

# Wait...That's not Milkweed!

By Carol Gaham

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Summer 2016



FOX ISLAND ALLIANCE

I have a small strip of land on my property that I'm trying to turn into a woodland prairie. Or at least get some wildflowers growing. Recently I spent some quality time pulling thistles out of my prairie (and my thumbs) and noticed a fine crop of what looked to me like milkweed. I was very excited about all this milkweed I'd suddenly acquired, but upon a closer look I was confused. It looked an awful lot like milkweed...but not exactly. The bottom of the plant was kind of like milkweed and when I broke a leaf off it was milky like milkweed, but where the flower is supposed to be something was really different. Being the detective that I am I was pretty sure it wasn't milkweed, so off I went on a quest to find out what kind of crop I really had on my hands.

I discovered that my fine crop of milkweed is actually Common Dogbane, (a.k.a. Indian Hemp, Prairie Dogbane, or as it is scientifically known, *Apocynum cannabinum*). According to the internet, this is a highly toxic plant, poisonous to dogs and other herbivores (and humans), but further research found that this is true only in large amounts, and animals usually leave it alone because it doesn't taste very good to them.

Actually it's a very interesting plant. Native Americans used it to make a lot of things, and its fibers have been found in some archeological sites thousands of years old. The twine made from Dogbane was used to make fishing lines and nets, and nooses for snaring birds and other animals. It was also used to make baskets, bowstrings, moccasins, clothing, and even woven into bedding for baby cradles. Used as a dye, it produces a dark tan color. Early settlers took advantage of its many uses after they learned how to use it.



A chemical found in its roots, Cymarín, was used as a cardiac stimulant, and until 1960 it was listed in the National Formulary. Although the plant is considered toxic to humans and can cause cardiac arrest if ingested, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the roots were harvested for a variety of folk medicine and medical purposes. It was used for treating fever and dysentery, as well as rheumatism, coughs, whooping cough, asthma, and migraines.

A tea made from Dogbane was used to treat cardiac diseases, worms, and as a laxative. The latex squeezed from the plant was used to make a type of chewing gum. On the prairie it was the little plant that could!

Common habitats for Common Dogbane include wet prairies, moist meadows along rivers, along edges of swamps, abandoned fields, fence rows, roadside ditches, and it loves soybean fields. In other words, it grows almost everywhere, including my little prairie. It spreads both by dropping its seeds after it flowers and also by its extensive and ever spreading root system. It grows up to 5 feet tall and the flowers are fragrant and attractive. It is found throughout most of Canada and the United States.

So what good is Dogbane in my little corner of the world? Its root system helps with erosion control, and the nectar attracts many species of bees, moths, flies, beetles, skippers, and butterflies. The larvae of several moths and beetles feed on Dogbane. It was thought for a while that Monarch butterflies lay their eggs on it, but that has never been proven.

How does one control Dogbane since it is a bit invasive? Don't cut it in the fall; that stimulates growth. And don't burn it; it really thrives on that, too. It doesn't respond well to herbicides, either. According to Penn State University, the best way to control it is to plow it up or keep it mowed. So, if you find yourself looking at a fine crop of Dogbane and feel the need to control it, get out your John Deere or your weed whacker and get busy! But hurry. It will be flowering soon.

## Upcoming Programs for Summer 2016 – Jeff Ormiston

### Raising Butterflies for Kids July 26, Tuesday

This class is designed for elementary school age kids interested in learning how to raise monarch butterflies. If available, the kids will be able to take home an egg or caterpillar to raise along with a container to raise their new friend.

Cost: \$3.00 per child  
\$2 per adult  
Pre-register by: 7/22  
Min. 5

To register or for more information:  
Email: [jormiston@allencountyparks.org](mailto:jormiston@allencountyparks.org)  
Call: 449-3180  
Jeff Ormiston

### Monarch Tagging and Monitoring, August 21, Sunday

Learn how to tag and release Monarch Butterflies thru the Monarch Watch Monarch Program. Also learn about the Fox Island summer Monarch Monitoring program.



Cost: \$2.00  
Free to park pass holders  
Pre-register by: 8/12  
Min:5  
Max: 40

To register or for more information:  
Email: [jormiston@allencountyparks.org](mailto:jormiston@allencountyparks.org)  
[Call: 449-3180](tel:449-3180)  
Jeff Ormiston

### Monarch Festival

**September 11, Sunday**

Visit the Fox Island education station at the Little River Wetlands Project's Monarch Fest at Eagle Marsh. You will learn about the predators and diseases that affect the Monarch butterflies and enjoy the other activities associated with Monarch Butterflies. Engle Road will be closed off, and there will be lots to do and see!

