



Friends of Steele Creek Nature Center and Park

Knobs and Knolls

In This Issue

July 2018

[Meet Our Naturalists: Lance Jessee](#)

[51 Historic Acres Gifted to Steele Creek Park](#)

[Thanks to our 2017-2018 Members and Donors](#)

[Upcoming Nature Center Events](#)

[Wildlife Weekend 2018: October 12 & 13](#)

[Wildlife Weekend 2018 Photography Contest](#)

**Meet Our Naturalists, Part 3:
Lance Jessee**

Steele Creek Nature Center Part-time Naturalist

By Michele Sparks

(This is the last of three articles featuring the Naturalists that work at The Nature Center.)

MS: When did you actually start working at the Nature Center?

LJ: In May of 2015 during my senior year at ETSU, I started out here at Steele Creek as a seasonal worker. It wasn't until Larry McDaniel retired in 2016 that I became a permanent part-timer.

MS: And your major at ETSU?

LJ: I earned a Bachelor of Science in Geology with a Minor both in Geographic Systems and the other in General Business. Since my Dad was a Finance Major, he liked that I would have a back-up plan with General Business if I would ever need it.

MS: So when was the earliest indication that you wanted to become a naturalist?

LJ: As a kid, I was into nature shows, or anything that had to do with wildlife and the outdoors. In elementary school, I practically grew-up with Jeff Corwin. I just watched anything on Animal Planet. I couldn't get enough of The Crocodile Hunter with the late Steve Irwin and/or any episode that had to do with reptiles, especially snakes. I presently have three snakes in my apartment that I fully enjoy taking care of: a Corn Snake, Gray Rat Snake, and a Rough Green Snake. And of course I have a dog, a Lab. I'll always have to have a dog.

MS: Did your family take "Nature" vacations?

LJ: No, not really. They always supported my interests in nature, though. I went fishing with my Dad and Grandpa and always loved the outdoors with them. But I guess you might say that my early influences were mostly through reading books, especially narrative books about the author's true-life experiences in the wild.

Lance Jessee (Cont.)

MS: Which books in particular?

LJ: I read all the "Hatchet" series by Gary Paulson and then in high school I read, "Into the Wild" by Jon Krakauer which probably changed my life. Krakauer's personal account of the 1966 Mt. Everest Disaster, "Into Thin Air" really made an impression on me, too.

MS: Do you have any special mentors who helped you along with your current interests?

LJ: My three biggest mentors to date have been Jeremy Stout, Larry McDaniel, and Don Holt. I've learned so much just from them alone. I can easily say they are by far the three best mentors and biggest influences anyone could want. I can't begin to tell you just how much I've learned from them. When I started my career here at Steele Creek Nature Center I only really knew some about Geology and reptiles. Then, Larry got me started with insects and moths. Don got me going with butterflies and dragonflies. I tend to focus now on insects. I'm studying as much as I can about beetles on my own right now and just recently did a public talk on beetles here at the Nature Center. I would really like to do that talk again.

There are nearly 400,000 beetle species described, with many more beetle species yet to be discovered. That's about 22% of described species or basically $\frac{1}{4}$ of all living things. There's a lot to learn and it's mind-boggling how little we really know about beetles.

Other major influences for me have been my former and present professors such as Dr. Jim Mead, (an internationally recognized authority on the study of dung who was the previous Department Chair of Geosciences at ETSU and studied the fossils found in Persistence Cave in the Black Hills of South Dakota). He focused on reptiles which is what I was most interested in at the time. He's a real down-to-earth cool guy and very easy to talk to. Then, there's my current advisor, Dr. Blaine Shubert, (executive director of the ETSU Center for Excellence in Paleontology). I also had an internship two summers ago with Dr. Shubert at the Gray Fossil Site and really enjoyed that. He's presently helping me along with my thesis.

MS: Where on this earth would you like to spend more time to broaden your interests? And what are those interests?

