



The Fox Tale

*A Quarterly Nature Newsletter Published by the
Fox Island Alliance*

I&M and Marsh Tower-Perfect Together!

When children used to go on tours through Fox Island County Park in Fort Wayne, there was one tour stop the park naturalist avoided: The Marsh Observation Deck. From its old platform, to benches and handrails that were falling apart, the tower was simply in too poor condition to be a safe attraction for children – or anyone, for that matter.

That was then. AEP Now: I & M leaders work together on community project.

Take a stroll near the Marsh Observation Deck today, and you'll see a totally different structure. It's all thanks to several I&M leaders who spent two days tucked deep into the woods of the park, where they rolled up their sleeves to transform the tower into a safe, attractive destination for tour-goers.

"It's nice to know that people will come out here and enjoy the scenery from the new observation tower," said HR Region Manager Cynthia Lambeth, who spent time hauling lumber and taking down measurements for the project on a recent brisk morning. "So very often with a utility, people don't think about us as trying to refurbish the environment. It's a little different than just contributing money to something. You're actually coming out here and putting your own sweat equity into it."

Benefiting the community was just one goal Ed Ehler, vice president – Distribution Region Operations, had in mind when he signed himself and several I&M leaders up for the project. Project workers included Lambeth, Rob Sturtz, manager – Distribution System, Fort Wayne; Randy Lawton, manager – Distribution System, Benton Harbor; Dave Ackerman, manager – Region Support; Kirk Eisert, manager – Distribution System, South Bend; Dave Isaacson, MDS in Muncie; Barry Wiard, director – customer Services & Marketing; Doug Hiatt, manager – Region Support; and Jeff Armstrong, manager – Safety & Health.

"I thought this would be a good team building task for all of us," Ehler said.

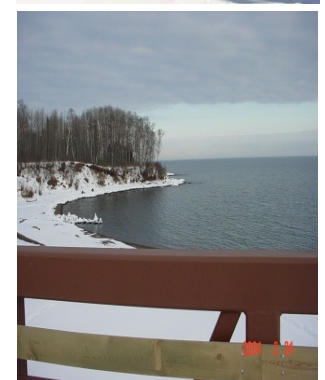
Ehler, who participated in the Leadership Fort Wayne program a couple years ago, said the opportunity to refurbish the Marsh tower arose when Leadership Fort Wayne gave him the opportunity to choose a nonprofit board on which to serve at the end of the program. Ehler selected Fox Island Alliance, an education support group that supports the Fox Island County Park.



THAT WAS THEN....



THIS IS NOW....



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When Ehler volunteered to help them with construction projects, the park asked for help fixing the Marsh tower observatory. And by bringing his team on board to help with the project, Ehler has enjoyed seeing them learn to collaborate on an unconventional work task.

“You know, you’ve got a bunch of leaders wanting to control the whole thing themselves,” said Ehler. “It’s been kind of an interesting challenge to give assignments and stay away from everybody else and do your own thing.”

“Especially me,” Ehler continued with a laugh. “Because this is something I want to do all by myself.”

Instead of being in the lead, Ehler was proud to say he was “benched” during the project. “All I’m allowed to do is cut wood and build benches,” he said.

Isaacson also saw the value in getting to learn other colleagues’ strengths and weaknesses and using each person’s strengths for the good of the whole.

“As a team we do a pretty good job of cooperating with each other,” said Isaacson. “It’s difficult to develop a sense of trust and candor just getting together once a month in an office-type setting where you’re sitting around a conference table.”

Ditto, said Ackerman. “We’re able to spend time together and do a project where we’re all interacting.” He said. “We have to rely on each other.”

This collaboration went beyond merely refurbishing the deck and building handrails and benches together. It also meant working together to handle the broader logistics of working at a site that was particularly remote.

Transporting supplies deep into the woods was a task itself, requiring quite a bit of peer coaching as the leaders maneuvered their vehicle through the trees, paying careful attention to limbs and other hazards along the path. Leaders also had to bring generators and fuel to be able to even use their power tools. In addition, project workers were assigned to cook meals on site each day, using a grill at the park. And, with the site being so tucked away having first aid kits available was a must.

To overcome the challenges of the location and help make the project a success, every person simply had a role to play, and safety remained an ongoing part of the job. Practicing safety meant having a plan, sticking to the plan, conducting safety briefings and critiques, and encouraging people to check in when they were unsure about a task they were working on.

If one person was working on a task that didn’t cater to his or her strengths, that person was paired with somebody else who was more experienced, Lambeth said.



