



Who's that bird? It's Lucy!

“After a long absence, Lucy reappeared today at the East Nature Center feeder,” Fox Island reported on its Facebook page Dec. 11. “She’s as fat and sassy as ever and looking very healthy! Welcome back young lady! “

Usually female cardinals have a black/gray eumelanin, chestnut/buff phaeomelanin, and red carotenoid pigments that usually gives them a black mask around the eyes and some red coloring.

However, Lucy lacks the black coloring and is more orange than red.

She’s a favorite of visitors who watch the birds at the feeders.

“She had an identical sister when we first saw them but now we only see one at a time.”



Fox Island Facebook posting

A perfect volunteer opportunity: Is it for you?

By Cynthia Powers

Volunteers are needed to keep open the Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building. It’s about the easiest volunteer gig you can imagine: you watch the bird feeders, record your sightings on the whiteboard, and chat with park visitors. Some of us record the sightings for Project FeederWatch, a project of National Audubon and Cornell Lab of Ornithology, but that’s not required. Mostly it’s to be welcoming to park visitors. If you’re so inclined and the visitors are interested, you could teach them the common feeder birds. Sometimes it gets exciting, if the pileated woodpecker comes to the suet. Later in the winter, you might have pine siskins, a purple finch, or even a redpoll. And it’s a good chance to learn sparrows, as they come up close enough to get a good look. Sometimes all the little birds disappear, a good clue that a Cooper’s Hawk is watching the feeders too.

You can bring your lunch, read the paper, or peruse the wonderful library of bird books donated to Fox Island by the late Rodger Rang. And you don’t need to get up early, because the building can only be unlocked when the staff gets there at 10 a.m. Master Naturalists: volunteer hours here!

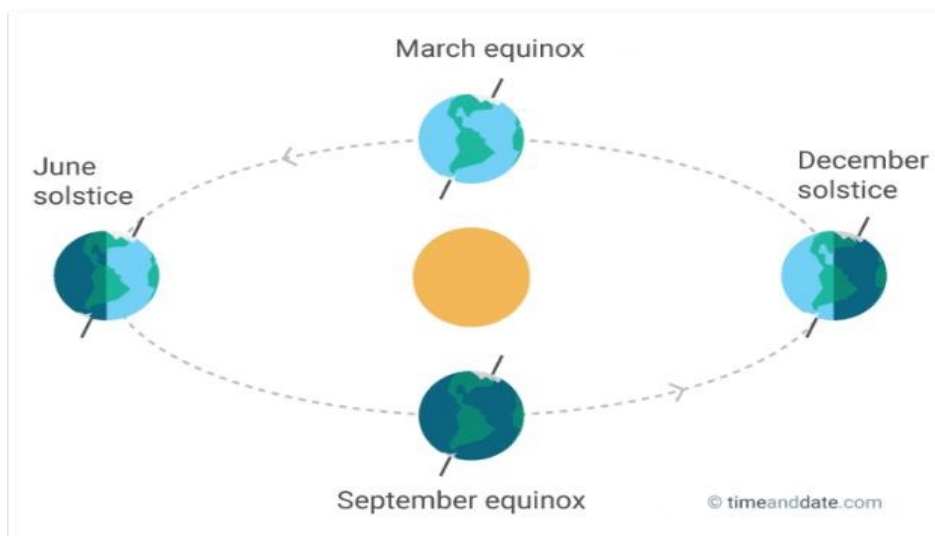
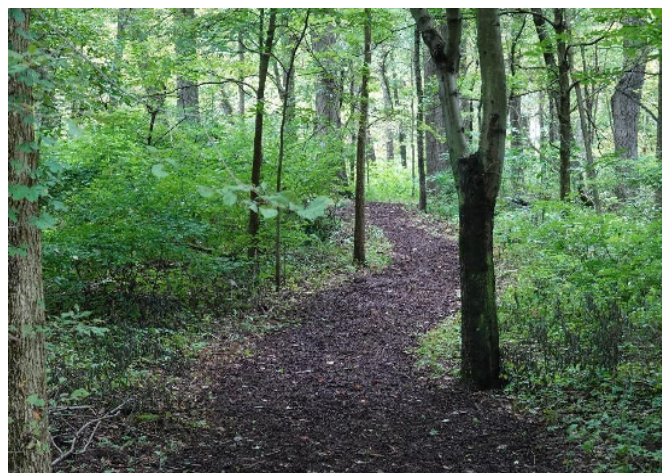
Just sign up with Natalie Haley, park and education manager, by calling 449-3246 or send email to foxisland@allencountyparks.org.

