



Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building

By Jeff Ormiston, President, Fox Island Alliance

The renovation of the Vera Dulin Wildlife Observation Building is nearing completion. The painting is finished, the windows installed and the light fixtures are in town and are to be installed very soon. The building is again being used but there is still more to be done. New tables and chairs will be purchased when the electrician has completed his work and we are looking into a new sound system that will allow the outside bird sounds to be better heard by inside observers.

We still need help with the inside arrangement of the building and I need someone to look into getting a sign/display for the outside of the building that indicates the new building name in honor of Vera Dulin. Anyone who can help please call Jeff Ormiston, soon, 260-414-2538

Editor's note:

Now that the building is all renovated, we need volunteers to keep it open! This is about the easiest volunteer work you can imagine. It's nice and warm, you can bring your lunch, read the paper, watch the birds, participate in Project FeederWatch, and most importantly, give a friendly welcome to park visitors.

Sign up with Ron Zartman, rzartman@allencountyparks.org.

[A Visitor Remembers Gathering Milkweed Pods](#)

Dear Mr. Zartman,

We met you, at Metea Park, while we were looking around the gift shop. In the parking lot we saw the milkweed pods opened up and the "cotton" blowing around. I told you about remembering, as a child in the early 1940's during the second World War time, how the citizens were asked to be involved in the war effort in many ways. One was collecting milkweed pods so they could be used in filling the life jackets for the forces. I remember going along the country road sides and at the field edges and getting bags full. We would then turn them into official locations. We all felt good about helping our troops in this way. While some businesses were "closed for the duration" and adults were holding their breath, we kids were excited about seeing how many milkweed pods we could find! The silk used in the life jackets for floatation was called "kapok".

Yours truly,

Eleanore Guthrie

"As winter's hand touches field and tree, it doesn't discourage the chickadee!"---
--Anon.

REPORT OF THE SW ALLEN “CHRISTMAS” BIRD COUNT

JANUARY 3, 2015

By Cynthia Powers

We probably picked the day with the week’s worst weather for the count, which covered Fox Island County Park, Eagle Marsh and two smaller properties belonging to Little River Wetlands project, as well as four small ACRES preserves including one in Wells Co. Icy roads and low visibility made challenging conditions, but nobody ended up in the ER, for which we are grateful.

Nevertheless, we had 17 team members and 8 feeder watchers! (Some of those who went out in the territories watched feeders when they got home as well.) 42 species were tallied by 8 teams, including Ron Zartman’s 4 mile hike at Fox Island away from the feeders. Notable sightings were one Wood Duck, an immature bald eagle, two Northern Harriers, one Red-headed Woodpecker, and a Northern Mockingbird. (What was it thinking?) Another bonus was that we had two new birders join us.

We had a nice article in the Journal Gazette the next day, written by Keiara Carr with photos by Rachel Von. I think they captured the spirit of the event as well as getting the facts correct.

We thank Little River Wetlands for hosting the breakfast meeting, which unfortunately most of us missed because of the ice. The best part of the whole day was Fox Island’s chili, made by Lori and Brett Fisher: three kinds! And they kept it going all afternoon for frozen stragglers.



All the teams were reminded to keep an eye out for a Snowy Owl, as one had been seen on Christmas Day along Homestead Road, but not since. It could have been in any of the farm fields within the 15-mile – diameter count circle.....but if so, it was not seen. Keep watching, though!

The Fox Island “Space Sycamore”

By Ron Zartman

This article is reprinted from the original 1995 winter Fox Tale

INDIANA

Words by Ballard MacDonald, music by James F. Hanley, Inspiration by NASA

*Back home again in Indiana, and it seems that I can see
The gleaming candle-light
Still shining bright
Through the Sycamores for me,
The new mown hay
Sends all its fragrance
From the fields I used to roam,
When I dream about the moonlight on the Wabash
Then I long for my Indiana home.*

Astronaut Jerry Ross, no doubt, sang Ballard MacDonald’s verse to himself in the loneliest place; as far away from home as you get. He carried with him a small, but potent symbol of home. To remember his youth and to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Cooperative Extension Service, Ross carried aboard a packet of Sycamore seeds. Launching December 2, 1988, from Kennedy Space Center, Florida, the space shuttle Atlantis, crew and cargo traveled 1.8 million miles. After orbiting the Earth 68 times, the seeds were planted in West Lafayette, Indiana. Every Indiana county received a two year old sapling for planting on Arbor Day or Earth Day 1990. Allen County’s Space Sycamore was planted in the rain by Girl Scouts on Arbor Day, April 20th, at Fox Island County Park.

