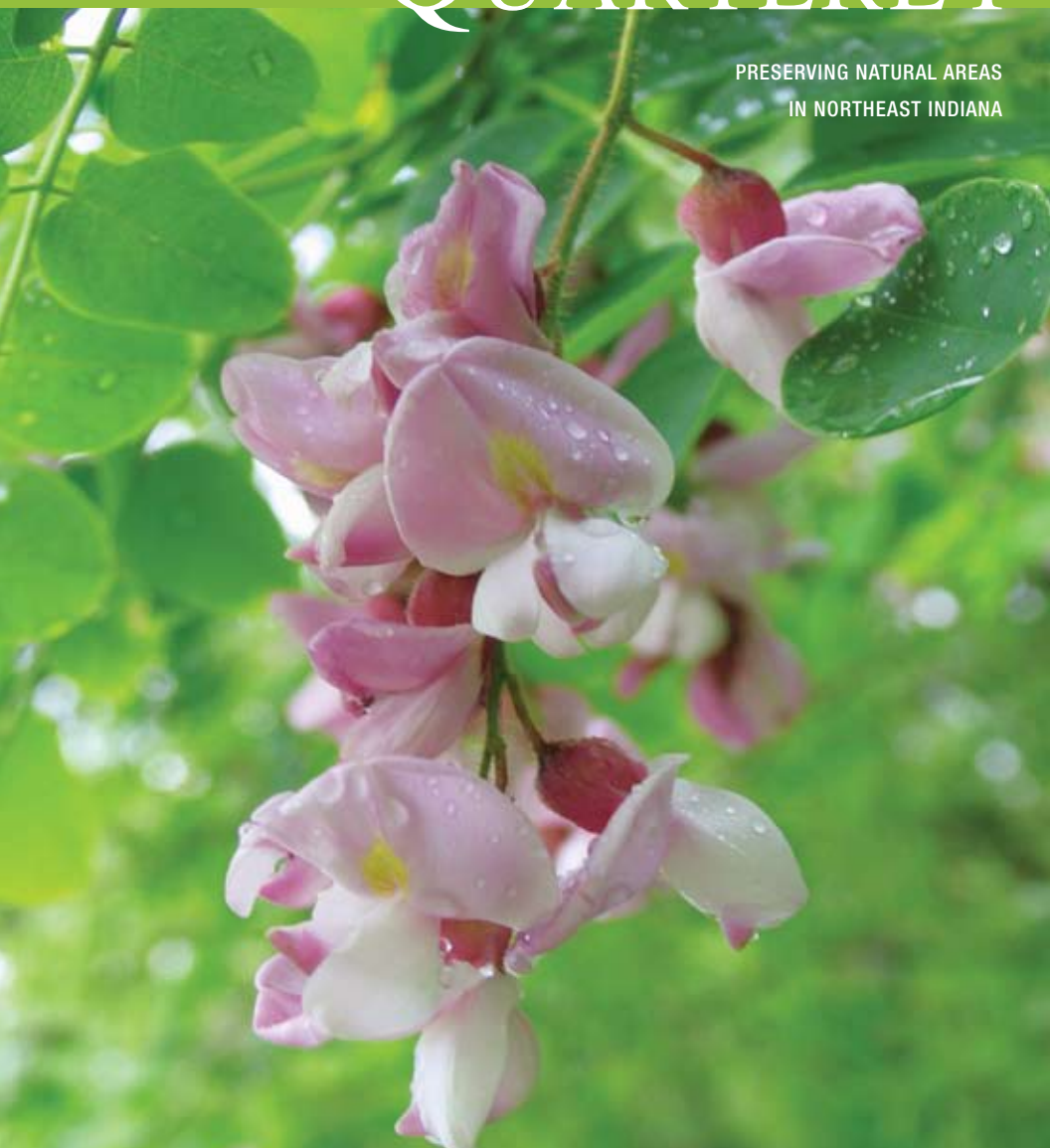


THE ACRES QUARTERLY

PRESERVING NATURAL AREAS
IN NORTHEAST INDIANA



ACRES New Office Location
Seven Pillars Geology
Nature Trust Radio Show
Martha L. Sittler
Elkhart River
Dustin Fund Drive
Tree Flowers
Chimney Swifts
Mourning Doves

Spring 2006
Volume 45 - No. 2



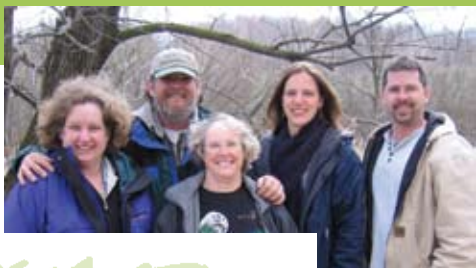
ACRESupdate

Special Board Announcement

It is with great appreciation for her services, that the ACRES' Board of Directors reluctantly announce and accept the resignation of our Executive Director of the past 12 years, Carolyn McNagny.

Ted Heemstra, past President of ACRES and long-time supporter, says, "This organization has been extremely fortunate that Carolyn chose to work for ACRES these many years. We hired her as our first, full-time employee, after she had volunteered for us initially. Due to her diligent care and efforts, the scope of the organization, as a whole, has increased dramatically. We now have 58 preserves that comprise over 4,075 acres in Indiana, a significant jump from the original 26 preserves of approximately 1,500 total acres! Additionally ACRES partnered on six properties that helped preserve another 1,500 acres in Pokagon State Park, Maplewood Nature Preserve, Oliver/Olin Lake Nature Preserve, Limberlost, Denison Fish and Wildlife Area, and the Crooked Lake Preserve."

