



# The Trailblazer

*Newsletter of the Elkhart County Indiana Master Naturalists*

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Issue 4

Autumn 2021

## Autumn Quarterly Meeting Elkhart County IMN Alumni Club

The autumn meeting was held Thursday, October 14, at the Feed Lot Shelter at Bonneyville Mill County Park on a cool rainy evening, but that didn't dampen our spirit or the presentation by our **guest speaker, Heather Downey** of The Nature Steward, Inc., a turtle rehabber. See a synopsis of her presentation below.

Please send your **volunteer hours** to Jenna by Friday, Nov, 5. Prizes will be awarded to the top three volunteers at the potluck on Tuesday, November 9. (Potluck details below.)

**Dates for meetings in 2022:** January 13, April 14, July 14 and October 13. The potluck date for 2022 has not been set. The January 13 meeting will be held at the Elkhart County Museum in Bristol and will feature the DNR's Urban Biologist. Meetings will be moving around the county next year, much like the IMN class does.

Carol Mitchell reported on **IMN presentations** she has done since our last meeting. On July 23 she represented the IMN program at Green Day at the Elkhart County Fair, August 7 she attended Envirofest at Island Park in Elkhart, and August 28 she was at Riverfest in Middlebury. Kate Barrett helped with her presentations. Upcoming programs where we can have a booth are the Seed Swap at Goshen College on January 15 and the Master Gardener Expo on February 26 at the RV Hall of Fame.

The next **IMN class** is slated for late May through mid July. We will start advertising it in the spring. Encourage your friends to sign up for the class!

Melanie Helmuth reported on several **volunteer opportunities**. Merry Lea needs volunteers for their Enchanted Forest on October 22 and 23. Saturday, October 30, you can help label trees for distribution for Trees for Goshen, and planting day is November 6. Pathways in Goshen is in need of help with removal of invasives.

\* \* \* \* \*



The potluck will be held at the Schrock Pavilion in Shanklin Park in Goshen on Tuesday, November 9, at 6 p.m. Table service is provided and there is a Google.doc sign-up sheet in your email to let others know what you are bringing. A new aspect this year is that we will be recognizing graduates of the two most recent classes and awarding a goody bag to those who have also completed their volunteer hours.

## Looking Forward to 2022!

When the Alumni Board met recently, we set dates for the 2022 Alumni meetings. We are optimistically scheduling indoor meeting places. We decided to have the meetings at four different places in the county. This is what we did during our IMN classes, and it was fun to spend time in new places.

Our first 2022 meeting will be at the Historical Museum in Bristol on Thursday January 13. We are looking at other sites that will take us to other areas of the county in April, July and October (second Thursdays).

Dennis Badke has lots of great ideas for programs. We looked at speakers and topics for the last number of years and hope to ensure that we vary the educational programs to cover the many areas of interest among us. Let Dennis or any board member know if you have a recommendation for speaker or topic.

Mary Kauffmann-Kennel

### Turtle Rehab



*A wayward turtle contemplating crossing the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail.*

Our speaker was Heather Downey of The Nature Steward, Inc. She had an interesting slide presentation of the various turtles she has worked with. Some of the slides were pretty gruesome and some turtles couldn't be saved, but she has released many back into their native habitat.

Turtles occur around the world, but North and South America have the most. There are 62 species in the United States. Indiana has 16 native turtle species and of those, six of them are endangered. The native turtles to Indiana are the snapping turtle, the Alligator Snapping Turtle\*, Eastern Musk Turtle, Eastern Mud Turtle\*, Spotted Turtle\*, Blanding's Turtle\*, Eastern Box Turtle, Ornate Box Turtle\*, Northern Map Turtle, False Map Turtle, Ouachita Map Turtle, Midland Painted Turtle, River Cooter\*, Smooth Softshell Turtle, Spiny Softshell Turtle, and Red-eared Slider. The ones with \* are the endangered ones. The Red-eared Slider is considered invasive. It's the little guy that was sold in dime stores along with little plastic bowls and a fake plastic palm tree, and most of them didn't live very long, happy lives!

Except for the box turtles, turtles are almost always in or near water, except in May and June when the females venture out to find a good dry place to lay their eggs. Many turtles return to the same spot every year to lay their eggs. The exact timing of egg-laying is temperature dependent. It is during this time that the largest number of turtles are in need of a rehabber's services. The biggest problem is being hit by a vehicle, and those injuries are the least survivable. Other reasons for turtle injuries include dog bites, raccoon bites, lawn mower strikes, and infections.

In her slide show, Heather had before and after pictures of the turtles she worked with, the date of their arrival to her, the date she was able to release them, and the number of days in between. She works with a veterinarian. If a shell is cracked or split, sometimes it can be sutured together and the turtle will recover. If a scute (one of the plates that make up a shell) is damaged, it can regenerate in as little as six weeks, as long the turtle doesn't get infected or re-injured. Infections can be treated with antibiotics. Keeping a turtle hydrated is key to its recovery. Euthanasia is an option only if the turtle won't be able to submerge, lay eggs, swim, protect itself, or forage, or as relief from pain. Submerging is important because water turtles can't swallow unless they are underwater.

Do not relocate turtles. Most turtles have a very limited range and when removed from that area they wander around trying to find their way back. Heather told about some calls she got from people who wanted a

turtle removed from their yard. If explaining that turtles do not attack people doesn't sway the caller, she sometimes surreptitiously "removes" them to a spot nearby.

