



The Fox Tale

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

SPRING HAS SPRUNG!

What makes YOU think spring is here? Some may say spring has arrived when they hear birds singing in the mornings, or see the migratory birds arrive or pass through, or feel the warmer temperatures and the snow melting. I know spring has arrived when a quiet and seldom noticed process occurs.



When the silver and red maple trees' flower buds begin to swell and then pop open, I know spring has finally begun around us. You may be surprised to know that trees have flowers. The forerunners of seeds are flowers. Some trees have showy flowers, like fruit trees, magnolias, and tulip trees. Maples, elms, oaks and ashes as well as pine and spruce trees have flowers. These flowers are less noticeable.



When you see a silver or red maple in your yard or at Fox Island, be sure to observe the tiny buds on the branches. The reddish brown bud scales will swell, and fall off revealing tiny flowers. You may first notice the brown scales on the ground beneath the tree. The scales will pop open in late February or early March through April. Later on, you notice a yellow dust covering everything under the tree. This is pollen from the male parts of the flowers. Perhaps you start to have a stuffy nose or watery eyes in the spring as I do? That might mean that you are allergic to maple tree pollen or some other spring flowering tree pollen as well. Pollen is spread by the wind to the female parts of the flowers where they become fertilized. As the season progresses, seeds begin to form and all those 'helicopters' are shed. Some trees, especially fruit trees, need bees and other insects to pollinate the female flower parts so fruits will develop. Pine trees have large flower structures called candles at the branch tips. These flowers produce seeds inside cones. Look under the pine trees at Fox Island in late spring to summer and you'll notice pollen dust also.



Take time to look at a red or silver maple tree. These trees flower before the leaves begin to grow in the spring. Examine the tiny red flowers with small dots of yellow pollen on the stamens. The flowers are quite simple but seeds will soon be hanging from the branches. Look also at an oak, ash, or cottonwood tree and examine their tiny flowers. They look different from maple flowers but they too will form seeds once pollinated. Some trees have both male and female flowers on the same tree and others have the sexes on separate trees. In all, if a tree has seeds, it had flowers some time previously. Remember to examine the trees at Fox Island this spring as well as at home and watch for the flower buds and seeds.



Linda Forest

FOX ISLAND ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIPS are Due in March every year. If you have not sent yours in, **now** is the time.

Fox Island Extras...

Fox Island Alliance Annual Meeting

Our Annual meeting has traditionally been held on the last Sunday in April. I think it was because it was close to Earth Day, which is April 22 this year. This year, the last Sunday is Easter, so that did not work. The following Sunday is part of Sol Fest weekend at Fox Island so that did not work either. The Sunday after that is Mother's Day and we decided to stay away from that in favor of our mothers. That brings us to May 15, which is when we will be presenting our FIA Annual Meeting and a great program.

Dr. Joe Smith, the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo Veterinarian, will be presenting: "Experiences Working the Frontlines of a Not So Natural Disaster—The Kalamazoo River Oil Spill". This one spilled over 819,000 gallons of oil into the Kalamazoo River. Dr. Smith and many of his zoo people, including our own Pam George, spent many hours working on that. Come to hear about their experiences on May 15. Members will be getting the flyers about the meetings very soon. All are welcome. If you want to eat with us please contact Kate Ferguson at 749-8881 before May 8.

Eagle Scout Project

Hello! My name is Nick Adams and I am 14 years old. I am in Boy Scout Troop 302 and working on my Eagle Scout Project.

To say a little about myself, this is my 4th year as a Boy Scout, I have earned 36 merit badges, I am in the Order of the Arrow, and my goal is to earn every single merit badge. Currently I am a freshman at South Side High School and plan to earn the IB diploma. My Eagle Project is taking place at Fox Island County Park. This past fall, some of the invasive plants from the north shore of Bowman Lake were removed. In the spring, I plan on clearing out the rest of the invasive plants and adding a fishing pier on the north shore. The cost of the pier will be about \$3,000. I am accepting donations to help make my project happen. If you have any questions or would like to make a donation, please call (260) 747-8175. Thank you.—Nick Adams

NOTE FROM EDITOR:

I know this has been a tough year for many but if anyone is able to make a donation to help Nick with his project please do—it would mean the world to this very dedicated Boy Scout & would benefit Fox Island immensely!!

