



A quarterly newsletter published by the Fox Island Alliance, Inc.

Exhibits unleashed

by Sarah Maloy, photos by Sarah Maloy

A journey into the Nature Center or approaching one of the many informational trail boards (alternatively identified as kiosks) may present you with a new look, exhibit or activity upon your next visit to Fox Island County Park. The changes over the past six months have been subtle, but represent the continuing efforts on behalf of Fox Island Alliance and a partnership established with park staff.

The exhibit chairperson position had been vacant for some time, but with a new year ahead, I accepted the opportunity to fill this role with excitement! I began by touring the nature center with park staff to identify needs of the park. It was at that time that my list was made and I got to work.



Sedimentary, Igneous, Metamorphic & Geode Hands-on Exhibit featuring samples, identification cards, informational posters and a QR code reflecting a live video of a geode activity in the spring.

In the beginning months, I primarily focused on the geology area of the Nature Center. I obtained permission from the Gem & Mineral Society to access their display case to initially refresh and clean, but ultimately worked with them to focus on a long-term change. The organization owns the display case, but allows the nature center to host it for educational purposes. They presented the idea of regular updates at their monthly meeting, and it was voted upon: they would begin to provide a new display approximately every four months. The first refreshed exhibit arrived in April and offered very inviting informational cards with specimen examples. This was the first time this case had seen a change in years! The case was also shifted away from the window and now sits next to the fossil cart, with an abundance of light shining through to illuminate it daily.

The fossil cart remains as an important hands-on educational tool for visitors

and youth groups, but also received minor updates with the addition of new informational fossil signage, with acrylic sign holders, black trays for organization and new specimens to supplement the appreciated exhibit. This area is complimented by the newly framed posters that have been hung to assist in the education of fossils, rocks and minerals.

Additionally, steps were made to partner with glass companies to acquire quotes to replace the glass top of the stone tools case. This exhibit is extraordinary and the replacement of the damaged section would allow for better viewing of these unique and special samples, representing cherished history in the park.

(cont. on page 5)



You can stomp over to the fossil cart refreshed, Gem and Mineral Society display case updated and informational posters highlighting fossils, rocks and minerals.

See what's inside:

- Park cleanup—page 2
- IMN meeting—page 2
- Park update—page 3
- Volunteering—page 3
- Black oak—page 4
- Black oak (cont.)—page 5
- Exhibits (cont.)—page 5
- Kit Kapers—page 6
- Bird count—page 7
- Nature's Christmas—page 7



Update on cleanup at Fox Island

by Dan Preest

Recovery work continues at the park as the logging company helps remove trees that are blocking trails or are damaged, especially those presenting safety hazards. Some people have asked why the downed and damaged trees are not just allowed to decompose naturally. To be clear, a lot of that biomass (primarily trees less than 10" in diameter, branches and treetops) will remain after the larger logs are removed. Without the removal activity it would be difficult to navigate within the park or to do needed land management as invasive plants will aggressively move into many new areas. It is also worth noting that it will take 20 to 40 years for larger trees to decompose. The remains of trees damaged in the 2012 storm are still easily seen and that damage was not as extensive as the storm damage this past June.

Finally, Park Manager Natalie Haley continues to consult with experts to develop workable options for the park's future ecology. She is working to develop options to be presented to Jeff Baxter and the county park's board. I have had the opportunity to listen in on input from various organizations such as Indiana State Nature Preserves/DNR, Heartland Restoration, Blue Heron Ministries, and others. There are of course many differing viewpoints and recommendations that will need to be sorted through to arrive at a final plan.

This is not to say that things are at a standstill pending a final plan. Treatment of newly exposed areas for invasives is underway by park staff, 18,000 oak trees have been secured for fall planting, and a project is under development to have acorns collected by the broader Fort Wayne community.

Indiana Master Naturalist Alumni meeting

by Clara Conroy

There were 19 members who attended the Indiana Master Naturalist Alumni meeting at Metea County Park on August 11. Jeff Ormiston held a brief meeting, and Jan Gibson took minutes.