A recent land donor commented, "Carolyn was always so wonderful at communicating with the land donors, keeping them informed about the status of their donation, and making sure you knew just how much their land meant to ACRES and to the state of Indiana."



ACRES' Staff: (L-R) Carolyn McNagny, David Homan, Ethel McClelland, Rachel Sherman, and Shane Perfect
photography by Tim Kimmel

The ACRES Board recently set up a search committee. Steve Hammer, Janet Kelly, and Bill Smith have been nominated to perform the difficult job of filling the vacancy created by her departure.

"We sincerely honor Carolyn for all the work she has accomplished. Her efforts leave a permanent and beneficial mark on Indiana and we wish her all the best of luck in her future travels and endeavors."

- The ACRES Board of Directors

The ACRES Office is Moving!

The ACRES office will be located at the Thomas and Jane Dustin house on Chapman Road in northern Allen County. The Dustin house is beautiful, with a deck overlooking Cedar Creek, a stone fireplace, slate floors, and flagstone steps leading up to the door. We will be moving upon completion of necessary improvements needed to use it as an office, probably in mid-summer.

ACRES will have a trail system at the Thomas and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve and hope our members will stop by for a visit! ACRES will be offering programs at the house, starting with one offered by Paul McAfee on June 15th (please see Field Trips, page 8 and 9). We are continuing to raise money to:

- Purchase 56-acres as an addition to the existing 29-acre Thomas and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve.
- Make necessary Improvements to the house and office. We have raised \$346,000 of the \$475,000 needed for the Dustin land and office improvements.

Please support ACRES in successfully completing this fund drive!

Dustin Nature Preserve by Shane Perfect



WELCOME new members!

John H. Anglin, Jr.
Barbara Barrett
Mary Bontrager
Jennifer Bowman and Twyla Kendrick
Dan Butler
Kelly and Kebra Byrd
Gift of Gordon Graef and Linda Duxbury

Bill Christie
Alan and Carolyn Critchfield
Theresa Dawson
David and Margarita Gall
Jenean K. Gibbons
Daniel and Winona Gillman
Mary Ellen Harnish
Gift of Alan and Prudence Harnish

David and Beverly Hewitt
Lisa Iddins
Jeff and Carol Keplar
Ronald L. and Patricia L. Kirkpatrick
Nate Klinkner
Richard Latta
Robert and Sandra Lemon
Dave and Holly Meyers
Ronald and Cheryl Noyer
Brian C. Pauls
The Plummer Family
Gift of The Anderson Family

Dennis W. and Alice A. Risser
Steve and Jean Ross
Rod and Mary Beth Schlabach
Mark F. Searfoss
Richard Sechler
Helen Sherman
Ronald and Deborah Sherman
Alan Sidel
Lee Sloffer
Sunny Stachera
Gift of Carolyn Stachera

Lee Stewart
Timothy T. Toporek
Nancy Vendrely
Jeff Zawadzke

Brockman Furnace Company
Butler Construction, Inc.
Fort Wayne Children's Zoo
Fort Wayne Zoological Society, Inc.
IPFW Library-Serials
Kiwanis Club of Northeast Fort Wayne, Indiana



time to renew!

As of July 1, 2006, the beginning of the ACRES new fiscal year, ACRES will be initiating a dues increase. In the interest of fair play, we are notifying you in advance so you can get in at the present rate. The dues have not been raised for more than six years. The reason for the increase is the cost of doing business continues to rise, especially the rise in gas prices. Your dues defray office expenses, staff salaries, and operating costs.

ACRES values you as a member and we hope you will renew!

- Mary Anna Feitler, ACRES Membership Secretary

Virginia bluebells by Tim Kimmel



ACRES' MISSION

Dedicated to preserving natural areas in northeast Indiana, ACRES manages and protects 58 nature preserves in 13 counties.

2000 North Wells Street
Fort Wayne, IN
46808-2474
260-422-1004
email: acres@acreslandtrust.org

acreslandtrust.org



seven pillars geology

by Carolyn McNagny

Seven Pillars photo by Carolyn McNagny

Bits of snow were falling when the March 25th Seven Pillars program started. Throughout the day, the sun would briefly shine, then more snow would ping off the river rocks. The eighty people standing along the Mississinewa riverbank did not seem to mind and the weather just added variety to the day.



Tony Fleming, professional geologist, and Jack Sunderman, founder of Geoscience Department at IPFW, had visited the Pillars in advance of March 25th. Their earlier visit was the first for Dr. Fleming. Dr. Sunderman, who had previously visited the site with Bob Weber many years ago, said he had never seen formations like the Pillars anywhere east of the Rockies. The closest geologic structure he could remember in his travels was at Bryce Canyon in Utah, which has numerous rock spires and columns along the face of its steep red and yellow cliffs.

Tony Fleming, with the 25 to 40 foot Seven Pillars serving as a dramatic backdrop, talked about how the pillars have been reinventing themselves for thousands of years, the river constantly forming new pillars as the old ones collapse and disappear into the river. The pillars are made up of two rock units, together called the Wabash Formation. The lower unit is called the Mississinewa Shale Member (actually a dolomitic siltstone) and the upper unit the Liston Creek Limestone Member. The Liston Creek limestone, which starts about 10 feet up from the pillars base, is lighter

in color, giving the pillars their soft yellow color.

