



The Trailblazer

Newsletter of the Elkhart County Indiana Master Naturalists

Vol. 14

Issue 3

Summer 2021

Summer Quarterly Meeting Elkhart County IMN Alumni Club



The Summer meeting was held Thursday, July 8, at the Feed Lot Shelter at Bonneyville Mill County Park. Around 20 people attended, dodging the nesting swallows and enjoying the cooler temperatures (and not enjoying the mosquitoes!). Courtney Franke, the miller at the park, gave us a tour, some history, and a demonstration of the grinding process. (See below.)

After the tour there was a short business meeting. The three top volunteers for 2020 were announced: Carol Mitchell (400 hours), Carla Gull (193 hours) and Mary Kauffmann-Kennel (106 hours). The winners were awarded prizes. All told, Elkhart County IMNs reported 1011 hours of volunteer time in 2020—not bad for a pandemic year! And then there were those of you that didn’t report—those 1011 hours were from only 11 of us. Please turn in your volunteer hours each year! Since 2007 Elkhart County IMNs have volunteered nearly 29,000 hours of service!

The 2021 IMN class ends this week. Jenna said they have been a great group to work with and she can’t wait to welcome them into the alumni group. One of the 22 members of the class received a scholarship from the state IMN and one received a scholarship from our local group. The one from the local group sent this thank-you note: “Thank you so very much for the opportunity to participate in this class! I have learned so much already and am super excited to learn



Carla Gull, Mary Kauffmann-Kennel, and Carol Mitchell, the top three volunteers for 2020



more, pass on, and help out! You all are much appreciated!”

Members of the 2021 IMN class.

Bonneyville Mill

We learned a lot about the history of Bonneyville. To start with, the waterfall which diverts water to the mill from the Little Elkhart River is not natural; it is a part of the dam that holds water back to create enough flow to power the mill. It's called a "rubble dam." Before the deluge of late June the waterfall has stopped altogether. The bridge that we crossed to get to the feedlot is actually a canal dug to bring water to the mill. And on the building it says "Bonneyville Mills" because originally there was also a saw mill there which was used to make the lumber to build the grist mill. By the 1950s the canal was so silted that there wasn't enough water, so the mill was converted to electric power. When the park took over operation of the mill in 1967 the canal was dredged and the mill went back to its historical roots.

Edward Bonney purchased the land for the mill in 1836 and the mill was constructed the following year; the mill sign says "1832"—one of the "mysteries" of the mill. Bonney was a bit of a character: He wanted the mill to be the centerpiece of a new city bearing his name. When he realized it wasn't going to develop much beyond what it is now, he sold the mill and moved on to other ventures as a counterfeiter, a Civil War soldier, a bounty hunter, and even an author. His book, *Banditti of the Prairies or the Murderer's Doom*, was a success that went through eight printings and is still available on Amazon. The mill went through many owners and most of them added on or made other improvements to the original structure. The mill as it stands now is approximately how it operated from 1880 to the turn of the 20th century, with a few safety features added, such as stairways instead of ladders to go between the three floors.



Hearing the story of the dam and canal in front of the recently restored Perkins Windmill.



Many visitors need convincing that this is actually a water-driven mill because there is no vertical water wheel. There never was; water wheels need more water velocity and in the relatively flat northern Indiana topography, there isn't enough slope to cause enough current for a vertical water wheel. What the mill has now, and had at the beginning, is a horizontal water turbine. The one currently in use dates from 1910. The one in the picture is the 1860 model and could generate about 75 horsepower. The mill also has an 1875 model.

We also learned about the different grindstones. Some are made of granite and some are "French Buhr." French buhr is a stone from France that was probably carried here as boulders used as ballast in the settlers' ships, then later cut to be a grindstone. Thus the pieces had to be fit together like a giant puzzle and are held in place by a metal belt. Granite grindstones are all one piece, but they can't grind as finely as the French buhr due to the consistency of the stone.

Bonneyville Mills was a private business until 1967 when it became part of the Elkhart County Parks. If you missed the tour, stop by sometime and hear the story for yourself. And buy some of the delicious flours and cornmeal that is ground on the site!



Two French buhr and one granite grindstone. In the background are samples of the different grains that are ground at Bonneyville.

Musings from Mary

I took down my bird feeders and birdbath on June 26. I will be honest. I did not remove them when I first heard about the mysterious illness affecting songbirds in several states in the eastern US. I did not remove them when reports of sick or dead birds came from five Indiana counties. Then, a report came from LaGrange County just to our east.