Kids education and exploration area

The Fox Island dune just to the east of the main gate has been selected as the location for the new Kids Education and Exploration Area.

Access to the area is through three paths that lead to the cleared and mulched top of the dune that has a collection of small boulders and cut tree stumps that are very tempting climbing elements for young visitors.

These paths are connected to the Nature Center Road and the Winter Hikers Trail. See the Fox Island gate attendant or receptionist for directions.



Happy winter solstice

Dec. 21: The winter solstice has the shortest daylight of the year as we begin winter and the days get longer and the nights shorter.

Sorry we're late



We're working on the winter issue, which will be coming within a couple of weeks, in time to get in your reservations for upcoming classes, which including Whittling with Jeff and Mammals, Our Furry Friends and Relatives.

The Alliance helps open Promenade Park

On Aug. 11, Alliance members Carol Gaham and Jeff Ormiston represented the Fox Island Alliance and Allen County Parks at the grand opening of Promenade Park in downtown Fort Wayne. Carol and Jeff set up on the Auer Lawn with displays of aquatic life and monarch butterflies as part of "Nature Day" at the opening. Riverfront Fort Wayne had a monarch and painted lady butterfly release at the amphitheater, and Jeff and Carol released several monarchs with the help of young visitors.





Where have all the invertebrates gone?

With the cooler days, nature takes care of her animals by giving each some sort of built-in weather gauge. Wild creatures seem to instinctively know what may lie ahead. If the winter is to be long and cold, mammals will grow longer, thicker hair. Birds that in earlier months use their melodic songs to find mates and protect their territories, start to reduce their singing. They migrate to warmer climates where food will be readily available. The last generation of monarch butterflies also take flight to a warmer climate only to return when the weather warms in the spring.



Have you ever wondered what happens to all the critters that represent 95% of the animal species – the invertebrates? They seem to be everywhere until the winter winds start to blow. Then they disappear. But they reappear as the weather warms in the spring.



Honey bees huddle in clusters in their hives eating stored honey and keeping warm by vibrating their wing muscles.

Wasp colonies all die off except for the queen wasp who hibernates in crevices, tree holes and logs and starts up a new colony from scratch in the spring.

Ants consume a lot of fatty foods in the fall and live in the soil or under the bark of trees through the winter as they enter a state of diapause or slowed metabolism.

Beetles and flies of all varieties lay their eggs inside the leaves or stems of plants that will provide a food source for the emerging larvae the following spring. Adult flies that survive the cold maintain a dormant stage (diapause) in cracks and crevices.



Dragonfly, mayfly, stonefly and some beetle nymphs spend the winter under the ice of ponds and streams actively feeding and growing so they can emerge as adults in the spring.

Mosquitoes all die off but not before laying the eggs that will hatch in the spring.

Underneath the weathered leaf cover on the forest floor, life also goes on all winter long. This damp, dark, cool environment below the frost line provides a lively habitat for the critters living there. Slugs, snails, millipedes, pill bugs and many kinds of spiders eat the surrounding litter to survive or eat each other as they huddle together to keep warm. They maintain their daily routines while living in this hidden, warmer world.

Global warming, however, may start to threaten insect populations around the world. As the Earth warms overall, insects are shifting toward the poles to colonize areas that are warmer than ever before in the summer months. Yet many of these insects lack the ability to survive the colder winters found in these regions.

Meanwhile, toward the equator, warmer temperatures are disrupting other insects' diapause cycles. Diapause isn't triggered by colder temperatures. Instead, shorter days help signal to the insects' bodies that it's time to get ready for dormancy. As the days stay warmer later into the fall, insects' bodies get confused. Mistakenly thinking that it's spring or summer, they often end up delaying the diapause process and continue looking for food or mates—which leaves them unprepared for when winter actually comes.

Fewer insects surviving the winter means fewer young egg-laying insects around in the spring to help pollinate our flowers, trees, and food crops!



You still have time to get in your Trailblazers hikes

No mosquitoes. That's reason enough to enjoy a hike in Fox Island, but you can earn a walking stick medallion, too.

The Allen County Trailblazers Community Hiking Program runs through Dec. 31 and has a list of trails at county properties that will take you on short jaunts, including Fox Island.

Sign up for the free program through www.allencountytrailblazers.org, go on 10 of the 14 listed hikes, and turn in a form to earn a walking stick medallion. Present the form for admission to the parks, which also include Metea.





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 "Renewal"

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