



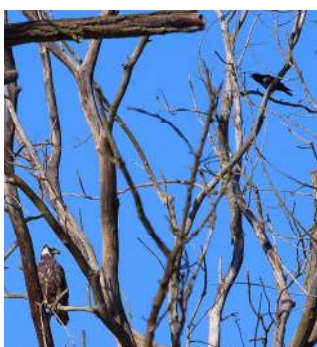
Winter on the wetlands

By Clara Conroy

When the temperatures plummet, life on the marsh seems to go on hold. A lonesome hush falls over the land, interrupted by the wind rattling through dried reeds. Plants are dormant, and reptiles, amphibians and fish go into a state of hibernation. But if you look and listen carefully, you can still find activity among the cattails.

Mammals such as rabbits, coyote, deer and mink remain active all winter, going about their normal (albeit more difficult) daily life. Voles create networks of tunnels under the snow, where they search for food, and huddle together in communal nests for warmth. Mice also continue to search for seeds, going into a state of torpor only during extreme cold. Beavers spend most of their time in lodges but will come out to make occasional repairs and look for food if their stores runs low. Muskrats also spend the cold season in the lodges they built in summer, but they do not store food like beavers. They must look for food every day and are often restricted to foraging under the ice. Raccoons do not hibernate, but the fat reserves they built up in the warm months allow them to hunker down in hollow trees and burrows for extended periods of time during the bitterest days of winter. Once snow has covered the ground, tracks make it apparent how many animals are still going about their activities at the wetlands.

Once the weather turns cold, there are not as many species of birds around the swampy areas of the park. Many waterfowl have migrated south, but others, such as Canada geese, mallards and mute swans, will remain all winter so long as there is open water. Great blue herons will continue to hunt for food until the shallow areas freeze over. Dead and dying trees in the swamp provide shelter and food for various species of woodpeckers.

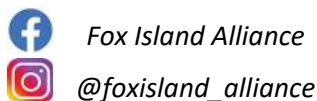


Juvenile Bald eagle
by Clara Conroy

Bald eagles can be seen at the wetlands year-round. They prefer to catch fish for their dinner, but will also prey on whatever is available in frigid weather, such as ducks, rabbits or muskrats. Birds of prey are often harassed by American crows, another year-round resident, as seen in this photo taken from the Marsh Trail. An immature eagle was dive-bombed and scolded by two crows (one is partly visible above and to the right the eagle) until it tired of the torment and moved on. Red-tailed hawks and Northern harriers can also be found soaring over and hunting around the frozen marsh.

Bundle up and take a hike along the Fox Island wetland trails this winter to see what you can discover!

Find out about events, volunteer opportunities, improvements and life in general at Fox Island by following Fox Island Alliance on social media.



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Excitement at the bird building

By Cynthia Powers

An unusual sight turned up a few weeks ago during the FeederWatch at the Vera Dulin Bird Wildlife Observation Building: it was a Brown Creeper. It preferred the suet feeders, and was observed quite a few times by several feeder watchers. Once we even saw two of them.

This small brown bird climbs up tree trunks, looking like a little mouse. It flies from one tree to the base of the next, then creeps up, using its decurved bill to probe for spiders and insects in the tree bark. That behavior is opposite of the nuthatch, which likes to go head downward.

My Sibley guide (2004 edition) shows creepers in Indiana only in winter. So I checked a later edition (2017); it says the same thing. But Hoosier birder Don Gorney has found them nesting in Indiana, mostly in larger natural areas. He says those we see in winter are likely migrants. They nest under loose tree bark such as shagbark hickories, and their nests look like little hammocks with a cup inside to hold the eggs. If you should happen to hear its song, it's been described as "the tinkle of a small chain being dropped into a heap." Might be a good test to see if you need a hearing aid.

Brown Creepers (*Certhia americana*) are the only U. S. members of the family Certhiidae. Their closest relative is the Eurasian Treecreeper, once thought to be the same species. The family is closely related to wrens, gnatcatchers, and nuthatches.

If you'd like to volunteer in the Vera Building, check with Natalie (nhaley@allencountyparks.org or 260-449-3246). It's easy and fun, watching the birds and chatting with any park visitors that happen by.



Brown Creeper by Jeff Ormiston

Jim Haw's big day

By Terri Gorney Lehman

Jim Haw, Jim Williams and Dick Heller planned a big birding day on May 7, 1975. Haw was a young IPFW history professor and one of the best birders in the state. Heller was the owner of the *Decatur Democrat*, and Williams was a retired salesman. Heller wrote an article about their big day for his newspaper.

