



Fall 2010

BIG OAKS CONSERVATION SOCIETY



Newsletter of Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge & Big Oaks Conservation Society

President's Column

By Jim Leveille

Another fall is underway. BOCS is in its eighth year. We've established ourselves as a valuable and trusted refuge partner of both the US Fish and Wildlife Service and of the Indiana Air National Guard, through our stewardship of Old Timbers Lodge (OTL). Now, each season brings with it pre-ordained activities that we have become accustomed to performing. Outdoor Women, Take-A-Kid Fishing Day, Deer and Turkey Youth Hunts and Lodge Cleanup Days come to mind. The newsletter is another activity where much effort is required. Some, like me, prefer the print version, while others access it on our website. Most importantly, we use it to communicate to our membership and neighbors about our refuge and activities here. When VIPs visit or patrons make donations, we provide them with a copy, showing them that BONWWR and BOCS are vibrant and valuable contributors to our community.

Putting a good newsletter out requires work. Besides the writing efforts of our members and the refuge staff, two other individuals deserve special notice. The first of these is my wife, Sara. Whereas most of us (me included) found studying the intricacies of grammar to be boring and unintelligible, she passionately mastered all of its secrets. She reviews most of the newsletter articles and corrects the many errors she finds. This very column, which I am presently writing in barely legible script with a crayon, will pass, after her review, as a competent piece of prose. The other "Thank You" is to our editor, Lisa Jones, who, these last three years, has assembled all of the various articles and carefully blended them with the inputs of the office staff to assemble a great final product. Lisa will step down from her position with this issue. We have received many great comments on our newsletter and appreciate her hard work. Laura Lake has graciously agreed to assume the editor's mantle, and we look forward to her new ideas and energy.

One of our regular contributors to the newsletter, who is also retiring, is Ken Knouf. Ken is retiring with 34 years of federal service - the last 28 years being at Jefferson Proving Ground (JPG). He was a key mentor to the OTL agreement between BOCS and the IN Air National Guard (INANG). Ken is our resident historian for both JPG and the communities that preceded it. As a key member of the JPG Heritage Partnership, he has fostered the publications of multiple books, pamphlets and DVDs, which preserve the history of those communities lost when JPG was formed. He has been a great friend and contributor to BOCS, and we thank him for all he has done.

I look forward to seeing you all at our October OTL Cleanup and the Christmas Party in December.

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Join the Refuge System on Facebook

The National Wildlife Refuge has launched its own Facebook page, www.facebook.com/usfwsrefuges. More than 300 people signed on to "like" the Refuge System within the first two days. Daily updates will be posted, offering intriguing facts, opportunities to be outdoors, and invitations to share personal experiences on refuges. The Refuge System looks forward to generating lively discussions and broaden awareness of national wildlife refuges by using Facebook as one avenue for communications, especially as people share the page with friends. You can also follow the Refuge System on Twitter @USFWSRefuges. All Refuge System social media links may also be found on the Refuge System's Web homepage at www.fws.gov/refuges.

Annual Membership Dues/Signup for 3rd Annual Old Timbers Lodge Christmas Party on Dec 10th

The BOCS membership year starts in October. So, if you haven't paid this year's dues, now is the time to pony up. See membership/Christmas Party form on page 11. BOCS members interested in attending the 3rd annual Old Timbers Lodge Christmas Party must be current on their membership to buy a \$12.00 per person ticket to the event. Only BOCS members and their spouses are eligible for tickets. Family memberships only apply to dependent children living at home. If you have friends or relatives who wish to attend, they must join BOCS to do so. Again, we will have refreshments. No one will leave the event hungry or unsatisfied. The \$12.00 ticket will pay for food, Lodge heating and beverages. A ticket will be sent to those who have paid their dues and ticket fee and sent in the names of those wanting to attend. We will need the names for our gate entry volunteers. **If you do not have a ticket, you cannot pay or enter at the gate.** Last year, we hosted 140 people at this party. We will keep this year's party at or below that same level. Invited guests at this event will include the FWS and INANG range personnel with whom we partner at BONWR. Everyone else must be a BOCS member and have a ticket. Don't miss out on this opportunity to attend a great holiday evening at the Lodge. The party will be Friday evening, Dec 10th at 6:00PM. It will start with a 5:30PM entry time at Gate 6. Gate 1 will NOT be open! To get to Gate 6: take US 421 N from Madison, turn left (west) onto 900 South for one mile, dead-ending at Gate 6, which is in Ripley County. **Remember: Gate 6 will be open only to current BOCS members who have a ticket.** Tickets will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis. Lifetime members of BOCS need only send in their ticket fee. If you have questions concerning the Christmas Party at OTL, contact party chairman Gary Stegner at (812) 667-6433 or garyandsally@hotmail.com.