My 96 year old mother was coming for the weekend and I really wanted her to be able to see Orioles and Chickadees up close. My sister-in-law was coming from Georgia. Not a birder, but she loves to see the Rose Breasted Grosbeaks and Goldfinch.

On June 25, reports increased to include 15 Indiana counties. Other northern counties reported sick birds, including St Joseph County to our west. The Department of Natural Resources put out a recommendation for the entire state that all feeders and bird baths be removed until the cause of this mysterious illness is found. Investigations so far have eliminated bird avian flu, West Nile Virus and salmonella and at least six other illnesses. Suspicion that birds congregating at feeders could be helping to spread this mystery illness led to the recommendation.

Decision time. Do I like watching birds close up so much that I am willing to risk their lives? Birds already have a lot of human caused challenges such as window strikes, outdoor cats, light pollution, tidy lawns, habitat loss, and pesticides.

June 26. Time to remove the feeders and bird bath. Sad. Fewer birds to watch out my windows.

Birds kept coming to the feeder spots for several days. Gradually they stopped coming.

July 9. Feeders still down. Sick or dead birds have been reported in 53 counties, including Elkhart. Birdwatching from my window is not too satisfying. But a walk around the yard shows me that the birds are still there. The Black Capped Chickadee family moves from tree to tree, finding insects to eat. The Blue Jays yell at whoever is in their way. The Goldfinch find food in the Coneflowers in the mini prairie. The Northern Rough Winged Swallows swoop overhead, catching insects on the fly. The Carolina Wrens belt out their song from corners of the yard or perched on a deck chair.

What I haven't seen are the dozens of House Sparrows, Grackles and Starlings that frequented my feeders. Hmm....an unexpected benefit!

I was surprised at my reluctance to remove my feeders, as I care enough about wildfire to plant native plants while removing invasives that provide little benefit to wildlife. I plant to attract pollinators and keep my landscape messy to allow spaces for overwintering insects.

I hope feeders can go up again, but I must say that I am actually enjoying the peacefulness of the yard, with birds calling from the different corners, and having to search a little harder to see the beauties as they forage for natural food.

To get the latest news from the DNR, check out their website. <https://www.in.gov/dnr/>

Alone Again. Naturally.

I have an iced tea.
I have a snack.
I think you know where I'm going with this,
I'm sitting by my pond out back.

A favorite place any time of year.
But especially when the weather is mild.
A place that is nothing but nature.
The closest I have to wild.

When I say I am alone back here,
that's not entirely true.
The birds are signing, the insects buzz.
Now the sounds of a bullfrog or two.

Evidently other frogs
were waiting for their turn.
Now there must be a dozen of them,
all getting in their croaks.

I suppose my needs have simplified,
in these latter years of life.
It seems the presence of nature,
helps to balance out the strife.

I brush a spider from my arm,
feeling the breeze on this summer's day.
For right now it all seems right,
This is my work, this is my play.

Jim Carpenter
June. 2021

Are you enjoying Jim's poetry? He's coming out with a new book in a few months. In the meantime, you can hear him read his poetry in a podcast at <https://loosepartsnatureplay.libsyn.com/nature-poetry?fbclid=IwAR1sbb4eeEN-k8BkyDalVUHGOhasdz6FmTgy7pfA41u5qaxI1DVL6puIUc0>

Volunteer Opportunities

August 7 is Envirofest at Island Park in Elkhart. Volunteers are needed in many capacities. Go to <https://signup.com/client/invitation2/secure/47015286280420061/false#/invitation> to sign up to volunteer. Questions? Contact Annie at (574) 293-5070.

The Elkhart County Fair is back and the Elkhart County Parks need help manning their booth. Fair dates are **July 23 – 31**. Contact the park office to volunteer for one or more shifts. Volunteers get a free ticket to the fair for the day they work.

August 6 is Bug Night with the Elkhart County Parks. Contact Krista Daniels for more information or to volunteer.

Carole Mitchell needs help at the booth for the IMNs at the County Fair on **July 23** for Green Earth Day. The Elkhart County IMN program will also have a booth at Envirofest on **August 7**. Contact Carole (574-536-3213) to volunteer.



Check your email for more **volunteer opportunities**. Sometimes those emails get filtered to junk folders because they have multiple recipients.

