



Spring, Invasive Species, and Renewed Hope

With the unusually warm February this year, it is easy to dream about spring being just around the corner. It truly is exciting when plants start to “green up” and days start to get warmer and longer. I have often listened to people remark on the green of spring. To be honest though, in those earliest days of green, I get nervous.

In our area, the earliest things to leaf are invasive species: bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, garlic mustard, and more. These plants emerge earlier in the spring and die back later in the fall. A longer growing period overall gives them an edge over our precious native plant species. The early leaves shade out what is below, and the native plant community struggles for water, nutrients, and light. As I drive down roads, or hike area parks and preserves in the earliest part of spring, I can see the enormous amount of work that needs to be done. In some places, there are so many shrubs with green leaves, or green garlic mustard leafing out, it is overwhelming to think how many hands and hours will be needed to remove them all.

When I see invasive species taking over our landscape, my initial response may be despair. But spring is a time of renewal and rejuvenation, not just for the plant community, but also for all of us, including those who care deeply about native species. Spring replenishes our motivation. It is the boost we need to fortify our quest to remove invasive species and restore native plant communities. After our long winter’s slumber, we once again have the energy to restore balance. Together, we can help make things right again. –Kate Sanders

What’s been happening at the Vera Building?

Project Feederwatch is winding up, thanks to many volunteers. Again this year our leucistic (pale) female cardinal has been a frequent visitor, nicknamed “Lucy.” We’ve also hosted two gorgeous male towhees, at the north end of their winter range. This year didn’t turn out to be a “winter finch year” as no purple finches pine siskins or redpolls showed up, and red-breasted nuthatches have been very rare in the area this year. Our resident pileated woodpeckers have made a few appearances, and can be heard calling around the nature center. And we had a record 26 cardinals after the March snowstorm. What a sight!

Fox Island Alliance: Project Spotlight 2017

- ~~Large classroom A/V update (\$3,551)~~ **DONE**
- ~~2017 NE Indiana Regional Science Fair~~ **DONE**
- Annual Meeting of Members
- Nature Center deck replacement (\$15,000)
- Kent Library Upgrade (\$2,200)
- Butterfly garden and pollinator plantings

All of these projects were made possible because of the dues and donations of our members. Thank you for your continued support.

Join us for food and friendship at our Annual Meeting at the Fox Island Nature Center May 21, 2017 at 12:30pm.

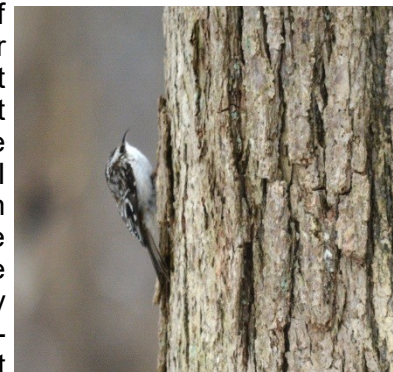
Not Just Another Day

Last Friday I went into Fox Island knowing that there were some items that I needed to take care of inside but wanting to spend time out on the trails checking on the progress of our resident skunk cabbage and salamander eggs. After taking care of my business on the computer keyboard I packed up my cameras and headed out the front door of the nature center. There had been an early morning snowfall that was in the beginning stages of melting and the temperature was just above freezing. There was a little fog at ground level and the thick clouds were low enough that the passenger jet approaching Ft. Wayne International was loud but invisible as it passed over the park. The snow crunched under my boots and the feel of impending drizzle was in the air. The birds were very active and vocal and there was no wind. I knew immediately it was going to be a good day in the park. Since I was a little kid I liked these dull, silent days with the fog wrapping everything in a haze that seemed like it was hugging everything.

Tracks on the trail were many and distinct as the ground under the snow was wet and produced distinct black tracks in the snow covering. Two robins were on the trail ahead of me, sometimes running across the trail, sometimes landing on the low branches of the spice bush that line the beginning of the main trail. I noticed that the tracks of the robins were in a single row as they ran through the snow or in pairs with one foot slightly ahead of the other if they chose to do a modified hop. I felt fortunate that the weather had produced conditions where I could see this for the first time ever. As I continued towards the dune I thought to myself that I should see deer on the trail because there seemed to be no one else on the trails and the lack of wind should conceal my scent from my whitetail friends.