Millions of years ago, silt, which became the Mississinewa shale, was the ocean bed of an inland sea. Coral grew in scattered reefs and beautifully spiraled-shelled nautilus glided over the sand. Violent storms would take the coral and shell bits, depositing them in layer after layer until the sea receded. In our brief period of geologic time, these geologic layers that took millions and millions of years to form, now stretch for more than 800 feet along the river.

In the last ten years, there has been concern expressed that the pillars are eroding at a quicker pace than previously. Both geologists agree that the pillars' retreat might be slightly speeded up by the warmer winters, as freezing and thawing creates tiny fissures in the rock, which quickly widen as water seeps in and then expands to ice. Dr. Sunderman said thousands of years ago, long gone pillars could have been where the ACRES group was presently standing, migrating with geologic slowness 200 feet to the north.

The surprise to everyone was that flint creates the pillars. The Liston Creek limestone is anywhere from 20 to 35 feet high. Near the base and the top eight feet of the Liston Creek face are 3 to 4 inch bands of chert, also known as flint. Chert is a much stronger rock than limestone and, where it is present in bands, the flint helps resist weathering and later erosion by the river.

In the middle of the pillars, the flint and limestone occur together in thin, contorted layers that are highly fractured and fall off the face in small pieces, causing the middle section of the bluff to retreat faster than the more massive rock above and below. The river winds around the rock face, always seeking the path of least resistance, and erodes the weakest rock away, leaving pillars of stronger limestone, or maybe limestone with more nodules of flint. As the saying goes, what is beautiful remains.

A note from Carolyn McNagny:

The 150-acre Seven Pillars Nature Preserve was the first property I worked on acquiring while with ACRES. I also remember visiting the 1-acre Seven Pillars landmark with Ted Heemstra, former ACRES President, in 1982.

As Tony Fleming led the group across the river, this past March, where ladders had been set up for people to climb down and see the rock face up close, I could hear Tony's voice echo up and down the river. It was a good place to attend my last program with ACRES.

I would like to thank the many friends I have made with the organization, and wish the group much success in the future!



Mississinewa River and hike by Tim Kimmel; spiral-shelled nautilus by Shane Perfect



nature trust radio show goes statewide!

Beginning in May, the *ACRES Nature Trust* radio program will be heard on other public radio stations throughout Indiana.

Nature Trust is a 3½ minute program heard on Northeast Indiana Public Radio and sponsored by ACRES Land Trust and corporate sponsors. The show is written and hosted by Jeff Britton, ACRES Board member. It is recorded at Monastic Chamber studio in New Haven, Indiana. *Nature Trust* gives the public radio listener unusual insight into common nature themes.

Nature Trust has addressed such diverse subjects as fungus, coyotes, snakes and skunks. The show has gone back in time to take a look at glaciers, shrunk Jeff so he could ride on the back of a hummingbird, and fed Jon Gillespie, *Nature Trust* recording engineer, to a giant sundew plant to demonstrate its carnivorous habits. Along the way, listeners learn

quite a bit about the world they live in. They are also introduced to ACRES Land Trust.

In 2005, *Nature Trust* attracted the interest of WFYI Public Radio in Indianapolis. Visentin Wines sponsored the show in the state's capital and the show soon gained new fans. Barbara Duke Sams, WFYI Senior Account Executive and Steve McMichaels, Sales Manager for WBOI in Fort Wayne, found sponsors interested in bringing the show to the rest of the state. The Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources are sponsoring the show state wide over 9 public radio stations starting May 15th.

The ACRES' mission is to acquire important properties in Indiana as well as to bring educational opportunities to the public. *Nature Trust* is a result of the ACRES



Education Committee.

The show may be heard on WBOI, Fort Wayne Wednesdays at 12:40 p.m. and Saturday morning at 9:30 a.m. Audio files of the show may also be found on the ACRES web site. If you would like to sponsor *Nature Trust*, please contact the ACRES office at (260) 422-1004.

And as Jeff suggests when signing off the show... "This land is your land... so get out there ...take a hike".

MARTHA L. SITTLER UNITRUST BENEFITS ACRES



Mallow at Acres Along the Wabash



Acres Along the Wabash



Kokiwannee Falls



Salamonie River at Kokiwannee

Photos on the left by Tim Kimmel

Since 2001, ACRES has received an annual gift from the Martha L. Sittler Unitrust, managed by her son David W. Sittler. One person can accomplish great things and, through her fund that she established during her lifetime, Mrs. Sittler has given back to what mattered to her while she lived.



The yearly gifts have benefited the acquisition of the 140-acre Kokiwannee Nature Preserve, ACRES' Nature Trust radio show, the 136-acre Evelyn and Wendell Dygert Preserve, and land management projects with the local Boy Scouts. Martha's Unitrust succeeded in finishing the fund drive to raise funds for the 58-acre addition to the 29-acre Acres Along the Wabash Preserve.

"She was a dynamic person," said David Sittler, "who loved travel, animals, and anything to do with nature. Anytime we hiked all I had to do was point to any random plant or tree and ask her what it was, and she knew it. She felt ACRES was a worthwhile endeavor with the organization's efforts to preserve land." As she once stated to David, "Once the land is gone, that's it. So, it is important for all to preserve what land we can for future generations as well as for our own."