If you would like to join, or rejoin, the Big Oaks Conservation Society, please fill out the membership form on page 11 and send along with your check to:

Big Oaks Conservation Society
P.O. Box 935
Madison, IN 47250



2009 Old Timbers Lodge Christmas Party

From Left: Carole Poffinbarger, Ashley Buchanan, Karl Poffinbarger, and Wilma Hughes.

ULSTER PROJECT Teens Visit Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge

On July 13, 2010, 16 teenagers, 8 each from Ireland and the United States visited Big Oaks NWR. They were escorted by their adult leaders to learn about our wildlife refuge, the history of the Jefferson Proving Ground (JPG), and to do a work project for Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS). The standard briefing for all visitors was given by Joe Robb, Refuge Manager. This was followed by a presentation by Andrew Hoffman, about amphibians and snakes. The kids showed great interest and handled the snakes without fear.

Following the presentation, they traveled to the new Indiana ANG range tower, where they were briefed by Lt Col Matt Sweeney and CMSgt Todd Bass on the mission and operation of Jefferson Range. While there, they observed an F-16 flyby. Following the range visit, they visited Old Timbers Lodge (OTL) for lunch and a work detail, clearing stones from the new waterline route. The kids had a good time and were thankful for the day's visit.

A big thank you goes out to Dr. Joe Robb and Lt Col Matt Sweeney and their staffs for hosting the group and to the Ulster Project kids for their work at the Lodge.

2010 OWBO Event Draws Large Crowd

By Dianna Swinney

The normally serene interior of Old Timbers Lodge was uncharacteristically buzzing with anticipation, as a record 76 registrants signed in for the 6th annual OWBO event on Saturday, June 5th. Nice weather served as the added touch to the many months and hours of preparation required to make this activity the continued success for which it has become known. All the hard work and attention to details made for a good outcome.

Excitement was in the air as the registrants began to arrive, sign in, enjoy the continental breakfast and mingle around the grounds of the Lodge. It is always fun to watch the participants search through their goody bags for treats! Most of the items were donations from our many generous sponsors. The actual goody bag for this year was an insulated cooler bag from Honda Manufacturing Indiana! The raffle was yet again a tremendous success with over \$1,100 in ticket revenue generated. We must continue to thank and support those businesses and individuals who give so generously to the raffle each and every year.

The Planning Committee gave much time and attention to planning the classes we offered. The participant evaluation forms, completed at the end of each event, provided valuable information for next year's planning. We strive to provide a few new classes each year and to expand those classes that seemed popular and well received. The 2010 post-event evaluations indicated that the classes and instructors were again well received and highly rated. The instructors are all volunteers, and they come very well prepared to make the classroom experience meaningful for each participant. It takes much patience and dedication, and OWBO instructors truly make a difference in the life experiences our guests take home with them.

There always seems to be a new experience at each event, and this year that experience was a visit by Troy McCormick of Indiana Outdoor Adventures. He conducted video interviews with volunteers and filmed different classroom activities. The video was posted on his website for viewing and serves as yet another means to get the word out about the great opportunities that happen at Big Oaks!



▲ Indiana Conservaton Officer, Andy Crozier providing archery instructions at 2010 OWBO.

