

Fall/Winter 2023 Edition

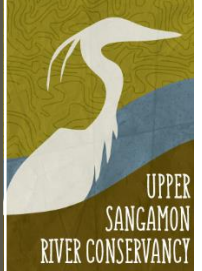
Nest Box Program Expands Reach
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Catholic Heart Work Camp Back Again
Girl Scout Troop 2973 Pitches In
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Volume 3
Issue 2

Recreation * Stewardship * Citizen Science

USRC Newsletter



Breaking news >>>

12th Annual Fundraiser Event

Shelsey Crull Wins 2023 Sangamon River Duck Race

Sangamon River Duck Race sales once again topped 500 duck chances. The race winner, Shelsey Crull, took first place, while Brandi Hughes snagged second and fourth place. The Mahomet Area Youth Club received 3rd with tickets purchased for them from an anonymous donor. The USRC netted \$2450.00 from this year's event. Thank you to everyone who sponsored a duck and helped make the event a great success. The Sangamon River Duck Race is the USRC's primary fundraiser each year.

2021 Sangamon River Duck Race Winners

- 1st Place – \$500.00 – Winner Shelsey Crull
-Donated by First Financial Bank
- 2nd Place – \$250.00 – Winner Brandi Hughes
-Donated by USRC
- 3rd Place – \$100.00 – Winner Mahomet Area Youth Club
-Donated by Glenn & Mary Stech
- Last Place – Duck in 2023 Race – Winner Brandi Hughes



Nest Box Project Expands Reach

Champaign Park District Receives USRC Nest Boxes

The USRC Nest Box Program is once again making a difference thanks to Joey Anthony.

Earlier this year, Joey Anthony and the USRC nest box committee collaborated with Champaign Park District to mount 9 new blue bird houses at Porter Family Park in southwest Champaign. Although this prairie restoration is not in the Sangamon River watershed (it's in the Kaskaskia River watershed), USRC and the nest box committee love to work



together with local organizations to enhance habitat to benefit wildlife. Next time you are exploring Porter Park, check out the new birdhouses to see if any blue birds (or swallows) have called them home. USRC bluebird boxes are made from repurposed wood. If you have any wood left-over from a home project that is suitable for use as nesting boxes or if you know of any properties or parks that would benefit from additional bluebird or wood duck nest boxes, please reach out to our Nest Box Committee leader at joey.anthony11@gmail.com.

Mussel Project Continues to Grow

The project, Biodiversity of Freshwater Mussels of the Upper Sangamon River: Community Science in Action is in partnership with IL RiverWatch, INHS, St Louis Zoo, and MO Botanical Garden.

A record number of volunteers turned out for the mussel surveys this year. The project, *Biodiversity of Freshwater Mussels of the Upper Sangamon River: Community Science in Action*, drew 225 volunteers over the 4 surveys. The citizen scientists logged more than 1100 volunteer hours, while collecting 2,440 mussels from the river. An additional 971 mussels were tagged this year. One species only rarely found in the Sangamon River, the Slippershell mussel (*Alasmidota viridis*) was



pulled from river bottom at the Nettie Hart site by the USRC's very own, Joey Anthony. The find brought to 22, the number of species found during the project. Although Slippershell mussels are found occasionally in some of the tributaries to the upper Sangamon, the last record of one found in the Sangamon River was in 1988. Some other nice finds during the first three years of the project included Monkeyface (*Quadrula metanevra*), Spike (*Elliptio dilatate*), and Fluted-shell (*Lasmigona costata*). The diversity of freshwater mussels in the Sangamon River is one reason that the upper portions of the river have been designated by IDNR as a "biologically significant stream." To learn more about the freshwater mussels in the Sangamon River and about this project, click on this link: [Mussels of the Sangamon River \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com). Contact Bruce Colravay at citizenscience@sangamonriver.org if you would like to be a part of this project.



Joey Anthony, USRC Secretary, Nest Box Coordinator, and Mussel Grubber Extraordinaire proudly displays the Slippershell mussel that he plucked from the Sangamon River at the Nettie Hart site.

