



# The Trailblazer

*Newsletter of the Elkhart County Indiana Master Naturalists*

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Summer 2022

## Summer Quarterly Meeting Elkhart County IMN Alumni Club

The summer meeting was held Thursday, July 14, at the Waterford Mennonite Church. Our guest speaker were John Jay Smith and Krista Daniels. Our rather large group of IMN alumni and the current IMN class were split into two groups and one group started with Krista while the other group started with John. As we came to the center point of the loop trail, each group traded its leader so we got to learn about the fauna from Krista and the flora from John. (See article and pictures on p. 3)

We had a short business meeting during which Carole Mitchell reported on the events where she has presented the IMN program to attendees and Melanie Helmuth updated us on volunteer opportunities.

## IMN Alumni Workday @ Elkhart Environmental Center

By Melanie Helmuth

On Saturday, May 14, 2022, a group of about 10 IMN Alumni and the Elkhart Environmental Center staff met at the EEC to pull invasive weeds and trees, as well as plant native trees throughout the grounds of the Environmental Center in the wooded areas, the edges of the prairies and in the rain garden in the parking lot. As you can see in the picture with the truck, we filled an entire truck bed with invasives. Overall, it was a very productive work day!



# Representing the IMN Program at Local Events

By Carole Mitchell



We were represented at the Garden Expo on February 26, from 8 - 4 at the RV Hall of Fame in Elkhart. Jenna and I were there most of the time, and Tammy Shidler came by later to help out. We passed out calendars and pencils. Jenna had the slide presentation going that talked about the Soil & Water Conservation District. We signed some people up for the upcoming IMN class. I think all that excitement prompted Jenna to have her baby two days later!



Clara Wait—who almost didn't "Wait" for the Garden Expo to end!

April 29 (4-8 PM) was the Arbor Day Celebration in downtown Goshen. It was a very busy evening with lots of tables and activities going on. Jenna, Mary Kauffman Kennel's sister, and I were there to help. We had tulip trees to pass out courtesy of the SWCD, more calendars and pencils, and we presented a hands-on activity: Ephemeral Art. (See the article below.) It was a good event with lots of curious people.



Then on June 25 the Master Gardener's annual Garden Tour was held at Trinity at Jackson Church in Elkhart from 9 - 2. This event is always popular, and Jenna and I set up. Again the slideshow was running. We were soon joined by Colin Eicher, a new IMN class member. He is very eager to learn about IMNs and what we do. We answered questions and passed out even more calendars and pencils. It tapered off as people went to visit the gardens on the tour.

## Ephemeral Art

By Jenna Wait

This year, we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> Arbor Day in downtown Goshen. There was tree climbing, singing, face painting, and many educational booths. The Elkhart County SWCD, along with Indiana Master Naturalist (IMN) alumni, set up an interactive display along with a tree giveaway. The activity, titled "Ephemeral Art", was a big hit with people small and tall. The concept was that participants were able to take items found in nature—such as sticks, leaves, acorns, rocks, and pinecones—and create a work of art within a picture frame. Eventually, another participant would come along and change the picture within the frame. If we were to leave the artwork, it would still only be around for a short amount of time as the medium which created it would eventually blow away, wash away, or decay. I think there is something that we can learn from this concept of ephemeral art.



As I watched people come up to the table to create a picture, they would often collaborate with their friends, family, and sometimes strangers to arrange their masterpiece. One teacher can influence a student, but it takes many to create a student masterpiece. If you take one of the artists away, the finished product would not look the same. Never underestimate your power as an educator to influence a student. Whether you have them for a year, a month, or a day you could have an immense impact on their future because in that moment you are changing them.

Ephemeral art is a representation of a moment in time that will change and fluctuate with the world around it. As an educator, you are helping to form your students, so that they may transform and adapt as everything around them does. In any given moment, you have a big impact. Your approach to education influences young minds, constantly forming them into their future selves.

You are the artists and they are your masterpieces. Treat them with thoughtfulness and individuality.