LJ: I'd spend time in the Southwest region like Arizona or even go to Mexico where the amount of snakes and insects are so abundant. I have a particular interest in the Tarantula Hawk Wasp. Its sting causes a fiercely electric pain that could only be described as totally unacceptable according to the Schmidt Sting Pain Index. Justin Schmidt, an entomologist (at the Carl Hayden Bee Research Center in Arizona), allowed himself to be stung by various wasps, bees, and ants and then rated the pain on a scale of 0-4.

Zero was for stings that are completely ineffective against humans. A four was reserved as the most painful, "just lie down and scream" kind of pain. Tarantula Hawks, along with two others species (the Bullet Ant and the Warrior Wasp) were the only ones to attain the ranking of a four according to his scale. The Tarantula Hawk is a large solitary wasp that preys on tarantulas. Once injected, its venom renders a tarantula helpless. The tarantula is then taken back to the nest for the larvae to eat. It's still alive as it's being eaten by the larvae. I read his book, "The Sting of the Wild" if you're interested. Sometimes he was stung by accident and other times on purpose by using himself as the test case. So, the Southwest region would definitely be an adventure for me with the many species of insects to study.

I may have the opportunity this fall to attend the SVP (Society of Vertebrate Paleontology) Conference in Albuquerque. ETSU goes every year, so I plan to go with them this time. Then, hopefully, I'll be presenting part of my thesis project at the 2019 SVP Annual Conference which will be held in Australia.

Lance Jessee (Cont.)

MS: And your thesis?

LJ: *I'm planning on studying the Vertebrate Paleontology of a local cave here in Sullivan County. I met with Dr. Shubert about it just yesterday. In a cave site, you don't have to specialize on just one species. With cave sites, you can pretty much focus on all the vertebrates that were once present, the time period that they were present, in addition to the geology of the cave and why it looks like it does today.*

MS: What specific duties do you have here at the Nature Center when you're not presenting or working the summer camps?

LJ: *Mainly, I care for the terrestrial critters like the snakes, lizards, and frogs. When there is time, though, I work with the Osteology Collections. I really enjoy that, too. I can be pretty OCD about the Osteology Collection which involves a great deal of labeling and cataloging. I like working on the Zoology collection here at the Nature Center for scientific study and modern comparison studies. I recently completed the Red Fox skeleton that is now on display in the viewing drawer under the Woodland Animal Exhibit. It's cool to have an extensive collection so that if a researcher has a special species that is needed for a specific study, we may actually have that specimen for them to use for comparison studies. Also, recently, I helped Jeremy write the text on some of the reader rails and Water Fowl Exhibit. So really, I do just about anything that needs to get done.*

MS: What would you like to see more of in the park by way of educational programming?

LJ: *I'd like to see more research done at the park and not just university students but high schoolers and citizen science projects like BioBlitz surveying. It would be great to attempt to record all the living species here at the Park with as many naturalists and volunteers as we can get. I would like to head up a project like that. That way, we would really get more public participation and get the public super interested in the enormous biodiversity of the Park.*

MS: Do you have any hobbies aside from caring for snakes and collecting bones?

LJ: *Two things. My girlfriend got me into roller-skating and now I really enjoying doing that and then there's cooking. We like to cook together. I don't like to cook alone or just for myself because there's too much to have to clean-up. My favorite recipe so far is my grandmother's Parmesan Chicken Recipe which always turns out really good. I also cook a lot of salmon. There are a lot of new recipes I want to try out. My grandmother passed on to me her Pumpkin Cookie Recipe that I'm going to try out for Thanksgiving this year. She had some really good recipes.*

Of note: Lance also compiles the information and photos for our Recent Sightings blog! We look forward to hearing more about Lance Jesse's thesis and future travel adventures. Let's hope his first encounter with the Tarantula Hawk Wasp is strictly for photo ops and not a certain lasting memory on Schmidt's Sting Pain Index.



Lance plays a critical role in the Summer Nature Camps and other Nature Center programming

51 Acres with Historic Cabin Added to Steele Creek Park Lovett Gift to the City

In early May, James D. Lovett, Jr. donated approximately 51 acres of land to the City of Bristol Tennessee, with the provision that it would be protected and never developed for any purpose other than recreation. Although the parcel is adjacent to the north side of the Park, near the golf course, it is not currently accessible by any public roads or existing trails.