Two representatives from Soarin' Hawk Raptor Rehab were on hand for an informational presentation. They explained how their mission is to rescue birds of prey, rehabilitate and return them to the wild. Sometimes a bird's injuries are too extensive so they cannot be released. Some of these birds become ambassadors for education. At this meeting Soarin' Hawk brought out a screech owl, an American kestrel, a barn owl, a red-tailed hawk and a great-horned owl and talked about how each of these birds is unique. Some of the characteristics of raptors are large eyes that take up 70% of the skull, good hearing, ratchet tendon in feet and, in owls, special feathers for silent flight.



Soarin' Hawk Raptor Rehab representative with screech owl.



Soarin' Hawk Raptor Rehab representative with barn owl.

Also discussed was how important it is to educate everyone about the importance of raptors in the ecosystem. They are a farmer's friend because of the large amount of pests they eat every year, and they need to be protected.

All Indiana Master Naturalist alumni and their guests are invited to attend the quarterly meetings.

Fox Island park update

by Liz Hincks and Jeff Ormiston

Fox Island County Park is alive, well, and thriving! It looks different, you can definitely see that a major change occurred as a result of the storm and strong winds that ripped through, but the essence, animals, and growing life in the Park are still present and clearly visible.

Jeff O. and I did a short hike on a sunny morning in mid-September from the Bird Building to the outdoor building/play/survivor area (almost to the front gate) and looped back around to the Nature Center. Everywhere you looked there were changes as a result of the storm. Most, but not all, of the tree canopy for as far as you could see was gone. But it was amazing how far into the Park you can now see, how many tall trees are still there, and the amount of sunlight that now hits the floor of the woods. All of this open sunny area allows the new growth that has sprung up since the storm to thrive. Jeff said that with the new lower canopy found in a lot of areas in the woods, the birds seemed to be more plentiful and busier looking for food in areas where they were easily observed, which is always good news to a birder. Judging from the variety of bird songs heard on our hike, the birds still love their homes in the Park. Amazingly huge piles of cut trees, stripped of their branches, were stacked in piles in the once grassier area outside Nature Center. This area is one of many staging areas where trunks are piled by equally large equipment with funny names who's jobs are to strip, cut, and gently place the logs on the ground. The freshly cut tree ends showed off the beautiful designs that lived inside the trees thanks to insect friends. All the logs currently being cut are waiting to be loaded up and removed via huge flatbeds. There are still trails intersecting the Park but they are now 8-10 feet wide to allow the trucks room to maneuver. Trails that will stay after the logging is complete. However, mixed in and among the tire treads on the trail we found fresh tracks of coyote, several deer including a doe and her baby, and raccoons. So many more tracks are being seen on the trails lately that Jeff commented he is going to put up some of the trail cameras again to see who is enjoying the Park. Both sides of the trails we walked were filled with fall flowers, butterflies, and singing insects. The tree that fell across the pond behind the Nature Center was trimmed and will remain as it has become a favorite daily sunning spot for turtles.

Many things are thriving while they are waiting for the work to be done and the Park to reopen. The animals inside the Nature Center are waiting for all the guests to come back while Sherry lovingly tends them, talks to them, and makes sure all their needs are still being met. There are new displays on the entryway bulletin boards and the newly painted twelve foot high soil profile (which is almost finished) is waiting to teach visitors. The six foot stumps of two of the trees in front of the Nature Center are waiting for Jeff and his chain saw to carve some giant wood spirits to stand guard outside the Nature Center. The brush left over from tree removal has already become home to a lot of animals, but it is waiting to decompose and become new rich soil for the next generation of trees that have already started growing. Natalie is waiting to purchase and plant new trees made possible with money that caring people have donated to rebuild the Park. And we are all waiting to visit the Park to see these changes for ourselves. But while we wait, know that the park is alive and well and thriving during this new phase of Fox Island County Park.

Be on the lookout!

by Tori Mumaw

With the Alliance's up and coming website there will be easy access to volunteer opportunities at the park. The volunteer application will be accessible online and volunteer events will be posted for easy sign up. Keep an eye open as we move toward 2023 and the reopening of Fox Island.

Can't wait? The Alliance has several committees to help accommodate the needs of the park. Maybe you enjoy education, conservation or would like to aid in the upkeep of the Nature Center exhibits. No matter your interest or talent we'd love to have you be an active Alliance member. For more information, please contact Fox Island Alliance at fiallianceadm@gmail.com.

Black oak speaks

A tale written for Fort Wayne's Bicentennial 1794-1994

by Cynthia Powers, Fox Island Trail Guide

Editors note: This story is being reprinted because of the popular tree's damage in the summer storm.