Raised on a farm in Warsaw, Indiana, Mrs. Sittler was a Purdue graduate with a career as a registered dietitian. Mrs. Sittler enjoyed camping & hiking with her family, Girl Scouts, the Allen County Genealogical Society, Curios Antique Club, the Mary Penrose Wayne Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and being an active member of the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church.



Evelyn and Wendell Dygert Preserve by Ron Everhart

Memorials

R. Lawrence “Larry” Huff

Capturing what he loved on film, Larry was a respected local photographer who believed conservation was essential to preserve natural beauty for future generations.

for Wing Haven Nature Preserve

from John and Debera Hicks

Frances Nevin

for the Scott and Frances Nevin Nature Preserve

from Alan and Carolyn Critchfield

Steve Wilson

for Thomas and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve

from Kathleen Fuller



Large-flowering trillium by Shane Perfect



Fallen Tree at Edna W. Spurgeon Woodland Reserve by Larry Huff

Greg Bright

Commonwealth Biomonitoring

Susan Britton

In honor of her work on the Quarterly
from Catherine and Scott Hill

Heidi L. Dunn

Ecological Specialists

Dwight Fish

of Fish and Willow Woodwrights
for the bluebird boxes!

David and Margarita Gall

In honor of their marriage
*from John Thistlethwaite and
Kay Feichter-Thistlethwaite
William and Cathy Gething
Phyllis and Gregory Jehl
Carolyn McNaggy
Mary P. Menge and Kenneth L. Scrogam
Robert and Phyllis Robb
Fort Wayne Area Association of Realtors
for the Thomas and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve*

Michael Anglin and Larry Biggerstaff

for helping move the ACRES office

John Bacone

Ethyle Bloch

Jeff, Susan and

Meghan Britton

Tom Crowe

Rich Dunbar

John and Marcella Ellenwood

David Gall

Ronald K. Gehring

Ted Heemstra

Tim Kimmel

Bob Lemon

Nancy Malis

Paul McAfee

Angie O'Neill

Marsha Raehling

Mary Schneider

Bob Weber

Fred Wooley

and the staff

David Homan

Ethel McClelland

Shane Perfect

Rachel Serman

for all their help and support
from Carolyn McNaggy

Tributes

What does ACRES mean to you? If ACRES has given you beautiful experiences and memories in your lifetime, perhaps you want to give back. If you would like more information on making a planned gift, contact ACRES at (226) 422-1004 or email: acres@acreslandtrust.org

For Information on all programs contact: ACRES Office at (260) 422-1004 or visit acreslandtrust.org

3RD ANNUAL DYGERT WOODS OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, May 6th 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Presented by: Jerry Stratman, Graduate of Brat School, Wisconsin. There will be a choice of activities including: wagon rides, guided wildflower and tree hikes, and eating Jerry Stratman's famous brats, homemade fries, baked beans and desserts! Food and beautiful wildflowers at this 136-acre nature preserve 9:00 a.m. Wildflower hike by Jennifer Kleinrichert; 10:00 a.m. Tree hike by Steve Ross; 11:00 a.m. Wildflower hike by David Hicks. **Where:** Evelyn and Wendell Dygert Nature Preserve, Whitley County. Take SR 109 north of US 30 at Columbia City to 400 N. Turn west on 400 N, then north on 50 W. **Please RSVP to ACRES Office (260) 422-1004.**



Virginia bluebells by Shane Perfect

POSSUM TROT ORCHESTRA

Sunday, May 7th at 2:00 p.m.

Presented by: John Minton, IPFW Professor of Folklore, Susie Suraci, Rob Suraci. Possum Trot will present a combination of American roots traditional music: folk, country, bluegrass, blues, gospel, with rock and touches of pop, swing, ragtime and reggae, there are few realms The Possum Trot Orchestra do not implement. **Where:** Wing Haven Nature Preserve, Steuben County. Take I-69 to Exit 154, turn south on SR 127 and then immediately east onto 400 N. Wing Haven is located on the north side of 400 N in approximately 3/4 mile.



MENGERSON NATURE PRESERVE CLEAN-UP

PART OF THE FORT WAYNE GREAT AMERICAN CLEANUP

Saturday, May 20th 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Post cleanup party: Headwaters Park-West from 11:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Great American Cleanup is the country's largest litter prevention, beautification and community improvement project. Over two million volunteers nationwide are expected to participate in the 2006 event. We anticipate over 3,000 volunteers here in Fort Wayne. The City will provide ACRES with garbage bags, gloves, T-shirts, and flower seeds. Mengerson is a beautiful preserve - let's clean it up! **Where:** Mengerson Nature Preserve located on Stellhorn Road west of the Maplecrest Shopping Center.



Spring Beauty by Shane Perfect

ACRES WITH THE CARDINAL CHAPTER OF THE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Sunday, May 21st at 2:00 p.m. Presented by: Dr. Richard Hurley, Botanist from University of St. Francis.

One hour hike to see the wildflowers of this 87-acre nature preserve, including shooting star and wild hycanith. Preserve has a new parking area and a bridge built by the Boy Scouts of America. **Where:** Acres Along the Wabash Nature Preserve, Wells County, 4 miles northwest of Bluffton. Located on State Road 116 1/2 mile west of the town of Murray on the south side of road.



GEOLOGY WALK AT KOKIWANEE - Saturday, June 3rd at 10:00 a.m.

Presented by: Orvil Schlatter, Master degree in Geology from Indiana University.