◀ Assistant Property Manager of Crosley Fish and Wildlife Area, Steve Mund, assists a novice skeet shooter at 2010 OWBO

BOCS Hosts Eighth Annual Take-A-Kid Fishing Day

by Jim Leveille

On July 17, 2010, Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge hosted its eighth annual Take-A-Kid Fishing Day at Old Timbers Lake. The 167-acre lake provided plenty of action for the youth and their families on a perfect weather day. The event, originally planned for early June, had to be rescheduled when violent thunderstorms caused a power outage at the refuge. The later date did not hurt the fishing, as many good-sized bluegills, red-ear and largemouth bass were reeled in.

The refuge event was co-sponsored by the Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS), which prepared free meals and organized the event, and by RKO Enterprises of Madison, whose generous donation paid for fishing prizes for the kids. Other sponsors included Madison's Wal-Mart and DMF Bait Company, who donated food and bait for the event. Volunteers from BOCS helped with set up, bait distribution, cooking and clean up. Every participant received a free fishing supply kit. The day ended with a casting contest and a random drawing for door prizes. This year's prizes included numerous fishing poles, tackle boxes, and other various fishing equipment. And thanks to our generous sponsors, every child who attended received a prize and all the hot dogs, chips and snack cakes he/she could eat.

For the past eight years, Take-A-Kid Fishing Day has proven to be a very popular way to introduce kids to fishing and families to Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge. The annual event encourages families to visit the refuge lake and provides an opportunity to fish at no charge. Volunteers assist inexperienced anglers, and the refuge provides loaner rods and reels, as well as bait for free.



Photo: Cassie & Austin Rudolph, from Lexington, KY.

BOCS would like to thank the Jefferson County Public Library for allowing the group to conduct meetings and presentations throughout the year. BOCS monthly meetings will be held at the Library the first Monday of each month at 6:30pm.

Volunteer Appreciation Day

By Ashley Buchanan



Big Oaks NWR staff held the annual Volunteer Appreciation Day on September 18, 2010 at the historic Old Timbers Lodge. There were nearly 80 attendees including volunteers, guests and staff. The Red Pepper catered a fabulous afternoon meal and The Chestnuts provided festive music. Fishermen enjoyed early morning and late evening fishing on Old Timbers Lake.

Refuge staff recognized five *Outstanding Volunteers* for 2009 and 2010: Dianna Swinney, Jean Herron, Jack Smitha, Bill Hughes, and George Terlinden. Dianna Swinney and Jean Herron received awards for their dedicated work on the annual *Outdoor Women at Big Oaks* (OWBO) event. These hard-working ladies have done exceptional work coordinating this women's event, as well as contributed their time on many other refuge projects. Dianna Swinney was an OWBO participant for several years before taking on the duties of OWBO Event Coordinator in 2009 and has spent countless hours contributing to the success of this event. Jean Herron has been the Co-Coordinator of OWBO for several years, and has been instrumental in planning, raffle, event registration, and many other tasks.



From Left: Jean Herron, Ashley Buchanan, and Diana Swinney



From Left: Bill Hughes and Ashley Buchanan

Jack Smitha and Bill Hughes received awards for *Refuge Support*. Jack and Bill assist the refuge through a variety of projects including boundary posting, trail camera studies, maintenance projects, working gates during hunts, helping with youth hunting and fishing events, OWBO, public outreach, and much more.

George Terlinden received the award for *Biology*. George has assisted the refuge with numerous biological projects as well as refuge support projects including Northern Saw-Whet Owl banding, breeding bird surveys, bird and butterfly counts, Northern crawfish frog surveys, field work for fire-related research, working gates during hunts, helping with youth hunting events and OWBO, and grant writing.



From Left: George Terlinden, Ashley Buchanan, and Jack Smitha

On the Oil Spill and Purposeful Data Collection

By Perry Williams

It is very likely that this article about my BP Oil Spill response will be different than the others, of which I have not yet read. Let me first provide a brief summary of the data which I contributed to the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) investigation that is continuing in the Gulf; I collected 22 dead, oiled birds (13 Laughing Gulls, 3 Royal Terns, 2 Brown Pelicans, 2 Sandwich Terns, 1 Double-Crested Cormorant, and 1 Least Tern), saw 26 oiled birds that I could not capture (9 Royal Terns, 8 Brown Pelicans, 4 Laughing Gulls, 3 Sandwich Terns, 1 Magnificent Frigatebird, and 1 Snowy Egret), and captured 8 living birds that were oiled and needed rescue (4 Laughing Gulls, 2 Brown Pelicans, 1 Royal Tern, and 1 American White Pelican). In addition, I captured and released a black-tip shark on a fisherman's errant "jug-line"