**12 pm – 4pm**

Cost: FREE

### Eagle Marsh – Engle Road

For more information search  
Search: [www.lrwp.org](http://www.lrwp.org)  
[Email: jormiston@allencountyparks.org](mailto:jormiston@allencountyparks.org)  
Call: (260) 449-3180  
Jeff Ormiston

### Dragonflies and Damselflies

**September, 25, Sunday**

Learn about the Fox Island Dragonflies and Damselflies and take a hike and try to catch a few in with our nets.

**1:30 PM – 3:30 PM**

Cost: \$ 2.00  
Free to park pass holders  
Pre-register by: 9/18  
Min: NA  
Max. 20

### Fox Island Nature Center

To register or for more information:  
Email: [jormiston@allencountyparks.org](mailto:jormiston@allencountyparks.org)  
Call: (260) 449-3180  
Jeff Ormiston

# Science Fair Winners 2016

**Nirupama Devanathan** was a senior at Homestead High School.. Nirupama became fascinated with environmental science, particularly the history of Crooked Lake. The project involved comparing the lake's water quality with that of 1970 and 1990.



The lake is cleaner than in 1990, but not as clean as in 1970. Another finding was that the Midwest contributes 70% of the nutrient load that causes the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico, which now measures 6474 square miles! Crooked Lake is participating in a program to prevent this runoff, serving as an example for the rest of the Midwest.

Nirupama reports being a tree-hugger, a vegetarian, and a student of both Western and Indian music.

**Zeah Merritt** was 14 and in 8th grade. She is the middle of three girls and likes to run, swim and walk her dogs. Her science teacher, Mrs. Grier, helped her select her project, about compost. She wanted to see which of several items would disintegrate the fastest.



“I had two compost bins. An open one (chicken wire wrapped around a few wooden posts) and a closed one (a large trash can.) I put in compost (dry brown leaf, grass clippings, coffee grounds, and food scraps etc.) to each one, five quarts of each. After one month ....I checked the compost and it looked like it was ready to put the testing items into the bins. I tested a small piece of Styrofoam, a piece of a paper plate, a little scrap of cardboard, a half of a plastic cup, and a piece of a plastic shopping bag. After I set the items in the two bins, I stirred the contents. Every two weeks I went to check on the testing items. In the span of eight weeks, the cardboard and the piece of paper plate were almost completely gone, but the others were unchanged.”

Both the winners were given family memberships in the Fox Island Alliance.  
Congratulations!

## Upcoming Programs for Summer 2016

Ron Zartman



### Preschool Discovery Hour – Fossil Hunt

#### July 26, Tuesday

We will explore fossils indoors, and then go outdoors to the fossil pile to hunt for them. Found fossils can be kept and carried home. No dinosaurs in Indiana, but lots of crinoids and brachiopods that are **way** older than the dinosaurs! Usually it takes kids about 5 minutes to find one.

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Cost: \$3.00 per child

\$2 per adult

Pre-register by: 7/21

Min. 5

Max. 20

Nature Center

To register or for more information:

Email: [rzartman@allencountyparks.org](mailto:rzartman@allencountyparks.org)

Call: 449-3186

Ron Zartman

### August 30, Tuesday

Create a window on worm life. We'll build see-through worm habitats to take home, hunt for worms to live in them and end with a snack. Bring a clean, clear two-liter and 16 Oz bottle for each worm farmer.

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Cost: \$3.00/Child

\$2.00/adult

Pre-register by: 8/25

Min:5

Max: 20

Fox Island County Park

To register or for more information:

Email: [rzartman@allencountyparks.org](mailto:rzartman@allencountyparks.org)

Call: (260) 449-3186

Ron Zartman



**Little Wabash River Bike Hike**

**September 17, Saturday**

Bring your own road-ready bicycle, 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 weather.

**9:00 AM**

Cost: \$2.00

Free to park pass holders.

Pre-register by: 9/12

Min: 5 Max: 15

**Fox Island County Park**

To register or for more information:

Email: [rzartman@allencountyparks.org](mailto:rzartman@allencountyparks.org)

Call: (260) 449-3186

Ron Zartman

**Edible Wild Plant Hike**

**September, 17 Saturday**

Discover some of the many wild edible plants that live in parks and public places while learning why they should not be collected there. Dress for the weather and bring bug spray for this two-mile walk.

**3:00 PM – 4:30 PM**

Cost: \$ 2.00 / person

Pre-register by: 9/12

Min. 5

**Fox Island County Park**

To register or for more information:

Email: [rzartman@allencountyparks.org](mailto:rzartman@allencountyparks.org)

Call: (260) 449-3186

**Glow-in-the-Dark Hike**

**September 17, Saturday**

Join us to search the night for glowworms and bioluminescent mushrooms. Dress in long sleeves and bring bug spray in case of mosquitos. Please, use no flashlights in order to preserve night vision.

