



Fall 2004

The Ozark Society, Inc.

"The challenge goes on. There are other lands and rivers, other wilderness areas, to save and to share with all. I challenge you to step forward to protect and care for the wild places you love best." — Dr. Neil Compton

Fall 2004 Meeting, Daisy State Park By John Heuston Communications Chairman

The modern and relatively new enclosed pavilion at Daisy State Park, located at Daisy, Arkansas in Pike County near Lake Greeson, proved to be a rain proof and comfortable setting for the Oct. 9-10, 2004 Ozark Society Fall Meeting and funfest.

The meeting was hosted by the Bayou Chapter of Louisiana, our brethren who always know how to mix serious business with a good program and lots of fun. We thank Chairman Steve Eyler and the Bayou membership for a program that was both educational and entertaining.

We were treated to a rousing introduction to the ancient hunting sport of falconry, thanks to Master Falconer Thomas Young of Mena, AR, who operates a center for rehabilitating injured birds.

See the cover story by Alice Andrews about this amazing young man and his work in this issue.

Getting Down To Business

Since Pack & Paddle is widely available to members, friends, and perhaps our foes, we don't get too detailed about some of the conservation initiatives and tactics we (continued on page 7)



Master Falconer Thomas Young with friend

Ebb and Flow By Alice Andrews, President

The Bayou Chapter, Shreveport, hosted the Fall Meeting of the Ozark Society at Daisy State Park on Lake Greeson. These wildly enthusiastic folks always provide an outstanding program for us. As we registered for the meeting, each member received a jar of Mayhaw jelly, made by Marian Howard and Jack Land. Many thanks to the Bayou Bunch!

The program included Alan Newman and Bill Pell, Ouachita National Forest, talking about

planning and the future of the Ouachita NF. A question and answer session followed. They urged us to write letters in support of designating the Glover River in eastern Oklahoma, a national wild and scenic river. We were also encouraged to seek more wilderness acres. How about that?!

Next, most observers would agree that we were totally captivated by Thomas Young's presentation.

I have never met anyone who is more (continued on page 10)

The Uneasy Chair

By John Heuston,
Communications Chairman

Well, the presidential election, one of the nastiest in recent memory, is finally over, thankfully, and being the diverse collection of individuals that the Ozark Society has always been, some of us are probably happy with the results and some of us are not.

I guess it's just too bad the so-called "Green Party" doesn't have a prayer of winning, but at least they did manage to get in some public relations licks.

One of our members, who shall remain nameless, sent me this little e-mail message that sums it all up for him.

"The bard has said it all ... "I think our country sinks beneath the yoke. It weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash is added to her wounds ..." Macbeth, IV iii.

On the bright side, we now have some new faces on the regional, state, and local political scene and we need to take pen or mouse in hand and let them know we expect environmental laws, regulations, and conservation practices to be respected and continued. Identify specific problems in your area and document them as best you can.

Having once been a paid political operative, your editor knows that letters and phone calls do matter. Politicians like to keep their fingers on the political pulse, so when the mail stacks up, they pay attention.

Now, we will have more time to focus on getting the Arkansas Department of Environmental

Quality more concerned with protecting the environment than churning out in-stream gravel mining permits on what few unpolluted mountain streams we have left.

The recent South Sylamore Creek gravel mining controversy is just the latest reminder that in-stream gravel mining not only threatens fabled Crooked Creek, but a lot of other free-flowing streams in the "Natural State" as well.

Simply put, the scientific studies that have been done on in-stream gravel mining indicate strongly that it is a very destructive practice that destroys both fisheries and scenic beauty. Fisheries biologists point out that when such mining disturbs the graveled stream bottom, fine silt clogs up the interstices (crevices) between rocks in the stream bottom and pre-

vents successful fish reproduction.

That's bad news for the economy of those areas of the Ozarks where sport fishing and "outdoor tourism" is an economic mainstay for many communities. In-stream gravel mining on highly prized smallmouth bass fishing streams is simply very bad environmental policy and should be outlawed.