Kokiwane has fascinating geology, from the Salamonie gorge, which creates the eight waterfalls, to the unusual seep areas along the streams. Starting at the Army Corp parking area along the Salamonie River, Orvil will explain the formation of the gorge.

From there, we will drive around to the bluffs overlooking the river. **Where:** Kokiwane Nature Preserve, Wabash County. Take old US 24 to Lagro, turn south at Lagro (there is

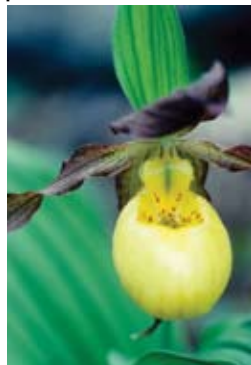
only one road that crosses the bridge) and turn onto Hanging Rock Road. Follow Hanging Rock Road to 600 E. Turn south onto 600 E, which will dead-end into the Army Corp parking area.

For Information on all programs contact: ACRES Office at (260) 422-1004 or visit acreslandtrust.org

A LOOK OF LADY'S SLIPPER'S Sunday, June 4th at 10:00 a.m. or 2:00 p.m.

Presented by: Brad Bumgardner, Wing Haven Caretaker and Pokagon State Park Interpreter. Come join us for a brief introduction to Lady's Slipper orchids at the Wing Haven Nature Preserve. We will then carpool to Pokagon State Park and surrounding areas to search for yellow, showy, and maybe white Lady's Slippers. It will be an exciting hike in and around the Pokagon wetlands. You will need at least water-proof boots, but knee waders would be better. To prevent excess damage to the wetlands, there will be two trips with a maximum of 10 to 15 people each trip. **Where:** Meet at the Wing Haven Nature Preserve, Steuben County. Take I-69 to Exit 154, turn south on SR 127 and then immediately east onto 400 N. Wing Haven is located on the north side of 400 N in approximately 3/4 mile.

Must RSVP to the ACRES Office at (260) 422-1004.



Yellow lady's slipper by Bill Krebs

BIOBLITZ AT KOKIWANEE

Friday, June 9th and Saturday, June 10th

What's a BioBlitz? A Biodiversity Blitz, or BioBlitz, is a 24-hour team event to identify every living thing at a selected nature preserve. ACRES BioBlitz of Kokiwanee is a celebration of this beautiful area and the diversity that is protected within its boundaries. The Kokiwanee Bioblitz will begin Friday, June 9th at 4:00 p.m. and end Saturday, June 10th at 4:00 p.m. Scientists will be working to identify hundreds of species of



plants and animals before the clock stops. Open to children and adults, this is a way to learn from some of the top scientists in the state - specialists in their field be it trees, bats, mussels, or dragonflies.

Photos by Tim Kimmel

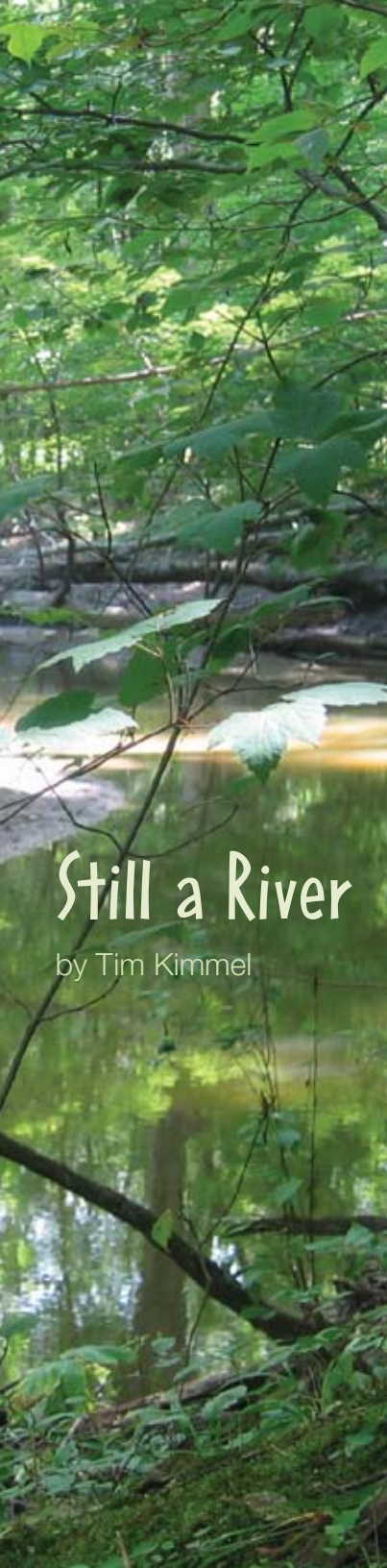
You can register for the Kokiwanee BioBlitz by visiting the ACRES website at www.acreslandtrust.org and download a BioBlitz form, or you can call the ACRES Office at (260) 422-1004 and ask to be sent a registration form. Jerry Stratman will provide dinner on Friday, June 9th and ACRES will provide breakfast and lunch on Saturday, June 10th. People are welcome to stay overnight at Kokiwanee. Must provide own tent, sleeping bags, and other camping supplies. Kokiwanee has outhouses available and will have potable water. ACRES will post all findings, be it fungi or beetle or fish. A BioBlitz is part educational event, part contest, and all fun! **Where:** Kokiwanee Nature Preserve, Wabash County 140-acre preserve located on the Salamonie River. Invited: Children and adults (Must be 18 years of age to stay over night without adult supervision Friday, June 9th) Cost: \$30.00 for Adults; \$15.00 for Children.

