



Fox Island goes batty for research

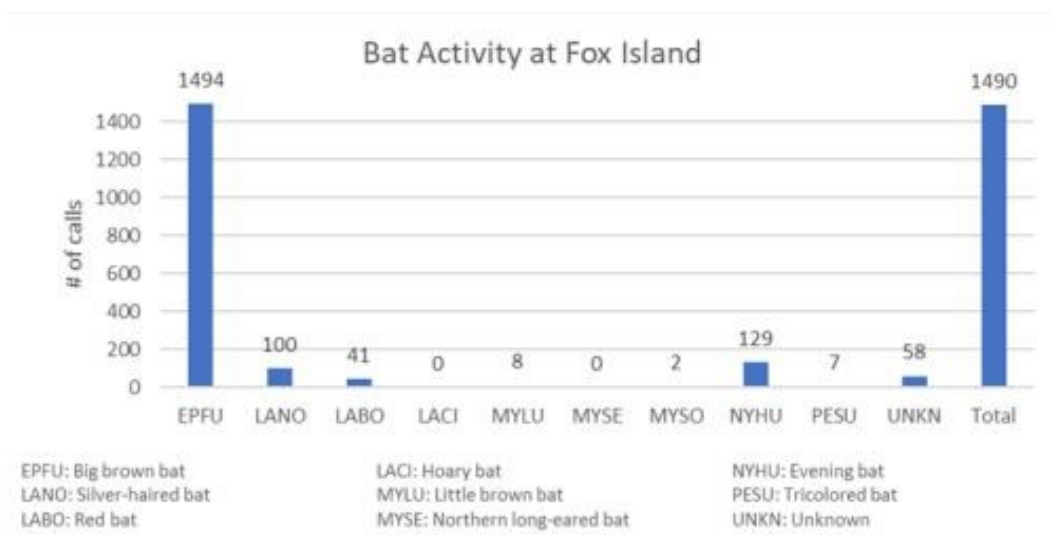
By Galen Burrell and Scott Bergeson, Purdue University Fort Wayne

Editor’s note: Fox Island served as one of the locations around Fort Wayne for the 2020 Allen County Bat Acoustic Survey. The work was led by PFW professor and researcher Scott Bergeson and his Wildlife Lab students. Here’s a summary of the work.

Across all study sites, we found that the most dominant species – in both urban and rural areas – were big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*) and silver-haired bats (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*), followed by red bats (*Lasiurus borealis*) and hoary bats (*Lasiurus cinereus*).

We detected five other bat species at lower levels, including evening bats (*Nycticeus humeralis*), tricolored bats (*Perimyotis subflavus*), and three *Myotis* species, which were often very low in abundance. The sites listed in this report followed the same trends, with big brown bats being most abundant. Silver-haired bats were often the next most abundant species except for at Makel, where little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*) comprised 20% of collected calls.

Of the sites listed in this report, the highest activity was recorded at Lindenwood and Makel,



followed by Fox Island, Spring Lake, and Eagle Marsh. Detectors at Makel, Spring Lake, and Lindenwood also showed high levels of species diversity. Fox Island and Eagle Marsh exhibited less call diversity. Of the five

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A feathery irruption

By Clara Conroy

If you enjoy feeding and watching birds, you may have noticed some different arrivals over the last few months. The fall and winter of 2020-2021 was a big irruptive year for some migratory birds. This means that some species that usually migrate short distances, at the most, were seen far south of their normal range, and in very large numbers. There are different reasons for autumn and winter bird irruptions, but this year the cause is most likely due to a shortage of food. Low conifer seed production across Canada's boreal forests has pushed many birds to search far and wide for nourishment.

Pine siskins were some of the first irruption birds to start showing up. These gregarious and feisty little finches with a sharply pointed bill and yellow on the wings have been coming to feeders across Indiana since October. While not uncommon in the winter, their numbers this season are unprecedented in recorded history, with flocks all across the United States of 20 to over 100 birds being the norm rather than the exception.

Right on the pine siskins tail feathers, red-breasted nuthatches started showing up in larger than normal numbers. These winter visitors resemble the common white-breasted nuthatch, but are smaller and have a bold stripe through the eye. They have a call reminiscent of a dog chewing on a squeaky toy. Red-breasted nuthatches are also fearless (or impatient) and may scold anyone who is not fast enough refilling the feeder!

Purple finches are often confused with the much more common house finch. Male purple finches are tinged a rosy-purple all over and lightly streaked, as opposed to the more orange-red (mainly on head and breast) and heavy streaking of the house finch. Female purple finches are streaked brown and white, and have distinctive facial markings. Purple finches only show up in Indiana in the cooler weather months, and their numbers were good this winter.