SPRING IS IN THE AIR...

THE YEAR'S AT THE SPRING

The year's at the spring
And the day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven-
All's right with the world!
- **Robert Browning**

TREES

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.
- **Joyce Kilmer**

The FWAS observatory at Fox Island Park opens for the season on April 2nd. The 16" Richard Johnston Telescope at the observatory offers free public viewing of the night sky every clear Saturday for 2 hours, starting 1 hour after sunset, from April through November.

You may check the forecast using the Clear Sky Clock on our web site at <http://fortwayneastronomicalsociety.com>

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 IS A TREE? HOW DOES IT GROW AND WORK?

Trees can live a very long time, sometimes for hundreds of years. They can send away millions of their offspring every year. They are able to live on sunlight, water, soil and air. They make their own food and distribute it where it is needed. They have adapted and evolved for many years. Very little of a large tree is really alive. The center core of the tree (heartwood) is not living now. It could be called inactive, however it does hold up the tree with the help of the roots. The heartwood also helps the tree reach the sunlight, which it needs. Only the parts on the very outside edges of the tree are alive or active.

Large roots brace the tree. They also, along with the smaller roots, bring water up into the tree through a pipe system just under the bark. The small roots have tiny hairs that move toward water. They take the water into the roots and up the tree. The bark is a protector. It keeps out water and most insects, and insulates against extreme cold and heat. The thin layer under the bark is called the phloem (flow-um). The phloem carries sugar (food) throughout the tree. As its cells age the old cells become part of the bark. The layer, one cell thick, under the phloem is the cambium. The cambium covers the tree from twig to root. It is the growing layer. The xylem, or sapwood, carries the water up from the roots to the leaves. The sapwood is made up of tiny straws (or pipes) that let the fluid move to all parts of the tree. After a winter like we have had this year, we are all happy when we hear, "The sap is running!" Maple trees are best known for producing sap that is collected and boiled down to make maple syrup. (The people who tap maple trees only do it for about a month in the early spring so that the trees have plenty for themselves.)



Where does the sap come from? What about the sugar that is food for the tree? In the early spring the sapwood carries water from the roots to the branches and twigs. A very young tree may only carry 10 gallons of water in a day but a medium-size tree might carry 150 gallons of water each day. Water can stick to itself and the sides of the pipes in the sapwood. The buds are formed in the fall and stay closed till the sap starts to run in the spring. In the early spring, water goes up to all parts of the tree. When the leaves break from their buds and grow, you know the water is getting there. Veins in the leaves stiffen and carry water in and sugar out (as sap) to other parts of the tree. What a joy to see the tiny leaves coming out! Then we know spring is here. As the sapwood tubes fill up and get old they die and become heartwood. The cambium layer continually makes more sapwood to take over. The cambium layer also makes more phloem. The tree grows all its growing season. When the leaves fall the buds that were hidden under them can be seen.

The sugar that feeds all parts of the tree is made in the leaves. The leaves are tiny sugar factories! The leaves have chlorophyll in them. Chlorophyll is used with the sun and air to change water and carbon dioxide into sugar and oxygen. This process is called photosynthesis. In the fall, when the chlorophyll is gone, we see colors of yellow and orange, which will then turn to brown. Reds are caused by chemical changes in some leaves. If the tree makes extra food, it is stored in the roots for when the tree needs it. Trees are very important to us. The tree does not use the oxygen from the air so it releases it. We need oxygen to live. We do not use carbon dioxide, but when we breathe out, we release it for the trees to use.

By Kate Ferguson

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE PARK THIS SPRING?

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.

