

BIG OAKS

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

Spring 2005

Refuge Manager's Comments

Joe Robb

I want to congratulate Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS) for an exciting schedule of events for the upcoming spring and summer. The last several monthly meetings have been especially productive and enjoyable; perhaps it was the fine food at the Big Oaks Café (where the meetings were held in January thru March), or the sense of community that the group provides. I encourage all of you to join us for the next meeting (held at 6:00 p.m. on the 1st Monday of each month). Check with a BOCS member or the refuge office for details of the next meeting.

Our Youth Turkey Hunt is soon approaching; we are working with Indiana Department of Natural Resources to finalize the dates. Youth can apply by sending us a self-addressed post card by April 8.

We are again hosting (in partnership with BOCS and Wal-Mart) "Take a Kid Fishing Day" on June 18. This event has grown during the last 2 years and we expect further growth in the activities this year. There is something magical and timeless when you take a child fishing, especially if they have never caught a fish before. Please join us and tell others about these events.

A new event is taking place thanks to the hard work of BOCS members. A "Women in the Outdoors" event will be held on the refuge on June 11 and will offer many exciting activities to women who want to sharpen their outdoor skills in a fun, non-threatening, supportive setting. Activities will range from gun safety, canoeing, backpacking, orienteering, bird watching, fly-fishing, and hunting. Refuge staff and other experienced instructors will participate in the event, which is also sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Indiana Air National Guard at Jefferson Range. More details will be available soon on the Big Oaks NWR website.
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/big Oaks>

The refuge staff is busy finalizing plans for habitat management activities scheduled for this spring and

summer. Our prescribed burn plans and activities strive to provide productive habitats for rare species and game species on the refuge; both Henslow's sparrows and bobwhite benefit from productive native grasslands that are found here. We are also looking at other management tools (mechanical and herbicide) that would ensure the persistence of healthy grasslands. Bison and other herbivores would have provided similar assistance here before settlement, perhaps that option will be available in the future, but in the meantime, we need to use the tools in hand.

We appreciate all the support the community has given us here at the refuge. We hope to continue to offer fun wildlife-oriented activities for individuals and families. With the help of Big Oaks Conservation Society, I am sure that will continue.

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BIG OAKS NOTES

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By Jason Lewis

Christmas Bird Count

The 105th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count (CBC) proved to be an overwhelming success at Big Oaks. Good volunteer turnout and several rare and unusual species contributed to this success. There were 16 CBC volunteers and refuge staff that weathered the mild, windy conditions on December 18th, 2004 to



canvass the refuge to count birds. Golden eagle, bald eagle, Lincoln's sparrow, rusty blackbird, and a

merlin were just a few of the noteworthy species identified. The eagle species and merlin were firsts for the Big Oaks CBC. There were 66 species totaling 4,409 individual birds counted. A special thanks to everyone who helped and I look forward to seeing you at the 106th CBC.

International Migratory Bird Day in May

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is scheduled for May 14th. The refuge will be conducting an Audubon May Day Bird Count on the 14th in support of IMBD. May Day counts are used to monitor migration patterns and population levels of migratory birds. Count data are compiled for each Indiana County. Volunteers will be needed to support refuge staff. Also, the refuge will be recruiting volunteers to assist refuge staff at the Cincinnati Zoo's IMBD event May 3rd – 5th. However, the refuge will set up only one day of the three-day event. There will be approximately 6,000 K-12th graders attending the zoo's International Migratory Bird Days. If you are interested in volunteering for the count or Cincinnati Zoo IMBD please contact the refuge office.



Turkey Hunting

For you wild turkey hunters, it's that time of year again. The 2005 Big Oaks spring turkey season is right around the corner. Anyone interested in applying for the spring hunts should complete the "Wild Turkey Hunt Application" found in the 2004 – 2005 Indiana Hunting and Trapping Guide. The deadline for the hunt application is March 15th. If you miss the deadline, there will be "no-show" drawings at 6:00 a.m.



each morning of the hunts to fill empty hunting spots. A great nesting season in 2004 should provide hunters ample opportunities. Big Oaks will not be offering a Fall Turkey Hunt in 2005. For more information about refuge hunts contact the refuge office.

Youth Turkey Hunt

For the young jakes and hens interested in the Big Oaks 2005 Youth Turkey Hunt, the refuge is accepting hunt applications. Please send a postcard with the name, address and phone number to: Big Oaks NWR, 1661 W JPG Niblo Rd, Madison, IN 47250. Youth 17 years and younger are eligible for the hunt. The deadline for the application is April 8th. A drawing will be held the week of April 11th and hunters will be notified by mail. The date of the youth hunt has not been established pending a review of dates by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. For information contact the refuge office.



