



Fly away home!

By Jeff Ormiston

While we all have been dealing with the challenges of 2020 the wildlife of Allen County Parks has been oblivious to COVID-19 and continued to conduct life as usual. On March 16 we collected the first salamander eggs and later found out that three different species had laid eggs on March 13 and we had collected those eggs thinking they would only be tiger salamanders. In early June snapping turtles and painted turtles were observed laying eggs near the Nature Center, and the little snappers appeared in mid-September to the delight of all. While there is some consistency in these events it is the year-to-year changes that keep us all excited about our natural world. It was French writer Jean-Baptiste Karr that said “The more things change, the more they remain the same,” and so it has been for 2020.



Monarch butterflies, after 2 years of very early arrivals, decided to stage a grand entrance by waiting an extra three weeks to show their presence. In the meantime, Cheryl Bell, friend from Marion’s Matter Park, brought eggs of monarchs, luna moths, and polyphemus moths to get us started with raising Lepidoptera for the summer. We later collected eggs from hackberry emperor and Tawney Emperor butterflies as well as Black and Spicebush swallowtail butterflies. For the first time, receptionist Sherry McGinnis found a clouded sulfur butterfly caterpillar, and so raising these beautiful butterflies became a priority.

To date the Monarch Team has raised and released about 450 monarchs and since Aug. 20 has tagged 305. We will tag about 400 this year, down about 100 from last year. Currently the milkweed supply is in serious decline, and so feeding caterpillars is now a concern, but all caterpillars will be assured a meal. It was also discovered that 5th instar monarch caterpillars can be successfully fed butternut squash.



Fortunately again this year we have had volunteers to greatly help with the care of all our butterflies and moths. Pavi Chidambaram and Megan Barasch, attending Purdue-West Lafayette and Purdue-Fort Wayne, helped three days a week until returning to school this fall. Joy Maassel helps 20+ hours a week and often talks to the public about our butterflies and moths. Bernadette Pikle has also helped with the raising of our fliers.

On any given day at Fox Island...

By Liz Hincks

Friday, Sept. 18, was a sunny fall day with a cool breeze blowing around a few clouds in the afternoon sky when an incredible event happened. The occasion was witnessed by some park staff, a few volunteers and FIA members, as well as a 4-year-old visitor with his dad who just happened to wander by to see what was going on.

It was amazing! Twelve baby snapping turtles, all very active half-dollar-sized miniatures of their mother, were being released into the pond behind the Nature Center at Fox Island Park. They didn't all scramble immediately into the water, some of them even needed helping hands to redirect their exploration paths, but all 12 of them eventually went bobbing out into the green plant-filled water. As they disappeared, it wasn't just the 4-year-old who called good-bye and good luck to those babies!



It all started months earlier, though, on another adventure-filled day at the park.



Adult snapping turtles are about the size of a dinner plate (Impress your family and friends with that fact next mealtime!). While snappers are not very people friendly and aren't often seen despite their size, Jeff O. saw a pair of them outside the Nature Center, distracted and unaware of him because they were busy mating. While the staff isn't sure how many snapping turtles are presently in the area, we now know there are at least two! Jeff put out the word that there might be eggs soon.

On Monday, June 8, the female was observed wandering around in the Butterfly Garden. She made a "test" on a patch of soil, then moved over a bit, and began laying her eggs in the soil. Being the videographer that he is, Jeff O. taped the event. That video, along with others he has created, is on the

Fox Island County Park's Facebook page if you would like to watch some of the events that happen in the park.

See **Baby turtles**, Page 3

From the Fox Island Facebook page

Staff learned Oct. 9 that a young visitor had moved Eastern box turtle Casanova from his enclosed tent outside to the Nature Center pond. The problem is that those types of turtles don't live in ponds.

Staff have searched for days, but as of press time, Casanova was still missing.

A \$300 reward has been offered for his return. Anyone who wants to search for Casanova can contact Jeff Ormiston at 260-449-3184 or jormiston@allencountyparks.org.



