

# THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY *A Reincarnation*

by Michael R. Jeffords and Susan L. Post

“GLACIALLY SLOW, COMBINES ENGULF THE GOLDEN VEGETATION, leaving nothing behind but dust—21st century loess—a dusty, dirty ballet, choreographed in green and brown, producing rivers of gold. The dust will soon settle, just as it did 10,000 years ago, to create a new beginning of infinite possibilities. Not 30 seconds after the final combines have passed, a mayfly alights on my back, poised and ready for a river of a different kind—the long process has begun. The mayfly flutters away to rest on a windswept bit of grass. What it looked like perched on corn, as it obviously was a few seconds ago . . . I can only speculate.”

*Emiquon Preserve, Fall, 2004*

“Strolling through this woods relieves the tension of a long, stressful month—the rounded, cool smoothness of a tupelo fruit in one hand, nearly ripe, not quite midnight black with spots like stars in a late-night sky, suffused with the warmth of the stirring dawn; the feltlike texture of a pair of aged water hickory nuts in the other. The woods itself is odd—trees buttressed, fluted, or just simply large, with names like water tupelo, overcup oak, pumpkin ash, Drummond’s red maple, water locust, and a host of others. What events happen in this dark, primeval forest on a daily basis?”

*Section 8 Woods, Cache River State Natural Area, Fall, 2005*



It is noteworthy that 200 years ago Illinois served as the start of one of the greatest explorations undertaken on the North American continent—the Lewis and Clark Expedition (nicknamed the Corps of Discovery). This 2-year traverse of the American West generated the most famous nature journals ever compiled. The country was new, the land west of the Mississippi virtually unknown. Thomas Jefferson envisioned woolly mammoths and mastodons still roaming this vast landscape. Strolling through the Illinois landscape of today provides not quite the same experience. Most of Illinois is flat to rolling farmland, punctuated by the occasional town or city. Driving across Illinois has been equated to “zipping through eye-level corduroy.” Over the past few years, however, we have

found that Illinois citizens desire a deeper knowledge, a more thorough understanding of their state. They want to delve deeper into what was once Illinois. Perhaps because the anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition triggered the thought, or perhaps simply because we believed the time to be right, the idea surfaced for the reincarnation of the Corps of Discovery.

The basic idea for a new Corps of Discovery was put forth by Jo Skoglund, formerly of The

Nature Conservancy (TNC) and developed by the authors and Carolyn Nixon, all scientists with the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS). We at INHS had recently created a new course entitled “Communicating Nature.” The impetus for this was that historically, scientists, restoration specialists, and land managers have communicated their research findings through scientific literature, book chapters, textbooks, summary articles, and technical reports. These venues have often been the only outlet for their work, realistically meaning that most science is generally not available to a lay audience. Such venues also fail to engage the community-at-large in the ecology and biology of a landscape. In communicating scientific findings, we have found that journal articles seldom succeed in presenting the total complexity or aesthetic appeal of nature to a wider audience. This aesthetic dimension is left undescribed. Communicating within this arena requires a different skill set than those typically taught to scientists. These skills are more closely associated with the artistic realm than with the scientific. Today’s higher education system seldom places value on these skills that are invaluable for education and outreach, and thus graduates are not prepared when opportunities and necessities arise for them to present their work outside the scientific world.

