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Summer 2013

FOX ISLAND ALLIANCE

POISON HEMLOCK

By Jeff Ormiston

In 399, Greek philosopher Socrates drank a potion laced with Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) and died a very short time later as his nervous system shut down. In 2010 a woman in Tacoma, Washington died after adding the leaves from poison hemlock to a salad thinking it was related to parsley or wild carrot and would be a good addition to her home grown salad. While often mistaken for wild carrot (Queen Anne's Lace) the differences are many. Poison Hemlock grows 4' to 8' tall, along road sides, in back yards, and wet areas. The flowers are white in a flat umbel and the stems are smooth, green and streaked and dotted with purple. I recently had a single plant grow in my flower bed next to my house. At first I thought it a weed but it was attractive so I let it grow hoping it would bloom making identification easier. As it reached the overhang on my house I got out my wildflower field guide and realized it was poison hemlock, famous for the demise of Socrates. Carefully I cut and disposed of the plant after reading that all parts of the plant are highly poisonous. After last summer's dry conditions Poison Hemlock is now growing with renewed vigor and as people unfamiliar with the plant use it for salads and other food dishes the death rate is slowly climbing. Young children are especially attracted to poison hemlock due to its delicate flowers and fern-like leaves. While some members of the order Lepidoptera rely on poison hemlock as their main food source most wild animals also are adversely affected if they feed on the plants.

Ed. Note: "maculatum" means "spotted." See all the spots on this stem? (Jeff Ormiston's photos.)

It's a Privilege to Live in Indiana!

SOL FEST 2013: TWO DAYS OF SUN AND FROLIC by Jeff Ormiston

Sol Fest 2013, held May 4th and 5th, again brought hundreds of visitors to Fox Island to enjoy one of the most popular spring events in Allen County. True to form, the Fox Island Alliance set up the "Pond Life" station with many varieties of reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and fish on display for the nature loving families and individuals in attendance. A 14" largemouth Bass even made a brief cameo appearance. A first this year were the three sizes of Musk Turtles on exhibit that we could compare to the usual Painted Turtles. A large group of Alliance members and volunteers assured that all visitors to our tables got their questions answered. A special thanks to Russ Voorhees who demonstrated that a Giant Water Bug can inflict a painful bite when provoked. Thanks to the staff of Allen County Parks for a great week-end!

NEWS FROM OUR SCIENCE FAIR WINNERS

My name is Alex Bayes and I am a seventh grade student at St. Charles Borromeo school. I was the junior recipient of the Environmental Excellence award at this years' regional science fair. I just wanted to give you a little bit of information about myself, my family and my project. I am on the high honors role and I play several sports including: basketball, soccer, and tennis. Some of my hobbies are: reading, cooking, playing outdoors, sports, and babysitting. My family which includes my mom, dad and little brother, loves to joke around, but they are always there for me. They encouraged me to do this project and remind me to put out my solar panel on days I forgot.

My science project compared wind and solar power to determine which would be the better alternative energy source for Fort Wayne. The results were close, but I found that solar power had the slight advantage for our area. I decided to do this project because I am interested in preserving our environment. Using clean energy sources, such as the sun or wind will help reduce pollution. These resources are also free, and abundant, unlike coal or gas. It just makes sense for us all to think about better ways to live and preserve our world!

Dear Fox Island Members,

My name is **Grace Steensma**, and I'd like to thank your organization for presenting me with the Fox Island Regional Science Fair award.

My project was on **bats and bat population**. I learned a lot and had fun! Thanks again!

Sincerely, Grace Steensma, 5th grader, Oak View Elementary

Woodland Songbirds in Decline?

By Jim Haw

For more than thirty years, I have kept track of numbers of neotropical songbirds at Fox Island in spring and fall migrations. (Neotropicals are species that nest in the U. S. and/or Canada and winter in Latin America.) Using a method borrowed from Dr. Kenneth Brock, I calculate the average (mean) number of individuals for each species over the years and try to detect trends.

Fall 2012 was a very bad year for migrants at Fox Island. Five species were found in numbers above the long-term mean, one at the mean, and 37 below the mean, in many cases in numbers from 1/3 to 1/5 of the mean. **The five species above the mean were all species that nest at Fox Island: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher , Gray Catbird**, **and White-eyed, Warbling, and Red-eyed Vireos.**

Of course, one should not draw sweeping conclusions about bird populations from one year's data at one location. Perhaps I was not at Fox Island on the right days when good numbers were there, or perhaps weather conditions were such that most migrants flew over us without stopping. Counts of birds on their nesting grounds in June are much more reliable in showing population trends.

