

What has the Alliance been up to?

By Brett Fisher, President



Greetings, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year!

As some of you already know, 2016 is a big year for the State of Indiana. This year is the 200th anniversary of Indiana's admittance to the United States on December 11, 1816 (three years later than Ohio...just saying). For outdoor enthusiasts this year also marks the 100th anniversary of Indiana's first state parks, McCormick's Creek and Turkey Run State Park. These parks were presented to the citizens of Indiana to mark the 100th anniversary of statehood and resulted in great part from the work and dedication of Colonel Richard Lieber, the "Father of Indiana State Parks". I hope each of you are able to celebrate these historical milestones and encourage each of you to visit your favorite state parks, take time to reflect on the people that first thought to protect these places as well as those who work to maintain and protect them for future generations. Please consider contributing to the parks by choosing the environmental license plate when you renew your registration, supporting the Indiana Parks Alliance, or purchasing an annual state parks pass and use it!

The Allen County Parks also has reason to reflect in 2016. It is with my deepest sympathies to announce that on October 23, 2015, Samuel Gregory, the previous park board president of 21 years and avid park supporter passed away. His leadership and dedication will be greatly missed.

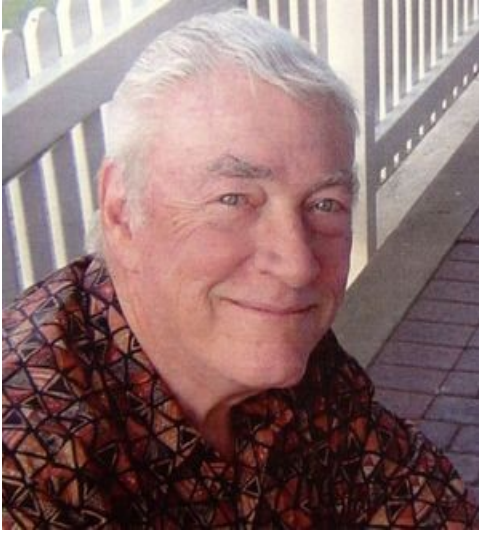
On December 31, 2015, Tom Lochner, maintenance foreman stationed at Fox Island County Park will retire after dedicating 21 years to the care and maintenance of our parks. Please join the rest of the parks board and staff in thanking Tom for his years of service at Fox Island County Park on December 31st beginning at 10 am.

The Fox Island Alliance will continue to support and promote Fox Island County Park in 2016. Our biggest project in 2015, the remodeling of the Bird Observation Building, is nearing completion. New windows, lights, paint, stain, displays, sound system, tables, chairs, and exterior sign are all in place and await anyone wishing to volunteer or participate in our Feeder Watch programs this winter. We will have an open house in 2016 to formally dedicate the newly remodeled building as the Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building. The Alliance has once again opened registration for another class of Indiana Master Naturalists from February 23 – May 31, 2016. In addition, the Alliance will also be taking the lead on offering and organizing classes for those wishing to fulfill their Advanced Indiana Master Naturalist requirements.

The main project I am focused on right now is organizing the contents of the Fox Island Alliance Office in the Fox Island Nature Center and turning it into usable office space for the organization once again. This will not only allow me to become more familiar with the history of the organization, but will also give me the opportunity to evaluate and preserve important documents, photographs, blue prints, and educational materials that comprise the history of the Fox Island Alliance. I currently have 3 file cabinets full of written documents, several boxes of slides, multiple photo albums, and multiple storage containers to examine. If anyone who is familiar with the history of the Fox Island Alliance and may know the names and faces that are in many of these pictures would be willing to help me comb through this material I would greatly appreciate the assistance. Please contact me directly if you are interested in helping me piece together and preserve some of our history.

Good Winter Reading... One of my favorite books is *Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival* by Bernd Heinrich. It deals with a scientist's study of animals and plants in winter and their unique ways of surviving. I find myself returning to this book whenever the weather turns cold, and recommend it to anyone who enjoys nature writing.

It's a privilege to live in Indiana!



Sam Gregory Remembered

By Jeff Baxter, Park Superintendent

The Allen County Parks staff and Board learned of the passing of our past President and good friend, Samuel B. (Sam) Gregory Jr. on October 23rd at the Sage Bluff Nursing Home in Fort Wayne. Sam had been the President of the Park Board until January 1, 2014, a position he had been appointed to over 20 years before. Sam asked that he not be re-appointed when his term expired stating the department was doing fine and it was time for someone else to take over!

During his 20 plus years of service as the Park Board President he oversaw the fund raising and construction of both the Nature Center at Fox Island and the Gloria Goeglein Nature Center at Metea County Park. Other accomplishments of the department included the acquisition of the lands that now encompass the park we now know as Metea County Park, the construction of a new maintenance barn at Fox Island, construction of a new residence at Fox Island, the threat of merger with Fort Wayne Parks (an idea he vehemently disagreed with) and an agreement with the Board of Commissioners of Allen County for operation of the 107 acre Deer Run Wilderness Area & Timberline Challenge Course. No small accomplishments, and ones that Sam would have been the first to remind you were accomplished with many great people that served with him on the Board.