### Emiquon Opportunity

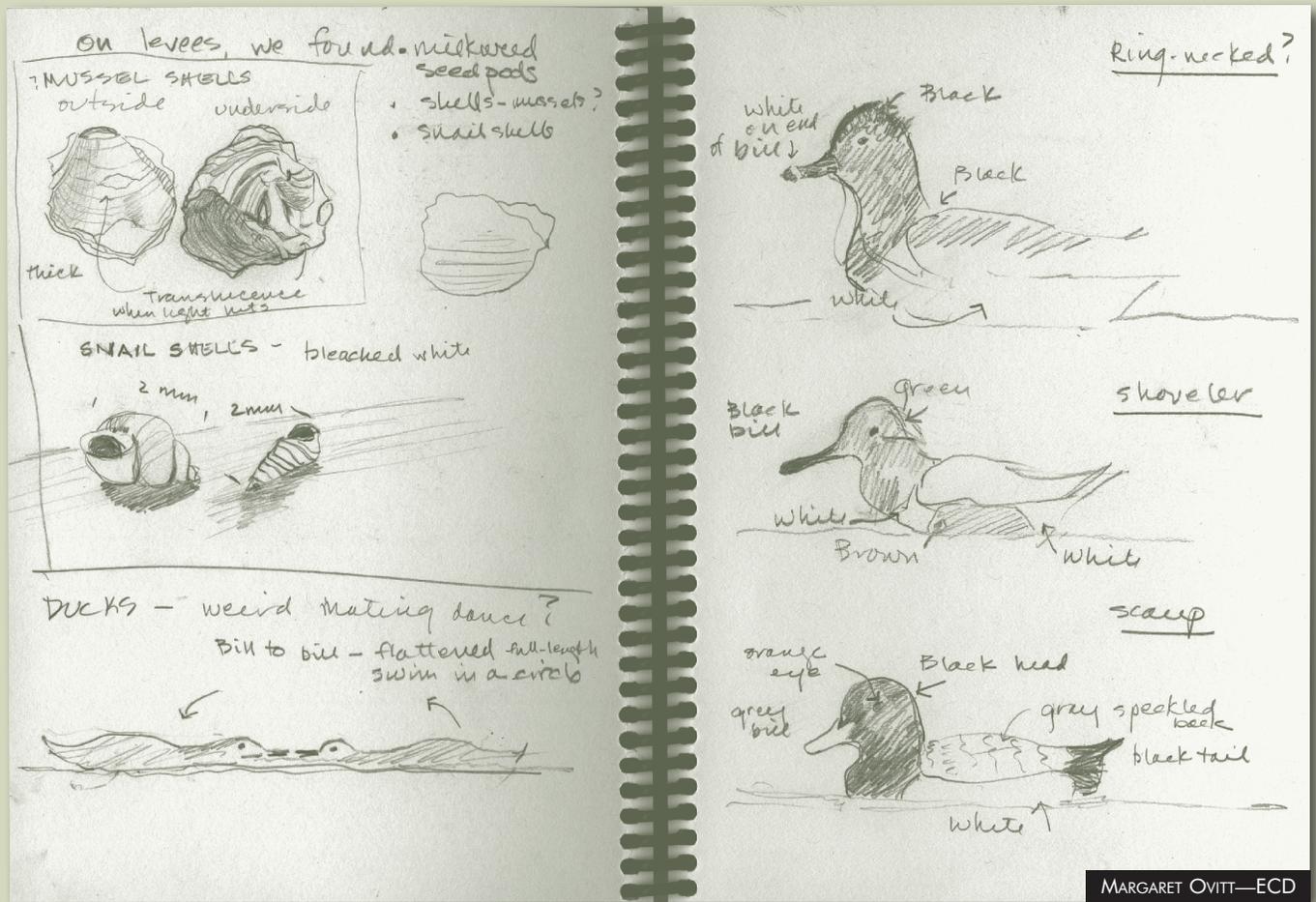
The restoration of TNC’s Emiquon Preserve over the next decade provides a unique opportunity for dedicated citizens to participate in the documentation of the dramatic changes that are likely to occur. The Emiquon Preserve, once a spectacular lake-wetland complex (consisting largely of the former bed of Thompson Lake), was levied and drained in the early part of the 20th century and has been farmed ever since. The nearly 8,000 acres, purchased by TNC in 2000, are now in the early stages of restoration. While the demise of these historic wetlands was documented by INHS scientists, and its restoration will also be closely monitored

### SOUTHERN ILLINOIS DUCK MIGRATION

PINTAIL	L 25"	WS 34"
MALLARD	L 23"	WS 35"
WIGEON	L 20"	WS 32"
BLUE-WINGED TEAL	L 15.5"	WS 23"



GENE BELL—CCD



by scientists, we felt Emiquon needed an additional perspective. To document the evolution of Emiquon over the next decade, we developed an “Emiquon Corps of Discovery” (ECD), consisting of individuals trained in the skills of photography, descriptive writing, sketching, and drawing who will create a total aesthetic picture of Emiquon. The 2005 ECD differs from the Lewis and Clark Expedition in a fundamental way. That Corps of Discovery traveled thousands of miles to record the landscape and its organisms. At Emiquon, it is the landscape that will evolve and change and the individuals who will stay put and observe it.

