



SPRING BUTTERFLIES

By Jeff Ormiston, President, Fox Island Alliance

When the temperature recently climbed to near 70 degrees we all felt that spring was really going to arrive and the snow would melt away. Both Fox Island and Metea County Parks reported that the skunk cabbages were up, the trails were nearly ice free and, yes, the Mourning Cloak Butterflies were stretching their wings after being dormant all winter.



Mourning Cloak, like the Eastern Comma and Question Mark (anglewing) butterflies over-winter as adults hibernating behind loose pieces of tree bark, hollow logs and trees or sheds and garages. Red Admiral butterflies are also in this group of hibernating butterflies that produce a type of glycerol in their

bodies that lowers the freezing temperature of their body fluids. The production of these cryoprotectants is triggered by the decrease in sunlight and temperature as winter approaches. As the temperatures warm in the spring the over-wintered adults thaw out become active, mate and lay eggs immediately.

There is some debate on whether there are one or two flights of Mourning Cloaks per year. It is now believed that the adult Mourning Cloak butterflies, that are the result of early spring mating, may actually enter a period of mid-summer dormancy known as aestivation. As summer temperatures cool the adults again become active, mate and lay eggs that will become the adults that will overwinter and mate in the spring. This decrease in daylight and temperature also starts a process called diapause which produce changes in the butterfly caterpillar that stops the emerging adults desire to mate and focus on eating in order to build up the necessary fat reserves to get it through the winter



There is always the question of “What do the butterflies eat when they emerge in the spring when there are no nectar producing flowers?” These spring butterflies



feed on the sap seeping from recently bored woodpecker holes or bark fissures created during the winter.

Did you remember to renew your membership? They expire March 31.

Keep reading for upcoming events, and how you can help!

Two events are coming up where the Alliance will need volunteers to staff our tables:



EARTH DAY at Eagle Marsh, April 26, 1p – 5p Staff the Alliance table and promote The Fox Island Alliance, Allen Co. Parks, Fox Island Co. Park, and the Indiana Master Naturalist Program. The table is inside the non-profit tent. This is a very popular event that closes Engle Road and has numerous educational stations for event visitors.

Sol Fest at Fox Island, May 2, 3. 12p – 5p each day. Staff the pond dipping table and talk to visitors about pond life and help kids dip critters from Bowman Lake. This is a popular event open to the public with live music, live exhibits, a beer tent and many activities for families. Volunteers can work all hours or any part as their schedule requires.

Please contact Jeff Ormiston, jormiston@allencountyparks.org, 260-414-2538 if you would like to participate.

And invite everyone you know to come enjoy SolFest! The \$5 admission fee helps fund park programs and field trips for school groups.



It's a privilege to live in Indiana!

Is it really spring?

By Ed Powers

As I write this, it's three days after the "official" start of spring, it's been snowing heavily most of the day, and there are three or four inches of snow on Fox Island. Some people will tell you that winter has returned. I say those people have short memories. They don't remember that March snow is common; in fact, the last snow of the season is usually in April. That doesn't mean winter has returned – it just means that spring is getting frisky.

Spring weather in northeast Indiana is capricious. A snowy day may be followed by a sunny one, followed by rain. Temperatures may range from the 20s to the 70s, or even the 80s. You may get your shorts out, but don't put away your winter coat yet.

I say spring starts when the Red-winged Blackbirds return and the daffodils sprout. It continues through the snowstorms and lasts at least until the last migrant warbler has passed through.



Hybrid Chickadees at Fox Island By Cynthia Powers

Fox Island is in the hybrid zone for chickadees. Recently young birder Ryan Smith addressed a meeting of Stockbridge Audubon, open to the public and to the Master Naturalists. He is a recent IPFW graduate, and this was his senior thesis.

We have Carolina Chickadees at Fox Island, but north of Fort Wayne the chickadees are Black-capped. However, they do hybridize, and the hybrid zone reaches from Kansas across to Pennsylvania. In the mountains of Pennsylvania, the Black-caps take the higher altitudes.

Without doing a DNA test, you can tell these chickadees apart, if they hold still long enough to get a good look. Carolinas are a bit smaller and the bottom edge of their black "bib" is very distinct, not raggedy. The Black-cap has a bit of white on his shoulder.

In the spring Carolinas have a four note whistle "Fee-bee, fee-bay" That's easy to remember: it's 4 syllables like "Carolina." The Black-caps, a bit bigger, have a two note whistle. And their "chick-a-dee" call is lower pitched. Granted this takes some practice!