But there does seem to be a long-term downward trend for a lot of neotropical woodland birds. I added up the total numbers of individuals seen at Fox Island in fall for the years 1980-1989 and compared them to the totals for 2003-2012. In each case the totals are for nine years; I did not do the survey in 1988 or 2010.

The result shows 16 species in higher numbers recently than in the 1980s, one stable, and 29 declining. For warblers only, 7 species were up in the recent period, one stable, and 16 down. Species nesting at Fox Island fared better (11 species up, 12 down) than transients (5 up, one stable, 17 down). In some cases the change was major. Giving first the totals for the 1980s, then those for the last decade, among the most affected were: Ruby-throated Hummingbird 234/318, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 57/161, Gray Catbird 996/1778, Yellow-bellied Flycacher 17/7, Veery 22/9, Gray-cheeked Thrush 33/9, White-eyed Vireo 177/50 (2012 was an exception to the trend), Blue-winged Warbler 66/13, Golden-winged Warbler 14/4, Tennessee Warbler 652/306, Chestnut-sided Warbler 203/89, Magnolia Warbler 431/216, Cape May Warbler 114/34, Blackburnian Warbler 175/45, Bay-breasted Warbler 410/67, Cerulean Warbler 18/1 (apparently extirpated as a nester at Fox Island now), Ovenbird 259/51, Canada Warbler 60/11, Scarlet Tanager 103/52.

Long-term data for migrants at Fox Island supports the general impression of many Indiana birders away from Lake Michigan: many of our neotropical woodland songbirds are in decline. Wildlife specialists believe the largest single factor in declines on the nesting grounds in eastern North America **is habitat loss and habitat fragmentation, both due to land development. Habitat loss on their wintering grounds in Latin America is another major factor. The hazards of migration and numerous other factors are also involved.**

Holy Smoke! Our Trees Have Holes!

Under the spreading branches of the towering tree next to the Bird Observation Building at Fox Island Park, you can find numerous brown seed pods shaped like stars that seem to have fallen from the sky. However, they only fell off the branches of the giant sweet gum tree overhead.

You can recognize a sweet gum tree not only by its unusual seed pods, but by the star-shaped leaves on its branches. These majestic trees can grow as tall as 100 feet and can live over 150 years! There are even fossil records of their spikey seed pods.

The scientific name for the sweet gum tree is *Liquidamber styraciflua* which describes the sticky, sweet sap, called resin, that seeps through the bark if it is broken. This sap has been collected for centuries and used to make chewing gum, perfumes, and even a medicine that could treat a sore throat. The sap also contains a special chemical, called **styrene**, which is the chief ingredient used when making Styrofoam products!

If you look very carefully at the bark of our old sweet gum tree, you will see neat rows of shallow holes circling the tree and maybe even notice some of that sticky sap oozing out of a few holes. These holes are called **sapwells.**

These sapwells are the work of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a medium-sized woodpecker that likes to lap up the leaking sap and any trapped insects with its brush-tipped tongue. Sporting black-and-white bars on its back and a red cap and throat (males only), it perches upright on our tree's trunk while leaning on its tail for hours drilling just below the tree's bark, trying to tap the nutrient-rich sap that flows down from the leaves towards the roots in tissue called the "**phloem**".

Male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

This "circling the tree" technique works because sap from the first row of drilled holes leaks out, but then thickens and clots. This blocks the downward flow of sap. The enterprising sapsucker then drills a row of holes directly above the clogged row, where sap starts to spurt out due to the built-up pressure from below. The row of holes on the top of a section of circles on a tree is the freshest row.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers will continue to "drill & sip" on the same tree for years, sometimes causing the tree to die. But, since the holes are shallow, the tree is usually able to heal itself from past years of drilling.

Even before you spot this skillful driller, you may be able to hear it drumming its irregular "stuttering" sound or making its cat-like "meow" to warn others they are in its territory!

Ed. Note: Sapsuckers migrate through Fox Island, but nest farther north. Sometimes hummingbirds are attracted to the insects that come to the sapwells.

Volunteers are needed in the Bird Observation Building: see Ron!

