



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

Strange facts about white-throated sparrows

by Cynthia Powers, photos by Ed Powers

You’ve probably seen white-throated sparrows foraging under your feeders in winter. They leave in spring for their nesting grounds in Canada, Michigan and Minnesota. We may hear them whistling “Oh, Sweet Canada, Canada, Canada” or “Oh, Sam Peabody” as they depart.



Their name refers to their white chins. They also have yellow “lores” - the area between the beak and the eye. But there are two color morphs with respect to their crowns: some have white stripes, and some have tan stripes. The two morphs differ in behavior, too: white-striped birds, especially males, are more territorial, and tan-striped birds are more nurturing, providing the most care to their young. Conveniently, birds prefer the opposite color morph to pair up with. This complex behavior seems to be unique among birds.

Reading in *Birds of North America* (1994), it seems that the difference is caused by variations in the shape of their second chromosome. Birds have 40 pairs of chromosomes, one set from each parent. In the tan-striped birds, both second chromosomes are shaped like X’s on stilts, pinched near one end. That’s called “acrocentric.” However the white-striped birds have both second chromosomes alike, shaped like a regular X, pinched in the middle, “metacentric.” In other words, the white-striped birds are heterozygous.

The most common combination seems to be of a white-striped male with a tan-striped female. That’s twice as common as the opposite pairing of a tan-striped male with a white-striped female. (Just to make it complicated, one study showed that last set to be more common in habitats with dense vegetation.)

When you think about it, both skill sets are needed for successful fledging of young.

Who knew that white-throated sparrows were so interesting?

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Regrowth and rebuilding the park

by Liz Hincks, Dan Preest and Jeff Ormiston

Dan Preest is FIA’s chair for the Conservation Committee. Dan has been working in the park, with staff, to help with the cleanup and restructuring for months. He, and many other volunteers, planted over 7,000 seedling trees in an effort to help with the reforestation of Fox Island. It has been very dry this spring and early summer which is causing some concern. Dan decided to do some “walkabout” observations and surveys on the state of some of the trees.

While Dan wasn’t able to observe and record on all seedlings, he is gathering some vital information and statistics regarding the newly planted. He is also taking pictures of “marker trees” that show the boundary of where he is doing his surveys. These statistics and observations are important information.

On June 17, Dan wrote:

I was curious about the state of the tree seedlings recently planted and decided to survey 100 and determine how many have produced leaves. In the area southeast of the gazebo (near the Nature Center) I surveyed 107 seedlings. Of that number, 79 (74%) had leafed out and 28 (26%) had not. I am reluctant to classify the latter as dead as some had viable looking buds and may still produce leaves.

On his second survey, June 22, Dan found:

Location*	Date	Leaves present	No leaves present	Total	Percent leaves	Percent no leaves
Upper Dune - SW base	22-Jun	13	3	16	81.3%	18.8%
Upper Dune - NW base	22-Jun	55	39	94	58.5%	41.5%
Upper Dune - NW mid-upper	22-Jun	10	23	33	30.3%	69.7%
Upper Dune - SW mid-upper	22-Jun	24	27	51	47.1%	52.9%
		102	92	194	52.6%	47.4%

There is new growth happening all over the park, some planted by us and some planted by nature. An added plus is that most of our old four-legged friends are still in the park and thriving too. Jeff Ormiston was thrilled to find one of his friends back by the Nature Center again. The box turtle in the picture was first seen, and photographed, by Jeff six years ago! It came back to visit the Nature Center and check up on Jeff a few weeks ago. Jeff recognized it by the distinctive markings on her shell.



The park is coming back! There are lots of signs that nature took a hit but there are equally a lot of signs that this is a period of regeneration and regrowth as well as celebrating that old friends are still here!

Want to help rebuild the park? Fill out an online FIA volunteer application. Then look at our website and Fox Island Park’s website for opportunities to volunteer and help.



