

Kentucky Ornithological Society – Spring Meeting 2024

Mammoth Cave National Park, April 26 - 28

The KOS Spring Meeting started with some afternoon walks on Friday. Nancy Braun & Donna Stricklin led some eager birders to the Echo River Springs Trail – a nice, accessible trail along the Green River. David Bailey & Asher Higgins took participants to the Dennison Ferry Day Use area/Flint Ridge Road for several stops in deep woods and prairie fragments.

Jeremy Teague, KOS President, welcomed attendees to Friday evening's meeting at the newly refurbished Mammoth Cave Lodge. He thanked Donna Stricklin for all her work organizing the weekend. Then, it was time for Steve's bird quiz, always a fun part of the evening. It was the 25th bird quiz – including several during the KOS virtual meetings during Covid.

Donna introduced our first guest speaker – Kimi Birrer. She is originally from northern Kentucky and was a 2017 recipient of a Kingsolver scholarship to attend Camp Colorado. She presented highlights of her experience at camp, which led her to studies/work in places like Montana, Costa Rica, and Missouri. She graduated with degrees in environmental biology and Spanish and worked for a time in a bilingual environmental education program in Florida. She switched to a biotech position, working with the red-cockaded woodpecker. She is currently working on her master's degree in Texas, focusing on habitat management for upland game birds. Meeting attendees enjoyed hearing about the impact of her early formative experiences on her career.

Brice Leech, Natural Resource Specialist at the park, was the next speaker on the program. His focus is ecological maintenance in the park. He spoke about the struggle to maintain the natural areas, with numerous invasive species and changing environmental impacts. He described what conditions were like years ago when chestnut trees dominated the forest, making up 25% of the woods. His team works on management of endangered trees, mussel propagation in the Green River, invasive plant removal, and inventories, among other projects.

He has worked for 20 years with the MAPS program – Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship – a continent-wide collaborative endeavor. This research is done in conjunction with a similar project in Central and South America where the birds overwinter. During the summer, he and his volunteers trap and band birds at a spot along the Green River. They have caught over 2,000 birds/47 different species. Scientists use the data to monitor population trends.

Jeremy and Donna went over the field trips scheduled for Saturday.

- 8:00 a.m. Field Trips - Departing from front of the Park Lodge
 - Jeremy Teague & Bridget Butler – Echo River Springs Trail
 - Steve & Janet Kistler – Diamond Caverns area
 - Ronan O'Carra & Asher Higgins – Joppa Ridge Rd/Turnhole Bend
 - Kyle Bixler & Michael Patton – Visitors Center/Heritage Trail to Sunset Point

- 1:00 p.m. Field Trips - Departing from front of the Park Lodge
 - Steve & Janet Kistler - Wildflower Walk, Turnhole Bend Nature Trail, Sloan's Crossing Pond
 - Kevin Burt – Echo River Springs or Diamond Caverns
 - Asher Higgins – Bike Trail

Saturday evening's program began with Jeremy tabulating the species list for the weekend. One highlight was a Black-throated Blue Warbler, along with many other wood warblers – a specialty of Mammoth Cave. There were 129 species counted so far, with more to come after the Sunday trips. Many participants were thrilled to see “lifers.”

He introduced our guest speaker, Bridget Butler. Known as the Bird Diva, Bridget advocates the practice of “slow birding.” Her goal is “to reimagine how we connect with birds.” She has worked in the conservation field for 30 years and has established her own business encouraging a deeper dive into the birding experience.

She maintains that slow birding leads to a deeper skill set, a calm connection with place, and improved wellness. Traditional birding tends to use the “left brain” while right-brained birding pulls in emotion and subjectivity. It goes beyond identifying to describing and includes observing behaviors and the environment. To practice slow birding, she recommends that you find a “sit spot” - a place to sit and observe every day, build a knowledge of local birds, and still the noise coming from the outside world – almost like meditation. After her presentation, she answered questions from the audience. Find her on Facebook – Bird Diva, or online at birddiva.com.

Jeremy announced the field trips for Sunday morning:

- Jeff Sole - a tour of his Hart County Farm which he has restored from croplands to rich and varied native habitats.
- Kevin Burt – Maple Springs Campground area on the north side of the Green River, a great place for spring migrants.
- Joppa Ridge Trail and Echo River Springs were suggested for people to explore on their own.

The annual fall KOS meeting will be held on September 20 – 22 at Lake Cumberland State Resort Park in Jamestown.