Baby turtles, continued from Page 2

Members of the staff and volunteers assumed the role of midwives, checking daily to make sure the nest was covered and the eggs were safe. Unsure of how long before hatchlings would appear because the nest was in the shade, the wait began.

Ninety-six days later the tiny turtles emerged from the nest and scrambled out of the little doors in the sides of the turtle box which had been placed over the nest to protect the eggs from scavengers. Many thanks to Little River Wetlands for the loan of the box!

Off they scurried, in all the wrong directions! Snapping turtles normally head for water upon hatching, but these dirt encrusted hatchlings headed for the road, the woods, the parking lot and everywhere but the water.

Caring hands found and collected all twelve and took them inside the Nature Center. They were placed in an aquarium with clean water for bathing and crickets for munching (though many of the crickets were seen enjoying free rides all over the tank on the backs of the turtles!). Over the next several days the turtles became the youngest participants in educational moments provided by staff on the trails for the many socially distanced guests taking advantage of hiking at Fox Island during this stressful time.

After a short stint as educational ambassadors, it was time to take advantage of another warm beautiful afternoon in September when a small group of people helped release the turtles to where they needed to go, their new home in the pond behind the Nature Center.

You just never know what incredible learning adventures may be waiting for you on any given day at Fox Island....



A case for mosquitoes, or not

By Carol Gaham

Imagine a world without mosquitoes. Is that really a good thing? No more West Nile, Lyme disease, Zika virus, chikungunya, malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, eastern equine encephalitis, among others? No more Deet.

Mosquitoes have been on Earth for more than 100 million years. There are 3,500 named species of mosquito. Only a couple of hundred of the species actually bite and only the female requires blood to produce eggs. They inhabit almost every continent and habitat and serve the important functions of providing food for other species and serve as pollinators. It is important to note that mosquitoes don't actually cause diseases, but act as carriers when they feed on a person or animal that is infected and then carry the disease to the next healthy person or animal.

Some entomologists estimate that migratory bird populations that nest in the tundra of the Arctic could drop by more than 50% without mosquitoes and midges. Caribou are thought to select migration paths facing into the wind to escape mosquitoes. It is thought that without this "incentive," changes in the migration paths of the caribou might have major consequences for the ecology of the area.

In the absence of mosquito larvae, hundreds of species of fish would have to adapt their diets to survive. Since feeding behavior is imprinted genetically, loss of mosquitoes may lead to extinction of some species, impacting other species further up and down the food chain. Many species of insects, spiders, salamanders, lizards, birds, bats and frogs would also lose a primary food source. Male mosquitoes also help pollinate some types of flowers when they consume nectar, especially aquatic plants.

Phil Lounibos, an ecologist at the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory in Vero Beach, states that "eliminating mosquitoes would temporarily relieve human suffering." He suggests that this process would be futile because the niche would quickly be filled by another species, "Something better or worse."

So, what if we merely eliminated mosquitoes in specific "trouble" areas? Chemical use would likely adversely affect the ecosystem where it would be used, and as indicated above, it is not clearly understood what the effect might be of removing the species from an area altogether.

Scientists at Oxitec have found a way to modify the male mosquitoes to carry a protein that will kill any female offspring before they can reach biting maturity. These modified males (named OX5034) would continue to survive, pollinating plants and providing food for other species as normal.

In tests the company performed in Brazil, the second generation of mosquitoes caused a dip in local populations of as much as 96%. These modified mosquitoes have now been released in Malaysia, Panama and the Cayman Islands.

Critics warn of creating a mutant species and are concerned about unintended consequences. An independent team of researchers raised alarm with a report that some offspring of the GM mosquitoes have actually survived and made it to sexual maturity, creating a hybrid species. They warn this could lead to a more robust population that is more resistant to insecticides or more likely to transmit disease.

You may have read about a plan to release 750 million genetically modified mosquitoes (the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito) into the Florida Keys in 2021. Local Florida residents have created a petition to stop the release of these "Robo-Frankenstein" mosquitoes. The plan has won federal EPA approval for both the Keys and also Harris County, Texas, but state and local approval is pending in both locations. Fresno, California, has already released 20 million of these mosquitoes.