According to Mr. Lovett and local historians, the property has been owned continuously by the Steele family (early settlers and developers of the area between Bristol and Blountville) since they arrived in the late 1700's. Of particular interest is the fact that the property has a log cabin that dates back to at least pre-Civil War days, possibly as early as the late 1700's. Despite obvious deterioration of parts of the structure and some structural modifications that have been made over the years, it appears to be in generally good condition overall.

Because of the significance of the Steele family in Sullivan County history, and the relatively good condition of the log cabin, we feel that preservation of the structure with appropriate renovation would be highly desirable. Our ultimate goal is to restore and relocate the cabin in a manner that will make it available to the public as an interpretive center, with relevant educational exhibits and programming. *Friends*, in conjunction with the City and with the support of the Bristol Historical Association and the regional Heritage Alliance, has been granted a partnership with the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation. Starting this fall, MTSU faculty and students will begin a project to better document the history of the property and, in particular, the cabin. Once this is done, we hope to restore the cabin to be used as an educational resource with accompanying displays and interpretive programming.



The addition is exciting for more than just historical reasons; it also adds features that enhance the value of the Park from a natural history perspective. According to Jeremy Stout "the Lovett property contains all three geologic bedrock units of SCP which means that it offers the complete diversity of terrain, and therefore habitats, found in the park! Gentle slopes quickly give rise to a complete knob and a half of steep-sided forest across the 57 acre expanse. Also, the property was actively farmed at some point and, as a result, much of the western portion of the land is undergoing primary succession (the process by which forest reclaims land previously disturbed). Because of this, rare habitat is created in the form of shrubby, brushy, and grassy areas that are replaced by forest elsewhere in the park. Finally, the property has a pond that is incredible! It's approximately 100 feet in diameter and contains a tremendous array of biodiversity, including frogs, fish, dragonflies, wetland plants, and much more! It also appears to be a central water source for many woodland species, as tracks of deer and raccoons abound."



Terry Napier and Jeremy Stout discuss the historical aspects of the Lovett property with Michele Sparks and Heritage Alliance Director Deborah Montanti

Thanks to Our 2017-18 Members and Donors

Many thanks to all those who contributed to *Friends* this past year, through memberships, direct donations, or contributions to the Blue Stocking Fundraiser. We couldn't have continued our important work in support of the Nature Center and Steele Creek Park without your support!

Oak (Champion) \$25,000+

Blue Stocking Club

Chestnut (Sponsor) \$5,000 - \$9,999

Myers and Jan Massengill

Rush and Lea Powers

Ben and Anne Cowan (Multi-year: \$5,000/year for 3 years)

Friendship Enterprises (Multi-year: \$5,000/year for 3 years)

Strongwell Corporation (Multi-year: \$5,000/year for 5 years)

Hemlock (Patron) \$2,500 - \$4,999

Poplar (Partner) \$1,000 - \$2,499

Rose Marie and Bill Burriss

John and Peggy Cowan

Terry Forrest

Sharon and Powell Foster

Janice and T.C. Greene

Nelson and Deborah Gwaltney

Don and Ginia Shawl

Speedway Children's Charities

Pine (Supporter) \$500 - \$999

Betty and Gary Bailey

Brenda and John Fincher

Lucyann Jewell

Jennifer and Chris Kennedy

Jim and Susan Lapis

Kim and Russell Leonard

Amy and Matt Luff

William Rogers McCall

Earl Neikirk

The Robinette Company

Dr. Michael Rowell

Mary Lynn and H.D. Satterwhite

Becky and Bill Smith

Fay and Nick Street

Patt Phipps, Debi Grayson, and Beth Taylor

John and Ann Tickle

John and Karen Vann

Douglas and Laraine Williams

Nancy and Matt Wood

Continued on Next Page

Thanks to Our 2017-18 Members and Donors (Cont.)