Front row: Ed Ehler, Cynthia Lambeth. Rob Sturtz, Randy Lawton and Dave Isaacson. Back row: Dave Ackerman

For the leaders involved, it was encouraging to see how quickly the final product came together, especially after it had been put on hold a couple times. The original plan was to finish the project in June, but with work scheduling conflicts, it was rescheduled for July and later set for fall when it coincided with everyone’s schedules, said Eisert.

With the lack of mosquitoes and the cooler weather this time of year, fall actually turned out to be the perfect season to complete the project. Of course, the leaders enjoyed working on the project so much, they may end up doing it more than once a year.

“We talked about doing this in other districts – maybe do a couple a year in the spring and fall as a leadership task for our team. We’ve been having fun with this,” said Ehler with a smile.

And when children finally climb onto the new Marsh Observation Deck and stare down at the marsh for the first time, you can bet they’ll be smiling too.

It's Winter and Critters are HUNGRY...

Winter is a good time to assess our backyard and gardens to see how wildlife friendly they are, or could be, with a little human help. During the colder months, most critters are gearing up for spring by searching for high-energy food. The best and easiest way to offer winter food for wildlife is by planting vegetation that produces berries, nuts or seeds. Leave seed heads on flowers rather than de-heading them. This will provide visual interest in the winter garden and feed wildlife at the same time. Many mammals and bird species depend on these plant foods for sustenance. A tree decorated especially for our furry and feathered friends will make your yard a popular stopping place for wildlife. By creating "decorations" made out of natural food items, you can provide added nourishment to supplement the winter diet of creatures wintering in your neighborhood.

Garlands

Create a garland made out of food items. Take a length of twine or string and tie a sewing needle to the end. Using the needle, thread a variety of natural food items like unsalted popcorn or dried fruit like apples, raisins, cranberries and nuts.

Wildlife Energy Bars

Suet, or rendered fat, is a great high-energy food source that can provide a lot of energy for backyard creatures during winter. You can even make your own special blend. Use 1 cup chunky peanut butter, 1 cup pure rendered suet or vegetable shortening, 2 ½ cups coarse yellow corn meal, seeds, raisins or other dried fruit, and roasted peanuts. Mix peanut butter and suet, then add cornmeal to thicken the mixture. Stir in seeds, raisins or roasted peanuts if desired.

Make suet "muffins" by placing suet stuffing into a muffin tin. Sprinkle seeds on top. Place a pipe cleaner in each suet "muffin" to act as a hanger and place the tin in the freezer to harden. Once hardened, hang the suet "muffins" or place in feeding stations. Hang the cakes from the tree with string, in a suet cage, or in mesh bags like those in which oranges and grapefruit are sold.

You can use orange, grapefruit or even coconut halves to create a feeder by putting suet stuffing into half of a hollowed-out rind. Poke three holes in the edge of the rind and run string through the holes. Sprinkle seeds on top. Place in the freezer to harden. Once hardened, knot the strings at the top and the bottom to secure and hang outside near a window. You can also gather cones from evergreen trees like pines and spruce, stuff suet and peanut butter into the crevices, and then roll the whole thing in seed.

Critter Cookies

Another great idea is to use cookie cutters to punch out holiday-shaped slices of bread. You can punch holes in the top to hang with string outside for birds. When it hardens up, it is a perfect treat for your nibblers. Bagels make great feeders as well. First, split bagels in half and harden overnight. Spread peanut butter on each side and then sprinkle with seeds. Tie a string through the hole and hang.

Wildlife Wreaths

Use wire to string 10 to 12 inch sections of popcorn and fruit like you would for a garland. Fold the ends of the wire up and twist together to form small wreath. Tie a bow on the top with ribbon and hang on the tree. Another way to make a wreath is to buy millet seeds still on the stalk from the bird food section of pet stores. Millet is the smallest seed in most bird seed mixes. The stalks can be bent around to form a circle and secured to form a wreath.

Seed Cakes

Combine one ounce of unflavored gelatin and ¼ cup of water in a saucepan over low heat. Stir until the gelatin is completely dissolved. Then add 1 ¼ cups of any combination of seeds that the birds in your yard enjoy. If you are unfamiliar with what they like, try 50 percent each of black oil sunflower and safflower seeds. Mix well. Until all seeds are coated with gelatin. Pack the mixture firmly into a plastic container and chill until solid. Use molds in the shapes of stars, wreaths, trees or other holiday shapes to make festive ornaments or tree toppers. Once the cake is removed from the mold, it's ready for the birds to eat.

Thank you AEP!!

PLEASE NOTE—FIA members are welcome to attend any of the FIA board meetings. Our next meeting is Monday, March 14, 2010 at 7pm at Fox Island in the Nature Center building.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE PARK THIS FALL?