BIRDS OF INDIANA - Thursday, June 15th at 6:30 p.m.

Presented by: Paul McAfee, Director of Little River Wetlands. Paul, a photographer for many years, specializes in bird photography and will discuss photographic technique. **Where:** Thomas and Jane Dustin Nature Preserve, Allen County. Take Coldwater Road (SR 327) north of Fort Wayne. At Chapman Road, turn east and preserve located on south side in 3/4 mile at 1802 Chapman Road



Blue Jay by Paul McAfee



Still a River

by Tim Kimmel

ACRES and our allies have once again defeated in court a Joint Noble-LaGrange County Drainage Board's petition to convert the upper Elkhart River system into a regulated drain. This was the drainage board's third attempt to claim such rights. Tony Fleming, geologist and ACRES member, said "this is a huge win for natural rivers in Indiana!"

ACRES was joined by the Izaak Walton League; municipalities and organizations of Albion, Ligonier, Rome City, Sylvan Lake, and Wolcottville; and several affected landowners with support from the DNR. John Bacone, Director, IDNR Division of Nature Preserves said, "The DNR strives to work with the Drainage Boards, the County Commissioners, and our other partners, such as ACRES Land Trust and adjacent landowners, to protect the significant wetlands along the Elkhart River. We hope to continue to do so in the future, as the Elkhart River is one of Indiana's highest quality rivers."

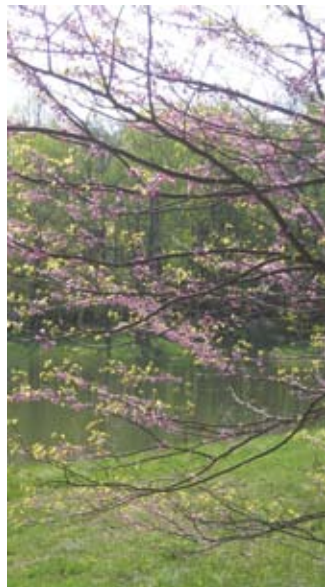
It was determined in the Indiana Court of Appeals that the drainage board had exceeded the scope of its authority in claiming the watershed and failed to comply with the Indiana Nature Preserves Act. Had they gained permission, the drainage board would have been allowed to clear and spray streams in our nature preserves and remove trees, logs and stream vegetation.

ACRES Attorney in the case, Marty Lucas, said "the key thing for me was that the scientific evidence (in the form of river gauge data) consistently shows that there is no need for a large scale drainage project on the upper Elkhart River. The costs to taxpayers and the environ-

mental damage on key riparian ecosystems -- including precious nature preserves -- simply aren't justified. The ruling was a victory not just for the environment, but also for taxpayers throughout the nearly 200,000 acre watershed .

David Van Gilder, ACRES Board President, said, "ACRES is committed to protecting Indiana Nature Preserves, and I thank the ACRES membership and board of directors for supporting work on this important legal case."

Elkhart River by Tim Kimmel



Elizabeth Snyder has redbud trees available.

Call Elizabeth at
260-432-4408
if you are interested.

Redbuds by Tim Kimmel



Thomas & Jane Dustin Fund Drive

Because of our sponsors, we have raised \$346,331 as of March 2, 2006

Foundations

Olive B. Cole Foundation
English Bonter Mitchell Foundation
Jack Ewing Charitable Trust
Indiana Heritage Trust Fund
Indiana Department of
Natural Resources' Division
of Nature Preserves
The Journal Gazette Foundation
M.E. Raker Foundation
Martha L. Sittler Unitrust

Gifts of \$1000 or more

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Wayne and Linda Boyd
David and Judith Ruoff
Andy and Geralyn Boyden
John and Marcella Ellenwood
Joseph and Elizabeth Huguenard
Lynn and Darlene Hyndman
Frederick and Pamela Jordan
Ethel McClelland
Scott and Frances Nevin
Herbert and Lorraine Weier

Individual Gifts

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Barbara Barrett
Carl and Barbara Bauer
Glen and Chris Bickel
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and Georgean Johnson-Coffey
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Gary and Susan Reynolds
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Kay Feichter Thistlethwaite
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William and Cecilia Weakley
Allen Wetter
Dennis and Rhonda White
Phillip and Marcia Wright
Donald and Cheryl Wyckoff
Ruby M. Yoder
James and Judy Zehner
Jan and Riet Zwiep

Businesses

Jefferson Letter Service
Merry Lea Environmental
The Yoder Farm LLC

Thanks!



WILDFLOWERS OF ANOTHER SORT

Crabapple by Tim Kimmel

By Steve Ross

Spring brings our celebrated carpet of woodland wildflowers. Look down and around in wonder at the incredible beauty and variety of form, color and function of Spring Beauty, May-apple, Trillium and Trout Lily. One could spend countless hours at this pastime, and some do! To this infinitely worthy endeavor we can add another by including a look outward and upward, at the trees and their equally amazing array of flower form and function. From showy favorites like Flowering Dogwood, Tulip Tree and Eastern Redbud to the less conspicuous oaks, we have a wonderful gallery of tree-borne blooms to explore. Here are just a few:

Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* Fabaceae)

Keep an eye out for this member of the Pea family in fence rows, along the edges of forests and in overgrown pastures. You will know it by its short and sharp paired thorns, small pea-like seed pods, furrowed bark and tendency to form thickets. In spring you will be captivated by the beautiful and fragrant flower clusters. We often associate such delicate beauty with frailty. This is not an applicable notion for Black Locust as it is a very hardy tree and can colonize even the most infertile of sites owing to its ability to “fix” nitrogen. A symbiotic (mutually-beneficial) relationship between the Black Locusts’ roots and a soil bacterium allows for the production of nitrogen, a nutrient that promotes vigorous new growth in seedlings of colonizing plants. This ability to enhance soil fertility makes Black Locust a common choice for planting on strip mine reclamations.

Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis* Rubiaceae)

Buttonbush is really more of a shrub than a tree but that doesn’t detract from its beauty as a flowering plant. The small globular seed structures that persist on this shrub no matter the season are, in the spring, covered in tiny white tubular flowers. The tendency for Buttonbush to grow in marshes may explain why many of us have not had ready access to these beautiful blooms. But winged creatures such as butterflies, bees and hummingbirds have no problem finding these flowers and extracting the nectar inside. Nature, never selfish, allows for pollination to occur during this feeding and thus ensures seeds and reproduction.

Pawpaw (*Assimina triloba* Annonaceae)

We can find the fruit, or “Indiana Banana”, of this small tree in the autumn - if we get to it before the wildlife that find it tasty. But long before the small green fleshy delicacies are ripe, we can look for the incredible flower from whence they came. In the spring, the pawpaw unfurls its large tropical looking leaves and displays its incredible crimson flowers. While beautiful to behold with the eyes, these blooms are not easily-appreciated by the nose, as they have a strong rancid odor. So keep a little distance and feast your eyes on the beautiful spring blooms. Leave the eating to the larval stage of the Zebra Swallowtail butterfly, which feed exclusively on pawpaw flower (David L. Wagner, Caterpillars of Eastern North America).

Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana* Hamamelidaceae)

Witch Hazel is arguably one of our most interesting trees and, in large part, this is due to its flowering habit. For those who know their Greek, the scientific name reveals interesting facts.

Hamamelis is a compound of two Greek words meaning “apple” (or fruit) and “at the same time”, because the fruit and the flower appear together on the same plant in the autumn (Marjorie Harris, Botanica North America). How is this possible? While most trees flower in the spring,

Witch Hazel flowers in the fall, and after the previous years’ seed pods eject their seeds. Small, hard, brownish seed pods persist throughout the year. At any time you can find seed pods, either the empty pods from the previous year, the developing pods of the current year, or both. But only in autumn will you find the flowers, and they are well worth the search! Witch Hazel has long twisted petals, sort of like tiny noodles, that are brilliant yellow and distributed among a lopsided crown. Look for the often multiple-stemmed Witch Hazel in the understory of mature forests where soils are moist.

As of this writing the wildflowers of both herbaceous and woody plants are blooming. Go take a hike and enjoy the beauty of these and all the other wonders at your many ACRES preserves!



Top to Bottom: Black Locust, Buttonbush, Paw Paw, Black Locust and Witch-hazel by Tim Kimmel

CARING FOR CHIMNEY SWIFTS



By Shirley Needham, Wildlife Rehabilitator

During my twenty-plus years as a wildlife rehabilitator, I've successfully managed to avoid becoming overly attached to the birds in my care with one notable exception - chimney swifts. These tiny little-known aerial acrobats have captured my heart and I have dedicated each summer to the care of orphaned or injured swifts and spend my winters giving lectures and presentations in order to share this passion with others.

Chimney swifts are much more common in North Carolina, where I lived until 2005. Each summer dozens of swift babies would arrive, brought to me by homeowners after finding them in their fireplaces. Most people don't realize that swifts are living in their chimneys until they hear the babies begging for food or until a nest falls. Each spring these (less than an ounce) cigar-shaped birds return to the eastern half of the United States from their winter home in South America. Swifts do not have the type of legs and feet that allow them to perch but instead use their toes and spiny tail feathers to cling to rough surfaces. Before the removal of North America's vast forests, the swift's home was massive hollow trees. As the westward movement of the population depleted these forests, competition for nesting sites became fierce and swifts adapted by becoming dependent on man-made structures. While in flight, the adult birds break off dead twigs from the top of trees, drop into the chimney and attach twig after twig with saliva, eventually forming a cupped nest. Once hatched, the young are raised on an insect diet and are totally dependent on the parents for food. If the young are removed from their secure home before they can fly, they will rapidly starve to death, as the parents are unable to care for them outside of the chimney.

Days old chimney swifts are very tiny with barely emerging pinfeathers but are able to cling tightly from the moment of hatching. We refer to them as "prehistoric Velcro". While in captivity they must be fed every 20 minutes from sunrise to sunset. During a typical summer, 60 baby swifts may need to be fed. By the time each feeding session was complete, it was time to go back and start over again. To ensure that each swift was fed as they shifted around in their temporary container, we would hang them on our t-shirts forming a black necklace of tiny swifts. By 2 weeks of age, the feeding time could be extended to every 45 minutes until their release at 30 days of age.

Facing new threats, the chimney swift population is steadily declining as older structures, which historically provided nest sites, have been demolished. Many new chimneys are constructed of metal and are too slick for swifts to cling to, or have screens and caps on them. Chimney swifts are solitary nesters (typically only one nest per site per season), so each and every suitable nest site is critical.