## A Walk Through the Summer Wildflowers

By Elma Chapman

The IMN alumni quarterly meeting was held at Waterford Mennonite Church just south of Goshen. The church owns 70 acres, 50 of which are a natural fen system that is near the Elkhart River. The church maintains this area in what they call “creation care,” meaning they are caring for God’s creation. There is a trail system there and it is open to the public to enjoy.



Adjacent to the parking lot is a planted prairie and that alone would be worth a visit. The bee balm and coneflowers were spectacular. But a little farther on is a pond and the beginning of the trails. We were a group of over 30, so we split into two groups. John Jay Smith, a self-proclaimed “enthusiastic amateur” botanist led one group and Krista Daniels, a church member and also a naturalist with the Elkhart County Parks and co-sponsor of the IMN alumni group, led the other group. Each group started on a different side of the pond and we met halfway through and exchanged leaders, since John knew more about the flowers and Krista was better at identifying wildlife.

My group started with Krista and our first sighting was a Northern Banded Water Snake. It was swimming along the edge of the pond. It is nonvenomous but aggressive as Krista explained it—if you tried to pick it up it would bite. The pond was rather picturesque and Krista said the church does their baptisms in the pond, but all things considered, I’d rather not be baptized with snakes!

As we walked along Krista told us that this area is listed on the Audubon list of birding hot spots. She has had success calling in a barred owl there, and in the spring it’s a good place to watch the American woodcock (also known as a timberdoodle) do its mating performance. They also have an active river otter population. We didn’t see one but Krista did identify some of its droppings. We saw where some turtles had dug a nest but

something, probably a raccoon, had dug it up and there were little bits of shell lying along the path. They have snapping turtles and Blanding's turtles in the fen. A little further down the path we saw a massive bank beaver lodge. The lodge was built into the bank of an island so that the human population wouldn't disturb it. In a place with more open water the beaver would have a lodge in the water, but since this was a very small waterway it burrowed into the bank and still covered the den with branches. The church has put up some barriers around the base of some of the larger trees to protect them from the gnawing beavers. Another option, we were told, is to paint the base of the tree with a latex paint mixed with very fine masonry sand. As we walked along we were serenaded by lots of green frogs and a couple of bullfrogs.

Two oaks grow in the fen, a swamp white oak with rounded lobes on the leaves and chinquapin oak which has very pointy unlobed leaves. Another tree that we saw was the hazelnut tree which was just starting to set the nuts. The nuts didn't look at all like what you think of when you think of tree nuts—they were little fringed things.



Marsh rose

John pointed out a wealth of summer flowers; in fact, he gave us a list of plants that should be flowering in that location at this time of year. We saw lots of yarrow, mountain mint, swamp milkweed (different from common milkweed, but just as popular with monarch butterflies), ironweed, boneset, swamp rose (a native plant as opposed to the invasive multiflora rose), and smooth sumac. Smooth sumac has a seed head similar to the staghorn sumac that you often see along the roadsides. Deeper in the wetland was poison sumac. Some people think all sumac is poisonous, but the first two are not, and the poison one usually grows in wetlands where most of us don't go. John identified two kinds of ferns for us, the sensitive fern and the marsh shield fern. The sensitive fern is so named because it is sensitive to cold temperatures and is the first fern to turn brown in the autumn. We also saw water hemlock, which is highly toxic, but an entirely different plant from poison hemlock. Button bushes were blooming, too. New plants to me were the thimble weed and the marsh bellflower.

There was so much to take in in a short period of time! I hope I can remember some of these plants so I can identify them the next time I see them. If you're in the Goshen area, the fen is definitely worth a visit, but either take a good guidebook or an expert with you so you know that you are seeing. Without a source of knowledge it's all "just green stuff."



Boneset



Swamp Milkweed

# Volunteer Opportunities

**Envirofest** is coming up on August 20 at Island Park in Elkhart. This is the 25<sup>th</sup> year for the Elkhart Envirofest, a joint venture of the Elkhart Environmental Center and WVPE. To volunteer go to <https://elkhartenvirofest.com/volunteer/> We also could use volunteers for the IMN booth, so contact Carole Mitchell for that: [bluebirdhill201@hotmail.com](mailto:bluebirdhill201@hotmail.com) If you can't volunteer, you can still attend and learn about what's happening in our environment locally.