The planting site for our “Space Sycamore” reflects not only its preferred habitat, but easy access for the public. The Eastern Sycamore typically grows in floodplain forests, and along lakes and streams. It competes well in these areas due to its tolerance of wet soils and periodic flooding. Sycamores are found in nearly all of the low lying areas of Fox Island in the floodplain of the Little Wabash River (or Little River). Its success as an early colonizer of old wet fields is evident along the road to Bowman Lake. In the higher, dryer wooded dunes it is dominated by the Black Oak and other upland trees. (I affectionately refer to the last high dune in the east portion of the nature preserve by the apparent misnomer “Sycamore Hill” because of their abundance on top). The Space Sycamore was planted in a suitably moist yard space off the north edge of the Nature Center parking lot.

Recognizing a Sycamore is easy. Young bark on the limbs at the top is smooth and whitish. At mid-tree a darker bark forms, usually peeling in jigsaw fashion to give the trunk an army camouflage look. At the base the bark piles up dark and furrowed. The leaf is deceitfully Maple-like.

Surely Mission Specialist, Lt. Col. Jerry L. Ross USAF sang these lines upon landing at Rogers Dry Lakebed, Edwards Air Base, California, after four days in space. It wouldn’t surprise me if his crewmates joined in on the chorus.

It’s a privilege to live in Indiana!



So you think you know squirrels?

While briskly hiking along the Upper Dune trail at Fox Island Park, you spot a HUGE nest high in a tree. Is it a.....

A. Bald Eagle's nest B. Squirrel's "summer cottage" C. Great Horned Owl's nest

Answer: Although Bald Eagle nests and Great Horned Owl nests, made strictly of twigs, might be spotted at Fox Island, tree-dwelling squirrels build "dreys" high in a tree, made of twigs and lined with grass, bark, moss, and feathers.

Do squirrels hibernate during the winter?

Answer: Squirrels do not hibernate. Since their body temperatures remain constant, they just remain in their winter nests in a tree cavity or abandoned woodpecker hole, raising their young and coming out to forage for buried food on warmer winter days.

Which squirrel is most common at Fox Island?

A. Red squirrel B. Gray squirrel C. Eastern Fox Squirrel

Answer: At Fox Island, you were right if you guessed the Fox Squirrel. The largest of the tree squirrels, a 10-inch body with a 10-inch tail, they are colored like a Gray Fox: gray above, with rusty orange fur on their undersides. Even the nocturnal Flying Squirrel has been spotted in another Allen County Park.

How does the Fox Squirrel find enough food through the long, cold winter?

Answer: They eat acorns, hickory, walnut, beech, mulberry and hawthorn seeds; also green shoots, buds, fruits, corn, and insects. In winter it locates its stashes using its keen sense of smell.

As you hike along, a gray squirrel scampers across your path. It suddenly freezes and starts to twitch its tail. What is it doing?

They twitch their tails to alert other squirrels of potential danger. They also shiver in cold weather to generate body heat. They mark their territory by using scat, urine, or the scent glands on either side of its nose.

Are you wondering what is coming up at Fox Island, and maybe at Metea County Park as well? Check www.allencountyparks.org, and click on “Wild Grapevine” newsletter.

Lots of programs for all ages. Most require pre-registration and a small fee.



Here's something the whole family can do, in as little as 15 minutes. You don't have to be limited to your backyard feeders, though. In fact, Natalie is leading a hike at Fox Is. on Monday Feb. 16. Check out

www.gbhc.org for complete information on this “citizen science” project.

There's also information about the next Junior Master Naturalist class to be held over spring break. Fee is \$100, for ages 9-12. Let's encourage our young nature lovers.

Lots of programs for preschoolers, some mornings, some afternoons.

Tai Chi and Scrapbooking will return; also look for evening Owl Prowl, Coyote Howl, Dance of the Timberdoodles, and Introduction to the Microscope, given by Jeff Ormiston. Stockbridge Audubon is showing a film about Passenger Pigeons called “From Billions to None.”

Check The Wild Grapevine at allencountyparks.org for all the details.

A partially leucistic squirrel, photo by Jeff Ormiston.





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.

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