Walking the park after a light snow is always enlightening for me because it makes the contours of the ground very obvious and the downed trees are much more visible as their horizontal trunks are highlighted by a layer of snow on top. Only in the winter, after a snow, can you see this kind of detail in the park. The number of downed trees in certain areas of Fox Island is staggering and would be very sad except for the realization that each downed tree represents an opportunity for new growth and safe dwelling for the parks wildlife.

As I followed the trail to the cabbage patch I watched for movement in the brush on either side of the trail and soon I saw what I expected as a deer was browsing about 50 yards ahead of me and was not aware of my presence. I stopped and prepared my camera for action. As I stood there I saw a second deer walking through the brush just behind the first deer and raised my camera and took a couple of shots. At that moment, out of the corner of my eye I saw movement on the tree next to me and looked to see a Brown Creeper bouncing up a cottonwood next to where I was standing on the trail. As I refocused on the first creeper a second Brown Creeper appeared on another cottonwood just ahead of the first. A couple more shots and my attention was drawn back to the whitetails as five more slowly crossed the trail behind the first deer that I had seen. The last doe finally looked up and saw me standing in the trail. We are all familiar with the signaling device from which these deer get their name but the low grunts and feet stamping are also effective ways in which they communicate. The last doe stood for only a few seconds and without a detectable signal alerted the others of a reason to be concerned. A few slow bounds and all seven deer disappeared off the trail and into the leafless brush.



Eventually I made it to the skunk cabbage patch, Bowman Lake, and the pool that contained the salamander eggs. By that time the drizzle was soaking my sleeves and luckily I had a garbage bag to keep my camera dry. I am relating my experiences on this seemingly dull and dreary day to encourage park visitors, who might otherwise stay inside and miss the wildlife activity on these less than perfect days, to dress for the weather and brave the elements and enjoy our park.

Just don't try it if the winds are high!

I would be less than honest if I didn't say that walking the park when winds are high is never a good idea and should be discouraged. —Jeff Ormiston

Earth Day Fort Wayne
Sunday, April 30, 2017 from 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm
6801 Engle Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46804



This is a FREE family-friendly community event celebrating Earth Day 2017. You'll enjoy conservation-oriented learning activities, education stations, stewardship opportunities, farmers market, and food trucks. Earth Day Fort Wayne continues to grow every year and is a great opportunity for businesses, nature groups, and YOU to support conservation activities in our area.

The Fox Island Alliance will be performing our famous pond dipping program for those of all ages!

Sol Fest: A Celebration of the Sun
Saturday, May 6 & Sunday, May 7, 2017 from 12:00 pm to 7:00 pm
Fox Island County Park, 7324 Yohne Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46809
Kids Area open 12:00 pm to 5:00



\$5.00 per person, Children 11 and under are FREE

ANNUAL PASSES ARE NOT HONORED THIS WEEKEND AT FOX ISLAND

Proceeds from the festival are designated for field trips for local schools, Summer Day Camp scholarships for low-income children, and Environmental Educational programming for organizations assisting disadvantaged kids. Additionally, the earnings allow our naturalists to travel to schools, organizations, community centers, youth centers, and youth detention centers.

What can you do at Sol Fest?

- Enjoy live music – from bluegrass to the Grateful Dead; we have something for everyone.
- Enjoy locally made brews at the Mad Anthony Brewing Company Beer Garden
- Kids Area activities include nature hikes, crafts, animal demonstrations, and games.
- Our hay rides will help you explore the park or shuttle you to and from the parking lot
- Enjoy great food from our local Lions club
- Learn what it means to go green from our local non-profit and vendor booths
- When the beach gets hot, cool off with our canoe and kayak demonstrations
- Challenge your friends to a game of sand volleyball
- Go take a hike through over 250 acres of State dedicated nature preserve.
- Dig for fossils in our very own limestone fossil pile
- Visit our Nature Center

Fox Island Alliance Annual Meeting of Members
Sunday, May 21, 2017 starting at 12:30pm
Fox Island County Park, 7324 Yohne Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46809

Proposed Schedule of Events:
Lunch 12:30pm - 1:30pm
Annual Meeting 1:30pm - 2:00pm
Guest Speaker 2:00pm - 3:00pm

Kaylee Kloer, USF graduate and aspiring arachnologist presents
"Amazing Arachnids"



Beaver Update

At this time last year there was a beaver paddling around in Bowman Lake at Fox Island showing itself only to a select few. After early April it was clear that the beaver had moved on to “greener pastures”, so to speak, and was seen no more. All summer and fall we waited for some sign that the largest rodent in North America was still frequenting our park. Then the report came in during the last days of November! Ron Zartman shared that he had seen a small chew along the trail on the west end of the marsh and it looked like beaver. A day later I checked it out and found a much larger girdling visible from the Marsh Tower and a hike through the brush confirmed that there was a beaver adding to its fat stores by munching on the cambium of at least one large tree at the marsh edge.