As that old bumper sticker said, "Gravel Mining Gripes My Bass!"

The need for gravel can be supplied by properly regulated "open pit" mining well away from the stream itself.

The challenge here is to be sure that we have enough trained inspectors who will properly supervise mining activities according to the law, which, as we discovered on Crooked Creek, is not always the case.



Arkansas Director Duane Woltjen in the Sylamore District of the Ozark National Forest, admiring the scenery and checking out possible extensions to the North Sylamore Creek Hiking Trail.



Following Bill To The Blue Hole

By Jerol Garrison

I've always wanted to hike in the Ozark National Forest, and Bill Steward's hike in and around the fabled "Blue Hole" on Oct. 16 afforded that opportunity. Seven of us, five men and two women, made the trip.

Years ago, my wife hiked in Nepal and said it was all up and down. Steward's hikes are similar. He doesn't believe in following trails – we went across country most of the time.

To get to the Blue Hole, we drove north of Morrilton on Highway 95, then northwest on Highway 124 to Jerusalem, then north on USFS roads. We soon were traveling in ruts and pot-holes.

We stopped near a deer camp (it was the deer season set aside for those who enjoy hunting with black powder muzzle loading rifles and handguns) and Steward provided us with the obligatory blaze orange safety vests before we started walking.

We followed a faint trail that zigzagged its way through the woods and down the hill to the Blue Hole, a magnificent swimming hole where two creeks come together. A landmark on the trail is a big tree with a fork high in the trunk. At the tree, the trail goes right, faintly.

From the Blue Hole, Steward led us upstream along one of the creeks. We scrambled through the creek bed or along the banks, grabbing vines or sprouts for support.

We came to some waterfalls and stopped to eat lunch above one of them. The weather was ideal, with sunlight streaming through the trees.

Steward guided us with a small USFS contour map, a compass and a GPS device. Whenever we reached a high point, he checked his bearings. Marion Fulk, who also had a compass and GPS device, helped.

We would be able to see better in a few weeks after the leaves are off the trees, Steward said. For now, he used his navigation devices in concert with the sun, which shone in the South.

After lunch, we headed up a mountain. This was the most difficult part of the whole day, going straight uphill, after lunch! I thought we were never going to reach the top! Steward cut some hickory walking sticks with a saw that was part of his pocketknife and handed them out. I found a good stick and shortened it by smashing one end against a tree.

At the top of the hill, we headed down into the watershed of another creek, negotiating our way along the steep sides. I used the walking stick as a third leg on the downhill side to keep from slipping and crashing.

When we came to the creek, Steward commented on a tall rock pedestal that was an attraction for his Boy Scouts years ago. He didn't let them climb it, but they scrambled through an opening

behind it. Earlier, we had seen some shallow caves high up along one of the creeks that were excellent exploring sites for Scouts. We just looked.

We left the creek for the hill-sides again, scrambling for footing, and then it was down to the creek again to walk back upstream to check out some interesting formations. The creek was an interesting study, having carved out the stone bed in different ways over thousands of years.

We saw many thick slabs of rock that had been moved by nature to unusual positions. At Blue Hole, a stone slab on the bank looked like a nice place to stretch out and rest. Marion Fulk had slept there on an overnight trip once and awoke to find water all around her even though it hadn't rained. It's hard to predict these creeks!

We also sat on giant slabs of rock that were stacked on top of each other and arranged like an amphitheater. The performance area was in the creek.

Others on this Ozark Society hike were Mark and Carrie Edlund, Charles Glasier and Bryan Day, the veteran parks and recreation director for the city of Little Rock.

We were in the woods from 9 a.m. until 4:15 p.m. As we came out, we walked past the some chatting deer hunters. They probably hadn't moved all day, but we covered six miles on irregular terrain. Our hearts were pumping.



Ground Broken For The Fred Berry Conservation Education Center On Crooked Creek

By Garner Jones

A handful of young people attended the June 9th groundbreaking ceremonies of the Arkansas Game & Fish Foundation's newest education center. Eventually, the "Fred Berry Conservation Education Center on Crooked Creek" will attract throngs of area youth. When completed, the facility will provide fourth through sixth-grade students with credited courses as they learn about nature and the environment.

