Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area has been left for the ages—thanks to one ambitious area conservationist.

A Dream Becomes a Dream Park

Story By Kathy Andrews
Photos By Adele Hodde

Jim Weber lives to hunt birds.

"I've had bird dogs since 1948 and spend a lot of my time wandering around at Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area," Jasper County resident Weber said with a chuckle. "My wife claims I don't know when to come in because I spend almost all my free time outdoors during upland game season—almost two full days each week and two or three other afternoons."

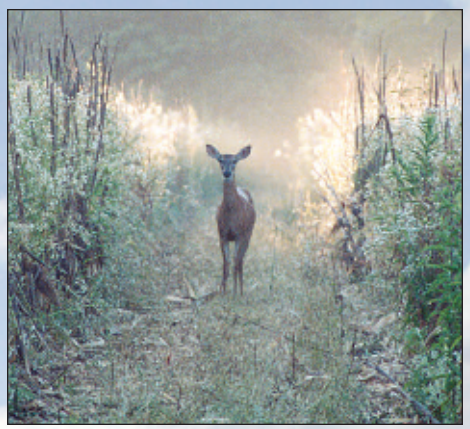
Over the years, even before the property was purchased by the State of Illinois, Weber and his Brittanys roamed the gently rolling grasslands and cultivated fields searching for bobwhite.

"The bobwhite population seem to have stayed stable over the years, I think because of the wildlife food plots the staff have planted," Weber continued. "I've been able to keep up on the trends in the quail population because of a research project I have assisted with for nearly 45 years."

Weber's input has been a part of a project conducted by the Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale and Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

"Each fall since 1950, quail hunters have contributed wings from harvested birds and records of their hunting trips," explained John Cole, DNR upland wildlife program manager. "We sort the informa-

Visitors to Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area in south-central Illinois will find an abundance of popular wildlife species utilizing the diverse habitat. Sportsmen, hikers and campers encounter waterfowl, wild turkey and white-tailed deer, as well as other native game and non-game species.



(Photos by Kenny Jayne.)

tion received to learn about regional bobwhite populations—the sex-age composition, hatching peaks, reproductive performance and trends in abundance.

"This research project is the longest continuous record ever compiled for a North American game bird," Cole said. "We have correlated the information to weather and land-use patterns to develop an excellent understanding of how bobwhite populations are affected by short- and long-term changes in environmental conditions."

And the wildlife research projects don't stop with bobwhite.

From early August through early September, Tom Micetich, district wildlife habitat biologist, sets up wood duck traps along the brushy shore of Sam Parr Lake. Birds following the trail of corn into the funnel trap are aged, sexed and a coded band is put on their leg before they are released.

"With the amount of data collected throughout the country from these cooperative banding projects, wildlife managers have been able to amass an incredible amount of information about the life expectancy and migration patterns of wood ducks," Micetich explained.

Located in Jasper County near Newton, the 1,180-acre Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area offers visitors a variety of recreational activities—equestrian and hiking trails, fishing, hunting, camping, wildlife watching and more. Recent improvements to the picnic areas, playgrounds, campgrounds and boat launch will enhance accessibility and are sure to please both new and repeat visitors.

Throughout the hunting season, Jim Weber, and his Brittanys Patches, Bandit and Bozo, enjoys nearly daily outings to Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area.

Wood ducks find suitable nesting habitat in the timber surrounding Sam Parr Lake. Built in 1971, the 183-acre lake has 9 miles of shoreline and a maximum depth of 28 feet. Anglers report the best fishing is for crappie, channel catfish and largemouth bass—a number of bass club tournaments take place on the lake. Bluegill and redear sunfish also are present.

Boats with maximum 10 horsepower motors are allowed on the lake, and the quiet, picturesque setting makes this a prime location for an afternoon in the canoe.

The 1,180-acre park originated in 1960 when 72 acres were purchased for the Jasper County Conservation Area. The site was renamed in 1966 for Sam Parr, an area resident and conservationist who advocated development of the park. The facility has recently undergone a number of renovations, including new handicapped-accessible sidewalks and a U-shaped boat dock adjacent to the boat ramp on the west side of the lake.

Improvements to the day-use areas surrounding the lake also have been completed. With a prime location overlooking the lake and a ball diamond commonly used by local schools, White Oak Picnic Area is a popular day-trip destination. Walking down the recently installed accessible sidewalk, visitors can picnic under the new pavilion and spend a few hours fishing from the dock.

