Chris and Rick pause for a Pic



The second delivery of 600 milkweed plants arrived in mid-October and on October 28 members worked together to add Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) to the capstone meadow and Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) to the wetter areas nearer the river. Watch for more plantings this year (2018) and join us in this wonderful endeavor.

# Snow Geese at Loess Bluffs Refuge

By Mort Nelson

In response to a question from a phone call to the Loess Bluffs Refuge in late February –“What is the best time for me to bring my children to the Refuge to see snow geese during the spring migration?”

**Answer: It depends on the weather!**

Snow geese winter as far south as the Gulf of Mexico and raise their young in northern Canada and Alaska near the Arctic Circle. Geese like open water. When they are migrating, they will move to open water if their current water surface freezes completely.

The key factor in spring is the weather to the north of Missouri. The nesting season is short and during the spring migration, the geese will push further north as soon as weather permits.

## SNOW GEESE COUNTS ON UNSPECIFIED DAYS

Month/Survey #	2016	2017	2018
<b>JANUARY #3</b>	0	345	0
<b>#4</b>	11	151,339	5
<b>FEBRUARY #5</b>	389,375	75,647	0
<b>#6</b>	224,613	154,398	0
<b>#7</b>	512,003	283,016	25,025
<b>#8</b>	1,079,940	172,575	555,445
<b>MARCH #9</b>	17,535	27,674	363,625
<b>#10</b>	2,630	3,256	732,015
<b>#11</b>	2938	1054	
<b>#12</b>	198	144	

The current waterfowl count is available to you on the Loess Bluffs website at:

[www.fws.gov/refuge/Loess\\_Bluffs](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Loess_Bluffs)

Shortly after the count of 555,445 on 2/27/2018, a large number of snow geese arrived from the south. There were probably 800,000 snow geese at the Refuge on March 1st. (See picture below)

Early the next morning, the geese flew north to feed, and they put in an appearance at the refuge at De Soto, Iowa. However, by mid-day long strings were in the sky over Mound City, Missouri, returning to Loess Bluffs.

The survey count of 363,625 on 3/7/2018 is likely to be conservative. The weather was cloudy and windy for the first few days of the week.

The refuges in northern Nebraska and the Dakotas are still ice covered, as of this writing. When the snow geese decide the time is right, they can ride a south wind all the way to Canada in a single day!



In 2014, the survey count of snow geese was 1,196,267 on 3/10/2014, and 1,087,439 on 3/17/2014  
**Photo March 2014**  
by Rodney Wright



This year there were probably 800,000 when this photo was taken **March 1st 2018**  
by Mort Nelson

# Rescue & Release Operation on the Florida Panhandle

by **Bob Dever**

On January 20, 2018, while vacationing in St. George Island, which is located along the Florida Panhandle, I was privileged to watch the release of 37 sea turtles back into the gulf of Mexico. Most were green turtles, considered a threatened species, but a few were Kemp's Ridley's, which are on the endangered list. This all came about due to unusually cold Florida weather in early January, putting into action "Florida's second-largest sea turtle rescue of the 21st century," according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Over 1,000 cold stunned turtles were rescued from various Florida beaches. The turtles were taken to Gulf Specimen Marine Laboratory near Panacea, FL where they were given time to recover, then 37 were released at St. George Island State Park, where my wife and I just happened to be. What a show! So inspired by these beautiful creatures, I decided to share with you, my fellow Master Naturalists, some pictures I took, and some excerpts published in the Tampa Bay Times, that explain many things about the rescue of these awesome turtles.

*Excerpts from the Tampa Bay Times:*

As reptiles, sea turtles are cold-blooded. That means when the weather is warm, they can be active, but when it turns cold, their movements slow down dramatically.

"We start monitoring (for stunned turtles) when the weather gets below 50 degrees," Lamont said. "If it stays cold over a prolonged period, then the turtles really start to slow down." Then they become unable to swim or even lift their heads above the water to breathe. Without warmth or help, the turtles drown.

To prevent that, biologists from USGS, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, plus volunteers from nearby Eglin Air Force Base and the environmental group Florida Coastal Conservation, start heaving the stunned turtles from the bay or the shore. One thing that's changed, though, is how they go about retrieving the ailing turtles. During the 2010-11 cold snap, she said, 400 of the turtles that washed up on the beach died. This time, though, the teams of scientists and

volunteers are taking boats out into the bay and plucking the turtles out of the water, trying to save them before they wash ashore. High winds overnight still drive some stunned turtles onto the mud flats of Cape San Blas. So teams of rescuers walk the flats, picking up cold-stunned turtles and loading them onto kayaks. When fully loaded, the kayaks may weigh more than 400 pounds. Then someone has to drag the loaded kayaks several miles through the mud to a truck. "It's exhausting," Lamont said. "It's really tough. And it's really inspiring to see that people are willing to do it to save these animals."



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The Loess Hills Chapter WEBSITE:

[https://  
loesshills.missourimasternaturalist.org](https://loesshills.missourimasternaturalist.org)

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