TRAIL TREKKERS Thurs. March 3- Free- Hike with Natalie 1-3pm

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

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

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

Three Rivers Gem and Mineral Society will visit **Saturday March 5, 1-3:00**

Indiana Geological History The Origin of Rocks and Minerals

Fossil Pile Digging and Identification Bring rocks or fossils from home for ID

Activities for 4th and 5th grade students running simultaneously

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

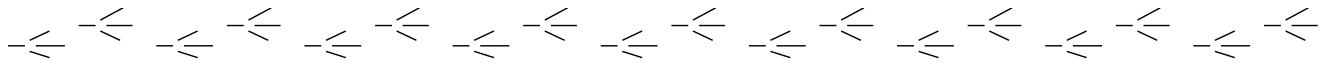
TIMBERDOODLE “SKY DANCE” – Sun. Mar 13, 7:30-9:00pm,\$2. Ron
Male Birds Showing Off.

TRAIL TREKKERS (at METEA PARK)—Thurs Mar 17 1-3pm

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**

If there is an event or class you would like to see at Fox Island please call Natalie Haley at 449-3180 and make a recommendation—we would love to hear from you. Our Park is Your Park!!



Signs of Spring

Here, as I write this in the depths of February, I'm beginning to wonder if spring will ever come. I'm looking for some sign.

For many, wildflowers signify spring; but when they show, it means spring is already here. I want some assurance that it will arrive someday. So I look to the birds.

As I wrote in the last issue of the Fox Tale, while the appearance of an American Robin is a traditional sign, it is not a very good sign, since they can be found here all winter long.

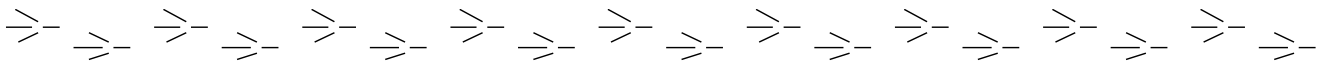
One early sign is singing Cardinals. Along about Valentine's Day, we start to hear "What cheer! What cheer! Purty, purty, purty, purty." Lengthening daylight tells them it's time to start thinking about love and the next generation.

Some waterfowl, beyond the ever-present Canada Goose and Mallard, begin to show up as lakes and ponds begin to thaw, and there may be some Sandhill Cranes passing over.

For me, I know that spring is a serious possibility when I hear the first "Konk-a-ree!" from a Red-winged Blackbird in late February or early March.



By Ed Powers



Musings

"O Wind, if Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Percy Bysshe Shelley

Amid all this snow... mind-boggling to realize no two flakes are alike...and icicles everywhere, there are some surprises in the neighborhood. An occasional robin that apparently forgot to leave in time and a great horned owl, a very large dark presence high in a silver maple. It is always a surprise to see how well those "horns" stand out even at a good distance. He was very vocal. Eerie! But I am wishing for my snowdrops to appear by my backdoor, a sure sign that it won't be long now.

Usually the snowdrops pop up through the white stuff in February, so I know they are down there, in spite of the overdose we have received this year. The little bulbs give us a slender, dainty plant with white bell-shaped flowers that have a pretty green spot on each petal. Not a wild woodland plant, but they arrive well before Fox Island's Dutchman's britches.

So now we wait for Fox Island's display, heralded by the tiny "harbinger of spring". Following soon are Dutchman's britches, bloodroot, the beautiful trillium, Solomon's Seal...true and false...and violets...yellow and shades of purple, and the dog-toothed violet among many others. And all this is just at ground level. Think of the flowering dogwood and redbud to come!

Just keep repeating Shelley's words like a mantra, "O Wind, if Winter comes, Can Spring be far behind?"

By Iona Mensch



Kit Kapers: Fox Island for Kids

Furry Foragers at Fox Island Park

by Pam George

As the snow melts and ponds and streams fill with fresh, clear water, many furry creatures start to emerge, having spent the winter hidden away from nature's chilly wrath in a warm spot, secured for eating and sleeping.

Two such creatures are permanent residents @ Fox Island and have a lot in common:



American Beaver



Muskrat

When a furry fact below describes a beaver, place a check under the "B"; when the fact describes a muskrat, place a check under the "M".