I am the black oak that lives along the main trail, in what is now the Fox Island Nature Preserve. I'm getting very old now—over 200 years—and my children and grandchildren have heard my stories over and over. But I wanted to tell them once more to the park visitors, before a windstorm blows me over, or the carpenter ants make me hollow.

My friends the squirrels tell me that Fort Wayne is having a birthday celebration called a Bicentennial. When I heard that I got excited, because it could be my birthday too. I grew from an acorn a squirrel buried and forgot, near the edge of the Fox Island sand dune. My roots grew very fast through the soft sand. It might have been the same year Anthony Wayne built his fort, but of course that was too far away for me to know about.

I do remember the Indians who came in fall to pick up hickory nuts and walnuts. Once a little Indian girl stepped right on me, wearing her soft, beaded moccasins! I was only a baby—I only had two leaves. But I was flexible and grew straight again after only a few days.

The Indians collected acorns, too, to make flour. But there were always plenty left for the squirrels and for sprouting into new oak trees.

When I got a little taller, I could hear the songs of the French traders as they carried their canoes to the Little River. Even though a beaver dam held enough water for them to paddle part of the way through the marsh, it was still hot, sweaty work. Sometimes I heard them say "Sacre Bleu!" The squirrels say that is a really bad swear word in French. Once they got their canoes over the portage, they could paddle all the way to New Orleans if they wanted to.

One day in the 1830's a man walked down the trail. I could tell he was very sad, just from the way he walked. He sat near me and talked to himself. He was very homesick for his home in Ireland, and he was sure he would never see it again. He had come to America to help dig the Wabash and Erie Canal. It was very hard work and sometimes the men spent their money on whiskey. This man's best friend had been killed in a fight last payday. But after he rested a while in my shade, I think the Irishman felt better.

On July 4, 1835, the canal near Fox Island was finally done. People could ride the packet boats from Fort Wayne to Huntington and didn't have to use the portage any more. I hope the Irishman got to take a ride on the canal he helped build.

I was a tall tree when Fox Island was made into a farm. Men cut down many of my brothers and sisters. Sometimes they cut through their bark all the way around—they called it "girdling." I thought it was so cruel—I had to watch their leaves wilt as they slowly died. Then they were cut down later. Somehow I was never cut down, and I must admit I loved having all the sunlight for myself. My side branches grew long and strong in those days, and I made a lot of shade. Sometimes Farmer Yohne would eat lunch under me and his horse would rest a while before they started the afternoon plowing. Sometimes the corn grew tall all around me, but sometimes the rains didn't come often enough and the corn wilted in the sandy soil. Black oak trees don't have to worry about rain much—our roots go deeper and our thick bark keeps us from drying out.

My thick bark protected me another time, when lightning hit me! I was the perfect target, all alone in the middle of the corn field. You can see even now how my bark was split all the way down my trunk. Luckily I didn't catch fire, and my bark healed the edges of the split.

Farmer Yohne finally gave up on raising corn and I had a few years of peace before a very strange thing happened. Men came out in big noisy things called "tanks" and drove them up and down over the sand dune. They even scooped out holes in the sand, called "tank traps," and practiced driving the tanks in and out of the traps. Sometimes motorcycles roared up and down over the sand dune. I told the squirrels, "I'm getting too old for this!" After all, I was over 150 years old.

Shortly after that, I could see a big highway being built west of me. After it was done, it's never been completely quiet any more. Big trucks go by day and night, and trains go by on the north side of the sand dune. What a racket! I'd rather hear the birds and the chorus frogs. And you know, I think people would too, at least the ones who come to Fox Island. I heard one say she wanted to get away from "computers." I don't know what computers are, and even the squirrels can't find out. Maybe they are a specially noisy kind of truck.

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But I'm getting ahead of my story. After the tanks and the motorcycles were gone, I heard people talking about making Fox Island into a park. I thought to myself, "I wonder what a park is? I hope it isn't noisy!" Lots of people came out and worked hard picking up all the trash. Trucks came and hauled away all the old refrigerators, rolls of fence, tin cans, and old carpet. What a relief! I was beginning to think living in a park was going to be OK!