Deer Hunt Synopsis

The 2004 deer season at Big Oaks attracted nearly 4,000 hunters, and success remained constant from the year before at 13%. The archery season harvest brought in 66 deer, including 15 bucks. Of 443 deer taken during the gun season, 218 were bucks and 184 were does. Buck and doe harvests were approximately equal, but due to button buck harvests, only 44% of the deer taken were does. The points on harvested bucks were the highest since 1995 at an average of 7.2 this season. In addition, lost hunters kept refuge staff busy. There were a record number of five search and rescues implemented, with two requiring the assistance of state and local law enforcement agencies. All hunters were found unharmed, but tired. Interestingly enough, a majority of the search and rescues could have been avoided if the hunters had possessed two simple items: compass and flashlight. A special thanks to all the volunteers and BOCS for making the 2004 deer hunt a success. The refuge could not have done it with out you.



UNCOMMON WINTER SIGHTINGS AT BIG OAKS

Dan Matiatos

The Big Oaks refuge contains one of the largest and most diverse blocks of forested and grassland wildlife habitat in the region. Consequently, many rare and uncommon species are attracted to the refuge where they find food, shelter, and sanctuary that isn't available on surrounding agricultural lands. A number of unusual species have been observed on the refuge over the last few months. A few of these infrequent visitors are highlighted below.

The first recorded sighting of a northern shrike on the refuge was an exciting experience for a number of staff and volunteers. The northern shrike nests along edges of the coniferous forests and brush country of the far north from Alaska across northern Canada. It winters from northern California and Arizona through the Great Plains east to New Jersey. It is uncommon in southern Indiana during the winter months. The northern shrike is often seen sitting patiently in the top of a tree waiting for unsuspecting prey such as insects, mice, and small birds. It has the unique habit of impaling prey it doesn't immediately eat on a thorn, or wedging it in a forked twig. On lean days it feeds on these stored items.

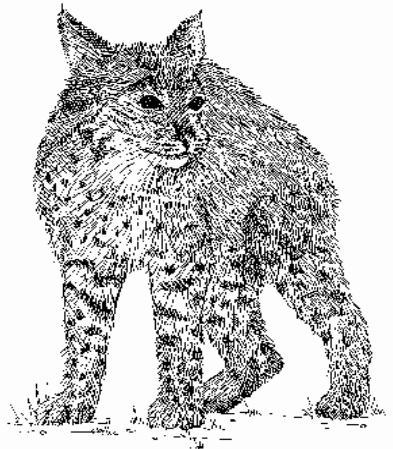
The merlin, observed during this year's Christmas Bird Count, is the first of two raptor species included in the list. The merlin is a member of the falcon family and was formerly called the pigeon hawk. It is a small raptor that sometimes looks like a pigeon in flight. It is not particularly common anywhere. It breeds in Canada, Alaska, and parts of the western United States, and is found in Indiana during migration. Small birds, often ambushed by merlins when they are vulnerable feeding, comprise 80 percent of its diet. They soar low to the ground, plucking prey out of the air with their talons, and have been observed catching two birds at one time! Like the northern shrike, the merlin will cache food for later consumption. During migration merlins prefer open habitats and can be found in open fields, grasslands, marshlands, and lakeshores. They also love to harass larger birds including other raptors.

One of the more charismatic species recently observed by staff and volunteers is the golden eagle. The golden eagle, more commonly associated with the western plains and canyon country, probably bred historically in low numbers in the eastern U.S. including Indiana. Today, it is occasionally seen in Indiana during migration and winter months often associated with major river systems. They are often confused with the only other eagle native to North America, the bald eagle, which is more common in Indiana. Both young bald eagles and golden eagles have an overall dark brown plumage. Seen in flight, young



bald eagles have some white scattered throughout their body. Young golden eagles usually have a distinct white patch under each wing and a white band at the base of the tail, and adult golden eagles have a complete dark plumage. If you're lucky enough to get a close view of a golden eagle you may see the golden colored feathers on its head and nape of its neck. They primarily feed on rabbits and waterfowl on the refuge and they may be attracted to carrion available as a result of the refuge deer hunt.

Staff and volunteers have been busy placing infrared cameras again last fall and this winter to capture a photograph of one of the refuges more elusive species, the bobcat. Although, we haven't caught a bobcat on camera yet, two lucky staff members recently glimpsed this secretive cat. One bobcat was spotted at night along the east perimeter road north of J Road, and another was spotted in daylight along C Road in the southern part of the refuge. The bobcat gets its name from its stubby, "bobbed" tail. Rabbits are the primary food of the bobcat, but it will switch to other prey items including deer and turkeys when rabbits are scarce. Bobcats tend to be more active during daylight periods of the winter months. So, if you're helping with a project on the refuge this winter, keep your eyes open and you may be the lucky person to spot the next bobcat.



The refuge's wildlife community changes with the changing seasons, so visit the refuge often during the public use season from early spring through late fall. Groups can also arrange special winter tours, or better yet, become a refuge volunteer and help with one of the biological surveys, habitat management projects, or general maintenance activities that occur at the refuge throughout the year.

