



Bird observations at Fox Island feeders, Winter 2020-21

By Ed Powers

From mid-November 2020 to early May 2021, several people (listed below) observed and counted bird from the Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building at Fox Island, usually for a two-hour period.

There was a total of 46 species recorded over that time. The most found at any one period was 22.

The largest number of any species seen at one time was 40, the house sparrow. It also had the largest average count, 8.9. However, the bird reported most frequently was downy woodpecker, 204 out of 207 count periods.



Cedar waxwing

The observers were Nathan Arata, Barb Bauer, Aaron Elliott, Nancy Kilduski, Lorenzo Kleine, Belinda Lewis, George Manning, John Moore, Ed & Cynthia Powers, Dave Reichlinger, Dessie Smith, Ray Steup, and Bob & Donna Streeter.

More exciting, though, were the birds that showed up a single time. These included red-tailed hawk, great horned owl, red-headed woodpecker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, brown creeper, European starling (well, nobody was excited by that), cedar waxwing, yellow-rumped warbler, yellow-throated warbler, purple finch, and common redpoll.



Great horned owl

My favorite bird

by Ed Powers

From time to time, someone, usually a non-birder, will ask me what my favorite bird is. Usually, I say “the next one.”

But just what constitutes “favorite”? Is it the most colorful? There are many to choose from, but maybe it’s a wood duck.

Or the most beautiful song. My choice there would be the wood thrush.



Could be the cutest. A hard choice, but a good candidate would be the Carolina chickadee.

The most spectacular? How about a pileated woodpecker? This crow-sized woodpecker always elicited a gasp, even from those who have seen it many times.

The rarest? I’m sticking to birds seen in Indiana, so this would have to be the Great Kiskadee, also a choice for best name). This is a flycatcher seldom seen north of Texas, and never in Indiana until December 2018, in Noble County, near Chain o’ Lake State Park.

You can see the problem here. There are several other categories to consider, and each category has several possible choices. So I guess my answer is still “the next one.”



The milkweed is blooming!

By Kate Sanders

The milkweed is blooming! For several years now, the conservation community has talked about planting milkweed for monarchs - but the question is, which kind? There are more than 12 kinds of milkweed that are native to Indiana, so how do you choose? The best way is by soil type. I know what you are thinking - in gardening we often choose plants because we like the way they look, either the bloom color or the texture the foliage lends, but really when gardening with native plants the best thing to do is choose plants according to soil moisture. This means less work, inputs (water and fertilizer), and worry for you, and the plants will still thrive.

Of the variety of milkweed species native to Indiana, there are really only 4 or 5 types of native milkweed that are commercially available. Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) blooms the earliest and has the most amazingly orange flowers. It likes drier soils, and so does not much like to be mulched. Plant common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) and/or prairie milkweed (*Asclepias sullivantii*) if you have medium soils, somewhere between wet and dry. These plants look similar, although prairie milkweed is purported to spread less readily in garden settings. Common milkweed sends underground shoots to grow many plants (we call this rhizomatous growth), and can be the "the gift that keeps on giving" if you prefer a more manicured garden style. Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) likes to have wet toes, so choose this if you have wetter areas in your garden or yard. Finally, whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*) is the shortest of the bunch, with white flowers and the finest textured leaves of them all. It grows in poor soils, and is usually pretty happy anywhere except wetter soils. This species is fine to attract monarchs, but there is not much vegetation for hungry caterpillars. If you plant whorled milkweed, you might want to also plant one of the other species so that there is enough food to go around.



When planting milkweed, don't forget the nectaring flowers! It is important to have native flowers blooming from as early in the year as possible to as late in the year as possible for monarchs and other native pollinators. For early monarch arrivals, ohio spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohioensis*) or wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) are wonderful additions to the garden. For the monarchs late to head out in the fall, make sure to have goldenrod or aster blooming so that they have flowers to nectar before their long journeys. Smooth blue aster (*Symphotrichum laevae*), New England aster (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*), stiff goldenrod (*Oligoneuron rigidum*), or showy goldenrod (*Soildago speciosa*), are nice additions. Of course there are many, many more. We could go on and on for pages and pages about so many lovely natives. Think you are allergic to goldenrod? Many people do, but in most cases it is really the ragweed that sends out pollen at the same time that bothers people, and the goldenrod gets the bad rap. Goldenrods support a wide diversity of insect species.

The milkweed is blooming ere you are on your journey, just that you are taking another step down the path of supporting our native flora and fauna. Happy planting!

Programs

Scrapbooking/Crafting Night at Fox Island August 27 and September 17, Fridays

This program was developed for adults who appreciate an evening to socialize with other adults while crafting or scrapbooking. We provide some refreshments and will order a pizza together (optional). Bring a snack to share! We have a separate ALL DAY Crop on August 28 that ties in with the August 27 evening class. You may sign up for both classes at \$10.00 for each class.

5:00PM-11:00PM

Cost: \$10.00 per class
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 5
Max. 14

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

To register or for more information:
Email nhaley@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3180
Natalie Haley

Scrapbooking/Crafting All Day at Fox Island August 28, Saturday

This class may be paired with the August 27th class. Please let us know upon registration if you need space for both classes. We provide some refreshments and will order food together (optional).

10:00AM-5:00PM

Cost: \$10.00
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 5
Max. 14

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

To register or for more information:
Email foxisland@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3246
Natalie Haley

Buck Full Moon Hike July 23, Friday

Full Moon Night Hikes are a fun after-hours experience! Summer insects are celebrated at this time of year at Fox Island so wear appropriate clothing (long sleeves, long pants, etc.). If you have a large enough group (min. 10), we can schedule a separate hike just for your group!

