

# **Springfield Plateau Missouri Master Naturalist Chapter Annual Report – 2020**

## **2020 By the Numbers**

- Number of volunteers that achieved their initial certification in 2020: 10
- Number of volunteers that achieved their 2020 annual certification: 29
- Number of volunteers graduating from a training course held in 2020: 0
- Number of active members: 81
- Total hours of volunteer service conducted during 2020: 5166
- Total hours of advanced training volunteers participated in during 2020: 1232
- Total Education Hours: 2532

## **List of Local Chapter partners:**

Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World  
Bat Conservation International Organization  
Bennett Spring State Park  
Branson for Monarchs  
City of Springfield  
    Springfield-Greene County Park Board  
    Department of Environmental Services  
    Department of Public Works  
Friends of the Garden  
Greater Ozarks Audubon Society  
Interpreters Coalition of Springfield and SW Missouri  
James River Basin Partnership  
LAD Fair  
Leave No Trace National Organization  
Missouri Department of Conservation  
Missouri Prairie Foundation  
Missouri State University  
    Biology Department: Bat Studies  
    Geology Department: Karst Studies  
    Bull Shoals Field Station  
National Speleological Society Organization  
Safe Kids Coalition Springfield and SW Missouri  
Springfield Plateau Grotto  
Springfield R-12 School District  
University of Missouri Extension Service/Greene County  
Lakes of Missouri Volunteer Program

## **Springfield Plateau Chapter Projects for 2020 – Overview**

Like all Chapters, the Springfield Plateau Chapter was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 virus and associated effects, including school closings, meeting restrictions/cancellations, etc. The Chapter has a post-holiday Winter Celebration in January during which new officers are installed, retiring officers are recognized (did someone say Roast?) and our fund-raising Silent Auction takes place – with the proceeds going to grants for scholarships and projects. Little did the members know when they gathered on January 24 what the coming year would bring. Our February general membership meeting, held on February 17, would be the last time our Chapter would meet in person for what looks to be over a year. On March 11, the date of our March Executive Board meeting, the first COVID case was confirmed in Springfield. On March 16, orders went into place regarding meetings and gatherings. Our March general membership meeting was canceled. Hunkering down and thinking this would pass in a couple of months, we canceled our April Executive Board meeting. Seeing we were in it for a longer haul, the Executive Board met via phone conference call in May, with general membership meetings being cancelled until further notice. The Executive Board continued to meet through the summer and, in September, the first Zoom meeting was held for the general membership meeting, as it has been in the months since. Chapter leadership was concerned about keeping the members together, especially our new class members, who had just graduated in the Fall of 2019.

A face-to-face gathering and welcome field trip was held on October 10 hosted at the Bull Creek home of members Bob and Barb Kipfer. The purpose of this field trip was to spend time outdoors participating in educational activities while prioritizing social distancing. Educational activities included nature hikes, wild mushroom identification, microhabitats, tree identification, birding, rotten log discoveries, and nature photography. While COVID put an end to most in-person events, this outing was a refreshing change of pace and allowed the group to learn and socialize outdoors while staying safe.”

As we adjusted to living with COVID, Chapter members continued to participate in some of our activities, employing full COVID safety measures; however, during 2020, face-to-face educational programming opportunities were very limited and most of the events at which Chapter members would have assisted in various ways were canceled or held virtually, but members still participated in invasive species removal; reviewing deer cam photos; the Christmas Bird Count and Backyard Bird Count, planting natives; and developing/maintaining pollinator habitat. The excellent MDC educational webinar series were a real hit with Chapter members and offered a way to stimulate conversation and virtual interaction among members.



## **Scholarships – 2020**

Fund raising efforts to provide scholarships for area youth continued on a limited basis in 2020, with no scholarships or project grants being awarded due to diminished activities of potential grantees.

## **Chapter Promotion**

We continue to promote our Chapter and the Master Naturalist program via our blog, website, Facebook page even when our presence at face-to-face special events was limited or nonexistent.

Our Chapter Blog, posted by head blogger, Bob Kipfer, continues to grow and inform viewers. There were 106 posts in 2020, bringing the total number of posts since 2009 to 1384.

Blog at [Springfieldmn.blogspot.com](http://Springfieldmn.blogspot.com)

## **Educational Programming – the WOLF School**

Our chapter continues our support of the WOLF School, pre-COVID with both in the classroom plus frequent field trips. This year; however, as were so many activities, chapter participation was weekly teaching sessions via ZOOM. WOLF (Wonders of Outdoor Learning Facility) is a partnership between Bass Pro and Springfield Public Schools with 46 students and two teachers presenting the full year of the standard 5<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum “taught through the lens of nature.” One of the first of its kind in the nation, it continues to provide exceptional educational opportunities and experience wide popularity and respect. Dr. Bob and Barbara Kipfer teach at the WOLF School every Thursday as well as selected

field trips. MN's are also called upon for selected areas of expertise (Mark Bower, Richard Hermann, Dr. Chris Barnhart, Dr. David Ashley, and others).

### **Education Programming with the Missouri Department of Conservation – Missouri Master Naturalist Junior Leader Program**

The Chapter continued the MDC Junior Leader Program in 2020, undergoing a major teen volunteer recruitment effort with the New Year under a new Chapter Coordinator, with the assistance of the initial Coordinator. Then came the COVID-19 virus and the initiation of virus prevention safety guidelines putting on hold all face-to-face orientations, presentations, and programs for the health safety of everyone. Social media was and continues to be utilized to reach the parents and teenagers interested in the MDC Junior Leader Program. There were numerous educational posts throughout 2020 reaching these interested volunteers, their parents, and by the end of the year, some formal and non-formal educational individuals. The program continues, just under a different format for the current time. Despite the COVID-19 virus, with schools back in session, the MDC Junior Leaders did receive numerous requests for in classroom educational presentations. While these requests were declined for safety reasons; those requesting the presentations were provided alternative resources.