The year before, Williams and Haw recorded a total of 112 species. Prior to this day, Haw's biggest count day was 117 species in Virginia.

The trio's big day began at 6 a.m. at Fox Island. They hoped to see 75 species in four hours. They ended up with a total of 82 species; 22 of them were warblers.

From there, the group went to northern Allen County in an area covered by the Fort Wayne Christmas Bird Count where they checked ponds and fields. Heller noted that there was a lack of waterfowl and shorebirds, but the number of warblers, vireos, thrushes and flycatchers made the difference.

They ended their big day at 7 p.m. in Fort Wayne with a total of 121 species of birds. They had driven a total of 229 miles and hiked 6 to 8 miles. They were tired, but not too tired to plan to go May 10 to Oak Openings for a day of birding with the Stockbridge Audubon Society.

Source: Decatur Democrat, Decatur, IN, 9 May 1975, p. 4.

A tree for Darrell

By Lisa Esquivel Long

The board of directors in autumn voted to spend \$200 on a white pine tree in memory of our late Vice President Darrell Will. The board contributed a little more for installation by Laura Stine Gardens. Laura is an FIA member and made a donation. The tree has been planted by the Geogarden. The board has used other money from donations made in Darrell's name to pay for a bird feeder constructed from recycled plastic, mealworms and tape for the Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building window to prevent bird strikes.



Children stand by the recently installed memorial white pine tree for Darrell Will, IMN 2016 and vice president of the board. He died Jan. 2, 2021.

Meet board member Clara Conroy



My name is Clara Conroy and I have been attending the Fox Island Alliance board meetings since the autumn of 2019. I officially became a board member in February 2020, but due to COVID-19, all but the first of my meetings since then have been via Zoom!

I joined the board when my friend and fellow board member, Grace Danel, informed me that new members were being sought and she thought that I might enjoy working with this great group of people. I was looking for a new, productive way to spend my free time, when not working full time at Courier Printing of Allen County or caring for my family, so I accepted the invitation. Grace also enlightened me about the Indiana Master Naturalist program, which I graduated from in 2019.

Since joining the board, I have focused on sparking interest in the park by creating a greater public presence. This has included creating the Instagram account @foxisland_alliance, gaining more followers on Facebook and creating weatherproof stickers for FIA members. Plans are in the works for a Twitter account and updating the web page to keep everyone current on what is happening at the park and with the Alliance. I also recently joined the Fox Tale committee – this is actually the first issue I have helped with.

I have always loved, and loved to learn about, all aspects of the natural world. My passion, however, is birding. Ever since I was a young girl down on the Ohio River, I have been compelled to get outdoors and find as many different kinds of birds as I can. And when I track down or stumble upon a “lifer” (that elusive species that you are seeing for the first time) it’s a thrill like winning the jackpot! I also enjoy photographing nature – everything from close-ups of tiny spiders to Mother Nature’s bouquet of wildflowers to entire marsh landscapes teeming with waterfowl. Many of the photos on the FIA Instagram account are from my adventures at Fox Island over the last few years. One of my favorite spots at the park is the observation tower where I can sit in the peace and splendor of the wetlands and just let wildlife come to me. If you see me around the park, I will almost always be sporting a camera and a pair of binoculars. I sort of feel naked without them.

And I apologize in advance for zoning out, should we ever be having a conversation and a bird lands behind you. Happy trails in 2022!



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George



Pining For A Snowy Winter?

Maybe you could check out a nearby pine tree? Chances are, you used some type of pine cone as part of your holiday trimmings this year. Did you get a chance to look closely at this popular seasonal decor?

Cones are usually found on most conifer trees. But pine cones only grow on pine trees. All members of the pine family (pine, spruce, firs, and cedars, etc.) have cones. Usually, male and female pine cones grow on the same tree.



Male cones usually appear on pine trees in the spring, and are soft and spongy. They produce a powdery pollen, then disappear after the pollen is spread. These soft cones are located on the lower branches of the tree. This is to prevent the pollen from falling on the female cones located on the same tree.

So, the woody pine cones you used in your decorations are the female pine cones. Their scales serve as wooden casings that keep the growing pine seeds safe and protected from freezing temperatures during the winter. They close up tightly, keeping out cold temperatures, winds, ice and even animals that might eat these tasty seed morsels. These same scales are also light sensitive, closing up in the dark and reopening in the light.



Sometimes, after pollination, it can take these protected pine ovules 2-3 years to develop into viable seeds. When conditions are right, they emerge attached to winged scales with two seeds attached to each scale and become airborne until they land in an ideal growing spot.