This was made possible by Fred Berry, who in 1999 donated \$1 million of Bank of Yellville stock to the Game & Fish Foundation. In turn, the Foundation purchased 421 acres of Crooked Creek property, including 2.75 miles of creek frontage. The property is adjacent to Kelley's Slab, a popular access point for floaters and anglers. Seventy acres of the property had been contracted for an open-pit gravel mine. However, the transfer of land voided the mining contract.

Education and demonstration programs were chief among Berry's ideas for the land. It was his dream to provide area youth with hands-on opportunities to study the outdoor world of the Ozarks. The Conservation Center will include trails and observation sites to study Ozark area wildlife, plants, and aquatic habitat. In the future, these studies may be developed for older students. And the

future looks bright. Berry told the crowd of approximately 150, "We're not through yet. This is only the beginning and we're going to have fun." The Center is scheduled to open sometime next year. Two other conservation education centers under the auspices of the Game & Fish Foundation have attracted thousands of young people.

David Snowden, Foundation Chairman, announced that \$195,000 in donations will be utilized to construct a classroom, laboratory, office space and an outdoor pavilion. Donations are from Entergy, South Shore Telephone Company, Arkansas Wildlife Officers Association, the Game & Fish Foundation, Southwest Electric Cooperative, the Arkansas Outdoor Hall of Fame, Grisham's Art, and an anonymous gift.

Six members of the Arkansas Outdoor Hall of Fame, including Berry, were present to witness the ceremonial groundbreaking near the creek which has been a hotbed of controversy during the past decade. In-stream gravel mining (and open-pit mining in close proximity of the creek bank) has caused alarm among fishermen and conservationists who cite scientific studies which demonstrate that the mining is having a deleterious impact on the habitat and water quality. On the other hand, property rights activists argue that land-

owners have the right to sell sand and gravel from the stream, as they own the streambed. Other Hall of Famers included Dave Whitlock, Nancy DeLamar, Joe Mosby, Steve N. Wilson, and Forrest Wood.

Snowden told the crowd that there were different stages of outdoor enthusiasm. He said that Fred Berry is in the legacy stage. When Berry, a life-long resident of Yellville who lives approximately one-half mile from the creek, donated the bank stock for the purchase of the property he noted that "Crooked Creek is an old friend who has been sadly misused." Berry, who was once concerned that he might have to "watch gravel trucks running up and down the road in front of my house from now on," can feel proud that in lieu of gravel trucks, he can watch school buses transport youthful beneficiaries of his dream and conservation legacy.

In May it was announced that Berry donated an additional \$710,000 to The Nature Conservancy to benefit the Conservancy's Ozark Rivers Legacy Program. Berry's gift, which The Nature Conservancy hopes to double with additional grants and contributions, will be used to reduce sedimentation and other pollution in Ozark streams through targeted education and demonstration projects.



Survival Risk For South Sylamore Creek

By Jim Allen

This picturesque stream has been a source of pleasure for generations of Stone County residents and visitors. We were alerted, in July, to an additional threat by a new permit request for instream gravel mining to the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ.) The permit is to remove about 2000 tons per year from 3.4 acres of stream in addition to existing permits. The applicant already has permits for nine other sites to mine gravel from South Sylamore Creek.

Many people became concerned and decided to learn more. Two open meetings were held in Mountain View, sponsored by Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers (Friends). The more we learned, the more concerned we became about the health of South Sylamore Creek. We saw a study of South Sylamore Creek by ADEQ. The study has not yet been formally approved report but it describes in graphic detail the damage already done.

More than 100 people attended the public hearing held by ADEQ in September in Mountain View. We are grateful that several Ozark Society (OS) members were present . . . Alice Andrews, Mile Farar, Bobby Stout, Laura and David Timbey, Ainslie Gilligan and others. Audubon Society was also represented. Friends has led the campaign to educate the public and to organize the effort to have meaningful public input into the process.