The reason I suspect this article is likely to be different than the others, is because most of the novel experience I gained resulted from the extraneous observations I made that were largely unrelated to my official capacities as a biologist. The personnel turn-over on national-level incidences such as the Gulf oil spill, and large-scale fires is rapid. Generally, resources (people) serve 14-day periods, and then are replaced by the next resource. Therefore, by the time you learn how to do your job, it is time to go home. However, because of the uniqueness of this opportunity, I elected to serve for a 30-day detail and therefore was there longer than most. Thus, I got to see how the dynamics changed through time as personnel changed. During the 30-day period, I worked for 7 different supervisors (albeit 2 were for only 1 day); each had a different idea of how a crew should be run. All of these supervisors were good, just different. Needless to say (but I choose to anyway), I saw the dynamics of our unit, and the duties we conducted, shift every few days. For example, one supervisor emphasized the importance of diligence while surveying birds, another stressed sacrificing the quality of data in order to stay away from breeding colonies, and another, not knowing anything about birds or data collection, chose to emphasize safety.

In all that I saw, what I feel was the most valuable lesson was: understanding the importance of collecting data for a purpose, and not just collecting data because it is what has always been done. This of course, is not a new phenomenon. Throughout the Refuge System, there are hundreds of metal cabinets of files that contain data that have been collected, not because it was needed for some practical management purpose, but because nobody ever asked why they spent every spring counting deer or ducks or whatever the critter happened to be; they just did it because it is what had always been done. Working in a system with a high degree of rapid turn-over such as in the Gulf, I was able to see how some of these superfluous, inefficient data-collection procedures started, and continued to persist. Their inception generally went like this: 1. someone had an idea that seemed appropriate at the time. This may have been along the lines of counting every single bird seen so they could estimate not only the number of oiled birds, but the proportion of oiled birds relative to un-oiled birds. 2. There is consensus within the group and then the supervisor (without contacting officials responsible for the integrity and efficiency of the data collection protocol) decided it was a good idea and implements the new monitoring techniques. Thus, biologist begin to count every bird they see so they can estimate the proportion of oiled birds relative to all birds, an incessantly time-consuming task, especially considering NRDA has a team of biologists doing precisely this, in a much more structured, efficient design. 3. The supervisor and the person responsible for the idea go home. 4. The new protocol continues to be implemented for an extended period of time until someone finally asks "why?" Let me assure you, this is seldom. But when an individual finally asks "why," it has also been my experience that most everyone else do not care why, but are always willing to do more (most times useless) work in the off-chance that perhaps the data might be needed later, which of course it never is. The expression "I don't think we'll need it, but in case we do, we'll have it" is paradigmatic, and results in sizable inefficiencies in data collection and staff time.

It is not the observation of this phenomenon in the Gulf alone that made this important to me, but the understanding that this same procedure is what happens at National Wildlife Refuges across the country, only at a much larger time scale. It follows the same procedure: 1. a biologist or a manager has an idea in which they are interested at the time, but (to be fitting for this argument) is ultimately unimportant. 2. They find support and implement their idea by spending resources collecting data. 3. The biologist or manager takes a job at a different refuge. 4. The former refuge continues collecting data without remembering exactly why they do so. For me, it took seeing this process occurring in an accelerated environment such as the Gulf to understand why so much effort goes into collecting data that ultimately has no purpose. In a recent publication by Lyons et al. (2008), featured in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, the authors stated that data should be collected for one of three distinct reasons: (1) for making state-dependent decisions, (2) for evaluating the effectiveness of management actions, and (3) to provide a feedback loop for learning about the system. In the case of the oil spill, data was gathered mainly for reason number one, making state-dependent decisions (we need to know the state [degree of oil] of the system [the Gulf] so we know how much to charge BP for compensation). However, because of the influence of many different people cycling through, the data collecting process became cumbersome and inefficient and much of it was not used for any of these three appropriate data collection purposes. I believe that this has happened at many Refuges throughout the country, and now I see how this happens.