Fox Island County Park 7324 Yohne Road SW Fort Wayne. tel **260-449-3180**

Please call the park to pre-register for the following programs or for more information.

TAI CHI Jan. 5 to Feb. 23-Wed. - 6-7pm. \$50 -Instructor - Sandy Gebhart

TRAIL TREKKERS Thurs. Jan 6, Feb 3, March 3- Free- Hike with Natalie1-3pm

CROSS COUNTRY SKI CLINIC Sat. Jan 8,10am-12pm., \$7 or \$3 – Basic instruction Ron

OWL PROWL Sat. Jan., 8, 5:30-7:30pm, \$2, Instruction indoors then out to listen - Ron

FOX KIT ADVENTURES-preschool- Tues..Jan. 11, Feb. 8, Mar. 8, 9:30-10:30am \$3,\$2. Nat

PRESCHOOL DISCOVERY HOUR – ANIMAL SIGNS –Tues-1-2pm, \$3,\$2, in and out

SUNSET PHOTO SAFARI – Thur. Jan 20, 4:30-6pm, \$2, Bring your camera. Ron

SCRAP-BOOKING – Fri. Jan 21, Mar.11, 6pm-12am, \$10 –Sherina Hewson, Consultant

TRAILGUIDE TRAINING - ATTRACTING BLUEBIRDS –Sun 1-4pm- Free, Natalie
Conrad Goetz - local bluebird specialist-freewill donation of suet or mealworms accepted.

SCRAP-BOOKING VALENTINES – Sat. Feb 5, 10am to 8pm, \$12. Natalie
Natalie Haley & Sherina Hewson,

PHOTO SAFARI Sat. Feb 5, 3-4:30pm, \$2. Free to pass holders. Bring your camera. Ron

PRESCHOOL DISCOVERY HOUR – PIG PARADE Tues, Mar. 1, 1-2pm \$3,\$2,

TRAILGUIDE TRAINING- Three Rivers Gem & Mineral Society – Sat. Mar 5 1-3 pm
The History & Make Up of Indiana Geology and The Origin of Rocks & Minerals

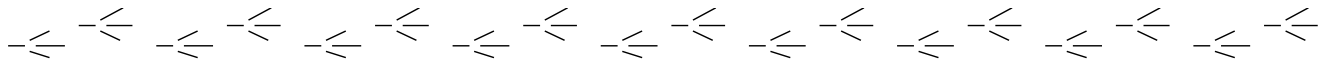
MOREL MUSHROOM MAN – Alex Babich – Sun. Mar 13 1-4pm. Free to Vol.
Alex will share tips and tricks, not locations.

BUZZARD DAY RECON – Sun. Mar 13. 4:30-5:50pm, Free to Pass Holders –
2 mile walk to check for Turkey Vultures

TIMBERDOODLE “SKY DANCE” – Sun. Mar 13, 7:30-9:00pm,\$2. Ron
Male Birds Showing Off.

TAI CHI Mar 30-May 11, Wed. - 6-7pm. \$50 -Instructor - Sandy Gebhart

JR. INDIANA MASTER NATURALIST CLASS - 9am-3:30pm-\$80 each
April 4-8- Monday –Friday – Spring Break for **ages 9-13**



Robins in Winter

When someone excitedly says they saw the first robin of spring, birders tend to smile – they know that robins can be found through the winter if you look in the right place. One “right place”, in fact, is in the woods at Fox Island. Another might be around ornamental shrubs with berries.

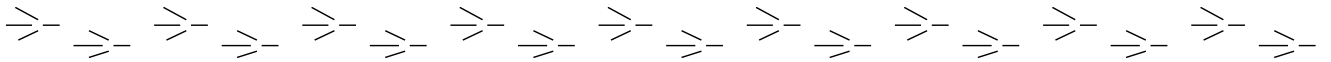
On the other hand, there might be something to this “first robin” business. The robins that can be seen here in winter are probably not the ones that are hopping around people’s lawns in April. American Robins are migratory (in fact, their scientific name, *Turdus migratorius*, means “migratory thrush”), and in the fall the population moves south. But as it happens, their winter and summer ranges overlap, so some of the more northern breeders turn up here in winter. So the first robin people see in the spring may well be a new arrival from warmer climes.



Other birds, Horned Larks, Eastern Bluebirds and Cedar Waxwings for example, do this too. And others, such as Juncos and American Tree Sparrows, who are not found here in summer, choose to spend the winter in northeast Indiana. Why would they do this? Why not go further south where the weather is milder, rather than endure the sometimes harsh winters here?