This project developed as a unique partnership between INHS, TNC, and the Dickson Mounds Museum near Lewistown. Members of the ECD were trained in a series of workshops at the museum, beginning in January, 2005. The 45 students, citizens with a diversity of skills and experiences, attended four all-day Saturday workshops in late winter and early spring. Course instructors were Michael R. Jeffords (INHS Senior Scientist), photography; Susan L. Post (INHS Technical Scientist), descriptive writing; and Carolyn P. Nixon (INHS Technical Scientist), sketching and drawing.

The ECD did not ignore science, however, merely for the sake of aesthetics. To provide a systematic approach to the Emiquon documentation, a series of Aesthetic Points and

Pathways (APPs), analogous to scientific sampling points and transects, were developed for the ECD. Thus, over time, corps members will be able to show systematic change at Emiquon, filtered through their own creativity. There are no rules governing the APPs, except that the time, date, and direction of the observations be noted. The ECD is a long-term project with additional opportunities for members to experience further creative growth following the completion of formal training in the form of advanced classes in the various disciplines. To showcase the changes that occur, the ECD, in conjunction with the instructors and museum staff, will have a yearly exhibit of their works on display at the Dickson Mounds Museum.

### Cache Documentation

Due to the success of the ECD, and because we believe that the Corps of Discovery concept provides powerful motivational activities that not only promote an understanding of the basic science involved in major restoration, but also creates an environment where issues such as biodiversity, conservation, and environmental ethics can flourish, in winter, 2006, we developed a Cache Corps of Discovery (CCD) for this unique wetland complex in far southern Illinois. The Cache wetlands are of international importance and are the

## CACHE RIVER BASIN

- C CIRCUITOUS CACHE RIVER MEANDERING
- A AWE-INSPIRING ANCIENT LAND ASSETS
- C COASTAL PLAIN, CANEBREAKS, CYPRESS TREES
- H HABITAT FOR HERONS, HIKING, HUNTING
- E ENVIRONMENTALISTS EMBRACING ECOSYSTEMS
  
- R RHAPSODY OF RIOTOUS RADIANT WILDFLOWERS
- I INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT WETLANDS
- V VENOMOUS SNAKES, VIGOROUS VARMENTS
- E ENDANGERED SPECIES, EROSION CONTROL
- R REJUVENATING MARSH RESTORATION
  
- B BIOLOGICAL MIDPOINT OF NORTH AMERICA
- A AGRICULTURAL ABANDONMENT, AMALGAM OF AMPHIBIANS
- S SHAWNEE HILLS, SPRINGS, STREAMS, SLOUGHS
- I INNUMERABLE ILLINOIS WATERFOWL AND INSECTS
- N NOURISHING FLORA, NESTING BIRDS, NATURE TRAILS