Ready or not, GM mosquitoes are on the continent. Whether they are harmless or Frankenstein creatures will become apparent in the years to come. Scientists will keep a close eye on these ecosystems. Watch for news as more information becomes known about this modern Jurassic Park experiment.



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

by Pam George

Fall Mist & Myths



The brilliant colors of autumn reach their peak at Fox Island Park around the third week of October. This can be such a mood changer after the blistering heat and hazy humidity of summer.

The brightest colors are seen when late summer is dry like this year, fall days are bright and sunny, and nighttime temperatures fall below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. However, if the days are mostly cloudy and the nights are warm, the expectation is that colors will be drab.



Another awe-inspiring sight on these crisp autumn mornings is the eerie mist that lingers just above the ground wherever pools of water have accumulated. As the sun rises and cuts through the mist, the mist rises like a giant cloud and slowly disappears into thinner air.

This annual display of colors, along with the rising mist, have been a yearly occurrence long before the Europeans arrived when all of Indiana was inhabited by Native Americans from different tribes, predominately Miami and Potawatomi.

Native Americans were hunters and gatherers, respecting each plant as a special gift with possible healing powers.

Purple New England Asters: Several tribes thought that smoke from a burning aster plant would revive a person who had fainted. The star-shaped aster was thought to be created out of the star dust from the constellations in the sky.



Purple Cone Flower: These plants belong to the Echinacea family and were used by natives to ward off the common cold. They were also used for snake bites and other stings or poisons

Yellow Evening Primrose: The young shoots, fruits, and seeds were eaten, and the seed oil was used to treat conditions as asthma, eczema, migraines, and arthritis.

Golden-colored Goldenrod: Native Americans used the plant to soothe burns, bee stings, and fevers. They also drank goldenrod brews to cure lung diseases and intestinal disorders.

They even cooked goldenrod and the bones from an animal that had died about the time a baby had been born and washed the baby in the broth to help the child have a strong ability to talk and laugh.

Purple Milkweed and Orange Butterfly Weed: The roots of this plant were bruised by pounding on them and then boiling the remains in water to help cure pleurisy or colic. The pioneers also “carded” the silk from the pod seeds to make silk candle wicks that were smokeless when burned.

Some of these traditional Native American cures are still used today, only the ingredients are usually purchased in a health food store.

Meet the FIA board's latest member... Tim Ormiston

By Lisa Esquivel Long



Tim Ormiston has joined the FIA board. Here's a bit about the newest board member.

What do you do for a living?

I am a retired engineering project manager. I worked for PPG Industries Glass Business for 37 years, finishing my last 17 years as a project manager, living in Pittsburgh, PA.

What kind of interests/talents do you hope to bring to the board?

I have an interest in sharing information about nature to those people interested in learning. I believe my 30 years of experience in volunteer organization BOD, along with project management skills will benefit the organization.

Hmm. Ormiston. That name seems familiar. You've been involved in Allen County Parks events. Has your brother, Jeff, been instrumental in that?

Yes! Jeff and I have many similar interests; one is the outdoors and nature.

Favorite tree?

Tulip poplar. 2nd would be sassafras.

Favorite bug or critter?

That is a tough question since I don't tend to focus on one specific thing. As a group, I enjoy learning about birds.

Favorite native flower or plant?

Coneflower

Are you an IMN or want to be?

Yes, I received my certification in 2019. Received Advanced IMN in 2019 and finished the requirements for 2020.

What interests you most about the outdoors?

Being outdoors takes you away from the crush of activities central to everyday life. It takes you away from technology and screens that are not beneficial one's wellbeing.

Favorite area or event you've attended at Fox Island?

I enjoy walking through the forest, listening for nature sounds, trying to identify the source of the sound. That includes animals, wind, water and other mechanical things.

Growing up did you have an interest in nature?

Yes. My grandparents owned a farm adjacent to our home. Being farmers, they were connected to the earth, outdoors and weather. I spent much of my childhood visiting them. Naturally, that relationship to the outdoors rubbed off on me. My family also had a basic cottage on a lake in Steuben County. We spent many summers there swimming, fishing, boating and camping.