Another species that is showing up in the greatest numbers in decades is the evening grosbeak. The males are striking birds that look similar to the American goldfinch, but with white wings patches, dark head, bright yellow over the eye and an oversized beak. These big, beautiful finches are rare winter visitors in Allen County, but there have been a few showing up locally, with hopes for more to arrive with the spring migration.

The common redpoll is an uncommon bird to find in Allen County, but several reports of them here have been coming in over the past few months. These little brown-and-white streaked finches look like they are sporting a red cap and black goatee. They breed in the Arctic Circle and normally winter in Canada, surviving the bitter cold by tunneling into the snow, but this might be the year that you get to see one!



A purple finch at a feeder.

Irruption birds can be attracted to feeders that offer a good selection of food. Most finches love black oil sunflower and nyjer (thistle) seed. Evening grosbeak seem to prefer striped sunflower seed. Nuthatches can't get enough of the shelled peanuts and will keep taking them until they are gone, caching the food to retrieve and eat later. A water source is also a big attraction, so a birdbath with a heater for when the temperature gets below freezing is very popular with all birds. These guidelines do not guarantee that uncommon migrants will show up, but you can still enjoy all of the other many beautiful birds that Fox Island has to offer.



Pine siskins started arriving at Hoosier feeders in October.

Mark your calendar ... the annual meeting is virtual again

If you've paid your dues (see the last page if you forgot to renew by March 31) we're having an annual meeting you won't want to miss. Indiana Native Plant Society Northeast Chapter board members Martha Ferguson, owner of Riverview Nursery, and Ronnie Greenberg, vice president of the state group, will talk to us about getting rid of invasive plants, using natives in your landscape, and more. A question-and-answer session will follow. The meeting is scheduled for **2-3 p.m. Sunday, May 23**. You will receive a Zoom link to the meeting in your email, so make sure we have one on record.



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George

Bee ready for summer

Did you know? The season spring was once called “springing time” referring to plants springing from the ground. Later, it was shortened to “springtime,” and later to just good ole “spring.” No matter what you call it, we’re all glad it’s here!

As all the flowers and trees start to bloom, they are going to need a ton of pollinators to fulfill their life cycles. Of course, the most popular pollinator of all is the bee.

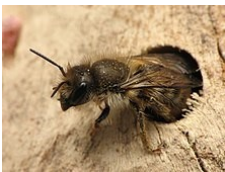
What type of bee do you think is the best pollinator at Fox Island Park? If you say “the honeybee,” you would be wrong, even though everyone enjoys the healthy benefits of the honey they produce. Ironically, honeybees are not native to Indiana, or even the United States. In fact, they come from Europe.

However, there are over 4,000 species of **native bees** in the United States with over 450 species active in Indiana. One of the most productive of these native species is the **mason Bee**.

How productive are they? Just two or three females can pollinate a mature apple tree!

Mason bees are called “masons” because they use mud to construct their nests. They belong to the genus “*Osmia*” that means “odor” referring to a faint lemony scent used by these bees to mark their nest entrances.

Mason bees have other advantages over honeybees:



They are solitary and can live closely even with honeybees or other mason bees since they have no hives with a queen to defend.



They work in cool or rainy weather when honeybees are more likely to take the day off.

Only the female mason bee is able to sting, but you have to work really hard to get stung. She has no venom, so the sting feels like a mosquito bite.

Even though they lay their eggs in natural cavities like insect holes, bird holes, or plant stems, mason bees never damage wooden structures, as they can’t actually excavate their own cavity.

Mason bee life cycle:

A female bee packs pollen and nectar into a tubal cavity, lays a female egg, then seals the cell (see above).

She then continues to fill another section of the cavity with pollen and nectar, lays another female egg and seals the cell until the entire cavity is filled with sealed cells. The egg laid in the last cell will produce a male bee. She then plugs the end of the tubal cavity with a mud ball.

The larvae hatch, munch on the pollen and nectar, spin a cocoon, and pupate over the winter.

In spring, the adult male emerges first, mates with the emerged adult females, and the cycle restarts.

Nature Center gets some updates while closed

By Victoria Mumaw

As we all know, last year was a challenge.

With most of our normal activities being cancelled or closed, a lot of people took to the trails at Fox Island and began reconnecting with nature. The park's nature center has been closed since March 2020 and continues to remain closed for guest's safety.* Since our doors have not been open, the Alliance saw an opportunity to update a main feature of the park's Nature Center.

In an effort to support Fox Island Alliance's purpose to promote the use of Fox Island as an education center we used this "down" time to fix up the Tree House.

The Nature Center's Tree House was completed in 2004 and was funded primarily by donations and grants. Over the last 17 years the Tree House has provided wonderful learning opportunities for all ages. Simple updates such as a fresh coat of paint and some new flooring will help freshen up this aspect of the Nature Center.