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George



As summer gets hotter, you may spot a “potter”!

Potter wasps are given this name because they make tiny nests that look like ceramic jugs or pots.

They build these small nests on twigs, branches, or on the trunks of trees. The potter wasp mixes hair into the mud she finds, strengthening it against the rain. The completed nests are usually gray and rounded with a small opening that looks like the neck of a vase and are about the size of a small marble.

Each pot has only one chamber. The female lays just one egg inside the chamber and then places paralyzed caterpillars or small beetles inside with the egg before sealing the pot at the opening. When the wasp egg hatches, it has all the food it needs to develop into an adult contained inside the pot. The top of the pot is the thickest part and requires more work to break through, so the new adult wasp emerges from the brood cell by chewing a hole through the thin side of the pot.

After a wasp emerges from a brood cell as an adult, the opening is quite often perfectly round, adding to the illusion that it was thrown on a potter's wheel.



Potter wasp adults come in a variety of colors but all of them look like small hornets. The most common species found in Indiana are mostly black with pale yellow bands around their abdomen.

The nests below were created by three different types of solitary wasps (wasps who live by themselves). Even though the adults look like many social wasps who are aggressive and fearlessly protect their nests, these wasps will not sting you unless you fiercely attack them! However, they play such an important role in nature by controlling either the larva or the adults of various insect pests who plague valued natural plant species or farmer's crops.

Which wasp nest pictured below belongs to the **Potter Wasp**?

A



B



C



Nest A belongs to a **Mason Bee**; Nest C was made by a **Mud Dabber**.

If you said “B”, you would be correct!!

Project Feeder Watch at Fox Island

by Cynthia and Ed Powers

In 1987, the Long Point Bird Observatory in Canada and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in New York inaugurated Project FeederWatch. Feeder watchers all over the US and Canada report the birds they see at their feeders. For two days each week, they note the highest number of each species, and report their tallies to either Long Point or the Lab of Ornithology.

Fox Island has been participating since 2004, undeterred even by the pandemic in 2019-2020 or the derecho in 2022. Each Monday and Tuesday from November through April, volunteers, typically in two-hour shifts, record their observations. These are submitted on-line to the Lab of Ornithology, who compiles them with thousands of other reports. This data has been used in dozens of scientific papers, too numerous to mention here.

Some interesting facts about winter birds at Fox Island have emerged.

In the 391 weekly counts so far, there have been six species seen more than 380 times, led by Downy Woodpecker and Carolina Chickadee, with 389 sightings each, White-breasted Nuthatch at 388, Tufted Titmouse and Northern Cardinal at 387, and Red-bellied Woodpecker with 383. Fifteen other species have been counted at least 100 times.

At the other end of the scale, five species have been reported only once: House Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Swamp Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole, and Rusty Blackbird.

Some rather more surprising facts are the maximum number of individuals of a single species on a single count. The highest such count is 79 House Sparrows. The next highest is 54 American Goldfinches, 45 American Tree Sparrows, 39 Northern Cardinals (a spectacular sight), and 30 Red-winged Blackbirds. Sometimes you wonder how there is room for all of them. There have been counts greater than 10 for Dark-eyed Junco, Mourning Dove, European Starling, Brown-headed Cowbird, Pine Siskin, and House Finch.

Species with a maximum count of only one were Cooper's Hawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-tailed Hawk, Pine Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, House Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Swamp Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird.

If you would like to participate in FeederWatch at home, go to FeederWatch.org and click on "Join, Renew or Donate," and follow instructions.

IMN alumni spring meeting

by Clara Conroy

On Thursday, May 18, the IMN alumni meeting was held at Fox Island Nature Center. A nice size group gathered to hear featured speaker Dave Messman, from Fort Wayne Children's Zoo. At the zoo, Messman's job is to look after various animals, specifically reptiles, amphibians, and insects. On this day, he shared about working with hellbenders.

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IMN alumni spring meeting (cont.)