I think the fundamental lesson that was reinforced was the importance of asking "why" when collecting data and doing field surveys. Because if you don't, you may be doing the leg work for someone's crazy-eyed (or other anatomical part) idea, and the resulting information (your hard work) may sit in a file cabinet for over 30 years, after which, during a random spring cleaning, is tossed in the garbage (recycling).

Oil Spill Assignment

By Mardean Roach

I was recently deployed to the MS Canyon 252 Oil Spill Response as a personnel time recorder. I worked at the Houma Check In office in Houma, Louisiana for three weeks. I was unsure of what to expect when I left Madison, but by the second day of my detail I found out just what I was in for. I was headed for a long detail with great people and a job that the word multi-tasking doesn't even begin to explain. I was responsible for maintaining all time records for 504 responders from multiple locations. On a daily basis I would receive crew time reports from ten off site locations and enter their work times into a database. Also during the day I was responsible to demobilize responders at my office and also remotely at three off site locations. My work days were long as I started at 6:30am and did not leave the office until 10:30pm or later.

While I was on assignment I was able to visit the BP Incident Command Center. The center was under tight control with security guards and even an alligator in the pond beside the front guard shack. I don't think the alligator was part of their security, but he was nearby at most times. The center was unlike anything I had seen before and their command room reminded me of only things that I have seen in movies. I was able to take two working mini trips to different off site locations. I viewed the swamp areas in Cocadrie, LA and viewed islands that had nesting colonies of pelicans off of Grand Isle, LA. Both trips were impressive and I learned a lot about the gulf. One of the boat owners even treated my group to a crab boil upon our return to the marina from our Grand Isle tour.

I had a great detail! I loved all of the challenges that my position brought forth and the new experiences of exploring the gulf. I was able to meet a lot of great folks. I was surprised at how many people were there that I knew and the individuals that worked with others that I had worked with in the past. After this detail I can definitely see that USFWS feels like a family and I am so glad to be a part of it!

Detailing the Lodge

By Carole Poffinbarger

My Grandparents, Hallie and Charlie Miller, were the care takers at Old Timber's Lodge when the Thomson's owned it. I always heard stories about the hard work it was to take care of the Lodge, but there were many great times shared. One of my favorite memories of my grandmother, when talking about Old Timbers, was her smile and laughter as she recalled, "We would work all day and then dance at night" & "I don't even think I stopped to wash my face."

There's been a lot of fun and hard work going on at Old Timbers Lodge this summer. Besides the big cleanup events in May and October, this summer, several smaller scale weekends have included detailed cleaning in the dining room, kitchen and bathroom, along with doors and hinges being repaired, scraped, and painted. We were without power in July due to a lightning strike, though we survived with a generator that Bill Hughes graciously supplied. At least we were able to keep the refrigerator and fans running. It was like we were taken back in history to a time when there was just a generator providing electric to the Lodge.

While sweeping, mopping or waxing the floors, and other jobs, I felt so appreciative of all the work my grandparents did to keep Old Timbers looking good. Today, we have a lot of conveniences that make cleaning and doing other chores easier. We have an electric buffer to use on floors after they have been waxed. Grandma said she would have to wax those floors on her hands and knees. She took great pride in those beautiful wood floors. I think she would be proud knowing we have worked to help restore the luster to the wood floors once again.

With the first clean-up weekend, I felt like I got to walk in my grandmother's shoes - sweeping the dust up and mopping the floors, and God forbid anyone walking on those clean floors! It was a great feeling walking in her shoes. I walked away thinking, not only do I have a connection and a story to this wonderful Lodge, but so does everyone else helping out.

One of the best parts of the work weekend is seeing all the connections that others have to the Lodge. It's those connections that build our community. Whether we are from Ohio or down the road from the Lodge, we all have some connection, and that connection turns into a wonderful friendship. It seems like we are getting back to the community that the Thomson's once shared with the Lodge, and we at BOCS are a community that cares about the land and the Lodge.