**Riverfest** – Saturday, August 27 – 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Another volunteer opportunity. For general volunteer duties, contact Middlebury Park Superintendent Tom Enright at [parks@middleburyin.com](mailto:parks@middleburyin.com) or to help with the IMN booth, contact Carole Mitchell at [bluebirdhill201@hotmail.com](mailto:bluebirdhill201@hotmail.com)

**Save the Date:** October 1 will be our next alumni group volunteer project. No details yet—watch your email for information!

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

## 20 Years of IMNs!

To celebrate this anniversary, various locations around the state are having one day programs. These programs will count for education hours. Any of these programs would make a good excuse for a weekend getaway to explore a new area. More information will be coming in emails from Jody, so stay tuned:

**August 11-** Virtual Edible Wildflower Hike by Presented by Carrie Vrabel, AIMN. Learn about some wild edibles and their lore as she takes us along for a hike. TEAMS platform [Click here to join the meeting](#) on date. Reminder with link emailed out closer to date.

**August 20** at Versailles State Park- register to [jackwilker@yahoo.com](mailto:jackwilker@yahoo.com) Free program just pay gate fee. \*

**August 27** at Mounds State Park – For questions, or to register, contact the Mounds State Park Interpretive Services at [kmorgan1@dnr.in.gov](mailto:kmorgan1@dnr.in.gov) or 765-649-8128. \$10 program fee includes gate fee. \*

**September 9-11** IMN Gathering in Indianapolis at Fort Harrison State Park, Eagle Creek Park and Holliday Park \*

**Oct TBA-** Pokagon State Park

**October 8** at Kosciusko County—held at Koinonia Environmental Retreat, just south of Pierceton

**November 5** at Indiana Dunes State Park

\* Registration information should have been received already for these events in an email from Jody. Check your inbox and your “junk mail” box! If you can't find it, contact Jody at [jheaston@dnr.in.gov](mailto:jheaston@dnr.in.gov)



Edutainment about the importance of fresh water  
and the value of the Little Elkhart River.

**WE ALL LIVE DOWNSTREAM!**

**SCHEDULE**

10 am - Electro-Fishing

11 am - Explore Riverfest

12 pm – Regatta of Recyclables

1 pm – Live Animal Program

**FOOD VENDORS**

Kings BBQ

Dougie’s Food Truck

Papa’s Dippin Donuts

Dips on the Vine

**SPONSORS**

JAYCO

TRI-STATE HOOF TRIMMING

LITTLE ELKHART RIVER CHAPTER OF TROUT UNLIMITED

Hawkins Water Tech

Forks County Line Store

First State Bank

Middlebury Optimist Club

Varns and Hoover

I met Abby on a Saturday and she charmed me with her lavender story. I wrote this the next day. I call it,

## Abby's Lavender

She was telling me of her experience,  
visiting the lavender patch.  
She was certainly quite impressed.  
I'm sure she wants to go back.

At the age of seven she had never,  
encountered such a sight.  
The field of intense purple color,  
filled her with pure delight.

And then she told me of the smell,  
so wonderful and so sweet.  
She told me that she thought,  
it smelled good enough to eat.

She may or may not have heard the phrase,  
but she surely knew what it meant.  
To taste the smell of a beautiful flower,  
is a blessing that is heaven sent.



Thank you Abby.

Jim Carpenter July 10, 2022

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](mailto:chapman_ej@yahoo.com) for the next issue of the *Trailblazer*, which will be out in October right after our next meeting. (But don't wait—you'll forget! ☺)

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.

If you don't save the *Trailblazer* but need to check the information for meetings, you can always find it on the SWCD website.

The picture on the masthead this month is from last year's Gathering at Turkey Run State Park. Send me one of your trail pictures for the next issue!

**Don't forget these important dates:**

**Envirofest** August 20

**Riverfest** August 27

**IMN Gathering** September 9-11

Next **IMN Alumni Meeting** October 13

**IMN Potluck and IMN Class Graduation** November 10



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.

