
11th Annual Cherokee Heritage & Sandhill Crane Viewing Days

What's so special about the Hiwassee Refuge?

The Hiwassee Refuge hosts one of the largest congregations of cranes on Earth. The Refuge is the second most important stopover site for greater sandhill cranes nesting in the Great Lakes Region of the United States and Canada. Each fall over 50,000 greater sandhill cranes migrate from their northern nesting grounds to wintering grounds in Florida and Georgia, following a route that takes them directly over East Tennessee. The majority of the sandhills stop at Hiwassee Refuge, where they rest and refuel before continuing southward. This journey is repeated in late winter, when they begin their return journey north.

Are whooping cranes at Hiwassee too? The Hiwassee Refuge is a key site for the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership. In an attempt to restore the world's most endangered crane to the eastern United States, the Partnership is teaching whooping cranes a migratory path from Wisconsin to Florida by training young birds to follow ultralight aircraft. Hiwassee Refuge is quickly becoming an important stopover site for eastern whooping cranes, as at least four out of five whooping cranes migrating unassisted in Fall 2002 stopped at Hiwassee Refuge. Additionally, one of the four has decided to stop at Hiwassee and make East Tennessee its winter home.

What's so special about cranes? Fossil evidence of sandhill cranes dates back 14 million years – making them the oldest living feathered relatives of dinosaurs. Cranes evoke strong emotional responses in people. They are a social animal, much admired and respected by peoples around the world for their stately appearance, graceful movements, beauty in flight, and their formation of strong pair bonds. In cultural and religious traditions around the world, they symbolize happiness, longevity, patience, and wisdom.

The Cherokee and the Hiwassee Refuge. The land encircling the confluence of the Hiwassee and Tennessee Rivers is steeped in Cherokee history. This land lies near the center of the ancestral land of the Cherokee Nation that once encompassed portions of Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

John Jolly, a wealthy merchant and planter who lived on Hiwassee Island, was one of the area's famous Cherokee residents. Although of both Cherokee and European descent, Jolly spoke no English and dressed in traditional buckskin clothing, leggings, moccasins, and turban. Jolly left Hiwassee Island in 1818 for Oklahoma where he served as Principal Chief of the Cherokee "Old Settlers" for 20 years.

William Blythe and his Cherokee wife, Nannie Fields, established one of the first permanent ferries on the eastern Tennessee River around 1809. By the early 1800s, Blythe's Ferry marked the northwestern boundary of Cherokee lands. During the forced removal of the Cherokee in 1838, Blythe Ferry took on an added significance. For nine of the 17 Cherokee detachments, an estimated 9000-10,000 people, Blythe Ferry was the final point of departure from their ancestral lands. The river crossing was slow, and Cherokee encampments along the river grew, as some groups waited up to two months for their turn to cross the river. In 1998 Joe Byrd, then Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, visited Hiwassee Refuge marking the initial dedication of the Cherokee Removal Memorial Park. Scanning the horizon along the Tennessee River, Chief Byrd noted the significance of the area to the Cherokee, "It's very touching and emotional to feel what our ancestors endured."

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Meigs County Tourism
PO Box 611
Decatur, TN 37322
Phone: (423) 334-5850

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Birchwood and Chattanooga, Tennessee



Chief John Jolly watches a whooping crane fly over Hiwassee Island.

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Birchwood and Chattanooga, Tennessee

Centered in the community of Birchwood, Tennessee, the 11th Annual Cherokee Heritage & Sandhill Crane Viewing Days offer an unparalleled opportunity to experience the unique wildlife and cultural history of southeastern Tennessee. More opportunities will be available this year than ever before, as we welcome presenters from around the country to celebrate this annual event. Please join us for three days of fun activities, including our first-ever special children's program on Saturday!