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The eastern hellbender is the largest salamander in North America, potentially reaching a length of up to 29 inches. Its range extends from New York State, south through Appalachia and west along the Ohio River Valley to southern Illinois. Hellbenders are endangered in Indiana with only around 100 adults left in the wild in the Blue River watershed, and those individuals are often too far apart to reproduce. They breathe through lateral folds of skin, so they can only live in cool, well oxygenated, sediment free, clean flowing streams with rocky bottoms.

Hellbenders are having a hard time surviving in Indiana, so FWCZ and Purdue University have partnered to help. Mr. Messman shared how eggs are collected from under rocks in streams in Kentucky and Ohio and raised at the zoo. Special 100 gallon aquariums have been set up to replicate the water flow (critical for physical stamina) and temperature of the streams where the eggs were collected. The tanks use RO water with minerals added back in to match the water quality level for nitrates, phosphorous, pH, etc., that the salamanders need to survive.



When eggs first hatch, the larvae don't eat until the yolk sack is absorbed. Once they start eating, they are fed a diet of black worms, mysis shrimp and krill. They have external gills, which they keep until 18 months old. Hellbenders are nocturnal, so they are given shelters to hide in during the day. The young are turned over to Purdue U. at around two years of age. The salamanders continue to grow until they reach a length of one foot long, between three to five years old. At this time, they are surgically implanted with a transmitter so that they can be relocated under rocks. They are then released back into the Blue River watershed.

In the wild, hellbenders will eat 14-35% of their own eggs that they are protecting from other predators. Dave Messman and his team hatched 345 eggs over a 10 day period with a high success rate. Once adolescents are released, they have a survival rate of 35-50%, and an overall better chance of reaching maturity at eight years of age than wild hatched hellbenders. The work that the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo and Purdue are doing is critical in saving this amazing species from extinction in Indiana.

Meet the Indiana Master Naturalist Class of 2023!

by Pam George

As of May 20, there are 28 new graduates of the 2023 IMN Class.

Next year's class will begin in February 2024 and will cover 15 nature topics, with 8 topics required to become certified. More information will be posted on the FIA website as the time draws near.



The End of the Trail @ Metea. On their final class, they walked the trails at Metea Park with Ron Divelbiss as they learned how to identify trees by bark and leaves.

Indiana Master Naturalist gathering

by Tim Ormiston

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge Tour
Friday, March 31, 2023

One of the Pre-Gathering options was to tour the Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is located about 8 miles north of Clifty Falls State Park and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Our group of 40 people was led by Joe Robb and his staff around the 50,000 acre property to see the Old Timbers Lodge, crawfish frog management area and crawfish frog tracking chip demonstration.

The Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge was formerly the Jefferson Proving Ground used by the U.S. Army to test new weaponry in the early 1940's. After 50 years of munitions testing the proving ground was closed, allowing for repurposing the land as a refuge beginning in 2000. The land is still owned by the U.S. Army with land use permits to the refuge and Indiana Air National Guard that actively uses the Jefferson Range.

Following a short introduction to the group, refuge staff led the carpool caravan on a 15-mile journey north to the Old Timbers Lodge. A rain storm was dropping its fury as we entered the refuge office. However, it had stopped by the time we started the caravan to the lodge and stayed dry for the remainder of the tour! The lodge was built in 1932 by Alexander Thompson for personal use. Building materials used in the lodge were magnificent limestone blocks for floors and walls and large solid wood timbers for framing. Unique hand-forged metal hinges were used for every window and door opening. The lodge property is restricted for use for special events managed by USFWS staff.