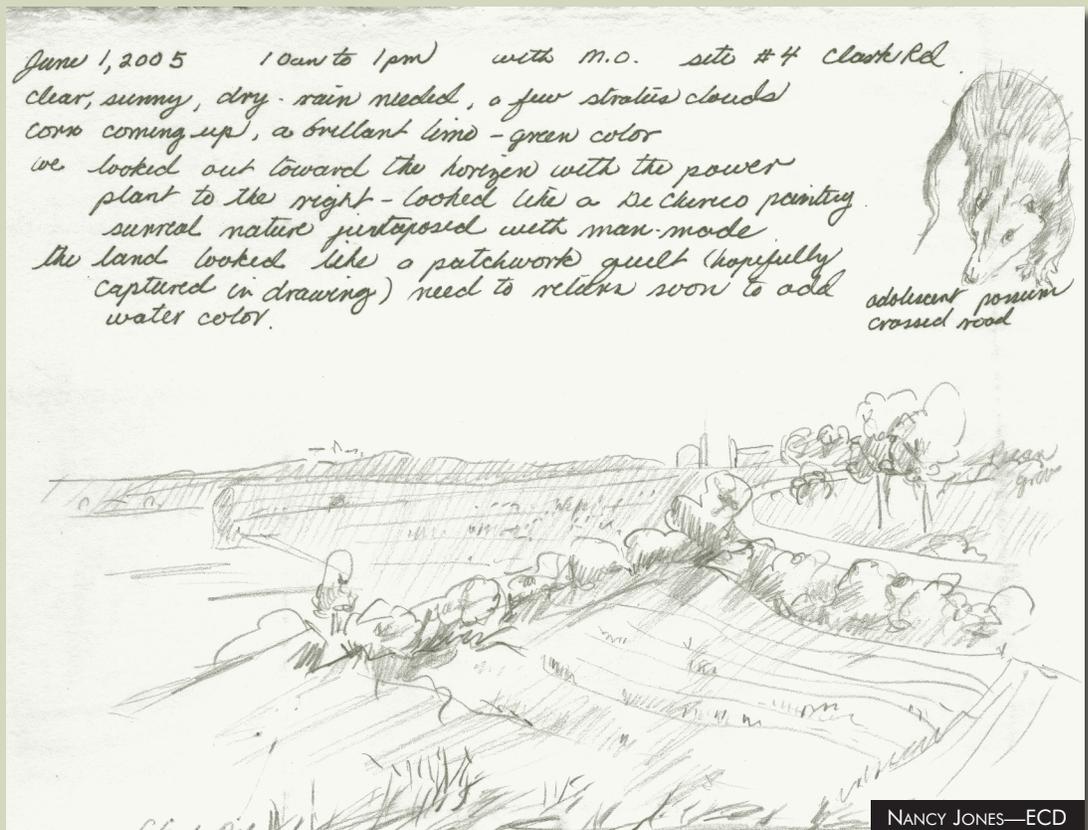


HERON POND  
3-16-06  
CACHE RIVER FLOODED  
GRT. BLUE HERON FLEW  
UPSTREAM FROM TRAIL BRIDGE  
(MAJESTIC, SILENT FLIGHT, AMONG  
OVERHANGING TREES)  
G. BELL

GENE BELL—CCD

focus of major restoration and preservation efforts associated with the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Cache River State Natural Area, TNC, Ducks Unlimited, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The CCD process was nearly identical to the ECD with a group of 29 citizens who came together to develop their skills at aesthetic landscape documentation. While the main focus of the ECD will be change over time as the land is converted from croplands to wetlands, the main focus of the CCD is the documentation of the extraordinary biological diversity present here. Our goal for these, and perhaps future Corps of Discovery teams is simple. We aim to engage citizens who will add a creative, aesthetic dimension to their local lands and who will contribute to the total picture of the evolving, diverse landscape that is Illinois.

*Michael R. Jeffords is the education and public relations liaison for the Illinois Natural History Survey in Champaign. Susan L. Post is a staff writer for The Illinois Steward.*

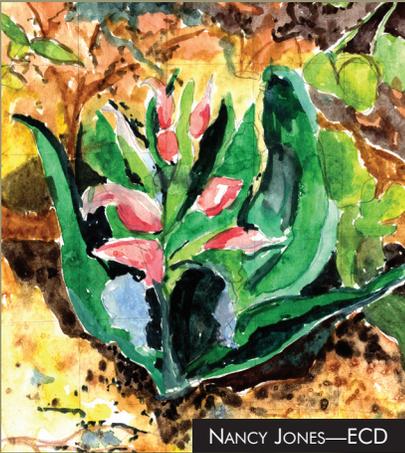


June 1, 2005 10am to 1pm with M.O. site #4 Clark Rd.  
clear, sunny, dry - rain needed, a few stratus clouds  
come coming up, a brilliant lime-green color  
we looked out toward the horizon with the power  
plant to the right - looked like a De Chirico painting  
surreal nature juxtaposed with man-made  
the land looked like a patchwork quilt (hopefully  
captured in drawing) need to return soon to add  
water color.

adulterant poison  
crossed road

NANCY JONES—ECD

# Student Work from



NANCY JONES—ECD



JAY ZIMMERMAN—CCD



It was around 6:00 p.m., April 21, 2006, shortly after a brief spring thundershower that was followed by a spectacular double rainbow. I was searching for a puttyroot orchid along an old rotted log when I spotted what I thought was a patch of dappled late-afternoon sunlight on the trail higher up the hill. I walked up toward the bright spots, began to run, and then danced to discover a patch of more than 10 yellow lady slipper orchids. I have enjoyed frequent walks in southern Illinois woods all of my life, and I have never seen this wild-flower species before. It was thrilling; I was so excited that I had to return the next day to get better pictures because, initially, my hands were shaking. I felt that I had truly found the gold at the end of the rainbow on a Union County wooded hillside.