They put up a sign right close to me that said "NATURE PRESERVE." It faces away from me so I can't read it, but I hear the trail guides read it out loud to the school children every spring and fall. The children like to feel my bark and pick up my acorns. Most of all they like to peek in the hole in one of my roots. They all think an animal lives there—but none of them have ever seen it!

I'm getting to be such an old tree now. We black oaks don't live as long as our cousins the white oaks, and I've already lived almost as long as black oaks ever do. Already some of my branches are dead. But I feel as if in a way I'll live forever, because I'm surrounded by so many of my children and grandchildren. I hope they'll always be safe in the Nature Preserve and that people will keep enjoying their shade and the songs of the birds in their branches.

"Is not the sky a father, and the earth a mother, and are not all living things with feet or wings or roots their children?"
from Black Elk Speaks

Exhibits Unleashed (cont.)

by Sarah Maloy, photos by Sarah Maloy

(continued from front page)

Lastly, the countertop beneath the tree that was once home to the salamander habitat now provides yet another hands-on area for our youngest (and young at heart) explorers. The Nature Center now offers the opportunity to identify, see and touch geodes and sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rocks! You'll find each category complete with signage and even the rock cycle explained! Want to see a live video of a geode cracked by our very own Jeff O.? Check out the QR code in this area to learn more about our experience this spring! Stomp on in and just follow the newly added floor decal (dinosaur) tracks, leading straight to all of these changes.



The spring Nature Center bulletin board highlighting pollinators of all kinds with a special focus butterflies and bees.

The Nature Center bulletin board has also seen quarterly changes. The first represented "winter in the forest" and later transitioned to "pollination," featuring pollinators of all kinds! A "color pop summer series" was prepared with artwork (posters) and photographs taken in Indiana that focused on specific color groups of our state. With the closure of the park in June, this update may be on hold as alternative plans have been requested by park staff. It is their intention to communicate and highlight the impact on the park since the June 13 derecho. Meanwhile, the trail boards and exterior Nature Center board also receive the same quarterly updates with informational and educational items. These items are complementary to the season or area of the park.

As the season progressed, display cases were shifted, signage was updated and the hallway became the focus. A pond life exhibit was created, in a hallway cubby, to showcase the yearly tanks that Jeff O. highlights to teach school groups and visitors about the rich life in the park during the spring. In

conclusion of the season, this area transitioned as we welcomed summer and concentrates on seeds - and stages of growth. This area was also created to encourage hands-on learning with various plants, trees and seeds to also identify and touch. The deer items were moved up in the hallway to assist in the preservation of articles and presented as a collection. And, finally, an inactive exhibit was removed from the wall near the hallway entrance and partnership with an electric company was established to ensure the safe installation of an electrical outlet. This was needed as our resident salamander moved and is now enjoying quite a lush dwelling in that area. Her new habitat features many of the same surroundings she'd find in the wild. Are you ready to learn a little more about the tiger salamander? Be sure to check out the new, custom canvas that showcases some really cool features about our resident amphibian, complete with a QR code!

Most recently, work has begun on a soil horizons mural. This collaboration between FIA and park staff has proved to be most beneficial as phase one has been completed and we look to complete phase two by the end of the year. This beautiful mural has already transformed this area of the Nature Center, but will also provide an ever-lasting educational resource for all who visit.

I look forward to continuing this work, as exhibit chairperson and invite you to tour these changes upon your next visit when the park reopens. I would also encourage you to share our progress with those interested or consider contributing to an outstanding exhibit need, as our committee has been added back to the membership form. Please feel free to contact me at smmindiana@gmail.com, if you'd like more information on these or upcoming updates!



Tiger salamander habitat refreshed and moved to its new location at the entry of the Nature Center hallway, featuring a custom creature feature canvas with QR code.



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George



Carpenters working at Fox Island?

Do you know where you might normally see something like this at Fox Island?

If you guessed on any wood-sided building or shed, you'd be right.



So, how did these distinct holes get there? *Read on.....*



Meet the carpenter bee! As its name suggests, wood is important to this type of bee because it builds its **nest** in wood. It prefers soft wood that is at least 2" thick, so you can find a carpenter bee nest in trees, around your home, on your wooden deck, and at Fox Island particularly around the gatehouse and the Nature Center's siding.

When you first spot a carpenter bee, you might think you are looking at a bumble bee, as the male is about the same size. However, he has no visible hairs on the top of his shiny, black abdomen and also has a whitish spot on the front of his face.