Magnolia (Contributor) \$100 - \$499

Lark Adams	Dewey Fuller	Carl and Elliot Moore
Joe and Sandy Armstrong	Rick and Diane Gentry	Bob and Ellen Mueller
Nancy Arnold	Frank Goodpasture, III	Barbara and Harry Oakley
Carol Bannish	Susie Gordon	Joyce and Sid Oakley
John and Linda Barker	Dr. and Mrs. Fred Greear, Jr.	Han and Laura Ong
Brad and Debbie Beeson	Joan and Ron Guest	Jan Rainero
Nell Bieger	Ed and Linda Hagaman	Linda and Jim Rainero
Thelma Blair	Ellen Haring	Mr. and Mrs. Charles Rainero
Alice and Rob Blanton	Eddie Harkleroad	Butch and Stevan Rainero
Joday and Bob Blevins	Harriett and John Harty	Sara and Fritz Reuning
Tracie and Bobby Blevins	Tina and Ed Hitt	Linda and Mike Riley
Stephanie Blevins	Peggy Horner	Linda B. Roberts
Louise Bowdoin	Ashlee Humphreys	Brennan and Craig Rockett
Jamey and Gretchen Bowling	Molly and Dale Keller	Nora Rockett
Penny and Bob Bruce	Peggy King	Frances Rowell
Connie and Scott Bullock	Ronan King	Joneen and Dale Sargent
Kay and Jim Bunn	Ruth King	Bill and Sonie Schermer
Elizabeth and William Burriss	Joyce and Ken Kistner	David and Anne Shumaker
Susan Caldwell	Barbara Sue and Joe Kurre	Thais Sikora
Eddythe and Austin Carr	Lisa and Rick Ladd	Jean Slack
Lois and Larry Clarke	Richard and Isabelle Ladd	Barbara and Tom Smith
Greg and Annette Cochran	Ann and Tim Landis	Michele Sparks
Jane and Nat Copenhaver	Sara and Klyne Lauderback	Anne Steele
Joan Z. Crockett	Pat and Joe Lawson	Linda Stuart
Ron and Lois Crockett	Jackie Leonard	Paul and Michele Tarricone
Rebecca and Tom Davenport	Gary and Tracy Lilly	Rodney Taylor
Jennifer and Preston Deal	Bonnie and Gary Liskey	Robin and Jeff Tickle
Carol and Steve Everhart	Ann McAllister	Maureen and Jim Tilley, III
Patty and David Faulkner	Bev and Dick McCallum	Barbara and Challen Walling
Donna and Tom Felty	George and Junella McClellan	Vicki Ward
Carolyn Ferrell	Dian McIlwain	Wendy Weidner
Donna V. Fleenor	Karen and Roger McSharry	Billie and Bill Whisnant
W. David Fletcher	Mary Molteni	Becky and Clarence Wilkerson
Andrea and Bill Ford	Charles F. Moore	

Continued on Next Page

Thanks to Our 2017-18 Members and Donors (Cont.)

Holly (Friend) and Others \$1 - \$99

Joan and Bucky Boone	Andrew Major Hanson	Amber and Carter Massengill
Brenda Bowman	Glen Harlow	Jennifer and Jeffrey McQueary
Charlotte and Curtis Burnette	Ron and Joan Harrington	Anna Morgan
Theresa Burriss	Anne Haynes	Alice Morgan
Susan Cadwallader	Adrienne and Maggie Hess	Tracy and Bill Pierce
Vivian Calcote	Hill & Dale Garden Club	Lila Ray
Chris and Tracy Campbell	Gay Hillman	Josh Rudd
Delores Champagne	Tony and Beth Hobbs	Ken Hendrix and Helen Sirett
Mary and Ruth Clark	Amelia Jarrard	Janet Smith
Greg and Steph Cousins	Wendy Johnson	Susan Solomon
Sylvia Crum	Ambrea Johnson	Susan Tanner
Amanda Deere	Bill and Brenda Johnstone	Terri Thomas
Charlotte Duncan	Michelle Leighty and Andy Jones	Linda Waldron
Tracy Griffith	David and Becky Luther	Steve and Sherry Willinger
Linda Gronski	Dale Marion	Gary and Jill Wishart
	Allan Marshall	

We're Looking for a Few Great Partners!