Ameren Awards USRC Proud Community Partner Grant



For the second consecutive year the USRC has received a grant from Ameren. This year's Proud Community Partner Grant was in the amount of \$3000.00. The grant will provide USRC volunteers with tools, safety equipment, and supplies to assist volunteers in more effectively and safely perform tasks.

Ameren Illinois' Community Partner Grant demonstrates their commitment to empowering the communities they serve through charitable giving and volunteering. One area of support is Environmental Stewardship. Ameren Illinois supports conservation efforts, tree planting, and habitat restoration. They strive to collaborate with local organizations to enhance green spaces. The USRC is grateful for their commitment to the environment.

Breaking News >>>

Mussel Grubbing Documentary Well Travelled

The award-winning documentary *Mussel Grubbing: A Citizen Science Treasure Hunt* was released in early 2023 with official selections from a multitude of film festival. The production team includes director Jason Lindsey, executive producer Talia Watkins, 1st AC Ian Mitchell and Kevin Lau, and production assistant Bjorn Lindsey. The film features USRC volunteer Nina Carmichael as she tells of her experience mussel grubbing as a USRC citizen scientist. The project is a collaboration between Illinois RiverWatch and USRC with partners in research and education that include the Illinois Natural History Survey, National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, Missouri Botanical Garden and St Louis Zoo. Funding came from the Consortium of Universities for the Advancement of Hydrologic Science, Inc (CUAHSI), and the Living Earth Collaborative. The film may be viewed using this link: [Mussel Grubbing Video](#)



Mussel Grubbing 2023 Film Festival Tour

- World Water Film Festival (Best Documentary Film Award) (New York City)
- University of Illinois Sustainability Shorts Film Festival
- Wild & Working Lands Film Festival
- Downstream Environmental Film Festival
- Oregon Documentary Film Festival (Finalist for "Best Director" and "Best Microfilm")
- Nature Without Borders International Film Festival
- Wildlife Conservation Film Festival
- Underwater Love Film Festival (Venice, Italy)
- Society for Ecological Restoration Film Festival (Darwin, Australia)
- Fresh Coast Film Festival (Marquette, Michigan)
- Main Outdoor Film Festival

Mussel Grubbing 2024 Film Festival Tour

- Wild and Scenic Film Festival (California)

The Stewardship Corner >>>

Catholic Heart Returns!

Smiling and eager to help



For the second consecutive year, Catholic Heart Work Camp volunteers have joined USRC in supporting the Illinois Adopt-a-Highway Program to keep the highways of Illinois litter free. The target area for the daylong event was the I-74 interchange at Rt 47, as well as portions of Rt 47 to the north. The 8-member crew, along with USRC board members, Mary Steck and Bruce Colrav, collected 33 bags of trash. Trash included hubcaps, yard signs, iron posts, mud flaps, plastic car parts, and more. For more than 30 years, Catholic Heart Work Camp has brought youths and youth leaders from around the country to make positive change throughout the country. The USRC is grateful for their hard work and dedication. They set a great example for all of us. We look forward to working with them again next year.

Mahomet Girl Scout Troop 2973 Cleans Mid American Road!

“Mahomet Girl Scout Troop 2973 did an amazing job of cleaning up trash on Mid America Road east of the River Bend Forest Preserve entrance” according to the USRC’s Adopt-a-Highway coordinator, Joe Niernberger. The twelve-member group of scouts and scout leaders collected seven bags of trash along with some miscellaneous items. This was their second roadside cleanup with USRC—their first being in November of 2022. They are now part of more than 10,000 volunteers in the state of Illinois that are dedicated to keeping our roadways litter free. By picking up trash from roadways they make a safer work environment for maintenance workers and they make our communities more appealing. A job well done—thanks to all!



Become a Volunteer

To learn more about the many volunteer opportunities available at the USRC contact Mary Steck at volunteer@sangamonriver.org or visit our website at sangamonriver.org.