Ryan's literature search found out that the hybrid zone is moving north, slowly. That's because the hybrids are a bit better adapted to colder temperatures, and also male Carolinas are more desirable as mates. Must be that 4-note call is irresistible!

Can you tell that the left picture is a Carolina, the right a Black-cap?





Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George

Bats @ Fox Island Park: A Face Only A Mother Could Love!

A few mammals, like flying squirrels and sugar gliders, may know how to perform free-fall gliding, but to fly by actually flapping their wings. They belong to the order Chiroptera, meaning “hand wing,” which reports their translucent wings.

Are there bats living at Fox Island? At least eight species of bats have been spotted in the park: Big Brown Bat; Evening Bat; Hoary-tailed Brown Bat; Red Bat; Silver-haired Bat; Indiana Bat; Keen’s Bat; Little Brown Bat.



land? At least eight species of bats have been spotted in the park: Big Brown Bat; Evening Bat; Hoary-tailed Brown Bat; Red Bat; Silver-haired Bat.

So, where can they be found? Bats live in a variety of habitats, including wetlands, fields, forests, agricultural areas, and even in the middle of cities or suburban neighborhoods. They usually feed where insects swarm, such as over water and agricultural fields, in forest clearings, along forest edges, and around parking lot lights.

To survive, bats need water and insects to eat, places to hunt insects, called **foraging habitats**, places to hibernate, sleep and raise their babies known as **roosts**, and safe routes between these different locations called **commuting habitats**.

Trees provide shelter and attract a wide range of insect species for bats to feed on. Oak, beech, ash and even the loose bark of the shagbark hickory tree are particularly suitable for bat roosts, especially if the trees have hollows in their trunks or branches, or woodpecker holes, or even deep crevices from lightning strikes. Since bats are not able to bore holes or make their own nests, they use whatever gaps are available – including hollows made by other animals or by the natural decay of the wood. They usually select naturally warm sites, such as sheltered trees receiving some sunshine during the day.

But roosting bats are masters at concealing their locations, so it is hard to find tree roosts, especially when looking from the ground.

Because few flying insects are active during winter, any bats remaining at Fox Island need to locate warm crevices in which to hibernate. Some big brown bats may overwinter in the rafters or under the overhangs of one of the Fox Island buildings, like the Nature Center, the Bird Observation Building, or the storage garage. Bats can survive colder temperatures because they are **heterothermic**, which means they can vary their body temperature. A bat can set its body temperature to be the same as its environment or be warmer when needed.

Bats at Fox Island are not suffering from white-nose syndrome, a fungus that grows on the noses of bats hibernating particularly in the caves of southern Indiana, irritating and possibly dehydrating them so they wake up and waste precious energy before sufficient food is available, which leads to their starvation.

However, because bats feed on insects, the increased use of pesticides has undoubtedly resulted in the poisoning of some of these beneficial critters. Also, the clearing of forests has caused a decline in the summer habitat of the many Indiana bats. Therefore, preserved areas, like Fox Island, become one of the few havens that provide a secure future for these unique creatures of the wild.

Are you wondering what is coming up at Fox Island, and maybe at Metea County Park as well? Check www.allencountyparks.org, and click on “Wild Grapevine” newsletter.

Lots of programs for all ages. **Most require pre-registration** and a small fee. And don't forget the summer day camps!

Movie night at Fox Island: **“Billions to None”**



April 14 at 6:30 p.m..

Join Stockbridge Audubon Society for this movie about the species we have lost: Passenger Pigeon, Carolina Parakeet, and Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. (Bring lots of Kleenex)

Free with park admission and a birdseed donation. Call Natalie to pre-register.

You can also join Stockbridge Audubon for Saturday morning bird hikes, **April 25 at 8. and May 25 at 7:30.** Meet by the Vera Dulin building with your binoculars and bug spray.

Sunday hikes with Jeff Ormiston: April 12 and May 17, 1:30-3:30 Bring the whole family! Call 449-3180 to pre-register.

How to Raise a Monarch Butterfly: June 7, 1:30-3:30 Jeff Ormiston has lots of experience doing this! Call 449-3180



April 11, Saturday has two hikes with Ron Zartman: 3-5 **Lay of the Land**, and then from 8-9:30 p.m. **“Daylight to Dark”** to hear the woodcock courtship. Call Ron 449-3186 to pre-register.

April 21, Tuesday 6:30 Evening Woodland Walk with Natalie.

Family GoFishIN' workshop June 6, Saturday 10-12 with Natalie. Sign up early and call Natalie for more information.

Scrapbooking with Natalie continues April 17, May 15 and June 5.



Fox Island Alliance

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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.

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

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

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