To help us continue the important work that we do, and to raise additional funds for new exhibits and educational resources at the Nature Center, we have begun a campaign to partner with local and regional businesses, organizations, and individuals. The purpose of this campaign is to assure an ongoing funding stream for our organization. We hope that you might be interested in becoming a Friend of the Park Partner by making a multi-year commitment of support.

The only requirements for becoming a Partner are 1) a signed agreement pledging to contribute a minimum of \$500 per year for at least two years, and 2) timely payment of pledged amounts according to the agreement. Total contribution amounts for the five partnership levels are: Oak - \$20,000 or more; Maple - \$10,000 to \$19,999; Chestnut - \$5,000 to \$9,999; Hemlock - \$2,500 to \$4,999; and Poplar - \$1,000 to \$2,499.

Sponsoring Partner's name(s) (with the designated level) will be prominently displayed in and around the Nature Center and in *Friends* advertising and promotional materials. Sponsoring Partners and their guests will be invited to attend all after-hours donor programs. For Chestnut level (\$5,000 total) and above, Sponsoring Partners will have the opportunity to be recognized as an exhibit sponsor with a stylized plaque placed on an exhibit of the donor's choosing (limited to those exhibits not already sponsored).

If you think you or your organization might want to become a Friend of the Park Partner, contact us at mail@friendsofstelecreek.org or by calling (423) 764-8828.

Upcoming Nature Center and Park Events

Friday, July 27th, 8:30 pm. National Moth Week Moth Night. Become a citizen scientist for a day and help record species for National Moth Week! Meet Lance at the Nature Center for a talk on our local moths. Then, go out to the light trap and see what we've attracted!

Friday, August 10th, 4:00 pm. Rooster Front Dragonfly Walk. Meet Don at Rooster Front Park (just off Vance Drive) for an easy hike looking for these warm-weather gems of the skies. Bring binoculars and a camera if you have them!

Friday, August 24th, 4:00 pm. Edible and Medicinal Plants Walk. Meet Jeremy at the Nature Center for a mild walk into the woods to learn about some common but beneficial plants of the region.

Wildlife Weekend 2018 Save the Dates: October 12 & 13

Friday, October 12th starts Wildlife Weekend!!! Besides our Photography Contest Winner Presentations (7:00 PM), Dr. Andy Jones will be the keynote speaker Friday night, at 7:30 PM, to help us kick-off the 21st Annual Wildlife Weekend at the Nature Center. *Friends*, the City of Bristol TN, and the Bristol Bird Club (the J. Wallace Coffey Chapter of TOS) are partnering together to make this year's Wildlife Weekend extra special.

A native of Kingsport TN, Andy presently serves as Director of Science and Curator and Head of Ornithology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. He is quite familiar with Steele Creek Park since his very first job was right there at the Nature Center under the guidance of his mentor, J. Wallace Coffey. Andy went on to become an expert on birds and their evolutionary history.

Saturday, October 13 will feature bird banding, bird walks, kids' bird crafts, and a variety of nature hikes. Special exhibits and additional activities will all be happening at your very own Nature Center and Park.

2018 Wildlife Weekend Amateur Photography Contest and Show

It's time to start getting your favorite Steele Creek Park Photos ready to submit to our 2018 Wildlife Weekend Photography Contest and Show. Amateur photographers of all ages, including children and teens are encouraged to participate. Eligible photographs must be taken at Steele Creek Park and should focus on the natural aspects of the Park. Deadline for submitting photos is 4:00 pm, Friday, September 28th. Details and entry applications will be available online and at the Nature Center and Slater Center beginning Wednesday, August 1st.

You can keep up with what's going on at the Park and with *Friends* by liking us on Facebook (Friends of Steele Creek Nature Center and Park) or by following our webpage at <https://www.friendsofstelecreek.org>.

We appreciate feedback about our communication. Let us know if you find these newsletters interesting and/or useful. If you have suggestions for topics to be covered, or other formats that we could use, let us know by e-mail at mail@friendsofstelecreek.org.

If you prefer to not receive these newsletters, simply let us know at mail@friendsofstelecreek.org.