How would you know these holes were made by carpenter bees?

As a carpenter bee digs a perfectly shaped hole in a piece of wood, it leaves behind a small pile of sawdust. This pile is usually directly below the drilled hole. The presence of a yellowish combination of pollen and bee excrement may also be seen near the entrance hole.

How do carpenter bees drill these holes?

The female bee is the expert carpenter! She uses her strong, broad mandibles (jaws) like a wood rasp file against the wood. She starts vibrating, tearing through the wood's fibers in a circular pattern, patiently removing one small piece at a time. Instead of eating any wood fibers, she may reuse particles to build partitions between the cells of her nest.

What is a carpenter bee nesting (brooding) place called?

The original tunnel, as well as any side tunnels of a nest, are called **galleries**. Carpenter bees have four life stages: egg, larval, pupal and the adult. Young male adults and females hibernate in a gallery during the winter. In early spring, eggs are laid in a side tunnel of the gallery. It takes about seven weeks for a carpenter bee to reach adulthood. It leaves its brood cell, mates, feeds on pollen and nectar, and then returns to its original gallery to overwinter, emerging the following spring.

Do carpenter bees sting?

The female carpenter bee may sting but only if aggressively provoked!

The male bees do not even have stingers but are very aggressive. They stake out and protect their territories from other carpenter bees and predators (woodpeckers). They can dive-bomb your head and buzz around a short distance in front of your face if you approach their nests too closely.

So, are carpenter bees an important part of our environment?

Carpenter bees are excellent pollinators of open-faced or shallow flowers, as well as eggplant, tomato, and numerous other vegetables. Their beneficial role as pollinators far outweighs their destructive habit of drilling holes and nesting in the wooden structures around Fox Island. Just remember, male carpenter bees don't have stingers, so leave them alone and they'll leave you alone.

Christmas Bird Count

by Cynthia Powers

The Christmas Bird Count was started in 1900 and has been collecting much needed information since then. The CBC now happens in over 20 countries in the western hemisphere.

Areas of recorded bird observations all across the United States have been developed. The Fort Wayne count circle is north of Fort Wayne. Since that area has become more suburbanized over the years, in 2015, I created an area of record in Southwest Allen County area as an experiment. The circle that was drawn for the count included Fox Island, Eagle Marsh, the Arrowhead properties on Aboite, Fogwell Forest, and the Homestead High School Doug Waldman Environmental Center. It was so successful that it became a permanent part of the Christmas Bird Count in 2016.

Each team that participates in the count drives the rural roads within their territory. I try to include a “hot spot” like Eagle Marsh in each territory within the circle. Volunteers can go onto private property with permission. Feeder counts in the area are conducted in the same way as they are for FeederWatch, mainly the largest number seen of each species are counted and recorded. At the end of 24 hours, to allow people to listen for owls, everybody turns in their final reports. I then compile the species names and numbers and turn the information in to the National Audubon Society.

Besides our Fort Wayne and Southwest Allen areas there is an observation circle around Pokagon State Park, one at Limberlost, and one at Pigeon River. All of the counts must take place within a few days before or after Christmas.

As you can imagine, the data collected over the years is of great interest to scientists tracking populations, ranges of the species, and so much more. I tell people that it’s about half science and half fun. If we see a snowy owl, as we did a few years ago, that’s a special treat! Usually we see around 50 species.

If you want to be a part of the Southwest Bird Count, you don’t have to be a bird expert and you won’t be alone, you will be part of a team. There are usually 6 to 7 teams in the area. **However, if you want to help with the Bird Count, you MUST contact me via email at zzedpowers@aol.com by the end of November.**

Nature’s Christmas is back!

by Liz Hincks

After a brief hiatus, Metea will once again be hosting Nature’s Christmas this year! In case you haven’t been before, this is a family-friendly, fun-filled event, which includes having your picture taken with Father Christmas in the decorated main hall. This year’s event will be held in Metea’s Nature Center on Saturday, December 10, from 2:00 p.m. to 5 p.m. Several groups, including FIA’s Education Committee, will have interactive activities for younger visitors in the main classroom. Let Liz know if you would like to help with the Education Committee’s activity. Bring your family and friends and join us for some holiday fun!



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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.

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