2023-24 USRC Board and Leads

Mike Daab – President
Mary Steck – Vice-President/Volunteer Coordinator/Hospitality Coordinator
Joey Anthony – Secretary/Nestbox Project Coordinator
Bart Duesdieker – Treasurer
Scott Hays – Board Member/USRC River Runners Coordinator
Bruce Colrav – Board Member/Citizen Science Coordinator/Communications Director/ Newsletter Editor
Joe Niernberger – Natural Areas Coordinator/Roadside Clean-up Coordinator
Michael Lambert – Board Member, Web Master
Mike De Canto – Board Member

Latest Update>>>

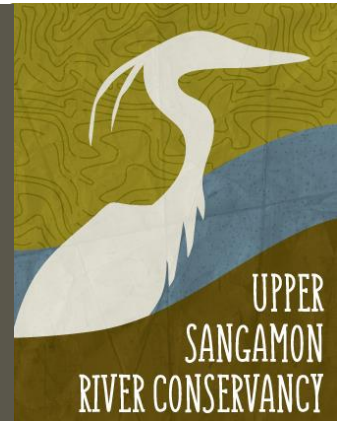
Sangamon River Greenway Park

The first pass through Sangamon River Greenway Park in the effort to remove bush honeysuckle from the woodland has been completed. Work on the project began three years ago. Joe Niernberger and his relatively small group of volunteers stepped-up their effort over the last two years as they cut their way through the dense tangle of honeysuckle. This spring the woodland floor exploded with color as bluebells and other spring ephemerals emerged. Many stumps still need to be cut and brush piles need to be burned, but what a difference a year makes. Some maintenance and attention to a few other pesky invasives, such as garlic mustard, will still necessary. As this season nears an end, the USRC would like to tip its hat to Joe and his small but mighty crew of volunteers. They are a shining example of what the best of the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy can be.



Joe Niernberger, USRC Natural Areas Coordinator, burns piles of bush honeysuckle at the Sangamon River Greenway Park.

An Appeal from the **USRC President**



Dear Friends,

Once again, we find ourselves at the end of another year. While low water levels through much of 2023 kept us from floating downriver as much as we would have liked (including our popular and gratifying cleanup event), we have much to celebrate! We were thrilled to be featured in the award-winning film, *Mussel Grubbing: A Citizen Science Treasure Hunt*, created by local director Jason Lindsey and in collaboration with Illinois RiverWatch and the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center. Check it out and be inspired!

The Sangamon River Showcase in May was, again, an annual favorite event thanks to our volunteers and many great partners, including the Illinois Water Survey, the Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. Along the way we removed several acres of invasive bush honeysuckle from the riparian forest, cleaned up trash from nearby highways, and installed nesting boxes for wood ducks and bluebirds in the Sangamon watershed and beyond.

As the calendar turns to 2024, we look forward to:

- Float trips that promote river awareness through recreation.
- Citizen science that promotes river ecology and advocacy.
- Outreach that provides educational opportunities.
- Clean-ups that remove unnatural debris from the Sangamon watershed.

Please consider supporting our efforts financially with a donation at whatever level you are able and willing to give. Contributions allow us to purchase watercraft and safety gear for use by float trip participants, and materials and equipment for water and wildlife monitoring efforts. Donations also allow us to provide food for the many volunteers who help with stewardship initiatives.

You may make donations by visiting our website at sangamonriver.org or by mailing a check to the address below. The USRC is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization and your donation is fully tax deductible. On behalf of the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy Board, I would like to sincerely thank you for considering a donation in support of our work.

Regards,

Mike Daab

USRC President

president@sangamonriver.org

Upper Sangamon
River Conservancy

PO Box 765,
Mahomet, IL 61853

president@sangamonriver.org www.sangamonriver.org



USRC Events >>>

Adopt-a-Highway Clean-up
Museum of the Grand Prairie
900 N. Lombard, Mahomet
Contact Joe Niernberger at
naturalareas@sangamonriver.org

Natural Areas Workdays
Mahomet Greenway Park
1404 S Division St, Mahomet
Contact Joe Niernberger at
naturalareas@sangamonriver.org

Recreational Paddles
Sangamon River
Locations vary
Contact Scott Hays at
riverrunners@sangamonriver.org

Nestbox Project
Locations vary
Contact Joey Anthony at
joey.anthonyl1@gmail.com

Citizen Science
Invertebrate Monitoring
Mussel Surveys
Chloride Monitoring
Contact Bruce Colravy at
citizenscienc@sangamonriver.org