All of the work being done will stay true to the natural tree theme and make you feel as though you are exploring a real tree. Crawl under the tree and see what animals take refuge in tree roots and burrows or climb the tree to explore what animals live in its limbs!

These updates will also allow us to better equip the Tree House with more hands-on activities. We plan on changing out activities every season to allow for different education opportunities year round. Along with the interior updates we are also adding a Little Free Library book-sharing box right outside the Nature Center doors. The Little Free Library is for all ages and book genres. We encourage you to come take a book and share a book while you are here exploring! Whether it has been years since your last visit or you are a park regular, come check out the changes this summer and fall. We look forward to connecting kids with nature as they explore Fox Island's Nature Center.

***NOTE: The Nature Center has reopened to the public! See the next newsletter for more details about the tree play area renovation.**

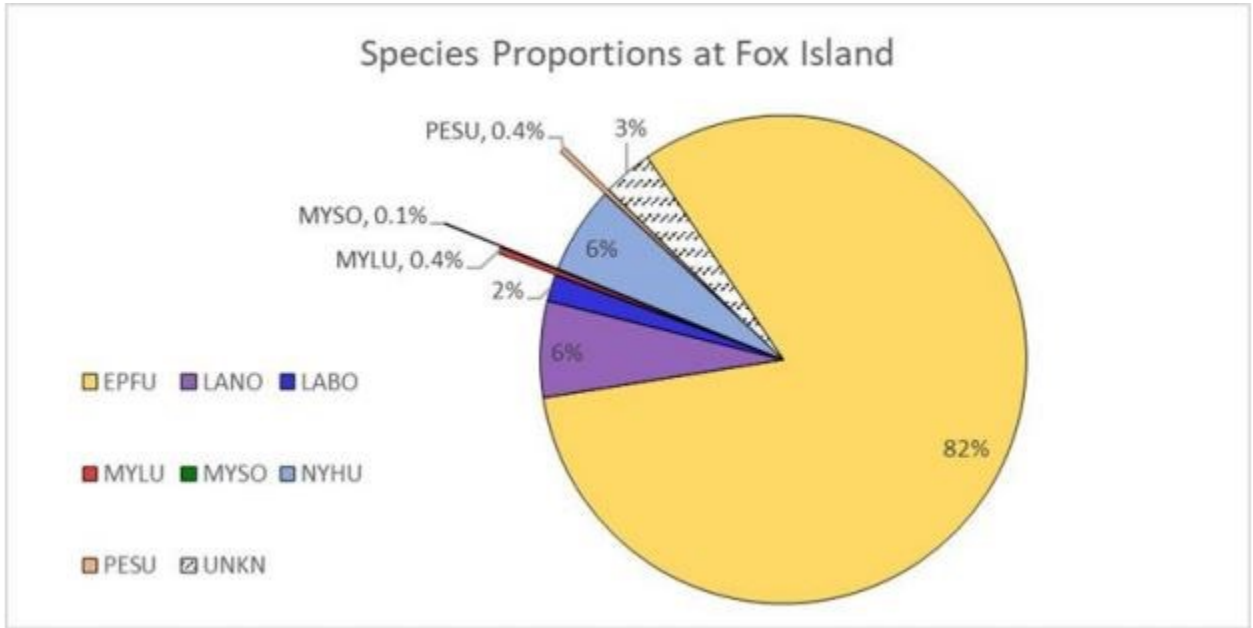


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sites, Eagle Marsh had the lowest levels of activity and diversity. This may be due to its placement below power lines in the early summer survey when the acoustic detector only recorded a total of 23 calls from 3 species. In late summer, after we moved the detector away from power lines, we recorded 259 calls from 5 species. We plan to collect further data at the second site during the summer of 2021, which will hopefully provide more information on the species present

around Eagle Marsh. The site at Makel is of particular interest, considering the large proportion of calls from little brown bats. We

deployed the Makel detector at the confluence of Cedar Creek and Little Cedar Creek, a site over water with significant canopy cover. This provides ideal foraging habitat for species that are adapted to flying in forests, such as little brown bats and the other *Myotis* species present in Indiana. The unusually high level of little brown bats at Makel could also be explained if our detector site was close to a little brown bat maternity colony, where large groups of females come together to rear young. Further data collection and netting efforts at Makel will help us determine whether this level of little brown bat activity was a phenomenon or is sustained between years.



Fox Island



Family Summer Fun at Bowman Lake

WHEN: 1 p.m. June 22 and each Tuesday until July 20, weather depending

WHAT: Wildflowers, pond dipping, nature art, more

COST: \$3 per person plus park entrance fee, cash or check; register early



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"

Fox Island Alliance Membership Application __New __Renewal

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

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