SPIDERS

By Kenlyn Peters

The most common reaction to those creepy, frightening, eight-legged creatures is to scream, grab a rolled-up newspaper and wage war with the beasts (or quite possibly to jump up on a chair and scream for someone else to wage the war…) I will be honest and confess that once-upon a time, this was my very reaction if I happened upon a spider, but these feelings of animosity quickly changed to fascination after I took a course on spider biology in college. My curiosity was piqued and the more I learned the more I came to feel that these creatures weren't creepy, they were amazing!

Many people tend to consider spiders as insects, when in fact they are actually members of their own class Arachnida, which is within the same phylum, Arthropoda, to which crustaceans and insects also belong. Eight percent of arthropods are arachnids and forty-nine percent of arachnids are spiders. Other arachnids include scorpions, psuedoscorpions, amblypigids and mites among several others. Some of the characteristics of all arthropods are a chitinous exoskeleton, a segmented body with bilateral symmetry, jointed legs, and an advanced sensory system. What sets arachnids apart are their eight legs, two body segments, pedipalps and chelicerae, eight eyes and the use of external digestion. Spiders are characterized by having un-segmented abdomens, cheliceral poison glands, spinnerets from which they spin silk and by being obligate carnivores. Most spiders have eight eyes, though some species have six.

Another misconception about spiders is that they all spin webs. Spiders do have the potential to spin silk, but not all utilize it to build webs. One of the largest web spinning spiders in the area is the beautiful black and yellow garden spider. Large females are the most recognized as the males are much smaller and not as brilliantly colored. Females' abdomens can be up to an inch large, whereas the largest males are only a third that size. Many people wonder how spiders don't become caught in their own webs. Fascinatingly, spiders can actual create different forms of silk. For instance a web is a combination of sticky and non-sticky silk. The non-stick silk is used for strength and framework; these are the lines the spiders walk on.

Other local spiders that do not utilize their silk to build webs are crab, wolf and jumping spiders. Crab spiders are often seen sitting on flowers where they lie in wait to catch insects. Amazingly crab spiders can even change their color to match their surroundings. Wolf spiders are commonly the large brown spiders found on the floors of homes. They are solitary hunters and have among the best eyesight of the spiders. Jumping spiders are adorable, almost fuzzy spiders, sometimes called monkey-faced spiders because they have two large anterior median eyes that give them a primate-like appearance. They are also among the best with eyesight and have a well-developed internal hydraulic system that allows them to jump distances several times their body length.

Lastly I will touch upon what is probably the largest misconception about spiders, which is that "daddy-longlegs" are the most venomous. There are actually two arachnids that are commonly called daddy longlegs in different regions. One is the harvestmen or Opilionid, which is actually not even a spider. The other is the cellar spider, or the Pholcid. Neither of these is toxic or a threat to humans. The myth was started because a black widow, which is considered one of the most venomous spiders, was found trapped in a Pholcid web, so the assumption was made that the Pholcid must be more venomous. This is not the case, the Pholcid merely has much longer legs and was likely able to wrap the black widow while staying out of reach of its venomous chelicerae.

There are so many amazing facts about spiders and I can only skim the surface. I encourage you to delve into the world of spiders. The next time you see one of these arachnids, I implore you to resist grabbing the rolled-up newspaper, and learn a bit about him.

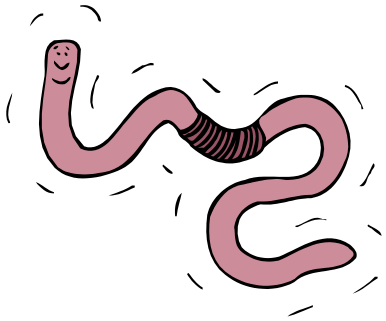
SUMMER ACTIVITIES AT FOX ISLAND

To register for programs or for more information contact one of the following:

For Ron Zartman call 449-3186 or rzartman@allencountyparks.org

For Natalie Haley call 449-3246 or nhaley@allencountyparks.org

Most activities and programs have a $2.00 charge and require pre-registration .



Preschool Discovery Hours: Worm Farmers

July 23, Tuesday 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Cost $3 per child, $2 per adult

Preregister by 7/18; Min. 5 max 20. Why are worms so popular with kids? We will build see-through habitats to take home, hunt for worms to tunnel in them, and end with a snack. Bring a clean, clear 2-L and a 16 oz. bottle for each worm farmer. Register with Ron.

Preschool Discovery Hours: Flutterbies

August 20, Tuesday 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. $3 per child, $2 per adult. Preregister by 8/15. Min. 5, Max 20. Explore the lives of butterflies, enjoy a story, and search for them in our butterfly garden. Have a snack to finish up. Register with Ron.