Next Meeting

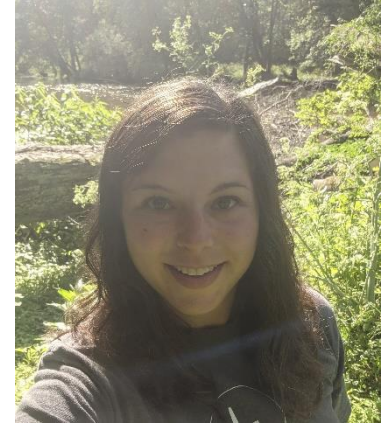
Thursday, October 14 at 6:30 p.m.

We'll meet at the Feedlot Shelter at Bonneyville Mill again. We hope to have a speaker from the DNR with an update on the birds' mystery disease.

Meet Your New Board Members!

It was suggested that the *Trailblazer* introduce the new Board members for those of you that don't already know them. Their names were announced in the spring issue, but that doesn't tell you much. Mary, our chairperson, introduced herself in the spring issue, Lou Anne (Vice Chairperson) has been a board member for a long time as has Steve Schantz (Treasurer), but we have three newcomers: Dennis Badke (Education), Susan Zook (Secretary), and Melanie Helmuth (Volunteer Coordinator).

Melanie Helmuth: I was born and raised in Goshen, IN. I studied theater at Goshen College, and have been working for the past four years at Goshen Community Schools as a Groundskeeper full time, and with Goshen High School's theater department as a Stage Manager for their plays and musicals. More recently, I also began a part time position with Elkhart County Parks at DeFries Calendar Garden. In my free time, I enjoy camping with my husband and dog, working on ceramic pieces at the Goshen Clay Guild, and volunteering at the Humane Society of Elkhart County.



During the pandemic, I had much more free time, as I'm sure many of us did. Much of that time was being in and observing nature. I have always enjoyed life more when I could be out in the natural world and learn about ways to take care of it. For years, this mostly meant recycling, planting native gardens to encourage pollinators, and encouraging others to do the same. In October of 2020, however, I was able to take the Indiana Master Naturalist Class, and I am SO happy that I had the opportunity! Taking this class introduced me to topics I had never looked into before, as well finding great places to begin volunteering with, like the Elkhart Environmental Center. The IMN class propelled me into searching for even more learning opportunities such as helping with prescribed prairie burns, and organizations to be a part of such as the Goshen City Shade Tree Board, and Trees for Goshen.

Although my journey as an official Indiana Master Naturalist just began last October, I am honored to already be working on behalf of this group as the volunteer coordinator! I know there are many opportunities of all kinds out there, and I hope I can find opportunities that work well for everyone. I look forward to making new connections with people and organizations around the area to help better serve the natural world around us.



Dennis Badke: "I am a retired Electrical engineer. My wife and I have been doing rehab work for 42 years, both state and federal. I have learned a lot in that. We do education programs for all, children to retirement homes." Dennis also helped out every day during Elkhart County Parks Nature Explorer Day Camp at Ox Bow last month. Everyone had a great time and Krista was very grateful for his help!

Susan Zook: I've always liked being out in nature, so when I stumbled across the IMN class in 2018, I immediately signed up. I enjoyed the class. I wanted to continue learning, so I joined the IMN alumni group. I don't have expertise in any particular area (as many IMN members do), but being in a group of people who share the same concerns as I do about the environment, native plants and animals, sustainability, etc., means a lot to me. Volunteering as an IMN has been a great way for me to learn more about our local natural areas (and their wild inhabitants). I'm grateful for the IMN alumni group and the opportunities it's offered me.



Everyone is invited to **Riverfest**, and if you're looking for additional volunteer time, we'd love to have you help out. Contact parks@middleburyin.com to volunteer.



RIVERFEST IS **TOAD-ILY** awesome!



Saturday, August 28

10 AM - 2 PM at Riverbend Park

You could win



a kayak!

Event Schedule

- 10 AM Electro Fishing
- 11 AM Discover Riverfest
- Noon Regatta of Recyclables
- 1 PM Live Animal Show
- 2 PM Kayak Drawing



FAMILY FUN & EDU-TAINMENT!



Riverbend Park | 511 E. Warren Street, Middlebury

Find us on Facebook! [Facebook.com/MiddleburyRiverfest](https://www.facebook.com/MiddleburyRiverfest)

40
YEARS

Food for Sale • Games • Crafts Activities • Door Prizes • Environmental Exhibits • Kayak the River

Celebrating 40 Years of Riverbend Park

The picture on the masthead this month is from the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail's Trestle Bridge in Middlebury. 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. Submissions are generally due the weekend after the quarterly meeting, so you have until October to collect your thoughts and pictures! ☺



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.