Aerial Spray Project at Big Oaks NWR - Part 3

By Brian Winters



Big Oaks NWR continued its battle against succession in the grasslands this year with another round of aerial herbicide spraying. Funding allowed us to increase our accomplished acreage from 300 acres in 2009 to approximately 1,000 acres this year. This is the third time in the last four years we have received funding for this project. Grasslands here at Big Oaks NWR are managed for grassland nesting birds such as Henslow's sparrows and Meadowlarks. We also manage the grasslands at Big Oaks NWR for wintering birds and other species of wildlife that use grasslands. Keeping woody vegetation out of the grasslands is one of our main habitat goals. We are attempting to manage our grasslands with prescribed fire and aerial herbicide application whenever funding is approved. The spray area was located south of E Road along both sides of Cottrell Road and Wonju Road. Invasive woody plants such as black locust, sweetgum, red maple and autumn olive were targeted. Small forested areas were also targeted this year to connect fragmented grasslands.



This year the project took three days starting on September 20th and ending on September 22nd. Crop Production Services were awarded the bid again this year and did a great job as usual. Big Oaks staff supplied 15,000 gallons of water for the project this year using two fire engines to shuttle water to a make shift supply truck that hauled 2,500 gallons. Fire pumps, hoses and water handling equipment were utilized for the operation. Water supply and delivery were fast and furious this year. The helicopter had to land and refill its' herbicide tanks over 150 times to complete the project. Volunteer and seasonal firefighter, Hillary Williams, donated her time during the entire project. Her help was much appreciated.



Rick Schultz , the new Midwest Region Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and Jim Leveille, BOCS President enjoy a fish fry that was held at OTL to welcome Mr. Shultz to Big Oaks NWR.



BOCS volunteers Bill Hughes and Campbell Higbie getting a tour of the new IN Air National Guard facility and being shown sample training munitions by MSgt Danny Thomas.

Old Timbers Iron



Gary Johnson & John Cummins (standing) replacing missing hardware with ones they recreated.

In 1982, Gary Johnson of Elrod Indiana, became a hobbyist blacksmith under the tutelage of John Cummins of Moores Hill. John & Gary have honed their blacksmithing skills over these decades by designing and fabricating utensils, fire sets, strikers and other black iron accoutrements that went hand in hand with their interest in pre-1840's camping. As members of the Indiana Blacksmith Association and Rural Smiths of America, they have a keen eye and appreciation for historical detail. In the fall of 2009, Gary had a chance to return to Old Timbers Lodge (OTL), where he and his wife, Diana, had visited as children. Gary photographed the Lodge, with a particular eye on the hand-wrought iron hardware. He shared his photos with John. Both were impressed with the craftsmanship and variety of the work. John pointed out that several pieces were missing and suggested the two should offer to recreate the missing hardware. They also shared the photos with the blacksmith (Jeff Farmer) of Berea College in Kentucky, where the hardware was originally forged.

Using the outline of missing hardware left on the oak doors as patterns, Gary and John set out to recreate the missing ornate hinges. Assuming that the original hinges were made out of flat stock, shaped by sawing and chiseling the outline, they did the same with a plasma cutter. Various punches and shaped chisels were made to mimic the marks of the originals out of tool steel. A coal forge, power hammer, followed by an anvil and swage block, were used to form the final shapes of the chisels and punches. The tools were then heated and quenched for hardness, then tempered to prevent breakage. The hinges were then heated in the forge and adorned, using these handmade tools.

With that complete, John and Gary are now moving on to the missing thumb latches and other pieces of missing hardware. Through tracings, measurements and extrapolation of the information available, they are remaining true to the original designs.

Gary also recently made a presentation on OTL at a forum hosted by SHP Leading Design (a 100 year old Architectural firm in Hamilton) at Miami University in Hamilton, Ohio. Hamilton was the home place of Champion Paper CEO and OTL owner, Alexander Thomson. The Thomsons completed the Lodge in 1932 and used it extensively as a summer home and weekend retreat until the Army's establishment of Jefferson Proving Grounds in late 1940. With the Big Oaks Conservation Society now serving as stewards of OTL, the society is extremely fortunate to have among its ranks skilled artisans, such as John and Gary, who are willing to do the work required to return the Lodge to its original form.