*Jean Snell*



SALLY MURPHY—CCD



LIZANNE GRAY—ECD

The skies are gray, the colors in the sky washed out, as if rinsed from a paintbrush. It's brisk, windy, above freezing, but not far above. It's quiet on this mid-winter day, and I walk near the bluffs not far from the TNC office, alternately hearing the cardinals in the trees and the trucks on Highway 97.

The grass is hard to walk through, ankle high and soggy due to the light snow earlier in the week that now has melted. To the east, fields that have seen their last corn crop for . . . ever? Some of the fields, south and a little east of the office are flooded, incubators of life come the springtime.

*Peter Cole, Emiquon,  
Saturday, February 12,  
2005, 2:45 p.m.*



KELVIN SAMPSON—ECD



KELVIN SAMPSON—ECD



RUSS CLENDENON—CCD



JAN SUNDBERG—CCD

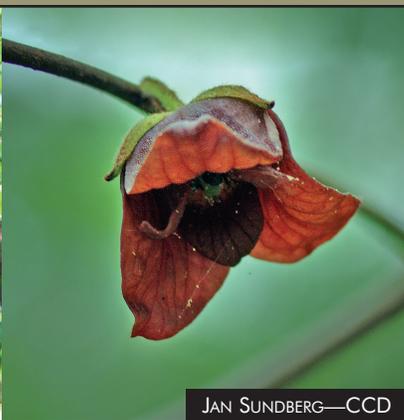


SALLY MURPHY—CCD

# the Corps of Discovery



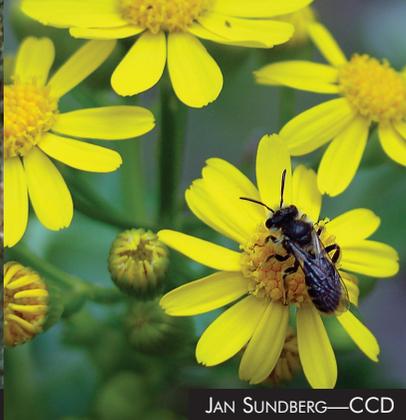
JEAN SNELL—CCD



JAN SUNDBERG—CCD



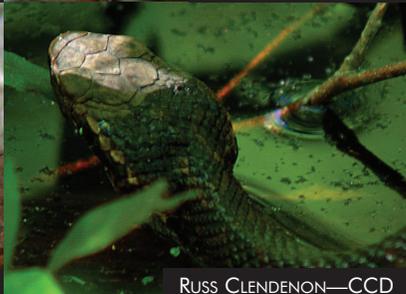
JAN SUNDBERG—CCD



JAN SUNDBERG—CCD



RUSS CLENDENON—CCD



RUSS CLENDENON—CCD



RUSS CLENDENON—CCD



KELVIN SAMPSON—ECD



BOB MARTIN—ECD

## Calico Crayfish

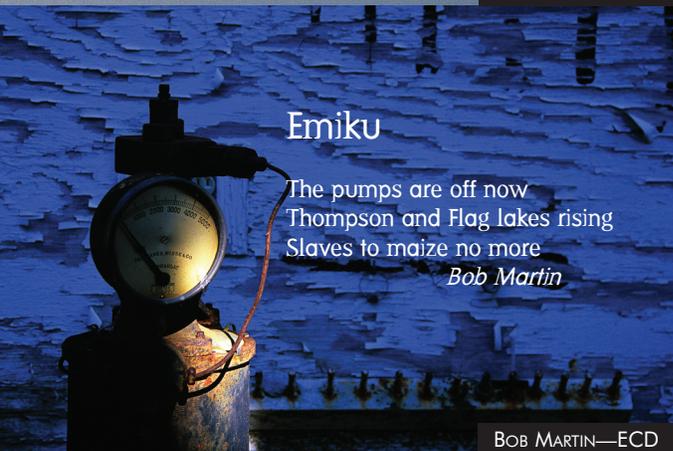
Crayfish creeps  
 Along the streambed, where  
 Limpid water flows  
 In narrow  
 Channels  
 Over  
 Colored  
 Rock.  
 And  
 Yes,  
 For an  
 Instant I  
 See  
 Him before he darts away.

*Jay Zimmerman*

RUSS CLENDENON—CCD



NANCY JONES—ECD



## Emiku

The pumps are off now  
 Thompson and Flag lakes rising  
 Slaves to maize no more  
*Bob Martin*

BOB MARTIN—ECD



EXHIBIT AND OPENING—ECD