### **Exciting Project Showcases Collaboration with local Municipal Utility – Update**

In 2019, member of our Chapter met with the Vegetation Management Department at City Utilities (CU) of Springfield, to discuss a collaboration to start City Utilities on a path to using CU right-aways to benefit pollinators, and reduce use of herbicides and mowing.

A demonstration plot project was begun at the CU Solar Farm, consisting of native plants that were host or food to native pollinators. This process began by mitigating the fescue grass in the plot area. A herbicide was applied followed by a burn of the area. Then cardboard was placed over the area and mulch on top.

One of our members, Sharon Hughes, designed the plot and joined several other members involved in preparation for the planting that took place in the Spring of 2020. Other Chapter members included Cami Chaddock, Matt Cruise, Sharon Hughes, Jessie Haworth, and Carl Haworth. Also as a part of the project, a rain gutter was installed on the building adjoining the plantings. The rain barrel, which will be decorated by another Chapter member (and talented artist!) Shae Johnson, was installed to water the plants and demonstrate the practicality of using rain barrels for plant maintenance.

City Utilities Solar Farm (originally the largest in the State of Missouri) is also available as an educational resource for school children and adults in the community, showcasing an on-the-ground opportunity to see and learn about the use of solar panels to generate electricity. This already in place educational program provided an excellent opportunity to include a demonstration of the beauty and practicality of pollinator gardens. The surrounding acreage of the Soar Farm is also being converted to native plants.

This use of native plants is being studied by other power generation utility companies throughout the region. For example, Liberty Electric, based in Joplin, is also involved in the use of native plants on right-aways. The Springfield collaborative project evolved as a result of the interaction of Scott

Gunzenhauser, manager of the CU Vegetation Management Department and several of our interested Chapter members. The long-term benefits to pollinators in Southwest Missouri could be significant. This collaboration between large power producers and Master Naturalists offers an opportunity possibly unique in our state, but, hopefully, one that can be utilized in other areas in the future.



### **Lake Springfield Park Boathouse Project -- Update**

This year, the landscaping around the boathouse was maintained by 14 Chapter members at various times, and some worked many hours; others helped for special projects. Together the entire group gave 193 hours of time to the park. Shae Johnson, the boathouse “taskmaster” worked behind the scenes due to a healing broken wrist, keeping records and meeting with Matt Coats and Jenny Perkins, Park Supervisors.

In order to work around the restrictions of the Covid-19, they didn’t have a designated weekly workday. All those involved with maintaining those gardens came when they could, masked and stay their distance from others who may have been working at the same time. A number of new perennials and annuals were added to “dress up” the gardens.

Together Chapter members were able to maintain the native gardens around the Boathouse Center itself and planted over 200 milkweed plants in another park area this fall. Our chapter funded the purchase of 8 native bushes that were planted near the back walkway, and landscape blocks on the right side of the walkway to stave off the erosion that was taking place. The Parks Department then added landscape blocks to the left side and filled the eroded path with stones. I



In order to give the new shrubs a good start, cages were installed around each one of them to keep the deer from eating them bare. A special task group of Chapter members did that work. Then another task group of Chapter members volunteered to water the plantings once per week. The Parks Department is purchasing name labels for all of the shrubs we planted this year.

Next year, with the Springfield-Greene County Parks, our Chapter will possibly be involved in a major redo of the lake side of the building. This will require Parks to bulldoze and remove all that is presently there, relevel, and rebuild the retaining wall. Then Master Naturalists will come be involved with choosing and planting new native plants in that area.





## **North American Mycological Association recognizes Master Naturalist Mark Bower's work**

Our Chapter member, a published and recognized author/photographer, Mark Bower received 9 of the 20 awards given by NAMA (North American Mycological Association) in their photography contest. Those included 1 first place, 1 second place, 1 third place, and 6 honorable mention awards. Seven of the 9 photographs were taken at Bull Creek on property owned by another Chapter Member Dr. Bob Kipfer (husband of 2021 Chapter President Barbara Kipfer) and 2 of the photographs were taken at the Valley Water Mill educational center owned/operated by one of our Chapter Partners, the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks.

Photographer Mark says, "My personal favorite is the *Cordyceps* fungus parasitizing a wasp at the bottom. "Different strokes for different folks."



Open Documentary Honorable Mention, Mark Bower, *Cordyceps bassiana*



## **Missourians for Monarchs**

Our Chapter continues to remain actively involved in activities supporting the creation and preservation of habitat for Monarchs and other pollinators, participating in our own projects and activities as well as supporting and participating in those of our various partners.

**And, we learned new electronic skills and a greater appreciation for the simple act of gathering, visiting and enjoying the fellowship of sharing food and friendship!**

**Springfield Plateau Missouri Master Naturalist Chapter members continued to provide service and educational assistance in 2020 as was allowed and safe and certainly look forward to renewed opportunities in 2021 for service, providing information and demonstrating our passion for the Missouri outdoors.**

## **Springfield Plateau Master Naturalist Mission:**

Our Mission is to engage people in the stewardship of our state's natural resources through science-based education and volunteer community service. [www.springfieldmasternaturalist.com](http://www.springfieldmasternaturalist.com)

## **Program Objectives:**

1. Improve public understanding of natural resources ecology and management by developing a pool of local knowledge about natural resources ecology that can be used to enhance education efforts within local communities.
2. Enhance existing natural resources education and outreach activities by providing natural resources training at the local level, thereby developing a team of dedicated and informed volunteers.
3. Develop a self-sufficient Missouri Master Naturalist volunteer network.

## **Our Sponsors:**