We expect to have a draft opinion from ADEQ that will be mailed to those that provided input during the comment period. Another 30 day comment period will follow and perhaps another public hearing. After that, ADEQ will rule. That ruling can be appealed to the full commission and then to court if necessary. They may have no basis under Regulation 15 to decline the permit. However, Regulation 2 requires that mining permits may not diminish water quality and their study clearly shows that has already occurred.

It may require action by the Arkansas Legislature to make changes in the regulations. This means we must educate and persuade legislators. We will need a "grass roots" campaign throughout the state to get their attention. Friends supports the idea of a coalition of environmental groups working together for our common concerns as suggested by Mike Farar. Numbers gets the attention of our lawmakers.

We are encouraged even while the threat still exists. Many people are now aware of the danger and have supported our efforts

to get the attention of ADEQ.

In a related development, Friends sponsored the organization of Stream Teams for the South Sylamore Creek, White River and other tributaries of the White. There were about 40 people in attendance at the first training session on October 23, conducted by Steve Filipek of the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission. The meeting lasted over 6 hours and Friends provided lunch. This will be a long-range program to monitor stream conditions.

Friends appreciates the assistance of the Ozark Society and hope it will be able to support OS in the future. As a member of OS and Friends, I am working to provide liaison between these organizations. Interested persons can contact Gene Dunaway, President of Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers, at: gdunaway@aol.com. or Jim Allen at: jjmallen@mvtel.net.



Judy Woltjen of the Highlands Chapter doing what her husband Duane terms the "trail stomp" on a section of the colorful North Sylamore Creek Hiking Trail in the Sylamore District of the Ozark National Forest northwest of Mountain View.

NEED WE SAY MORE?

This picturesque bluff shades the swimming hole at Barkshed Campground in the Sylamore District



BASS BOY! Here is one of the best reasons we can offer for protecting the smallmouth bass streams of the Ozark and Ouachita Mountains from in-stream gravel mining pollution -- the opportunity for youngsters like Christopher, the grandson of Ozark Society member Garner Jones of Greenwood, to fish for quality smallmouth bass like this one he reeled in on Crooked Creek. Need we say more?

OZARK SOCIETY FLASHBACK:
Arkansas Game & Fish Commission News Editor Gus Albright, left, and AG&FC Photographer Jack Atkins on Big Bluff as they watch Harold and Margaret Hedges and the Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club set up camp on the Buffalo River gravel bar below them. They soon scrambled down to joined the float-campers. The Douglas trip generated much interest in both canoeing and river preservation and sparked the official formation of the Ozark Society soon afterward. (photo by John Heuston)





The popular “swimming hole” on North Sylamore Creek at Barkshed Campground in the Sylamore District of the Ozark National Forest, a possible destination for an extension of the North Sylamore Creek hiking trail.

Fall Meeting...*(continued)*

discuss at our rendezvous and board meetings. That’s why we encourage every member who can attend these annual meetings do so – it’s the only way to keep current with all the conservation issues in play, and what actions we are contemplating.

However, there was considerable discussion about the thorny issue of in-stream gravel mining, and the silt pollution it causes in gravel-bottomed mountain streams. This type of destructive in-stream mining is not confined just to Crooked Creek, but is a problem throughout much of the Ozark Mountains.

South Sylamore Creek, a popular scenic waterway near Mountain View, is the current hotbed of controversy over this pollution-causing practice (see Jim Allen’s article in this issue).

Ozark Society President Alice Andrews reported that for the first

time the Ozark Society lost money on this year’s Buffalo National River float trip, a popular outing since its inception.

Financial Chairman Bob Ritchie said the financial loss was largely due to some costly motor damage and other unanticipated expenses, not a lack of enthusiasm for the trip. He advised that we probably should consider charging a little more for the trip to cover such eventualities, and trimming the food bill might help too.

Charlene Manning was congratulated for the excellent job she did of food planning and preparation for the canoe floats over the last two years. It’s great dining! We usually eat like kings, maybe too much like kings, so we might have to settle for just princely fare, as Ritchie implied, or up the tab.

