

EXTENSION  
SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

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## Chautauqua Refuge Gains Attention Through Master Naturalist's Writing Skills

Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, located north of Havana, may be unknown by many people, but for millions of waterfowl, migratory birds, and wildlife it is a very popular place. University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Carla Montez is helping to educate the public about the value of Chautauqua and the wildlife that live and feed there through educational articles.

Following her retirement as Communication Director at Bradley University, Montez took part in the Extension Master Naturalist training, Class of 2019, in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit. Having spent a lifetime enjoying the outdoors and making a career in communications, she knew that writing about nature topics would be a skill she could use to make a positive impact as a Master Naturalist.

"Even during the EMN training Carla began interviewing the presenters to begin collecting writing topic ideas," recalls Christine Belless, ag and natural resources program coordinator. "Carla approached her interviews in such a way that not only generated writing topics, it also gave us new programming ideas."

"What I learned from the presenters' responses exceeded my expectations," Montez explained. "Not only did their answers reveal some themes for future writing, but their comments also suggested some program planning opportunities for the Extension staff. For example, one idea that clearly emerged is that the presenters were unanimous that habitat loss was a serious concern. To me, this topic seemed like something both a writer and a program planner could pursue. It was more than I had hoped for."

Montez first official Extension Master Naturalist writing assignment came through a request for help from Mitchell Baalman with USFW Refuge, Chautauqua. He expressed the need for assistance in writing articles to promote attention to the Chautauqua Refuge.

Following a needs assessment, Montez began researching and writing her first article "In Search of the Illinois Chorus Frog" that was released through U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in early April.

"Biologists usually are not creative writers," stated Baalman. "We are more comfortable with technical reports and studies. However, delivering science to the public in an entertaining and skilled manner has become increasingly important. In fact, it is integral to our mission. Carla, with her years of experience and expertise, has been able to translate the sometimes mundane work we do into beautifully crafted conservation stories. She has given life and interest to the creatures of Illinois River National Wildlife Refuge and Fish Refuge Complex in a way that we could have never done alone."

Montez just completed her second article on the topic of Trumpeter Swans. Read more about Chautauqua and Montez's articles online at [www.fws.gov/refuge/Chautauqua/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Chautauqua/)

Extension Master Naturalists serve in a wide-variety of capacities with the overarching goal of connecting people to nature. To learn more about this program and others offered through University of Illinois Extension visit the website at [extension.illinois.edu/fmpt](http://extension.illinois.edu/fmpt).