In the early morning hours of December 5th I realized that

what I was seeing in the marsh was probably the western most edge of marsh beaver activity. In the afternoon of December 5th I hiked the “Tree Trail” to the marsh then walked the edge and was shocked at the amount of fresh beaver activity visible on several cottonwood trees in the marsh. A few days after my walk of the 5th the marsh froze over and subsequent hikes on the Tree Trail produced no new chew signs and still no fresh activity is visible. Visitors, do not despair. Hike the Tree Trail and take your binocs and check out the water line of the marsh’s cottonwoods and enjoy the abilities of our own *Castor canadensis*. –Jeff Ormiston



Trail Marker Trees

Not very noticeable to the normal hiker and also increasingly rare, trail marker trees are found throughout North America. These trees look a lot like many other deformed trees in the woods, and it is difficult to tell them apart from those that the hardships of nature have left its mark upon.



Much like today's road signs, these trees were intentionally bent and formed in such a way as to indicate important Native American landmarks and trade routes. The characteristic sign of a trail marker tree is a horizontal bend in the trunk several feet off the ground. The trained eye can determine whether a tree is a marker tree by the presence or absence of scars and other natural methods that trees use to repair themselves.

Trees used as trail markers were carefully chosen as saplings, usually hardwood (oak and maple or whatever is indigenous to the area). These trees were chosen for their flexibility when young and their ability to retain the shapes they were bent into. The tree was intentionally bent to form an arch, and secured with a stake in the ground or tied to a large stone with a leather strap or a vine. A young branch was usually left to grow skyward from the top of the arch to form a new trunk. Eventually the old trunk might be removed, leaving a knob.

The trees were bent in specific directions to mark the wilderness roadways and waterways that Native Americans regularly traveled. They also served as exit routes, pointing the way to sources of water and other mineral resources that were used to make tools and clothing adornments. The marker trees pointed the way to important portages and safe river crossings. It is believed that these trees might have indicated the way to important areas such as tribal councils and burial sites.

Marker trees are found throughout North America. Some experts believe this system was in place long before the arrival of the first Europeans. There are several trees still left in our geographic area (Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois), but unfortunately it is not known how many of these historic trees have been lost to development and age. The good news is that growing interest in the surviving trees has compelled some communities to proclaim them as landmarks and give them protected status. There is a group of people who are currently documenting these fascinating trees and trying to educate the public to protect them as valuable pieces of American history. These dedicated folks have now documented trail marker trees in at least 39 states.



So, all you tree detectives out there: When you see a peculiarly shaped tree, take a moment to ponder...is this nature at work or the work of the earliest map makers on our continent? What might have been going on at this location on the wilderness super highway that needed to be marked? How many hundreds or thousands of travelers looked for these signs to let them know they were headed in the right direction? -Carol Gaham

There is a trail marker tree at the intersection of Winters and Prine Roads in southwest Allen County, described as an Indian marker tree in the Allen County History book.



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George



Spring Leapers

Question: Is Spring just around the corner? Or did Spring arrive last month? Mother Nature, let us in on your grand plan!!! As you leap into Spring, on your first hike through Fox Island Park, see how many Spring Leapers you can spot.

The creatures below are great leapers, but you decide who leaps the farthest. Place a check beside which animal is the best leaper in each pair:



American Dog Tick

OR



Dog Flea

Fleas are the leapers They can jump over 5 inches into the air or 8 inches forward. Ticks just stands there, with their eight arms spread to the sky, and wait for a meal to come along. This behavior of throwing its feet into the air and waiting is called “questing.”



