



The Trailblazer

Newsletter of the Elkhart County Indiana Master Naturalists

Vol. 14

Issue 2

Spring 2021

Spring Quarterly Meeting Elkhart County IMN Alumni Club



Jim Carpenter and Carla Gull,
retiring long-time Board members

The Spring meeting was held Thursday, April 15, at the Feed Lot Shelter at Bonneyville Mill County Park. Around 25 people attended, which was quite a lot considering the meeting was outdoors and the temperature was in the low 40s. The scheduled speaker was unable to attend, so instead Krista Daniels and Tammy Shidler led a hike, searching for signs of spring. Lots of lovely Bloodroot was seen, as well as the early starts of several invasive plants. The pond was low due to the lack of rain and snow through the winter and early spring, so no frogs were singing, although our crowd hiking along with the low temperatures would have caused them to fall silent, anyhow.

Back at the shelter the results of the election were announced. Mary Kauffmann-Kennel is our new chairperson, Lou Anne Hostetler is the vice-chairperson, and Susan Zook is the new secretary. Long-time Board members Carla Gull and Jim Carpenter were thanked for their dedication to the organization and given tokens of our appreciation. Melanie Helmuth will take over for Carla as the volunteer coordinator, and Dennis Badke will assume Jim's role as the education advisor (the one who gets the speakers for the meetings).



Signing in at the Feed Lot



Mingling before the meeting

Tree Dedication and Garlic Mustard Pull

Saturday, April 17, at Boot Lake



Listening to the history of Boot Lake

Saturday morning was cool and clear as fifteen intrepid souls gathered at Boot Lake Nature Preserve at 9 a.m. to hear from Ronda DeCaire, Director of the Elkhart County Parks, about the history of Boot Lake. We were also there for two other purposes: to dedicate a redbud tree to Ronda for her years as a former IMN host and ECIMNA coordinator and to lend a hand in the never-ending fight to eliminate garlic mustard.

160 acres of agricultural field were purchased by the City of Elkhart in 1968 for use as a sludge farm, a.k.a. a sanitary landfill. By 1988 dumping ceased and a clean up began two years later. Eventually it became an Elkhart City Park, although it was outside the city limits. In 2003 it became a State-dedicated Nature Preserve. In

2017 the City transferred the property to the Elkhart County Parks who have since enhanced the area through prescribed fires, invasives management, boardwalk repairs, and the addition of an accessible trail, among other things. The nature preserve is recognized by the Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area. The total area now is 300 acres for visitors to explore and enjoy.

Ronda's talk was about 20 minutes and the tree dedication took another 10 minutes or so, and then it was down to business, pulling that garlic mustard from the area around the parking lot. Most attendees stayed to help with the garlic mustard pull which was scheduled to last until 11:45. Snacks were available and appreciated. According to Sherry, we completely filled three 55-gallon drums with what we pulled!



Ronda and the redbud tree



Pulling garlic mustard up by the roots isn't that hard, but all that bending—oh my!



One of several loads that were hauled away

Musings from Mary

Our first Elkhart County IMN Alumni meeting of 2021 on April 15 at Bonneyville plus our volunteer day pulling garlic mustard at Boot Lake on April 17 got us off to a great start this year! Our plan is to have our July and October meetings also outside at Bonneyville. The annual November potluck is planned for indoors at the Schrock Pavilion at Shanklin Park in Goshen. We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and adjust plans as needed.



Monitoring Bluebird boxes at Oxbow

I look forward to serving on the Alumni Board as Chairperson this year. Special thanks to Tammy Shidler for leading us the past number of years (and answering all my questions that I have had and will have!)

I took the IMN class in 2015 as preparation for my retirement from nursing. In 2020, I retired from a 40-year career as a Registered Nurse. Having spent decades working inside, I wanted to spend retirement outdoors as much as is possible in northern Indiana.

I have long enjoyed bird watching, in my backyard and while camping and hiking. This led me to explore the many local county and city parks. As I learned about birds, I learned about their preferred habitats. This led to learning about native plants and trees and the benefits to the ecosystem. So that led me to start transitioning my yard from traditional perennial gardening to native plant gardening. Currently, inspired by Doug Tallamy's writings ("Bringing Nature Home," "Nature's Best Hope") I am working to reduce invasives while adding more native trees, shrubs and plants to better fill in the landscape and benefit wildlife.

My interest in birding, native plants and removing invasive plants has led me to choose volunteer activities to match those interests. I currently lead weekly bird walks at Wellfield Botanic Gardens, monitor Bluebird houses at OxBow County Park, measure rainfall for CoCoRaHS, and have adopted a trail at the Elkhart Environmental Center (pick up trash, remove downed limbs from the trail.)