Picnic shelters also are available at the Red Bud, Dogwood and Shadbush picnic areas. Shelters may be reserved in advance. If not reserved, they are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Scenic sites exist for the visitor interested in an overnight stay. The Class D campground has facilities for 20 tents, and recent upgrades include a handicapped-accessible tent site, restroom and sidewalks.

"We have campers nearly every week of the year, even in the dead of winter," Jim Gillespie, Sam Parr SFWA site superintendent explained. "I expect that the new concrete pads at the Class B/E campground will make the 31 camp sites set up in the dense, mature oak-hickory woodland an even hotter commodity."

Winter visitors also enjoy ice fishing and ice skating on Sam Parr Lake, when conditions are suitable. Cross-country skiing is allowed on more than 2 miles of foot trails and 13 miles of equestrian trails that explore the park's woodlands and lake shore.

Hunting at Sam Parr SFWA

Hunting programs at Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area include white-tailed deer (archery only), squirrel, bobwhite, rabbit, wild turkey, dove, woodcock, raccoon and opossum. Hunters are to check in and out and report their day's harvest.

All hunters, except squirrel, archery deer and spring turkey, must check in at the site headquarters and leave their license until the completion of their hunt. Squirrel and archery deer hunters must sign-in/out at the office, but are not required to leave their license or wear a back patch.

Portable stands may be used for hunting and left unattended overnight (if legibly marked with owner's name, address and telephone number) during the period September 15 through January 31.

Night hunting for furbearers is allowed by permit only.

Spring and fall shotgun turkey hunters must apply for a site-specific permit through the statewide lottery.

Contact the site staff during regular office hours for additional details and permit requirements.

Department of Natural Resources District Wildlife Biologist Tom Micetich baits a trap for wood ducks at Sam Parr Lake.

Nestled within the woodland and adjacent to the lake, Class B/E and Class D camping are offered at Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area.

An equestrian parking lot is available on the east side of the park.

"We've been able to make improvements for the visitor who wants to picnic, fish, camp or have a place for their children to burn off some energy on new playground equipment," Gillespie explained of the construction projects. "Our annual visitation is nearly 250,000 and I think repeat visitors will be pleased with the improvements. I encourage new visitors to check us out and think they'll appreciate this as a scenic, family-friendly park."

Even when he's not bird hunting, Jim Weber enjoys a day at the park.

"My wife and I frequently drive through the park to look for deer and wild turkeys—and the occasional river otter or migrating osprey—or just watch the changing seasons."

With a cluster of towering cypress trees gracing the entrance to the park, roadways lined with pine trees and five scattered prairie restoration plots teeming with a variety of grasses and forbs, Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area certainly appeals to the passerby, beckoning them to stay awhile and explore the multitude of programs the site has to offer.

Facts at a glance

Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area: 13225 East State Highway 33, Newton, IL 62448.
Telephone: (618) 783-2661.
Website: www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/R5/SAMPARR.htm.
Directions: From Route 130, turn east on Route 33 in Newton and go 1 mile to the park entrance.

Crawford County Conservation Area: 12609 E. 1700th Ave., Hutsonville, IL 62433.
Telephone: (618) 563-4405.
Website: www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/R5/Crawford.htm.
Directions: From I-70, turn south on Route 1, proceed south 21 miles, turn right (west) on Eaton Road, go 1 mile to the site office on the left side of the blacktop.

Crawford County SFWA

In addition to Sam Parr SFWA, Gillespie manages Crawford County State Fish and Wildlife Area, a 1,129-acre facility that contains 1,100 huntable acres. The gently rolling land is bisected by Huston Creek and contains bottomland timber, high quality oak-hickory forest and open land managed for wildlife habitat.

Crawford County SFWA is popular with sportsmen. Available game species include squirrel, white-tailed deer, dove, woodcock, bobwhite, furbearers and rabbit. Hunters are advised to check with the site or local Conservation Police Officer for details on site-specific permits and seasons.

With nine ponds, ranging in size from ½ to one acre, the site provides hours of enjoyment for anglers interested in fishing with pole and line. No other fishing styles are allowed. Largemouth bass, bluegill, redear and channel catfish are commonly reeled in from these ponds. Fall trout fishing is available beginning the third Saturday in October.

Available to visitors on a first-come, first-served basis is a picnic area complete with a shelter, picnic tables and campstoves.

Whether along its 9 miles of shoreline or from a boat or canoe, anglers enjoy crappie, channel catfish and largemouth bass fishing on the 183-acre Sam Parr Lake.

(Photo by Kenny Jayne.)