Leopard Frog

OR



Toad

Leopard frogs can leap 5-6 feet in zigzag pattern. A frog's tendons act like springs. Before jumping, the leg muscle shortens, then recoils like a spring to propel the frog up, up and away!

Toads are not built for leaping. They hop. See those short, stubby back feet?



Cricket

OR



Grasshopper

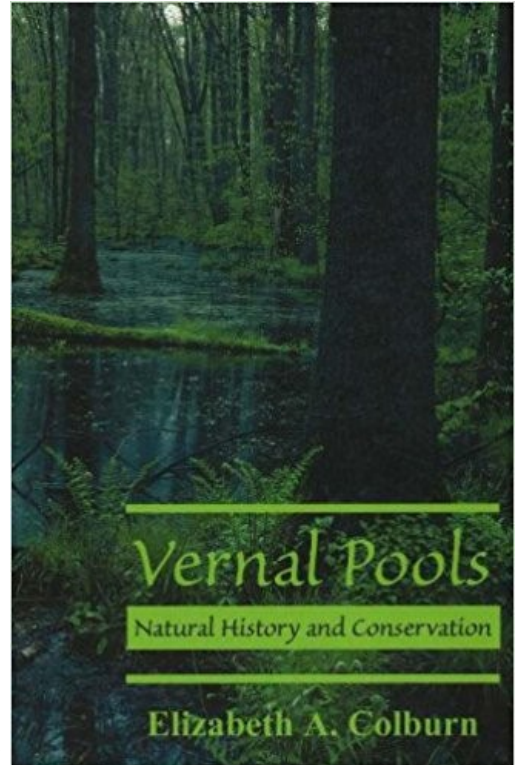
Crickets are able to jump 20 times their body length, which is about three feet into the air. However, they can also fly!

Grasshoppers, due to being larger, are the clear winners, as they can also leap 20 times their length. And remember, they also fly!

Book Review : Vernal Pools by Elizabeth A. Colburn, Ph.D.

Despite what it may feel like when you go outside, Spring has sprung in northeast Indiana and the local, vernal pools have filled with water just in time to welcome the eastern tiger salamanders, spring peepers, and chorus frogs during their nocturnal Spring breeding expeditions. Hiking the trails at Fox Island, it is impossible these days to ignore the sounds of our amphibian friends enjoying the seasonal pools that they depend on to lay their eggs and ensure the perpetuation of their species.

Although vernal pools can appear to be lifeless in winter, they burst to life when water tables rise to meet the collecting rainfall. This flooding triggers the hatching of fairy shrimp, ostracods, and other minute crustaceans whose would otherwise remain dormant. Other creatures more well-known to our pond dipping participants, such as caddisflies, water beetles, dragonflies, damselflies, water bugs, mosquitoes, and midges overwinter in or near vernal pools as desiccation resistant eggs. Like fairy shrimp, their hatching is triggered when water is readily available and temperatures are sufficient for their activity once again. Later in spring and early summer, vernal pools will become green oases punctuated by unique assemblages of sedges, rushes, manna grasses, ferns, mosses, shrubs, and trees adapted to live in soils saturated long enough to develop anaerobic conditions.



If you find vernal pools to be as fascinating as I do, I would encourage you to seek out a copy of Elizabeth Colburn's *Vernal Pools: Natural History and Conservation*. Although this book could easily be used to teach a high school or college course on the subject, it is very easy to read and use by anyone interested in these unique habitats. From general information to detailed species lists, this book has it all. –Brett Fisher

Upcoming programs by Jeff Ormiston

April 14, Friday, 1-3 p.m. Hike the trails; about 2 miles, will take in may interesting parts of Fox Island. Bring your camera for unexpected photo ops. Preregister by 4/7; free with park admission.

June 4, Sunday, 1-3 p.m. How to Raise a Monarch Butterfly. Learn how to collect, raise, tag and release Monarch Butterflies Leave with a “monarch nursery” to get started. Free with park admission. Preregister by 5/21.

For more park programs, look on the park website www.allencountyparks.org for their newsletter “The Wild Grapevine.” That’s the definitive source, and you won’t want to miss anything.



Fox Island Alliance

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Roanoke, IN 46783

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 Jeff Ormiston, 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.

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 _____

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_____ Check if you would like to receive your Fox Tale by email

_____ Check if you do not want your name published

_____ Check if you are interested in volunteering

Membership type, please circle one:

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