Please contact me or any board member with any questions, ideas for speakers, or for group projects or field trips. Contact me by phone, email, or Facebook Messenger.

Mary Kauffmann-Kennel marykk@gmail.com 574.612.5903

Coyotes!

By Lou Anne Hostetler

On March 26, 2021 in the evening, I attended an educational talk about the coyote given by Andy Langdon, an Interpreter for Elkhart County Parks, at Oxbow County Park. I learned that coyotes are native to Indiana, what they eat and how they hunt, their breeding habits, and then we walked to a den.

Some names for coyotes are prairie wolf, brush wolf and song dog. The scientific name of *Canis latrans* means barking dog. One way to tell a coyote from a German shepherd is that coyotes hold their tail behind them while running but a German shepherd holds its tail in the air. The average lifespan of a coyote is five to ten years. Coyotes howl at night to communicate with each other and they have at least eleven calls.

You will be surprised at what they eat and how they hunt. The coyote is a carnivore but will also eat berries and seeds, insects, and bird eggs. A coyote can run 40 miles per hour. A coyote will go as far as 100 miles in search for food, but usually sticks to a territory of 10 miles. Coyotes catch their prey by walking on their toes and sneaking up on them. Another interesting fact I learned is that the Coyote sometimes hunts with a badger.

Coyotes breed with dogs and wolves. They mate with domestic dogs resulting in what is called a coydog. They also mate with wolves producing coywolves. Coyotes in the Midwest are larger than coyotes west of the Mississippi River because they mate with wolves. A baby coyote is a pup. The five to ten pups stay in the den for protection. At around 10 weeks they are out on their own.

Andy walked us to a den within Oxbow County Park. The den was big enough for the mother coyote and her pups and is usually built on the side of a hill. The den is not used year round, but may be used more than once. We climbed the side of a hill in Oxbow and found a deep hole with a coyote pelt in the den. Andy removed the coyote pelt from the den and shined a flashlight in so we could see how deep the den was. I also learned that coyotes do not hibernate in their dens.

I found the lesson on coyotes interesting because many people are afraid of them. I am a fan of all wild animals and enjoy learning all about them. They eat more than meat and hunt with badgers. Coyotes breed with dogs and wolves. I enjoyed walking to the coyote den. I learned a lot of new coyote facts.

Then April 7 I went to Boot Lake Nature Preserve to bird with Annie from Elkhart County Parks. I went jogging after we finished birding, beginning in the north prairie that had recently been burned to help the wildflowers grow healthier. Then I ran through the woods that led to the south prairie. As I bent to pick up a plastic bag, I saw a coyote running the opposite direction in the prairie. My first thought was to follow the coyote, but then I thought better of it. It is not safe to follow wild animals. I was so excited that I emailed some friends. I will never forget that experience, because I never thought I would see a coyote in the wild.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

Boy on His Own

He had been told he could explore,
the woods in back of his yard.
He had been there before with his dad,
but was excited to go on his own.

He packed a water and a snack,
to sustain him on his journey.
He was heading for the Wilderness,
Two hundred feet from his back yard.

Hearing the sounds of birds and bees,
he walks through knee high grass.
When all of a sudden there comes a startle,
when a bird shoots up from his path.

In the woods he feels the shade,
as a squirrel makes a hasty retreat.
He spies a low limbed climbing tree,
and finds himself an air born seat.

As precarious as his perch may be,
he considers it his throne.
As he revels in his kingdom,
Two hundred feet from home.

Jim Carpenter



Volunteer Opportunities

April 23 from 1-4 p.m. in Goshen:
Aaron Kingsley, director of the City of Goshen Environmental Resiliency department, is in need of some volunteers to help package tree saplings for their Arbor Day celebration. Please contact aaronkingsley@goshencity.com if you are interested in volunteering.

The Elkhart County Fair will be back this summer and the Elkhart County Parks need help cleaning up the land around their space at the fairgrounds. Watch your emails for details on when exactly this will take place.

August 7 will be Envirofest at Island Park in Elkhart. Volunteers will be needed. More information will be available closer to the event.

Next Meeting
Thursday, July 8 at 6:30 p.m.

We'll meet at the Feedlot Shelter at Bonneyville Mill again and proceed to the mill where we will be given a tour by the Head Miller, Courtney Franke.

New Class Beginning Soon!