Replacements for missing hardware at Old Timbers Lodge

JPG Heritage Partnership Offers New Book

BOCS' members, especially those with connections to Ripley County, may want to purchase a copy of "Ripley County in WWII," assorted newspaper clipping articles dealing with Jefferson Proving Ground and Ripley County's involvement in WWII. The JPGHP took original clippings donated by Evelyn Comer, from Holton, and organized them into a very interesting chronology of events that transpired from 1941 until 1944. The book sells for \$12.00 and is available from the Historic Hoosier Hills office in Versailles or the Army office in Building 125.

Park Ranger's Corner

By Beth Black

Big Oaks Invaded..... By Butterflies!

What a year for butterflies! This year the refuge yielded its highest number of individual butterflies spotted during the annual butterfly survey. The total number of colorful fliers spotted this year was 4708. That number shattered the previous record, which was 2619, set in 2007. In addition to the record for the most number of individual butterflies, the record was broken for the most number of species. That total was 51. A new species to the Big Oaks survey was spotted by Beth Carey, a dedicated butterfly counter who has joined us on our count for several years. Beth spotted *and* she was able to photograph, a Goatweed Leafwing. The adults of this species are known to fly northward in search of food plants upon which they will lay their eggs. The food plant that they are in search of is croton, which comes in several forms including hogwort and prairie tea. Adult Leafwings are mimics, when their wings are folded; they resemble dead leaves, a perfect strategy for tricking hungry birds that may be in search of a meal on the wing.

So what made this year such a great year for butterflies? Could last summer's cool temperatures and persistent rain have played a part? Was it the extra snow that came in February and March? Or was it our dry hot summer of 2010? No doubt all of these factors played a role. Why specifically this year is not yet known. Whatever the reason, it sure made for a colorful summer.

Spotting butterflies was not at all a difficult task. Areas on the refuge where food plants such as butterfly weed and bull thistle (a weedy invasive) grow, were teeming (positively undulating) with the colorful gems. Add to that the multitudes of butterflies feeding at mud puddles and on coyote droppings and any attempt to miss them with your vehicle was futile. In fact, "During an average week in summer there are probably more butterflies killed by cars on American roads than the total collected by all the collectors in history", says Jim Brock and Kenn Kaufman, authors of *Field Guide to Butterflies of North America*.

Apart from being beautiful to look at, butterflies do help pollinate plants. They are not considered the most efficient pollinators, due to the fact that they have a limited sense of smell and large bodies, which makes it difficult for them to get inside flowers. They do have good eyesight and they look for brightly colored flowers. Those brightly colored flowers, with plenty of nectar, are the beneficiaries of the pollination that occurs when they feed.

Watching butterflies and learning to identify them is positively addictive. The first time I participated in the butterfly survey was as a volunteer in 2004. The rest of that summer I was hooked on learning my butterflies. I remember spotting an American snout at my house, and running inside to grab the field guide to confirm my sighting. Then as the summer progressed, more species of butterflies materialized and then the monarch migration began and I spent countless hours observing monarchs on just a small leg of their long commute to central Mexico. If you are a bird watcher or simply interested in the various and beautiful forms of life found in the natural world, then I highly recommend butterfly watching. Watching and observing a butterfly is a great way to enhance your skills in the field. They are so gorgeous and easy to spot once you start looking.

This year they were indeed everywhere!



Tiger Swallowtail
Photo Courtesy of Rachel Kappler

RECOGNIZING THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

by Ken Knouf

I recently attended the 70th reunion of the Marble Corner Association, which first met in 1941 and has never missed an annual get together. While the numbers of attendees have diminished, there remains a small hardcore group that shares vivid memories of the early days before the Army took over in December 1940. Although less than 200 people lived in Marble Corner, it is considered the largest community to disappear when Jefferson Proving Ground (JPG) was established. There were stories of childhood memories - being picked up by the “hack” to go to school, politicking at the Custer store, or skinny dipping at Wilson’s Dam on Big Creek. Members also chuckled over a story that involved pre-JPG resident, Charlie Jones, transporting 30 school kids in the back of an open truck protected only by cattle rails to the Cincinnati Zoo. Can you imagine?