Well, for one thing, it’s more crowded down there – there are more birds competing for food and space. For another, migrating is risky. A lot of birds die in migration, even without the additional impediments we humans place in their way, such as tall buildings and antenna towers. So it makes sense for some birds (but not too many) to spend a cold winter here rather than risk the longer journey to the warmer south.

By Ed Powers



Adventures in The Backyard

Each spring, among the usual crowd of song birds and various migrants, I am blessed with a few crows that come in daily and raid my back yard bird feeders. Last spring one crow had a damaged feather in its left wing so I knew it was the same crow that came back each day. We had an unspoken agreement. I would line up whole peanuts on the top rail of my deck and the crow would fly off with them one at a time while I sat on my deck. With its neck stretched as far as possible it would get within an arms length but no closer. I also found that if given a choice it would pick Cheetos 100% of the time over the peanuts. A choice I could completely understand.

I also had a crow that was a big fan of “Woodpecker Treat” suet. The problem was that it could not stretch far enough to reach the suet cage and was not built to hang upside down and feed from that position. It took the crow one day to solve the problem. The crow would perch with one foot grasping each of the arms of the feeder stand. It would reach down and grasp the cage chain in its beak and pull it up to its foot. It would then grasp the top of the cage with the middle toe of its foot and proceed to consume mass quantities of the suet. The crow’s buddies learned the drill quickly and soon I had to stop putting out the suet or start buying stock in the “Woodpecker Treat” company.

By Jeff Ormiston

NOTE: What’s going on in your back yard? Send your “Adventures” to Kate Ferguson at katef8881@comcast.net.



Great Blue Heron



Red Fox



Grey Squirrel



Light snow is falling
The world seems asleep.
But deep in the woods
Many creatures still creep!

These creatures are out there.
And how do I know?
I simply need follow
Their tracks in the snow!

Wherever they're going;
Whatever they're doing,
These creatures leave signs
Of what they're pursuing.

Food, water, shelter –
So basic their needs.
They scamper through woodlots,
And meadows with weeds.

Become a detective
And track down their route
To find what survival
Is really about!!



White-tailed Deer



Rabbit



Coyote



LEOPARD FROGS ONCE USED FOR PREGNANCY TESTS

Fox Island is full of leopard frogs in the late summer. As a retired medical lab worker I remember how we used leopard frogs back in the late 50's.

You've heard the expression "the rabbit died," meaning a positive pregnancy test. This was because a female rabbit developed hemorrhagic ovarian follicles after being injected with urine from a pregnant lady. In reality, the rabbit always died after being surgically opened up. It's interesting that the hormone secreted by the human placenta, HCG or human chorionic gonadotropin, has an effect on animals of different species. A later development was a test using the female African clawed frog, *Xenopus laevis*. In this test, the frog would lay eggs upon being injected with the specimen. More about this later.



Enter the test using *Rana pipiens*, the leopard frog. This is the one I learned as a student in the late 50's. Oddly, it used male frogs, which produced sperm when the test was positive. Only male frogs were sent by the supplier: they have a swollen and pigmented "thumb" so are easy to distinguish. We kept them in the refrigerator in a large container with a little water; they thought they were hibernating and didn't even have to be fed.



To do the test we just injected the filtered urine into the frog's big dorsal lymph sacs. The skin is very thin there so it didn't seem to hurt the frog very much. Then we let the frog sit in a glass jar for 2-4 hours; then squeezed him gently over a glass slide and looked for sperm under the microscope. As I remember we used two frogs per patient, just to make sure. After about 4 days the frog could be used

again. Of course sometimes we students managed to accidentally on purpose let a frog escape..... Although modern pregnancy tests are much more sensitive, in its day the frog test was cutting edge for its accuracy, rapidity and simplicity.

Back to the *Xenopus laevis* test: now it is thought that when they were imported from Africa they brought along a fungus called *Batrachochytridium*, which didn't harm them particularly but caused disease in native frogs which had no resistance. (Sound familiar?) As we know, amphibians are in trouble all over the world, but apparently not at Fox Island.

By Cynthia Powers MT(ASCP)

And a Winter Poem to enjoy...

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost (1923)

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.



FOX ISLAND ALLIANCE

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Winter 2011



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Fox Island Alliance Membership Application New Renewal

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The **Fox Island Alliance** is a volunteer not-for-profit organization. Its purposes are to help preserve the natural features of Fox Island County Park, to assist its orderly development as a nature preserve, to raise funds to facilitate its development, to promote Fox Island's use as an educational center, and to coordinate volunteer efforts.

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