The IMN class being held weekly on Wednesdays from May 26 to July 14. Registration ends May 1 and there are only a few spaces left, so let your friends know about this opportunity. Also there is some scholarship money available for someone who needs it. For more information contact Jenna at jwait@elkhartcounty.com or call 574-523-2023.

Calling all citizen-scientists: IU Herbarium seeking photos to document Indiana's flora

March 4, 2021



IU Herbarium director Eric Knox, left, is looking for people to join the Indiana Plant Photographic Scavenger Hunt to document more than 2,700 plant species with detailed photos. Photo by Emily Sterneman, Indiana University

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Indiana University is seeking citizen-scientists throughout Indiana to help photograph all plant species that comprise the state's flora.

The [2021 Indiana Plant Photographic Scavenger Hunt](#) is looking for help in documenting the more than 2,700 plant species in Indiana with colorful, detailed images. The IU Herbarium, which completed a [massive, five-year digitization project](#) in 2019, is upgrading its collection with photos of live plants from all over Indiana.

"The digitization project photographed our 161,000 herbarium specimens -- dead, dried plants mounted on paper. With the public's help, we want to gather beautiful photos of all Indiana's flora," said [Eric Knox](#), director of the IU Herbarium and a senior scientist in the IU Bloomington College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Biology. "Life under COVID-19 has

left many people feeling isolated, and this project encourages them to put on their boots, grab their camera and be part of a socially distanced statewide effort."

We're going on a plant hunt

While some plant species grow throughout Indiana, most grow in certain regions of the state known as ecoregions. The plants that grow in each of Indiana's nine ecoregions have their own unique set of characteristics due to being in the northern or southern part of the state, having a specialized habitat or simply being a rare plant.

"The success of this Photographic Scavenger Hunt depends on the willingness of people throughout Indiana to locate and photograph species that grow in their respective areas," Knox said. "Together, they will create a resource that will enable anyone to identify almost every plant species in Indiana. Knowing our flora is the first step toward conserving it for future generations."

[Hunting lists](#) are available for each of Indiana's ecoregions. In addition, [species information](#) can help participants determine where specific plants have been found in the past and when they typically flower. Once a plant has been identified, participants can [upload their photos on the Photographic Scavenger Hunt website](#). The IU Herbarium scientists also hope to collect the tentative species, when the photo was taken and specifics about the location of the photo such as habitat, latitude and longitude.

"Although we are happy to receive good photographs by themselves, we hope that participants will include the relevant collection information to make them scientifically valid observations," said [Paul Rothrock](#), associate curator emeritus, project leader and experienced nature photographer. "Botanists spend a lot of time studying specimens with a microscope, but most people don't like looking at flat, dead plants. This is where the Photographic Scavenger Hunt comes in and will help us get quality diagnostic photos of all of Indiana's plants."

A picture is worth a thousand words

In addition to being used for scientific research, the photos collected during the scavenger hunt will also be used to turn the current word-based glossary into a pictorial glossary linked to the [Golden Key](#), an online identification tool created by the IU Herbarium's digitization process that uses simple language to help people quickly identify plants.

"Many descriptive terms in botany are simple English words with a specific meaning," Knox said. "Pictures along with descriptive arrows and a few words are much easier for people to understand than written definitions."

The 2021 Indiana Plant Photographic Scavenger Hunt is open now, and photos may be submitted anytime. The project is financially supported by the IU Institute for Advanced Study, the Floyd/Cleland/Ogg Plant Biology Endowment Funds, the Indiana Academy of Science and the Indiana Native Plant Society. Additional collaborators include Central Indiana Land Trust; IU's Environmental Resilience Institute, part of the Prepared for Environmental Change Grand Challenge; Monroe County -- Identify and Reduce Invasive Species; NICHES Land Trust; Oak Heritage Conservancy; Purdue Extension Master Gardener Program; Red-tail Land Conservancy; Sycamore Land Trust; and The Nature Conservancy in Indiana.

The picture on the masthead this month is from River Preserve County Park by Marilyn Groves. Send me one of your trail pictures for the next issue!

Do you have any pictures or a story that you'd like to share with other Elkhart County IMNs? I edit the *Trailblazer*; I don't write it. It's YOUR newsletter—what would like to see in it?

Send your contributions to chapman_ej@yahoo.com for the next issue of the *Trailblazer*. I'm happy to help with smoothing things out, fixing misspellings, etc., but I need your input to have a truly creative and interesting newsletter.



The mission of the Indiana Master Naturalist program is to bring together natural resource specialists with adult learners to foster an understanding of Indiana's plants, water, soils and wildlife, and promote natural resource volunteer service within the State of Indiana.