What has become the annual Buffalo River Float Trip originated

in 1997 as the Ozark Society’s way to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Buffalo National River (1972-1997).

That first float trip and campout was so much fun (lasting friendships were formed) that people wanted to keep the Buffalo River float trip going, so we did. Ozark Society membership is required, so it also has proved to be an excellent “recruiting tool” to gain new members for the Ozark Society as word spread about how enjoyable and educational the floats have become.

However, the float trip takes a lot of planning, preparation, and just plain hard work to make it a success. Immediate Past President Stewart Noland suggested that we might ease the pressure a little by shortening each day of river travel to allow more time for fishing, exploring, swimming, or whatever.

Another possibility mentioned would be to establish a base camp, perhaps at Tyler Bend, and then paddle up or down the river from that point to do our fishing and exploring. In brief, we are exploring new ideas for the Buffalo River float, so if you have any suggestions – please pass them on to President Andrews.

There was also discussion of trying to get the National Park Service to approve of naming a popular overlook point on the Buffalo National River after the Society's founder, Dr. Neil Compton, who led the long struggle to "Save The Buffalo." This is still a mission in progress.

North Sylamore Creek Hiking Trail Extension

State Director Duane Woltjen of Fayetteville reviewed some possibilities he has explored for extensions of the North Sylamore Creek hiking trail to perhaps allow access to Blanchard Springs, Gunner Pool, Barkshed, and elsewhere.

Woltjen supplied some photos for this issue taken when he and his wife Judy explored the stark beauty of this popular area of the Sylamore District, Ozark National Forest.

However, some members cautioned us to be aware that the trail extension might generate some local controversy because it would funnel increased human traffic through a section of territory in the forest that is coveted by many deer and small game hunters. That possibility is something to consider, since we are trying to create allies up there, not enemies.

Buffalo River Handbook A Hit

Kenneth L. Smith, author of the popular book, *Buffalo River Country*, was on hand at the fall meeting to sign copies of his new

book, "Buffalo River Handbook." The book was edited by professional book editor Ainslee Gilligan, a member of the Buffalo River Chapter, and recently published by the Ozark Society Foundation.

This 436-page book is compact enough to fit into your backpack, SUV glove box, or that old waterproof GI ammo can you've got tucked under the stern seat of your canoe. Whatever questions you might have about the flora and fauna of the Buffalo River country, and its colorful human inhabitants, past and present – you will probably find the answers here!

Better yet, the book is coordinated with the popular National Geographic Trails Illustrated topographic maps of the Buffalo National River. These maps are on sale at most of the better outdoor equipment stores – a must companion to the book!

Two New Wilderness Maps Available

Membership Chairman Bill Steward also unveiled two new maps in our Wilderness Map series. They cover the Richland Creek Wilderness in the Buffalo Ranger District of the Ozark National Forest and the Leatherwood Wilderness in the Sylamore Ranger District of the Ozark National Forest. These maps are a must have item for anyone seriously interested in wilderness hiking.!

Smith's new book and the new wilderness area maps both are available from Ozark Society Supplies and Publications, P O Box 2914, Little Rock, AR 72201. The *Buffalo River Handbook* is priced at \$18 for Ozark Society members and \$19.95 for non-members. The wilderness maps are \$8 for Ozark Society members and \$9 for non-

members.

Ouachita National Forest Outlook

That afternoon, Alan Newman and Bill Pell, USFS employees who work out of the Ouachita National Forest headquarters at Hot Springs, brought us up to date on some of the Forest Services' ongoing plans and programs for the Ouachita Forest.

In response to a question about future recreation projects, Pell and Newman pointed out that building quality new recreational areas when and where feasible is desirable, but also very expensive.

Even building the popular SSTs (Sweet Smelling Toilets) costs lots of money, they emphasized. In short, the USFS is tasked with building new Recreation Areas where needed and desired, but only when their budget can afford such developments.

The ATV Situation

There also was considerable discussion about the possible impact on the environment of the popular and growing use of so-called "Off Road Vehicles" (ORVs) or "All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs).