Let's be kind to our turtle friends—and *all* wildlife, for that matter!

## Nature Poetry from our local IMNs



### A Favorite Color

I saw the flash of orange,  
as I came into the meadow.  
And I knew it in an instant,  
my favorite butterfly was there.

It was of course a Monarch,  
who continued to stick around.  
As I sat in the shade enjoying the day,  
watching this dance of orange.

When this angelic bug flew near,  
I threw my hands into the air.  
Hoping on just the barest chance,  
it would grace me a landing there.

So I enjoyed that beautiful insect,  
that stayed close by in the meadow.  
I followed its zig-zag path,  
as it flitted from nettle to nettle.

My philosophy in life is quite simple.  
At least it makes sense to me.  
Finding the value in simple things,  
gives purpose to a simple life.

Jim Carpenter August, 2021

### Mysteries of the Night

Mysterious nature happens at night  
Glowing animal eyes and stars shine bright  
Light pollution distracts all that we see  
In the sky planets and stars are the key

Constellations are in the deep dark sky  
Connect the stars to see pictures up high  
Big Dipper, Little Dipper, the North Star  
And many others are seen near and far

Bats fly from houses and trees at sunset  
Most owl species are nocturnal don't fret  
Animal sounds are also heard far and wide  
Coyotes howl and badgers will abide

Nature at night is difficult to see  
Many creatures are there, please let them be

Lou Anne Hostetler



## Strand Nursery and Blue Fox Farm

We have a local nursery that specializes in plants native to Indiana! In July the Strand Nursery offered a tour for the Indiana Native Plant Society, and the tour was also open to the public. The Strand Nursery started in Wisconsin, but it was sold to Blue Fox Farm in Wawaka and is licensed in Indiana. This is a mail-order wholesale business and they are not open to the public except for this special occasion. Their website states: *“Strand Nursery has been a wholesale distributor of quality dormant ferns and wildflowers to retail nurseries and landscape companies since 1897, one of a handful of businesses offering unique products. Many of the ferns and wildflowers that were sold in 1897 can still be purchased today. Our customers include small to major retail nurseries and other wholesale companies throughout the United States.”*

It was quite interesting to tour their growing fields. Since these plants need a variety of habitats, we saw open fields, wooded areas, and wetlands fed by springs. There is also a “trial” area where new plants are planted to see which soil type they are best suited to. The focus is on sustainability and the environment. Some of the plants they have were rescued from forests slated to be logged. By going in before the logging equipment, they can save plants that would otherwise be lost. They never sell all their stock; rather they collect some specimens and let the rest grow back naturally. Because they want to protect the environment they use natural fertilizers instead of chemicals, and when irrigation is required they use pond water.

Along with the tour of the grounds we were told about the history of the Blue Fox Farm which has been in the same family for generations. In what is usually their shipping room we were regaled with a variety of snack items featuring local herbs and fruits. Very tasty and appreciated! They even had available for us to use a bug spray that was all natural and locally produced at the Annie Oakley Perfumery in Ligonier.

So what’s the big deal with native plants? Native plants provide food and habitat for our native birds and pollinators. Other plants that have been brought in often outcompete the natives but don’t provide the same nutrients that the natives do because the plants and the animals that depend on them have evolved together over time. Some of these new plants cross-fertilize with our natives resulting in a hybrid plant that is neither one nor the other and as the older plant dies, only the hybrids continue to propagate. For example, white mulberry was introduced and crossed with our native red mulberry. Now red mulberry trees are rare and most mulberry trees locally are either white mulberries or a hybrid of the two.

Last year the Indiana Legislature passed a law aimed at restricting the sale in Indiana of certain plants deemed invasive. However, they left loopholes for plants that had a “big economic impact,” meaning nurseries made a lot of money from them. One case in particular was the Callery (Bradford) Pear. Originally bred to be sterile, they cross-pollinated with other pear tree varieties and are not only no longer sterile but proliferate profusely. In your yard you may think they are controlled by constant mowing, but birds that eat the seed deposit it elsewhere where there is no mowing, and over time those are the only trees growing in that area. They were one of the plants left unregulated due to their economic impact. Other plants that are to be avoided are Burning Bush, Tree of Heaven, Asian Bittersweet, and Japanese Honeysuckle.

The Indiana Native Plant Society has a local Northeast Indiana Chapter, which you might be interested in. The INPS is a great resource for what to plant, what to avoid planting, and how to care for your plants. Check their website: [www.Indiananativeplants.org](http://www.Indiananativeplants.org) for more information. Make sure whatever you plant is appropriate for this area. And if a similar tour is offered next summer, be sure to take advantage of it! Happy fall planting!

Are you enjoying Jim Carpenter'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-k8BkyDalVUHGOhasdz6FmTgy7pfA41u5qaxI1DVL6puUc0>



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

### Next Meeting

Thursday, January 13 at 6:30 p.m.

We'll meet at the Elkhart County Historical Museum in Bristol. We plan to have the Urban Biologist from the DNR as our speaker.

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 the hike at Blue Fox Farm in Wawaka. 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](mailto: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 January to collect your thoughts and pictures! (But don't wait—you'll forget! ☺)



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.