Tell us about your family and favorite activities.

I married my high school sweetheart! We don't have kids, but have enjoyed my many nieces and nephews throughout their lives. We graduated from Northrop H.S. Following college graduation, we moved to Pennsylvania to start our careers. After 37 years we returned home to Fort Wayne to be close to our siblings and their families.

I enjoy working outdoors on landscaping and yard improvements. I spend a lot of time with wood carving, or whittling.

Anything else you'd like to mention?

In the summer of 2019, I joined brother Jeff and his son-in-law for a hike/camp event in southern Illinois. We covered weeks of preparation with the kids involved, followed by 11 days in Illinois and southern Indiana. In total it was an eye-opener for my strengths and weaknesses. A very humbling experience.

FIA annual meeting goes batty

By Lisa Esquivel Long

The COVID-19-delayed annual FIA meeting took place in September for the first time by Zoom. At the conclusion of business, members heard a presentation on bats by Scott Bergeson, an assistant professor of biology at Purdue University Fort Wayne.

FIA board president Kate Sanders opened the meeting by informing members of some of the board's activities. They include:

- Fox Island's Jeff Ormiston served as a judge at the Haverhill Elementary science fair. He presented checks on behalf of the board to some of the students to encourage them to pursue science.
- Members participated in the Northeast Indiana Science Fair for grades 4-12. The FIA grants a special award for an environmental-themed project
- Supported the Fox Island award-winning Indiana Master Naturalist program, run by Pam George and Jeff Ormiston.
- Some FIA staff helped mulch the prairie circle outside the Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building
- The education committee is working with staff to update the Nature Center tree exhibit.
- The park is always looking for volunteers for the new Butterfly Garden outside the Nature Center or to seed other areas of the park. Please contact a board or staff member to find out what areas need work.
- Nathan Arata, FIA treasurer, said the alliance's funds are in good shape, allowing the group to fund such things as the park's prairie restoration and the IMN program. If people have recommendations for park improvements, please contact a board member or a staff member.
- Tim Ormiston was formally elected to the board.

Bergeson is using Fox Island in his research on how human activities had impacted North America's bat species.

Bats are interesting because some pollinate like a nighttime hummingbird. Some disperse seeds. One bat species pollinates the agave plant, meaning without them, we wouldn't have tequila! Northeast bats include about nine species, some of which are migratory, including one that's the only native mammal in Hawaii. Others hibernate, including the Indiana bat, a federally endangered species, and others that likely will go on the endangered list.

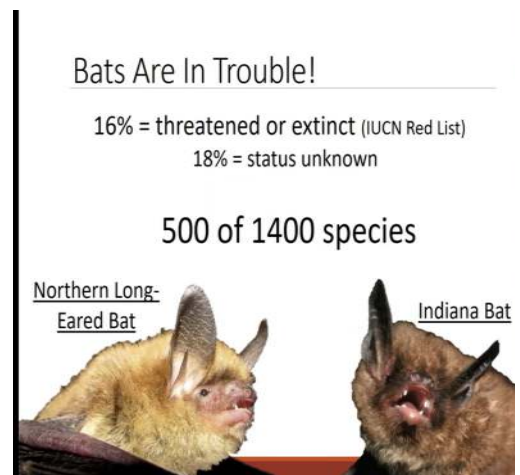
Wind turbines between 2000 and 2011 killed up to 1.3 million bats in the U.S. and Canada. However, white-nose syndrome, a fungal infection, has killed about 6 million bats since 2006. It's resulted in a loss of 90-100% of bats in some areas.

"I haven't caught a tricolored bat in 7 years because of this disease," Bergeson said.

Two years ago one of Bergeson's students studied the sounds of bats in Fox Island. Some of the sounds appeared to be coming from an endangered species, which could only be verified by netting bats.

The FIA gave money that paid for two students this summer to help trap bats in nets, with the animals checked for the fatal fungus and affixed with radio transmitters before being released.

This summer's netting program was delayed as federal authorities wanted to first make sure that the researchers wouldn't transmit COVID-19 to the bats.





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.

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