Some people think you can tell how harsh the winter will be by the height of pine cones on the trees. The higher the cones, the worse the season will be. However, since it takes at least two years for the pine seeds to mature, this probably isn't a good predictor of current weather conditions. Where they are located or the larger the cones probably explain more about what the growing seasons have been like for the past couple of years.



However, as you take a wintertime hike through the woods at Fox Island, you may spot a hungry squirrel chewing the scales off the core of a pine cone very much like how people eat corn-on-the-cob. First it will chew off the scales near the stem. As each scale peels away, the squirrel will spot another pair of exposed seeds. This chewing pattern will continue as it twirls the cone to expose new seeds. So, even if you don't spot the squirrel, keep on the lookout for mounds of discarded scales and chewed-off cone cores under a tall pine tree.

You'll know the trusty pine tree played an important role in the survival of both its own offspring and the squirrel!



Season's Greetings!



On behalf of the board of directors, *Thank You* for your support and dedication to the Fox Island Alliance. The winter season is upon us once again. This is a period of great reflection. I enjoy the stillness and quiet of this season, as it's a reminder for us to slow down. I am proud to share with you some of the activities the Board has been involved in this past year.

As a nonprofit corporation, the Alliance is powered by dedicated volunteers and donations. We continue to have strong support with over 160 members! *Wow!* Through generous donations of time, money, resources and efforts, we are able to maintain solid standing.

Your directors have put forth a great deal of effort, as 2021 was quite a transformative year. Work was done in updating protocols and processes, both administratively and financially. Our committees continue to drive change, both big and small, at Fox Island County Park. Our efforts have been focused on bat research with Purdue Fort Wayne, conservation and land management practices, Indiana Master Naturalist classes, and education, including the update of the Nature Center's Tree House and the addition of a Little Library located outside the front door.

This year brought about a change in leadership roles for directors and officers. The hardest challenge was hearing the news of the passing of Vice President Darrell Will. The Alliance decided to honor Darrell and his legacy by planting a white pine tree at Fox Island County Park. We will formally dedicate this special tree on Sunday, May 1, 2022. This event will be a part of the annual meeting of the members. So mark your calendars and stay tuned, invitations will be sent out next month.

In looking ahead to 2022, it is my hope to continue working toward streamlining our communications to members, which will include a new website presence. We are always looking for members to join the board of directors. If you would like to help us make a difference, we'd love to hear from you! The Alliance has a centralized email that is monitored regularly.

Reach us at FAllianceAdm@gmail.com.

May the beauty of the season be with you all through the year.

Terri Habig

Board President



We thank the many volunteers who graciously donate their personal time and many talents to help Fox Island Alliance and Fox Island County Park. You all, in conjunction with our financial donors, make all work possible.

Please remember to record all volunteer hours in the binder in the Kent Library in the Fox Island Nature Center. Not only does this allow us to recognize your efforts, but volunteer hours also can be used to leverage future grant funding for the park.

Upcoming Programs

Note: All events meet at Fox Island Nature Center. To register or for more information, contact Jeff Ormiston at jormiston@allencountyparks.org or 260-449-3184.

Young Naturalist Homeschool

Jan. 13, 27 Feb. 10, 24 March 10, 24 (Thursdays)

1:00-3:00 pm

Cost \$2.00 per child, \$2.00 per parent

Preregister by 1/07

Class minimum 5, maximum 20

This program is for students 6-13, covers a variety of topics and includes a hike during each class.

Hike with Jeff O.

Jan. 21, Feb. 25, March 25, April 22 (Fridays)

1:00-2:00 pm

Cost \$2.00 park entry fee

Preregister by one week prior

Class minimum 5, maximum 20

This program is open to the public of all ages and will vary depending on the weather.

Wild Edibles Class

Jan. 22, Feb. 26, March 26 (Saturdays)

10:00 am-12:00 pm

Cost \$2.00 park entry fee

Preregister by one week prior

Class minimum 5, maximum 12

Continue the exploration of wild edible plants with certified edibles specialist Carrie Vrabel.

Introduction to Whittling Figures

Feb. 19 (Saturday)

10:00 am-12:00 pm

Cost \$2.00 park entry fee

Preregister by 02/11

Class minimum 5, maximum 30

This is a chance to learn how to get started with wood carving animals and figures. We will discuss tools, wood, whittling safety, painting and more.

Salamanders and Amphibians

April 9 (Saturday)

1:00 pm-3:00 pm

Cost \$2.00 park entry fee

Preregister by 04/01

Class minimum 5, maximum 30

We will discuss salamanders and amphibians and hike in search of salamander eggs.