Little Wabash River Bike Hike

September 14, Saturday 9 a.m. Cost $2; free to park pass holders. Pre-register by 9/9. Bring your own road-ready bike, water and snacks for a leisurely 13 mile tour of the Little Wabash River valley. We'll see old Wabash-Erie Canal features, the Vermilyea House, and break at Little River Wetlands' Arrowhead Prairie. Helmets required; dress for the weather. Register with Ron.

Snorkel Bowman Lake

September 14, Saturday 3-4:30 p.m. Meet at Bowman Lake Beach. Bring your own snorkel, mask and fins to explore Bowman Lake with naturalist Ron Zartman. Participants should be confident swimmers with snorkeling experience. Cost $2; Min. 5 Max 10. Preregister by 9/9; call Ron.

Glow-in-the-Dark Hike: September 27, Friday 8 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Cost $2; pre-register by 9/22; Min. 5, Max 20. Search for glowworms and bioluminescent mushrooms. No flashlights, to preserve our night vision.

Scrapbooking "Crop Till You Drop" at Fox Island:

August 16, Sept. 20, Oct. 18, Fridays from 6 p.m. till midnight. Cost $10 per class.

Summer vacation pictures are beckoning! Creative Memories Consultant Sherina Hewson wil be on hand. Pizza can be ordered for an additional $5. Everyone usually brings an optional snack to share (not required.) Additionally, crafters that need table space may spend their time sewing or crafting for the same fee. Paid pre-registration is required five days in advance. Just send a check made out to Allen County Parks, Attn: Natalie Haley, 7324 Yohne Rd., Fort Wayne IN 46809, with a note letting me know for which night you would like to reserve your spot. You will have until 24 hours to cancel, and we'll give you credit for a future session.

Preschool Discovery Hour: Bug Hunt

September 17, Tuesday 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Cost $3 per child, $2 per adult. Pre-register by 8/12; Min. 5, Max. 20.

We will learn a little about insects and "bugs" and then grab some bug boxes to hunt for and catch some. Snack and drink provided. Register with Ron.

Fox Kit Club Adventures: "Sensory Walk into Nature"

September 10, Tuesday 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. For preschool aged children and their families or teachers. Meet a naturalist at the Nature Center to experience nature by using all of our senses. Fees include a snack and a nature realated craft. Paid preschool teachers of attending students are free; Cost $3 per child, $2 per parent. Pre-register by 9/5 Min. 5, Max 25; call Natalie at 449-3246 to hold your spot.

TAI CHI with Sandy Gebhard will be on Wednesdays 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. starting Sept 18 thru Nov. 6. Cost $50 for 8 weeks or $8 drop-in fee. Min. 10, Max 25. Call Ron to register by 9/13.

REQUESTED PROGRAMS: OPEN ALL YEAR! During normal park hours, or perhaps an evening night hike. If you're interested in having a naturalist guide your family, friends, homeschool group, church group, or club, contact a naturalist today. We require a minimum of 5 participants and a minimum of $20 per group session to guide your group. Topics might include wildflowers, prairie plants, insects, pond life, geologic history (fossils, glacier, dune sands), honeybees, butterflies, birthday parties, night hikes, canoeing 101, fishing 101, nature center tour. Crafts or snacks may be added for an additional fee.

Fox Island Alliance

Ed Powers
12206 W. Yoder Road
Roanoke, IN 46783

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.

MEMBERSHIPS EXPIRE ON MARCH 31. CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL TO BE SURE.

Use the application to the right and check the "Renewal" area!!

Fox Island Alliance Membership Application __New __Renewal

Name_____

Address_____

City, State, Zip_____

Phone_____ Email_____

__Check if you would like to receive your Fox Tale by email

—Check if you do not want your name published

Please Circle One:

Students $5 - Senior $5 - 2 Seniors $10 - Indiv. $15 - Family $20

Sustaining $30 - Patron $50

Additional gift $__ Education $__ Exhibits $__ Scholarship $__ Preservation

Total Dues and Gifts $___

If this membership is a gift, enter donor's name:

_____

Check if you are interested in volunteering. You will be contacted.

Will your employer match your gift to FIA?

Check with your Human Resources/Personnel Department.

FIA is a 501 (c) (3) organization; extra gifts are tax deductible.

Make your check payable to FIA, Inc. and mail with this form to:

Ed Powers, Membership 12206 W. Yoder Rd., Roanoke, IN 46783