These motorized mechanical mules are increasingly popular with hunters, backwoods anglers, and back country travelers of all types.

Unlike the larger typical "four-wheel-drive" automobiles (Jeeps, Scouts, Land Cruisers, etc.), which require some sort of a roadway, albeit a primitive one, these 3-wheel and 4-wheeled "scooter critters" can go almost anywhere you have the nerve to take them.

The earlier generation of three-wheeled ATVs earned a reputation for being more prone to accidents than the newer and more



manageable four-wheeled versions, so most of the ATVs you see in the woods today are four-wheelers. They're fun, and considerably safer than three-wheelers, but they also must be used with caution.

We have a sad reminder of this fact. Some of our veteran members will remember pioneer Ozark Society member Jack Atkins, a photographer and later assistant director for AG&FC, who photographed Supreme Court Justice William O Douglas during his famous Buffalo River float trip with Harold and Margaret Hedges of the Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club (OWWC) of Kansas City.

Atkins was killed several years ago in a freak ATV accident. It was a tragedy that haunted his many friends for a long time.

A New Approach

Therefore, the Forest Service approach is now geared toward limiting ATV use to designated routes in appropriate places where soil erosion can be better controlled. ATV caused soil erosion has become a major problem in some areas.

Newman and Pell pointed out that the Ozark National Forest now has about 100 miles of OHV trails, some of which are poorly located. The ultimate goal is to facilitate better, safer, and less destructive ATV use through improved trail systems and more public information about the damage that improper use of ATVs can cause.

It's Time For The Vision!

Newman and Pell also pointed out that the USFS is now involved in their annual process known as "Forest Plan Revision."

In essence, they explained that this is their challenge to for-

mulate a "broad vision of where we are going."

Pell and Newman explained that the USFS now must do "project level analysis" before doing anything. They noted that the plan had been amended 39 times since 1990! It's now what they call "integrated."

We wish them well, and await completion of the plan with interest, and the customary amount of trepidation. The USFS has some great and dedicated staff members, but we've learned only too well that they are not always masters of their own fate. They also have politicians to deal with.

They also emphasized that the USFS is currently trying to deal with the frustrating and scary process of "oak decline" in the Ouachita National Forest. Pell and Newman pointed out that "Oak decline is aggravated by drought and insect pests, such as the red oak borer, which has been a problem in the Ozark National Forest.

Ruthless on the Roadless Rule!

Newman and Pell also pointed out what we already knew – the proposed abolishment of the "Roadless Rule" on USFS lands is also a "controversial issue the staff must deal with.

For example, our speakers reported that the 2000 Roadless Area Rule has so far been subject to nine lawsuits!

That's no surprise. The timber lobby and its allies hate these protected Roadless Areas and want them abolished. Why? So they can gain easy access by road to these areas and cut whatever timber they are allowed to extract from them. Logging requires roads.

Shamefully, both President George W. Bush and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee have endorsed the abolishment of the "Roadless Rule."

Perhaps these politicians don't know that experienced hunters love these designated "Roadless Areas." Why? Because they are essentially the type of "Walk-in Hunting Areas" that hunters like and the AG&FC is promoting. They want more of them, not less.

Nothing messes up a deer hunt like some goofball floor-boarding his vehicle (ATV or SUV) by your tree stand or ground blind just when your trophy buck of a lifetime decides to step out into view! That can really ruin your whole day.

In reality, roadless areas serve many of the same needs that deer and turkey hunters, hikers, backpackers, birders, and other woods wanderers seek in designated wilderness, although it usually comes in a smaller package.

When asked about roadless areas on our state-owned lands, Newman and Pell emphasized that it is the Governor of a state, not the USFS, who should "propose what to do with roadless areas on state lands."

Uh oh! That's good news if whoever is Governor of your state happens to be interested in outdoor recreation and the environment; not so good if he or she sides with the powerful timber lobby.

Unfortunately, we already know where Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee stands on this important issue. He now needs to hear loud and clear the views of all the people who use and cherish our designated Roadless Areas and want them left roadless.