FESTIVAL KICK-OFF FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2003

7:00 p.m. – “An Evening for the Birds” Location: Chattanooga Choo-Choo – Join the Chattanooga Chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency for a benefit featuring Kenn Kaufman, one of the world's preeminent bird experts, authors, and illustrators and renowned Cherokee storyteller Choogie Kingfisher. The benefit will help raise money for the Cherokee Removal Memorial to be built on the Hiwassee Refuge in Meigs County and for conservation projects protecting sandhill cranes, whooping cranes and other migratory birds in Hamilton, Meigs, and Rhea Counties. For a donation of \$15.00, hear both speakers and sample desserts donated by restaurants throughout the Chattanooga area for the event. For information, or to purchase a ticket, go to www.tnbirds.org, www.chattanooga.org or www.tnwildlife.org.



Kenn Kaufman



Choogie Kingfisher

ACTIVITIES AT BIRCHWOOD SCHOOL SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2003 - FREE ADMISSION -

8:00 AM – Learn Backyard Birds – Warm yourself with free coffee and good cheer provided by the Chattanooga chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society. Join Kevin Calhoun, Senior Aviculturist with the Tennessee Aquarium, as he leads a perfect bird walk for beginners, focusing on common winter birds of East Tennessee. One free membership to the Tennessee Ornithological Society will be awarded to a lucky participant.

9:00 AM – Hot breakfast is served! – Visit the Birchwood School Cafeteria. Lunch will also be served during the noon hour. All proceeds go to the Birchwood School.

ALL DAY – Displays, arts, and crafts – Visit displays at the Birchwood School featuring traditional arts and crafts of the Cherokee Indians, the rich wildlife heritage of East Tennessee, and nature-related organizations.

Programs in School Gymnasium

9:30 AM – Silent Hunters from the Sky – Don't miss this opportunity to see the sacred bird of the Cherokee, the Golden Eagle, Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, and others flying over your head at the Birchwood School! The American Eagle Foundation provides this unique opportunity to learn about these fascinating birds of prey and get closer than you've ever been!

10:30 AM – Cherokee Tales – Choogie Kingfisher, master storyteller of the Cherokee Nation, has come from Oklahoma to teach us traditional stories of the Cherokee. Mr. Kingfisher returns these tales to East Tennessee, passed down through generations of ancestors who carried them to Oklahoma.

11:30 AM – What About Birds? – Alicia Craig, Senior Manager of Nature Education for Wild Birds Unlimited, will lead the event's first-ever children's program. Kenn Kaufman will assist Alicia with a fun, hands-on program that teaches children about birds and the outdoors.

1:00 PM – Eye in the Sky – Dr. David Aborn, assistant professor of biology from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga will demonstrate how biologists track birds by attaching small radio receivers to them! Dr. Aborn will demonstrate the use of the technology, by finding receivers hidden in the gym, including one in the pocket of an audience member!

2:00 PM – Cultural Demonstrations – Choogie Kingfisher will demonstrate the use of several traditional Cherokee tools.

3:00 PM – “The Trail Where They Cried” – Meigs County High School Drama Class presents their interpretation of the events leading up to the Cherokee Removal.

4:00 PM – Musical Ensemble – Tom Morgan, Lynne Haas, and Dalton Roberts with special guest local legend “Redbird” Clingan bring their unique blend of traditional music to wrap-up a great day in Birchwood!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2003 CRANE-VIEWING AND EAGLE WATCHING

9:30 AM – 5:00 PM – Catch the shuttle bus at the Birchwood School for a short ride to the Hiwassee Refuge to view sandhill cranes, bald eagles, and possibly even whooping cranes! Buses will depart throughout the day. Representatives with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and Tennessee Ornithological Society will provide interpretation at the Refuge and set up spotting scopes to improve public viewing.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2003

Crane viewing continues at Hiwassee Refuge.

Directions

Birchwood is located on TN Hwy. 60, three miles from the Hiwassee Refuge, midway between Dayton and Cleveland. From I-40, take U.S. Hwy 58 south to TN Hwy 60, turning right (north) on Hwy 60. From I-75, take TN Hwy 60 north to Birchwood. Follow the signs to the event.

Information

For general information about local attractions, accommodations, or other questions, call Meigs County Tourism at (423) 334-5850. For specific program information call Ken Dubke at (423) 499-3584.