Sam was a partner in Gregory, Zent, and Swanson Investment Corporation until its closing and was owner of Gregory-Shaw Financial Inc. as well as President and Owner of Financial Profile Systems.

As if he didn't have enough on his plate, he also was a charter member and President of the Fort Wayne Sertoma Club, an active member of Trinity English Lutheran Church, member of the Waynedale Masonic Lodge, Scottish Rite and Mizpah Shriners. He also was the past president of the Local Chapter of Life Underwriters, past Board Member of the Ft Wayne Estate Planning Group and a life member of the Million Dollar Round Table.

Oh, and then he was also a past commodore of the Put In Bay Yacht Club on South Bass Island on Lake Erie!! Other than working, his main hobby was cruising the Great Lakes with his wife Connie on their 43' Gulf Star Trawler. I can attest to this as many times his secretary would tell me if I called his office that he was out on the boat and I could try his cell phone. She always took my name and number because as she said, he may just be out of the coverage area but he'll call in eventually!

As you can see Sam was a busy man but never too busy to help and support the Allen County Park Department. I only had the pleasure of working for him for seven years but it never made any difference what I called about or needed signed he always made time to help me out. He could run a Board meeting like no one else I have ever met. You see, obviously he was a busy man, so he was not much for small talk and would frequently tire of long discussions during a meeting and simply say "moving on" and bang the gavel. If there needed to be a vote, then we took one, if not we moved on!

Our thoughts and prayers are with Connie and the rest of the Gregory family during this difficult time. We will miss Sam but our memories of our time with him live on.

Bandit the Raccoon ... and his grandfather's rootmail invention

by Jeff Keplar

...a different perspective on some of our furry friends, best read by those who aren't too tied to factual reality

For the benefit of you humans in the audience, this is the story of my grandpa's invention, rootmail, and I'm telling you because I know I can trust you since you read the FoxTale. Papa always said, "If you see it in the FoxTale, it's so." You see, I'm a very shy little raccoon and I live in Indiana, in a woods at Fox Island Nature Preserve. My name is Bandit, and did I tell you that I am very shy? In fact, whenever I go out where anyone might see me, I wear a mask over my eyes. I'm pretty sure that if I have a mask on and I can't see you very well, then you can't see me either! Right? I don't want you to see me because I am shy...very shy; did I already tell you that? In fact, I am so shy that I seldom go outside in the daytime when it is light but I wait until it gets dark and then my friends and I spend all night roaming the woods looking for food and trying not to get into too much trouble. I've heard that those humans around refer to those of us who stay up at night as "nocturnal" and that's okay. I just call it being like a raccoon. I've also noticed that some humans put on coats this time of year with fur to try to look as stylish as we raccoons are. No surprise they would want to copy us since we've been doing it forever.

Now, if you don't mind me saying so, most other raccoons think that I, Bandit, am a great friend to have, because I know lots of things about the woods, both near my home and across the country thanks to something my grandfather Bill invented. He and his wife Melinda live in a big Redwood tree completely across the country. You see there are millions of raccoons all over America, and we all share what we know with one another wherever we live. That's because we raccoons have this sort of internet-like thing called "rootmail". As long as a raccoon is touching a tree, any tree, anywhere in the United States, he can send messages through rootmail to any other raccoons and communicate with them. So if you make friends with one of us raccoons, you can learn things from lots of others.

Now if for some reason you can't find a tree to use rootmail, my other grandpa, Steve, invented what we call a uPhone, which allows "u" to find a healthy poison ivy vine (and we have lots of those at Fox Island) and use it to connect with any other raccoon who also has a uPhone via poison ivy vines anywhere across the county. We refer to them as landvines. Such a deal, huh?

I should tell you that I come from a ma Bandit, and all my little brother Bandito, a name that is also used for a Actually, my friends and I raided their after closing time for a late night snack. because their salsa has onions in it,

Of course life is not all roaming the I come from a big litter of raccoons. It oak tree that I have to keep my bicy-bark hickory tree. I don't like that neighboring trees borrow my bike rries, and they get purple raspberry

But I do make lots of friends with off. For instance, I am a good friend ed to parties, especially birthday par-going to parties, although I stay hid-tell you about being shy? So I hide be up close! But when I get word

I'm on it, and I stay around afterword in case they have left over birthday cake (or anything else).

Life as a raccoon is not easy. If I can't find any birthday cake to eat, I have to go scrounging for worms or creatures that live in the water, such as crayfish, mussels or clams, frogs, fish, or snails. When I can't find those, I eat insects, slugs, or even dead animals, birds and bird eggs, or even fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Sometimes, my friends and I even get into the neighbors' garbage cans and look for treats those humans leave behind.