Good Friends, Good Times

As usual, the fall meeting wasn't all talk and work.

The evening potluck was followed by a rousing lesson in how to dance Cajun style, led by Bobby and Billy Keys. It was no doubt planned to help shake all that good potluck food down!

The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism is doing a good job at Daisy State Park. We can see why it is a popular campout destination with people who are frequent visitors to this part of the Ouachita Mountains. Some of our Bayou Chapter friends have retired

to the Ouachita Mountains and now have permanent homes there, within easy reach of what's left of the Little Missouri, Cossatot, and Caddo rivers. It's a great area in which to live and play.

Save The Glover River – For All Time!

Ozark Society President Alice Andrews advised us that our old friend, the Glover River, over the line in Oklahoma, has been nominated for inclusion In the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. She urged that we all support this nomination in honor and memory of our Oklahoma allies of the

Indian Nations Chapter.

So, once again, it is time to take phone in hand (or e-mails and letters) and rattle the cage of your favorite senators and representatives. The Glover River is worth saving, both for Oklahoma and the nation.

Vannie Edwards gave the devotional on Sunday morning. Dean Miller and Jerry Martin was scheduled to lead a hike on the scenic Winding Stairs Trail, but rain was threatening, and some of us had to head home for a variety of reasons. We hope they were able to make their hike.

Ebb And Flow *(continued)*

enthusiastic or intensely passionate about his work. He is a Master Falconer, Ornithologist and rehabilitates injured birds and resides in Mena, Arkansas. He brought a great-horned owl, a white peregrine falcon and a 6-month-old, red-tailed hawk. After introducing us to the birds and a brief lecture, we went outside for a flight demonstration. No one was prepared for the treat that followed.

Tom told us this hawk was found and taken to the Zoo in Little Rock. Zoo personnel contacted him to see if he was interested in the bird. He was happy to take the hawk and delighted to discover that the hawk was wearing a leather legging valued at \$50. The legging led him to believe that an apprentice falconer had "lost" the bird. It would be the first time for him to "fly" the red-tail. He revealed that he did not know what the hawk would do. Exciting stuff! Would he just fly away, never to be seen again!



A Rapt crowd looks on as Thomas Young discusses his falcons

Would he accept his hunting partner and learn to catch a squirrel? (Since mice are not easily found in the winter, catching squirrels could mean the difference in living or not.) Could this hawk eventually be released to the wild?

Hawks are destined by their parents to become specialists at hunting squirrels, rabbits or mice. If the hawk is being taught to hunt

by a human hunting partner, then there are several training techniques. Tom used a whistle to call the hawk, tiny rewards of meat; he kicked trees which held squirrel nests or shook vines that climbed trees and touched nests, in order to "flush" a squirrel into the open. When he spots a squirrel, he told us that he sounds a little like Santa Claus. He signals the hawk by



calling out HO, HO, HAWK!

When Tom released the hawk it flew to a nearby branch. The details of what happened next were amazing to everyone watching. The hawk made two noble attempts to “nail” a squirrel and missed. Then Tom drug a rabbit decoy (a sort of flat piece of rabbit-shaped fur with ears) across the ground. The hawk immediately pounced on it and began mantling his catch. It was difficult for Tom to retrieve the dummy rabbit. He offered pea-sized pieces of meat to encourage the hawk. We learned a new term, “yarak”.



A Raptor spreads its wings in a glorious display

It is a natural conditioning to hunger and occurs when a raptor must eat or die. The talons clutch the prey and cannot let go. Once the bird has eaten, the tendons release their grip.

Everyone, old and young alike followed Tom, running at times, jumping over briars, retreating from poison ivy – all of us breathless, trying to keep up with him. His agility was unlike any human being I have seen. He literally flew through the trees, like a sprite or woodsy fairy, helping the red-tail learn to hunt.

Suddenly a squirrel nest was spotted in the fork of a large oak with no lateral branches up to about 50-55 feet above the ground.