The swifts are dependent on homeowners being tolerant of their presence through the brief nesting season. Chimneys should be cleaned prior to their arrival in April or May or after their migration in the fall, and chimney cleaning companies should not be allowed to remove nests and babies. If you have a masonry chimney that you use during the winter, have the chimney cleaned frequently, keep the top open and the damper closed during nesting season.

ACRES hopes to build chimney swift nesting towers at a few of the ACRES preserves. These 12-foot wooden towers have been accepted as alternate nesting sites by chimney swifts. Chimney swifts are remarkable, graceful and beneficial creatures. They have an important place in the world, and we hold their fate in our hands. Please consider joining in the conservation of this delightful species. If you can help with this project, please visit the ACRES web site at: www.acreslandtrust.org.



The Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) is one of the most common species of birds in North America. Both sexes are approximately 12 inches long and similar in appearance. They have slate-gray backs, cream-colored undersides, white feathers in their tails, and black spots behind their eyes and on their wings.

The males are slightly more colorful than the females, with a light-gray head and rosy breast feathers.

Mourning Doves will nest in a variety of habitats both urban and rural but prefer trees at least 8

the stick to her. At this rate, it may take up to one week to complete the nest. Egg laying begins in April/early May and can produce up to five clutches by the time it ends in early September. The female lays two oval, glossy-white eggs that are about an inch long and three-fourths of an inch wide.



Mourning Doves



inches in diameter and over 30 feet tall. This adaptability to diverse locations has contributed to their widespread distribution. One of the most interesting aspects of this otherwise unremarkable bird is the male's courtship display. An unmated male will attempt to gain the favor of an unmated female by leaving its perch with a loud clapping of wings, fly to a height of 100 feet or more, and then spiral down with wings held slightly below its body. Although I have never witnessed this, I can imagine it is very similar to the woodcock's courtship display.

Once mated, the pair will remain monogamous throughout the nesting season. Nest building finds the pair working together. Once a suitable site has been chosen, the male will bring nesting material to the female, one twig at a time. He will stand either on her back or next to her and pass



Both parents take turns at incubation. The male sits on the eggs during the day, the female at night. Their changeover schedule is between 8:30 and 10:30 in the morning and 4:30 and 5:30 in the evening. After about 14 days, the eggs will hatch. The young, or squabs, require constant care from both parents. Both male and female Mourning Doves produce "pigeon's milk", a

substance that is as rich in fat and protein as mammal's milk. Immediately after hatching the squabs insert their beaks into the side of the parent's bill who then regurgitate the "pigeon's milk" into the babies' mouths. After two to three days, the hatchlings' diet will be supplemented with seed. Twelve to fourteen days after hatching, the young Mourning Doves will leave the nest. Many times the female will immediately begin re-nesting.

Mourning Doves by Paul McAfee



By Guest Writer Scott Hill

I usually have trouble appreciating the middle of March. Winter often looks exhausted by then. Color photographs

rear of the wagon, our syrup guide answers questions about the trees: "Do they like being tapped?" Around us, winter-pale Boy Scouts scurry from tree to tree collecting sap from buckets that hang jauntily from the maples' low-slung waists.

come out looking black and white. Nature recognizes my desperation, I think, because it is at this bleak moment that the sap runs, setting the stage for the annual Maple Syrup Days festival at the Maple Wood Nature Center in LaGrange County. This welcome ritual reminds me that, though signs of spring can be hard to find at this time of year, it is happening out there, in the trees.

Part of the charm of this festival is that I do not know how to get there; it is a little north of my natural habitat. I only know that it is in the woods. Family friends Mike and Michelle know the way, though, and they drive a really large truck, so I only need to keep it in sight as we slide past rolling corn fields taking a deep collective breath before their season begins. We pass a sign telling us that we are on the way to a town called "Mongo" and I make a silent pledge to dedicate a few of that morning's pancakes to some of my favorite Indiana place names: Gnav Bone, Needmore, Dog Town.

Our two cars of families arrive at the woods, park along the road, and follow a path up a short rise back to the nature center. There is a line and it looks long. News has spread, apparently. The woman in line next to me holds a shivering dachshund in a blanket. Once inside, I'm again amazed at the efficiency of the operation. Long tables crowd under a wall of windows looking out upon a crowd of maples that look sleepy but are in fact busy on the inside, moving sap on a daily commute from roots to branches. We get our fill of pancakes and sausage in full morning light, surrounded by the cheery expressions of friends and dozens of tiny mounted birds.

After pancakes, we take a tour of the woods powered by a pair of stout draft horses. At the front of the wagon, people ask the driver questions about the horses: "Are they friends? Do they like pulling us?" In the

The last stop is the evaporating room. It is the room for the rock stars of syrup-making. Instead of stage fog, here we have steam. The stars here are the men who watch the sap boil. They add wood to the fire. They stir some. They answer questions too, and when they talk you can detect the fever they have for their work. Even though I am sitting in the fourth row and watching from behind glasses that are fogged over and dripping with steam, it is obvious that I am in the presence of people who appreciate maple syrup even more than I do.

Later, with tired kids piled back into the car and a little bit of spring's first sweetness in our bellies, March looks a little cheerier on the drive back to town.

Scott Hill teaches English at Homestead High School and blogs at monkey-squirrel.blogspot.com.



Wagon Driver by Scott Hill;
Maple Syrup Bucket by Jeff Britton

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