B M

- has a waterproof, furry body, but a hairless tail.
- has hard front teeth that just keep growing if not worn down by chewing.
- has very strong, orange front teeth because the enamel contains iron instead of calcium.
- has teeth that stick out in front of its cheeks & lips so it can chew under water with its mouth closed.
- is mainly a plant eater.
- hunts for food around ponds or slow-running streams.
- is constantly on alert for Fox Island predators, like hawks, owls, foxes, raccoons, minks, or coyotes.
- is a swift swimmer using its hind feet like paddles.
- can stay underwater for over 15 minutes without taking another breath.
- is an excellent tunnel-digger using its hand-like front feet as shovels.
- slaps its tail on the water as a warning to others of danger.
- builds a lodge in the water with an underwater entrance that leads to a living platform inside.
- marks its trails and territory using scent glands on its rear end that give off a musky smell.

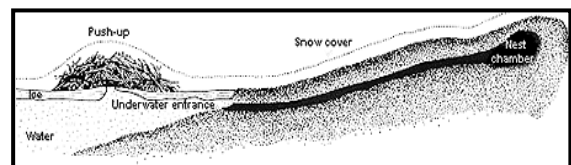
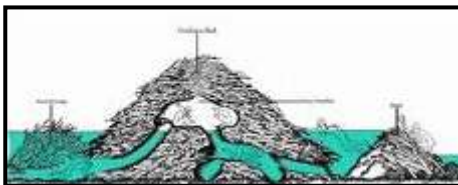
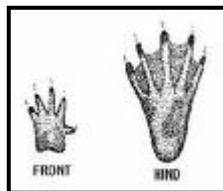
If you placed a check on all the lines above, you were RIGHT!!! But read on to discover how different they really are!

BEAVER

- * the second largest rodent in the world
- * has a wide, flat tail used as a rudder.
- * grows up to 32 inches long
- * eats mainly bark & stores a winter supply
- * builds its lodge behind a dammed up log jam

MUSKRAT

- * a rodent, but more closely related to a vole
- * has a flat-sided, skinny tail held out of the water to swim
- * grows up to 25 inches long
- * eats mainly cattails, sedges, bulrushes and other pond plants
- * builds its lodge either in a pond or into a bank of water



First Spring Wildflower of the Year

After every long cold winter, I am always itching to get out on the first warm day in February to hunt for the first spring ephemeral wildflower of the year. You might be asking yourself, "What wildflower is blooming in February?" It is no other than the lovely Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*).



Skunk Cabbages can be found in wetland areas near streams, ponds, marshes and wet woods. Early in February, the first part of the plant that appears is the spathe. The spathe is a dark purple pod with greenish splotches that generates heat to melt the snow around the plant. Then the spathe begins to open and you can see the spadix, which is a sphere-shaped knob with little yellow flowers all round it.

By late spring, the Skunk Cabbage will send out tightly rolled leaves that will open out into large egg-shaped leaves with heart-shaped bases. Supposedly, if you crush or bruise the leaves they smell like rotten meat, but I've never had any luck getting a whiff of rotten meat smell. But then again, the smell is not to attract me to the plant, but to attract insects to help pollinate the flowers.

By mid to late summer, the leaves start to rot providing food for slugs, millipedes, and isopods. And by fall, the skunk cabbage disappears and you would never have known it was present there. But for me, it is the first sign of spring that always cures my cabin fever blues.

By Jennifer Manning

Photo: Newcomb's Wildflower Guide

A Little Spring Humor...

Four high school boys afflicted with spring fever skipped morning classes. After lunch they reported to the teacher that they had a flat tire.

Much to their relief she smiled and said, "Well, you missed a test today so take seats apart from one another and take out a piece of paper."

Still smiling, she waited for them to sit down. Then she said: "First Question: Which tire was flat?"

=====

How does the Easter Bunny stay fit?
EGG-xercise and HARE-robics!

What is the Easter Bunny's favorite state capital?
Albunny, New York!



FOX ISLAND ALLIANCE

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Spring 2011



Please Recycle this!

Visit us online: www.foxislandalliance.org

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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