He kicked the tree and yanked on a vine to flush the squirrel. The hawk was on the nest in an instant and appeared to have caught his squirrel. He was mantling over the nest when Tom said, “If that hawk doesn’t come down, I’ll have to climb the tree to get him”. After a few minutes, he started up the tree. There was no safety harness, no climbing cleats, nothing but bare hands and legs – up that tree in a couple of minutes. In the meantime, the hawk flew away. Finding a lateral limb about 50 feet up, Tom pulled himself up to the nest and discovered a hole in

the trunk, below the nest. He thrust his hand and arm down the hole, exploring for the squirrel! How many of us would try that? No squirrel. Tom admitted that he has had many injuries, broken bones and stitches because of his adventures with animals.

Back on terra firma, he called the hawk and showed us the legging. It had new bite marks on it, made by the squirrel. So the hawk got his squirrel but lost it, a partial success. We were taught that it is critically important for a hawk or other raptor to be successful fairly soon; they easily become discouraged and may decide that a squirrel cannot be caught. Tom later said, “I like this bird”.

We returned to the pavilion where Tom continued to fascinate us with facts about raptors. His

great-horned owl was “partially imprinted” he explained and said, “Archimedes thinks that I am his woman; he’ll accept eggs placed in his care by me, as if they were his own.” Owls truly fly in total silence and can accurately grab a mouse, running over leaves, under a layer of snow. Hawks cannot do that. These birds are wondrous things with those intense golden eyes that don’t miss anything. They see in several colors and far exceed our human eye’s depth of field and resolution (detail of what we see). Their distance, close and peripheral vision works together without a need to “zoom”. A squirrel appears red to a hawk. The feathers on all three birds are a marvel of beauty and specialized function. We could not take our eyes off these birds or their human partner.

The beautiful peregrine falcon watched Tom intently throughout the program. One senses that Tom is intuitively connected with the natural world, its animals and especially with birds. He showed us the notched beak of the falcons and commented that God designed them to consistently kill their prey (mainly ducks) by precisely snapping the 2nd or 3rd cervical vertebrae, depending on the type of bird. Tom clearly loves his work and mentioned that as a master falconer he is certified to fly all raptors. Golden eagles are his favorite bird to fly.

Other little known facts: There is a critical and very small weight differential in raptors before they will hunt. For example, kestrels weigh around 100 grams; when their weight falls to about 97 grams, they hunt. If they don’t succeed in catching a meal before

Ebb and Flow ...*(continued)*

their weight falls by 2 more grams, they will probably die. In the big picture of evolution, it seems incredible that a 2-gram weight range could mean success or failure to live. Hawks weigh around 1000 grams. When their weight drops to about 960 grams, they hunt. Their success depends on a difference of 30-40 grams. When Tom "hunts his hawks", they must be weighed 5 times per day to assure a correct hunt weight..


Raptors do not have "brakes". When diving to catch prey, they do not slow down but crash onto their prey at full speed. Why aren't they injured? It is about incredibly efficient lungs and air sacs. Apologies here for my less than accurate description of a raptors respiratory process. The gist

of it, when a raptor raises it's wings air enters the right lung. On the next wing beat, air is pumped into the left lung. Some O2 goes into the blood stream while CO2 and some O2 is moved into multiple, protective air sacs in the chest and back. Why can't we earth bound creatures have this fall protection option?!

These birds can live up to 80 or 90 years; perhaps 50 to 60 years in the wild. I don't know if they share birthdays, but Tom and his falcon are both 35 years old. The smaller raptors can carry about 20 % of their weight but most eat their catch immediately. Eagles are able to lift 90 % of their weight.

No one could walk away from Tom. His love, devotion and

knowledge about these birds created the most engaging program I have heard, ever! It is a rare day when we are fortunate enough to learn so much in two or three hours.

I have saved the best news for last. He successfully released the red-tailed hawk today!!! 



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Ozark Society dues are for the calendar year and include a subscription to the Ozark Society's quarterly magazine, "Pack & Paddle," and conservation action updates via the Ozark Society's website.

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