I have always been struck by the ability of folks who grew up on the refuge in the 1920’s and 30’s to remember landscape features that remind them of precisely where their neighbors lived or the location where something significant happened in their lives. It’s always a treat seeing their eyes light up when we pass a particular stream or foundation, and a long tucked away memory erupts into a great story. BOCS member, Norma Lou Irwin, can show you the rock ledge on Little Graham Creek along the Benville Road (J Road) where she was bitten by a “moccasin” snake when she was a little girl. She realizes that it most likely was an aggressive water snake, but moccasin makes for a better story.

Next time you are on the refuge, recognize those landscape features that help to tell the whole story of the refuge. That single white pine planted to provide needed shade now surrounded by native hardwoods, that charred locust fence post still standing after 70 years and numerous fires, a patch of spring daffodils marking a home site, an isolated chimney or foundation—they all reflect a different time and a significant part of the fabric of the refuge.

Within a relatively short time, there will no longer be anyone who can share these early memories with us, but there will be interesting features. Isn’t it our job as ambassadors of Big Oaks to learn the significance of these features and pass the information on to current and future visitors, so they too can gain an understanding of what makes Big Oaks truly special?

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Would you like to become a Big Oaks Volunteer? Opportunities are plentiful to assist refuge staff in their management of the sprawling 50,000-acre refuge. There are a variety of positions available.

Those who enjoy fieldwork and the outdoors are needed to lead wildlife and educational tours at the refuge. Individuals or community-minded groups are also needed for bi-annual litter pick-ups along the refuge roadsides. Both of these tasks permit volunteers the opportunity to access Big Oaks at no cost and to see areas of the refuge not commonly viewed by typical visitors. If indoor tasks are more your cup of tea, then consider the refuge’s need for speakers who can visit schools and civic groups to speak about Big Oaks. Those interested in becoming ambassadors for Big Oaks would receive instruction and training in the history and on-going projects associated with the refuge. For individuals who don’t care to wander Big Oaks vast spaces, or are intimidated at the prospect of speaking to strangers, then the friendly U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff could always use help in their office. This could involve checking in visitors, answering phones, or aiding in the refuge’s safety-briefing program. The opportunity to become involved is open to all.

VISITOR INFORMATION

All visitors must annually view a safety video and sign an acknowledgment of danger form. This will give you access to the areas designated for public use. There is a daily access fee, or users may purchase an annual pass. The day use area covers 4,170 acres. An additional 22,500 acres is open to the public for special hunts and guided tours. The public may access the refuge from mid-April to the end of November every Monday and Friday, and the second and fourth Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

BIG OAKS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Mission Statement: *To support the goals of wildlife conservation and habitat restoration at Big Oaks NWR; develop environmental education programs; enhance public awareness; encourage use and appreciation for the natural and cultural assets unique to Big Oaks.*

Big Oaks Conservation Society

P.O. Box 935
Madison, IN 47250

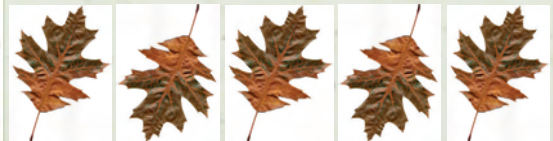


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**BIG OAKS
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
2010 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

January	River Otters Slide In The Snow
February	Great Horned Owls Nest
March	Prescribed Burning
April	Migrating Birds, Wildflowers, Fishing Begins! 17th Youth Turkey Hunt Workshop 18th Youth Hunt
May	15th Old Timbers Lodge Cleanup!
June	5th Outdoor Women at Big Oaks 19th Take a Kid Fishing Day
July	17th Butterfly Survey
August	14th Squirrel Season Starts
September	Migration Begins!
October	Deer Archery Season, Winterize Lodge
November	Youth Deer Hunt, Deer Shotgun Season
December	Christmas Bird Count



**Big Oaks
Conservation Society
P.O. Box 935
Madison, IN 47250**

Board Members

Jim Leveille - President
Gary Stegner - Vice President
Dianna Swinney - Secretary &
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www.bigoaks.org