The next stop on the tour was to visit a managed crawfish frog breeding site. Crawfish frogs are 2-1/2" to 4-1/2" long with a stubby body and a distinctive hump in their back. They have irregular dark spots with light boundaries. These frogs get their name from the use of crawfish burrows for shelter and feeding sites! The breeding site is controlled by creating a physical barrier around a pond and then burying 5-gallon buckets into the soil at regular intervals, next to the barriers. The buckets are placed inside and outside of the barrier. When any critter, large or small, runs into the barrier, they turn to the side and eventually end up down in a bucket. By this means, the crawfish frogs can be measured and important data recorded, and unwanted animals can be deterred from bothering the breeding site. Other animals observed at the breeding site included pickerel frog, adult red spotted newt (eastern newt), southern leopard frog, and Jefferson salamander.

The final stop of the tour was at a pond that had various frog and salamander egg masses. USFWS staff demonstrated how they measure a crawfish frog and then insert a tracking chip for future data collection.

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge is a restricted use property, but various activities are available for use by the public. Please see the website <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/big-oaks/about-us> for more information.

New Fox Island Alliance website now online

Our beautiful new user-friendly website is now up and running. Features include, but are not limited to, the option to establish or renew memberships, review the history of our organization, a newsletter archive, make donations, and sign up for volunteer opportunities! Visit at <http://www.foxislandalliance.org>

Meet Liz Hincks, Fox Island Alliance board president

What led you to join the Fox Island Alliance board?

Jeff Ormiston encouraged me to take the IMN class, get my national certification along with him and invited me to join FIA Board almost 15 years ago.

Tell us about your former jobs with Fort Wayne Children's Zoo and Little River Wetlands Project.

After teaching elementary school for 25 years I retired. When LRWP posted an education position, I talked to Betsy Y. who hired me to teach and create environmental education out of the barn working with amazing volunteers. After 5.5 years with LRWP, I left to head the education department at the Zoo, writing over 100 hands-on, inquiry based science programs and camps dealing with exotics and natives.

What did you like about those jobs?

I was given the opportunity to work with and learn from amazing people, and teach others about the wonders of nature.

What do you do in your role as president?

Our BOD is made up of a group of drastically different yet like-minded environmentalists with the goal of wanting to help make Fox Island the best it can be and educate others about the world around them. I get the pleasure of learning from and working with all of them to accomplish those goals.

What are some projects you've worked on as part of the board?

I have held every office, some more than once, in FIA, except Treasurer, worked during my years here on about every type of committee (except financial), and helped with a lot of projects large and small over the years.

What goals do you have as president?

One of my goals is to encourage FIA members to become more involved in FIA activities. We want and need members to help with BOD committees or participate at volunteer opportunities posted on our new website. We are celebrating our 50th Anniversary next year, come help us build, strengthen, and improve FIA for the next 50 years.

What is your favorite part of Fox Island?

My favorite part of the park right now is that everywhere you look there are signs that the park is regrowing and rebuilding itself. Many old trees are still thriving even though they may have shed a few limbs and newly planted trees are unfurling leaves for the first time. Signs can be seen everywhere that all the animals that were in the park are still there, signs can be found of new births and old friends still thriving.

Do you have a favorite native plant or animal?

I have a fondness for native flowers.

Anything else you'd like to mention?

Check out our new website for opportunities to help in the park while it is closed to the public. Fill out an online volunteer application and invite your friends to do the same. We would love to see your smiling faces at the park. Look for announcements about our 50th Anniversary Celebration next year. Contact me with any questions or concerns.



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"

www.foxislandalliance.org

Fox Island Alliance Membership 2023 **New** **Renewal**

Since a derecho closed the park in June 2022, and since it will probably remain closed the rest of the year, members have not been able to take advantage of all their benefits. To compensate, the board is offering to discount dues for the 2023-2024 year. If you wish to take advantage of this offer, check the appropriate box below.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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

	Full Dues	50% Discount
Individual	\$15	\$7.50
Veteran/Military/spouse	\$5 each	\$2.50 each
Family	\$20	\$10
Senior (55+)	\$5 each	\$2.50 each
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Sustaining	\$30	\$15
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Additional gift \$___ General \$___ Exhibits

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:
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