So there you have it; I just wanted to set the record straight about how rootmail got started...oh, and wish you a Merry Christmas, too. Now I'm going to go back to my den and get a nap in...have to be ready to go Christmas shopping for my siblings once it gets dark. And I hear there are some real nuts out shopping this time of the year...and I'm always looking for the best nuts!



big family of Bandits, with Papa Bandit, Mom-and sister sibling bandits. My folks call me restaurant chain in Fort Wayne – Banditos. trashcans one night behind their restaurant af-However, I discovered I don't like to eat there and I don't like onions! At all! Not a bit!

woods at night and living a life of ease. In fact, is so crowded in my family's den in the big cle parked outside under a neighboring shag-because sometimes the little raccoon kids from without asking, and use it to go pick raspber-stains on the handlebars.

other kinds of animals and sometimes it pays with Tigger, and often times Tigger gets invit-ties, so I come along with him. I really like den all day because I am so shy...did I already nearby and watch...too much noise for me to through rootmail that there is a party going on,



Does Indiana need a state butterfly? Soon a bill will be introduced to make the Monarch our State Butterfly! After all, we have a state tree, bird, and even a state pie! Contact your state legislator and let's make it happen!

Ed. Note: ours is Dan Leonard; e-mail him at h50@iga.in.gov.



Indiana Master Naturalist Class 2016

The 2016 Allen County Indiana Master Naturalist class will begin February 23rd, 2016. Information regarding the class, including the class schedule and registration, is available through the www.allencountyparks.org website. In the site's right hand menu click on "Indiana Master Naturalist 2016" in order to access the information.

Huge Rodents at Bowman Lake by Jeff Ormiston

During the first week of November of this year, as I walked the shoreline of Bowman Lake, I noticed something unusual for the lake but very distinctive in appearance. It was obvious that *Castor canadensis*. North America's largest rodent, was using small tree trunks and seedlings around the lake as a tasty snack. I thought it very fitting that the North American Beaver should visit Fox Island as we approach the 200th anniversary of Indiana's Statehood.

Between 1700 and 1840 the North American fur trade was a booming business. Nowhere in North America was fur bearing animals more plentiful than the lower Great Lakes Region and especially the rivers and streams of the Maumee and Wabash River flood plains. Most valued among the fur bearers was the North American Beaver. The fashion markets of the United States and Europe required Beaver pelts to fill the demand for beaver fur coats, jackets and the very fashionable beaver top hats made of felted beaver fur. In



July of 1839 representatives of George and Wm. Ewing shipped the following skins from Fort Wayne: deer, 3993; raccoon, 6172; wild cat, 234; gray fox, 29; wolf, 109; otter, 374; mink, 55; beaver, 194; bear, 30; rat, 33 (muskrat?); and badger, 6.

The geological features that separated the Maumee River and Wabash River systems created a portage that at that time was the most important portage in North America and led to the establishment of today's Fort Wayne, Indiana. Many of these pelts were transported over this portage. It was about 9 miles long, depending on the time of year and rainfall, and ran from the St. Mary's River at present day Swinney Park connecting to the Little Wabash River just west of Fox Island

County Park. The Little Wabash River then connected to the Wabash River at present day Huntington, Indiana. Today we can see the original channel of the Little Wabash River by visiting the Marsh Observation Tower north of the Upper Dune Trail.

Beavers are entirely vegetarian and gnaw on trunks of trees and aquatic vegetation. The nourishment needed by the beaver to attract being rodents their teeth grow continuously and are self-sharpening. The rusty color of adult beaver incisors is caused by the iron in the beaver's diet which combines with the teeth enamel to create an extremely hard surface. A Beaver's hind feet are webbed and their large flat tail acts as an appendage for storing fat reserves, but instead use their front feet to seal their



turnal. They feed on the leaves, branches The cambium layer of the trees supply the tain their 45-75 pound average body weight. ously and are self-sharpening. The rusty the iron in the beaver's diet which combines tremely hard surface. A Beaver's hind feet a signaling device as well as a rudder and Beavers do not pack mud with their tails, lodges with mud.

The lodge for the Bowman Lake Beaver is visible just west of the white pier on the north side of the lake. This lodge is considered a "pond lodge" and built against the shore of the lake. The entrance to the lodge is underwater on the east side of the lodge. Brush extends out into the lake about 20 feet from the lodge and gives the location away. Beaver gnawing can be seen on many tree trunks along the north and west banks of the lake and several locations can be accessed by a short walk from the main trail around the lake.

There will be a program on Bowman Lake Beavers on Sunday January 10th, 1:30p to 3:00p followed by a hike to the lake to observe the lodge and locations of beaver activity

Have You Seen Lucy?