**8:30 PM – 10:00 PM**

Cost: \$2.00

Pre-register by: 9/12

Min:5

**Fox Island County Park**

To register or for more information:

Email: [rzartman@allencountyparks.org](mailto:rzartman@allencountyparks.org)

Call: (260) 449-3186

**September 20, Tuesday**

Explore the lives of butterflies, enjoy a story, and search for them in our butterfly garden. Have a snack to finish up.

**1:00 PM – 2:00 PM**

Cost: \$3.00/Child  
\$2.00/adult

Pre-register by: 8/15

Min:5

Max: 20

**Fox Island County Park**

To register or for more information:

Email: [rzartman@allencountyparks.org](mailto:rzartman@allencountyparks.org)

Call: (260) 449-3186

Ron Zartman



## *Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids*

*By Pam George*

### *Soothing Sounds On A Summer Evening*

Some warm summer evening, venture outside to a cool, comfortable spot, sit back and take in the symphony of soothing sounds all around you. Most of these musical notes are produced by insects talking with other insects. Usually, they are looking for a mate, establishing their territories, or warning of danger.

These strange, but familiar, melodies are usually created as these creatures rub body parts together, called **stridulation**. For instance, at dusk on a particularly humid, late summer night, a grasshopper-like insect, the katydid, performs its “katy did - katy didn’t” chorus. Male katydids do all the singing to attract mates and establish territories. Their songs are produced by rubbing a set of tiny pegs, called a file, at the base of one wing against a strong ridge, called a scraper, on the other wing. Females can hear the call of the males with ears (tympanic membranes) located on their forelegs.

But, insects aren’t the only animals doing their best work at night. These nocturnal critters are also either searching for a mate or a tasty meal. Challenge yourself to match the names of some of these animals with the special evening serenades you might hear while secure in your outdoor retreat.

- |                             |       |  |
|-----------------------------|-------|--|
| A. <b>Barred Owl</b>        | _____ | short buzzing call followed by a whooshing sound as it dives                               |
| B. <b>Eastern Tree Frog</b> | _____ | chirping, high-pitched, melodic trill  |
| C. <b>Red Fox</b>           | _____ | short, high trill like a faster version of the “flutter, flutter, flutter” of a woodpecker |
| D. <b>Cricket</b>           | _____ | sounds like “Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?”                                    |
| E. <b>Coyote</b>            | _____ | short, loud bark used as an alarm call   |
| F. <b>Nighthawk</b>         | _____ | mournful howling   |



*“If moonlight could be heard, it would sound just like this.” Nathaniel Hawthorne, American novelist*



## I wish I'd known About That!

A statement we hear frequently from our visitors to the Allen County Parks is “I wish I had known about that!” referring to programs and events held at the parks. Over the past year the park’s staff has made considerable effort to make sure the events of the parks are communicated to the public.

Allen County Parks publishes “THE WILD GRAPEVINE” quarterly. This publication goes out to all AC Parks annual members and is accessible through the Allen County Parks website. The WGV also is available at the Metea and Fox Island Co. Park’s Nature Centers. The Fox Island Alliance publishes this quarterly newsletter, the “FOX TALE” which is sent to all Alliance members and is available in the Fox Island Co. Park Nature Center. These publications list programs and events happening at Allen County Parks.

Other internet sites related to Allen County Parks events:

On FACEBOOK search: Allen County Parks, Fox Island Park, Fox Island Alliance

On the Internet search [www.allencountyparks.org](http://www.allencountyparks.org).

Fox Island has lots of programs for all ages.

**Most require pre-registration** and a small fee. To pre-register call 449-3180.

Calling all nature writers: you don’t have to be a board member to write articles for the Fox Tale. If you have a favorite topic, research it and send it to the editor, Cynthia Powers, at [zzedpowers@aol.com](mailto:zzedpowers@aol.com). The deadlines are easy to remember: the first day of a new season is the deadline for that season’s newsletter.

Pictures are welcome too; or how about poetry?



**It’s a privilege to live in Indiana!**

Answers to Soothing Sounds:  
F, D, B, A, C, E.





# Fox Island Alliance

Ed Powers  
12206 W. Yoder Road  
Roanoke, IN 46783

Officers:

- Brett Fisher, President
- Liz Hincks, Vice President
- Jeff Ormiston, Vice President
- Carol Gaham, Secretary
- Nathan Arata, Treasurer

Board of Directors:

- Barbara Bauer, Nathan Arata, Sue Peters, Dr. Solomon Isiorho,
- Jeff Keplar, Ed Powers, Cindy Loos, Kate Sanders, Cindy Nestel,
- Pam George

Directors Emeritus:

- Phil Herrick, Kate Ferguson, Iona Mensch, and John McCory

Fox Tale Editor:

- Cynthia Powers

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 “Renewal”**

**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

**We’re on the Web!**