Fox Island River Otter 2020

In early January of 2020 parks Environmental Educator, Jeff Ormiston, photographed a River Otter swimming in the marsh waters of Fox Island County Park. Two months later the otter was again seen and captured on video from the same location at the Fox Island Marsh Tower. Scan the QR code and open the YouTube App to see the video of this member of the Mustelidae family, largest family in the order Carnivora.





We thank the generous financial donors who support Fox Island Alliance in our mission to support Fox Island County Park.

Evening Primrose Garden Club, Rich Stephenson, Mike & Barb Hunter, Kerry Kessens, Heather Bushong, Nate Danneberg, Gene Scheumann, Tom & Pam Schmidtchen, Sharon Westertlausen, Ed & Mary Lou Hutter, Carl & Barbara Bauer, Gregory & Terri Habig, Kathryn Farnsworth, Richard & Yvonne Harnley, Matt & Anne Henry, Frank & Nancy Hudson, Mark & Maryellen Maffey, Lisa Miller, Gregg

Pollander, Richard & Raquel Walker, Cindy & Doug Weakley, Glen & Janice Young, David Lupke from the David Lupke Charitable Fund, Mike & Jane Arata, Marion & Beryl Gray, Anne & James Heger, Frank & Nancy Hudson, Carol & Jeff Keplar, Marla & Paul McAfee, Rick & Rhoda Reichenbach, Randy & Carol Roberts, Bill & Laine Seidel, Bob & Donna Streeter, Ida & Jim Wine, Jo Ann Wyatt, Susan K Zwierko & Tim Farber, Dave & Margaret Ridderheim, Carl & Barbara Bauer, Laura Stine Gardens, George Manning, Bill & Cindy Young, Kent & Heather Castleman, and two anonymous donors.

Revisions to Fox Island Alliance membership

By Ed Powers

The board of directors recently approved some changes to membership benefits and descriptions.

Unchanged benefits are free admission to Fox Island, subscription to the quarterly Fox Tale newsletter; and a 10% discount in the Fox Island Nature Center gift shop. New benefits are free fishing and free mushroom hunting.

There are some changes to membership categories:

Senior: a person 55 years or older – it was formerly 60. Dues \$5. Dues for two seniors are \$10.

Student: a person enrolled as a full-time student, regardless of age. Dues \$5.

Veteran: active-duty military, or their spouses. This is a new category. Dues \$5.

Individual: anyone not a senior, student, or veteran/military/spouse. Dues \$15

Family: a couple and any children under 18. Dues \$20. Anyone over 18 should join as student or individual members.

Sustaining: a person or couple who wishes to support the alliance in a commendable manner. Dues \$30.

Patron: a person or couple who wishes to support the alliance in an exemplary manner. Dues \$50.

Contributions in excess of dues are welcome. They may be specified to go to the Conservation Fund, the Education Fund, or the General Fund. Unspecified contributions will go to the General Fund. The Exhibit and Scholarship funds have been eliminated.



Fox Island Alliance

Ed Powers
12206 W. Yoder Road
Roanoke, IN 46783

Officers:

Terri Habig, President
Liz Hinks, Vice President
Kate Sanders, Vice President
Carol Gaham, Secretary
Tim Ormiston, Treasurer

Board of Directors:

Clara Conroy, Grace Danel, Pam George, Carol Gaham, Terri Habig,
Liz Hincks, Lisa Esquivel Long, Sherry McGinnis, Tori Mumaw, Tim
Ormiston, Ed Powers, Dan Preest, Kate Sanders, Carrie Vrabel

Directors Emeritus:

Kate Ferguson, Phil Herrick, Dr. Solomon Isiorho, John McCorry, Iona
Mensch and Jeff Ormiston

Fox Tale Editor:

Lisa Esquivel Long

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 _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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

___ Check if you do not want your name published

Please Circle One:

Students \$5—Senior \$5—Two Seniors \$10—Military/Veteran \$5—
Individual \$15— Family \$20—Sustaining \$30—Patron \$50

Additional gift \$ ___ Education \$ ___ Conservation \$ ___ General

Total Dues and Gifts \$ _____

If this membership is a gift, enter donor's name:

___ Check if you are interested in volunteering. You will be contacted.

Will your employer match your gift to FIA? Check with your Human
Resources/Personnel Department.

FIA is a 501 (c) (3) organization; extra gifts are tax deductible.

Make your check payable to FIA, Inc. and mail with this form to:
Ed Powers, Membership 12206 W. Yoder Rd., Roanoke, IN 46783

www.foxislandalliance.org