8:00-PM-9:30PM

Cost: \$2.00 per person
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 5
Max. 20

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

To register or for more information:
Email nhaley@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3180 to register
Natalie Haley, 449-3246

Blue Sturgeon Full Moon Hike August 22

The Blue Sturgeon Full Moon Hike celebrates the time of year when the giant sturgeon of the Great Lakes was most readily caught. It is called a blue moon as it is the third of four full moons in one season. If you have a large enough group (min. 10), we can schedule a separate trail guide just for your group!

7:30PM-9:00PM

Cost: \$2.00 per person
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 5
Max. 20

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

To register or for more information:
Email nhaley@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3180
Natalie Haley

Fox Kit Club Adventures in the Afternoon September 14th, Tuesdays

The Fox Kit Club is designed for PreK through 1st grade children and their families. We will read a story and then take a hike focusing on a specific theme that correlates with the seasonal changes in the park.

12:30PM-1:30PM

Cost: \$3.00 per child,
\$2.00 per adult
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 5
Max. 15

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

To register or for more information:
Email nhaley@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3180
Natalie Haley

Hungry Ghost Harvest Full Moon Hike September 20, Monday

This is the Full Moon Hike that celebrates the fall harvest. If you have a large enough group (min. 10), we can schedule a separate hike for your group.

7:00PM-8:30PM

Cost: \$2.00 per person
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 5
Max. 20

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

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Email foxisland@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3246
Natalie Haley

Autumn Equinox Night Hike September 22, Wednesday

Celebrate the Autumn Equinox – one of our favorite night hike experiences! Autumn Equinox in Northern Hemisphere will be at 3:20PM on Wednesday, September 22. Equinoxes result in equal amount of daylight and darkness. We will have a campfire following the program if the weather is good.

6:30PM-8:30PM

Cost: \$2.00 per person
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 5
Max. 20

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

To register or for more information:
Email nhaley@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3180
Natalie Haley

Family Summer Fun at Bowman Lake July 6, 13, & 20, Tuesdays

Family Summer Fun at Bowman Lake is designed for exactly that – summer fun with your family. Meet us at **Bowman Lake, Shelter #2**. Registration is limited so sign up early. Programs such as monarchs, nature art, and Wilderness Survival. Each Tuesday offers a different theme. Cost is \$3.00 per child in addition to our regular park entry. Annual park pass holders do not pay any additional park entry – park entry paid at front [gate](#), program fee paid at the lake.

1:00PM-3:00PM

Cost: \$3.00 per person
Pre-register by: (5 days before program)
Min. 2 families
Max. 12 families = 12 picnic tables

Fox Island County Park Nature Center

To register or for more information:
Email nhaley@allencountyparks.org
Call: 449-3180
Natalie Haley



How Much Wood Can A Woodchuck Chuck?

Whenever I have the privilege of leading a hike for a group of school kids at Fox Island, one of the first questions they usually ask is, "What kinds of animals will we see?"

A variety of animals live in the park. But, with the exception of squirrels and chipmunks that are active during daylight hours (diurnal), most of the bigger, furry mammals are sleeping during the day and only active after sunset (nocturnal).



However, there is a large, furry creature related to squirrels and chipmunks that roams the park during the day and looks like this!

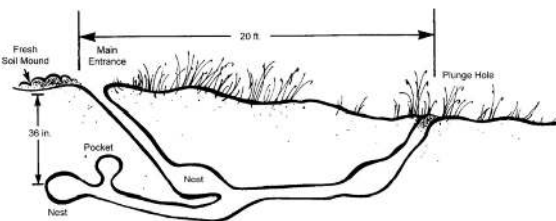
If you guessed a groundhog, you'd be right. Groundhogs are also known as woodchucks, forest marmots, land beavers, and whistle-pigs. Why whistle-pigs? Because of the sound they make through their large front teeth to warn one another of danger.



Woodchucks have short, muscular legs designed for digging, and large front incisors that they must wear down by chewing to slow down tooth growth. They often grow up to 20 inches in length, with a tail that measures about six inches long, and generally weigh between 6 and 12 pounds. Like other rodents, groundhogs can stand up on their hind legs and run about 10 miles per hour.



Groundhogs spend most of their time living in underground burrows, which have one main entrance that can be identified by a large mound of excavated soil immediately outside the entrance hole. The burrow also has at least one escape exit! A single groundhog can move nearly 700 pounds of dirt when making a burrow.



From their main tunnel, they dig side tunnels. Each side tunnel has a different use. One of these areas is used exclusively as a toilet. Groundhogs are very clean animals and will deposit all their waste in this area. At times, they will remove dried excrement and bury it outside the burrow to ward off intruders. Other tunneled areas are used as actual dens for raising their **kits**, sleeping in the summer and hibernating in the winter.

Groundhogs are true hibernators! Their hibernation can last for as long as five months. During this time, they go into a dormant state and can lose a quarter of their body weight, their body temperature decreases by 60 degrees Fahrenheit, and their heart rate slows to only 4 or 10 beats per minute. After their months-long hibernation, groundhogs emerge just in time for the mating season right after the time we celebrate Groundhog Day.

About that "woodchuck" name?



Groundhogs don't chew wood. Actually, the name woodchuck comes from a Native American word, wuchak, which roughly means "digger." In reality, they are vegetarians eating mainly grasses, clover, plantains, and wild flowers. They also love blackberries, raspberries, cherries, and other fruits. Of course, to the dismay of farmers, woodchucks love field produce, as well. They will even eat grasshoppers and other large insects. They're worth keeping around!



Fox Island Alliance

Ed Powers
12206 W. Yoder Road
Roanoke, IN 46783

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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 _____

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

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Please Circle One:

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