By Ed Powers

An unusual female Northern Cardinal has been appearing at the feeders outside the Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building this fall. She is pale in appearance, lacking the usual black "mask," or any other dark coloration, a condition known as *leucism*, so we've been calling her "Lucy." What is going on? To answer that, some discussion of color in birds is in order. With a few exceptions, parrots being one, there are two classes of pigments that give birds their colors.



The first is *melanin*. One kind of melanin produces black in birds (and other animals, including humans). It colors blackbirds, crows, the caps of chickadees and nuthatches, and many others. In lower concentrations it produces gray, as in catbirds and most gulls. A second kind of melanin produces a range of colors, from a rather bright gold to rusty red. Usually, it is combined with black melanin to make a variety of browns. Both kinds of melanin are produced by the birds themselves.

The other class of pigments is *carotinoids*, of which there are more than a dozen kinds. In pure form, they create bright reds and yellows; mixed together, they make oranges. Carotinoids, unlike melanin, are not made in the bodies of birds – they come from the food birds eat.

So Lucy has a normal amount of carotinoids in her diet, but lacks the ability to make melanin.

You may wonder why I haven't mentioned blue or green pigments. That's because birds don't have blue pigments. So how does it happen that we see blue and green birds? The color comes from the fine structure or *microstructure*, of the feather. These structures reflect some wavelengths of light and absorb others. The precise way this works is beyond the scope of this article. If you happen on a Blue Jay feather, you can test this for yourself; if you crush the feather, the blue color will disappear (remember, it's illegal to possess a feather unless the bird can be legally hunted, so leave the feather where you find it). If the feather reflecting blue has yellow carotinoid in it, the result is green.

Parts of this article are drawn from Geoffrey E Hill, *National Geographic Bird Coloration*, (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2010).

Photo by Jeff Ormiston.



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George

Harbingers of Spring @ Fox Island Park

The winter solstice (the shortest day of the year) just passed on December 21st. So what's all this talk about spring? "Harbinger" means "signs of a future event". With the mild winter we seem to be having, we may be seeing signs of spring as early as during the month of February! What should you be looking for?

Listen for sounds!

If temperatures rise for a few days in late February, some of the tiny frogs that have turned into frog-sickles and have hidden under tree bark or fallen leaves throughout the cold of winter will thaw out enough to start trilling loudly in the evening to attract mates. Three of these frogs live at Fox Island: the Spring Peeper, the Gray Tree Frog, and the Wood Frog.



Look for green!

Have you ever noticed small rings of fresh, green leaves pressed tightly against the ground, but still peeking through the snow? These are called *winter rosettes*.

A rosette's green leaves make low levels of food for the plant on rare days in winter when the sun shines, creating heat in the process and keeping the plant's roots from freezing! Several plants, like the mullein, the thistle, and the evening primrose, produce this type of winter rosette.



Smell the air!



In wet spots near streams or in boggy areas where ground water is close to the surface, there is a plant which may start to flower sometime in February. Its unusual chemistry lets it produce heat by using food the plant's leaves made and stored last summer. In late winter and early spring, it can melt its way through the frozen ground. What kind of plant is this? It's called **skunk cabbage**. Aptly named, it gives off a strong skunk smell to attract carrion flies who have been working much of the winter digesting rotting flesh from winter kills.

The beautiful purple hooded flower of this plant traps some of

its heat which also attracts early foraging bees inside to collect its pollen.

Spot flashes of color!

See if you can detect the bright red stems of the red-osier dogwood tree. The branches turn red as the sap starts to rise up from the tree's roots to feed the buds produced last fall under the leaf stems at the tips of its branches.



Another splash of red comes from the male Northern Cardinal showing off its brand new red feathers hoping to attract the attention of a more drab-looking female cardinal.

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.

Fox Island has lots of programs for all ages.

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

These are the ones submitted by press time:

January 10, Sunday from 1:30-3 p.m. Beavers at Bowman Lake, by Jeff Ormiston. Free with park admission or annual pass. Preregister by 1/2.

Feb. 18th, Thursday 1:30-3 p.m. Through the Looking Glass, an introductory class to microscopes and magnifiers for ages 6-11. Designed for home-school students. Free with park admission; preregister by 2/12.



March 27, Sunday 1:30-3, Skunk Cabbage Hike ; learn about this unusual plant and hike back to find some. Free with park admission; preregister by 2/17.

Check the park website for many preschool programs. Again, it's www.allencountyparks.org.

Ed. Note: you history buffs will remember the famous quote by one of Indiana’s vice presidents, Thomas R. Marshall: “What the world needs now is a good 5 cent cigar!” But **what the world really needs now, is MORE NATURE LOVERS!** At Fox Island, we’re doing our best!



Fox Island Alliance

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- Liz Hincks, Vice President
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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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