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MOBILE GAME "FIND THE BIRDS" HIGHLIGHTS ILLINOIS' RICH NATURAL LANDSCAPE AND WILDLIFE TO INSPIRE FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS

Lewistown, IL (September 22, 2022)—Just in time for the new season aspiring bird watchers have another way to experience the fall migration. The free mobile game "[Find the Birds](#)" features a new location that allows players to explore Illinois' rich natural landscape and wildlife, with challenges that take you to The Wetlands Initiative's [Dixon Waterfowl Refuge](#), The Nature Conservancy's [Emiquon Preserve](#) and the Illinois Audubon Society's [Chillicothe Bottoms Wildlife Sanctuary](#).

These locations, situated within the Illinois River Flyway, include dynamic, animated ecosystems, intriguing varieties of birds to find and a point system that allows the player to purchase tools and supplies. Included also are apt and significant conservation activities such as removing invasive species or restoring habitat.

"When people think of central Illinois they often think, 'Farm Belt,'" explained Suzanne L. Wagner, Director of Development and Communications for The Wetlands Initiative. "The Wetlands Initiative and our conservation partners want to expand people's vision of this region as they explore the Illinois River Valley's rich biodiversity and beautiful native habitats through 'Find the Birds.'"

"Find the Birds" was created by teenager Adam Dhalla, an American Birding Association Young Birder of the Year, and the non-profit Thought Generation Society. The mobile game now has thousands of players in 47 countries on six continents, transporting players to go bird watching in various locations including Arizona, British Columbia, and Japan. The game has been nominated for several awards including Best Educational Game at the Games for Change Festival.

"Find the Birds' engages its audiences, modeling field science skills of observation, data collection, interpretation and habitat conservation in realistic bird habitats along the Illinois River Flyway and around the world," remarked Karen Zuckerman, Chair of the Sun Foundation's Clean Water Celebration Navigating Committee.

The Illinois Audubon Society, the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy, The Wetlands Initiative and the Sun Foundation worked in partnership to bring the Illinois River Flyway from the real world to the digital world, modeling the real habitats, natural communities, and impactful conservation activities. At the virtual Dixon Waterfowl Refuge players harvest native plant seeds; at Chillicothe Bottoms Wildlife Sanctuary players build prothonotary warbler nesting boxes; and at Emiquon Preserve they build an osprey nesting platform. Another unique aspect of this version is the focus on fall migration with a gorgeous color palette, such as the bright crimson, burnt orange and flaming yellow of forested bluffs.

"The game is a wonderful introduction to the very real and beloved outdoor spaces in Illinois," said Jason Beverlin, Deputy Director of Conservation for the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy. "Players will feel motivated to take what they learn in 'Find the Birds' out in nature during the fall migration and beyond and become engaged stewards for the plants and wildlife that call this area home."

“Creating committed stewards of the future depends on how we engage the youth of today,” said Jo Fessett, Executive Director of Illinois Audubon Society. “At 125-years-old, Illinois Audubon Society is excited to bring our mission to preserve and protect birds to a platform that appeals to today's youth. ‘Find the Birds’ is a unique way to create a new audience of young birders.”

“Find the Birds” is available for free wherever apps are available. The Illinois River Flyway location is now live. Players use the touch screen on their mobile device to walk around in each habitat. When the icon for an eye opens, they look for birds and click on the bird every time one appears. Collected points can be cashed in for tools for the conservation activity. More points will help the player get the parts needed to fly an ultralight aircraft to the next habitat. Every bird comes with an identification card that includes information on behavior and bird songs from Cornell Labs’ Macaulay Library.

About The Wetlands Initiative

The Wetlands Initiative (TWI) is working toward a world with plentiful healthy wetlands to improve water quality, climate, biodiversity, and human well-being. In the Upper Midwest, where the majority of wetlands have been degraded or completely lost, TWI brings together ecology and engineering to create newly resilient ecosystems. By restoring more-natural water patterns to an area, removing invasive plant species, and reintroducing native ones lost over time, we make room for wildlife to find its way back and for the wetlands to provide their valuable “services.” To learn more about our mission and current major projects, visit www.wetlands-initiative.org.

About The Illinois Audubon Society

The mission of the Illinois Audubon Society is to promote the perpetuation and appreciation of native plants and animals and the habitats that support them. The Society is an independent, member supported, not-for-profit, statewide organization. Founded in 1897, the Society is Illinois’ oldest private conservation organization with 2200 members, 17 chapters and 19 affiliate groups. The Illinois Audubon Society has protected 6,000 acres by investing \$13 million to protect land and water throughout Illinois.

About The Sun Foundation

The Sun Foundation is a not-for-profit (501.c.3) organization, founded in 1973, dedicated to bringing professional artists, and scientists together in a supportive and engaging atmosphere with students, schools, families, communities, underserved populations and the general public.
www.sunfoundation.org

About The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at an unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. Working in 76 countries and territories: 37 by direct conservation impact and 39 through partners, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. In Illinois, The Nature Conservancy has helped protect more than 86,000 acres across the state since its inception more than 60 years ago with a particular focus on conservation of the prairies, savannas, forests, wetlands, lakes, and rivers that dot its landscape. To learn more, visit nature.org/illinois or follow @nature_press on Twitter.