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.

BOCS “FRIEND OF THE YEAR”

Ed Schafer

BOCS members voted Ed Schafer as “Friend of the Year” for his many hours of volunteer service on group projects and activities in 2004. Ed, along with his wife, Judy, can be seen helping at most BOCS activities and events.



Ed Schafer (L) received the “Friend of the Year” award from BOCS President, Rick Collier

BOCS Holds Officer Elections

Jim Leveille

At the BOCS annual meeting on October 4th, 2004 elections were held to fill leadership positions. Because the friends group has been established for only 2 years, an early election was held to stagger some positions, permitting continuity through overlapping three-year terms. New officers elected were Jim Gilley (Vice President), Dan Herron (Treasurer), Jim Leveille (Director), and George Terlinden (Director). These individuals will hold their offices for 3 years. The group’s other officers, Rick Collier (President), Kirsten Carlson (Secretary), and Dale Carson (Director) will hold their positions until elections this October.

WARM WINTER DINNER MEETINGS

During the winter months of January, February, and March, the Big Oaks Conservation Society held their monthly meetings at the Big Oaks Café. A specially prepared meal was offered at the Café for members who wished to eat together before the meetings began. All enjoyed the atmosphere, the good food, and the warm place to meet. Our thanks go to the Café for offering this service for our group. The Big Oaks Café also thanked the group for supporting their business.



Hats for Sale



The Big Oaks Conservation Society is selling Big Oaks hats and Indiana refuge license plates to raise money for projects that benefit the refuge. The hats are \$12 each and can be purchased at the refuge office. Indiana National Wildlife Refuge plates are \$8. Topographical maps of the refuge are also available for \$12.

Show your Big Oaks Conservation Society membership card and get a 10 % discount!



BOCS NEW BOARD MEMBERS

George Terlinden - My wife, Karen, and I reside on a small farm on Ryker's Ridge. We have enjoyed living here the last 12 years. We have 2 sons and a daughter. Jeff and Adam have fledged the nest and Sarah, a college student, still hangs around begging for food and testing her wings. I enjoy bird watching (especially raptors), fly fishing, target shooting, and reloading ammunition. Over the years I have studied and banded raptors from kestrels to eagles. One project involved studying and banding bald eagles in Michigan and northern Ohio. Currently I am working on the BONWR Northern Saw-whet Owl Study with Jason Lewis. I became interested in Big Oaks NWR (and later BOCS) during a winter bird count. I am overwhelmed with its natural beauty and diverse habitat.

Jim Gilley - I have enjoyed being involved in the natural sciences from an early age, while developing a true respect and love for the outdoors. I find great pleasure in seeing others enjoy our natural resources. I served as YACC while in my teens and developed an awareness of our national treasures. I have a diverse background serving on Boards that have worked to enhance lives and the environment. I attended college in Arkansas at NACC, and Twin Lakes Technical School where I certified in Computer Technologies, Blueprint and Drafting, and Metal Applications. For the last 12 years I have pursued a career with Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and have operated stores in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, and now Indiana. I have enjoyed the beauty of the Appalachian Trail of Pennsylvania, the Chesapeake Bay and Barrier Islands of Maryland, lakes and rivers of Kentucky, and the wonderful parks and wildlife of Indiana. Joanna, my wife of twenty-four years, enjoys the beauty of the ocean and the quiet places along lakes, rivers, and streams. She is also very fond of water sports of any kind. Our children April and Andrew enjoy outdoor activities such as hiking, horseback riding, canoeing, and fishing. I find it an honor and privilege to have been selected to serve on the Board of Directors as Vice President for Big Oaks Conservation Society and to be able to assist the Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge.

Big Oaks Fall Fish Fry/Open House

By Jim Leveille

Big Oaks Conservation Society provided their second free fish fry to the public last October as part of a refuge open house. BOCS members Dale and Diane Carson, Ed and Judy Schafer, and Bob and Dorothy Kimball once again demonstrated their culinary expertise by preparing crisp and tender fillets to 150 refuge visitors. The fish had been caught over the last season at the refuge's Old Timbers Lake and donated for the event. Other BOCS members

assisted with the event by driving vans for three-hour refuge tours guided by refuge manager Dr. Joseph Robb. The weather, tours, and fish were enjoyed by all and provided one more opportunity for the public to enjoy a free day on Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge.



Third Annual "Take a Kid Fishing Day"

The refuge, in conjunction with Big Oaks Conservation Society and Wal-Mart, will host the third annual "Take a Kid Fishing Day" on Saturday, June 18. Only kids 16 and under, and their parents or guardians, will be allowed to fish. All visitors will be required to watch the safety video. Fishing will be authorized from 7:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. on Old Timbers Lake. All state and federal regulations will apply.

Fall Fire Activity at Big Oaks

By Jim Leveille

Neighbors of Big Oaks NWR are accustomed to seeing smoke columns each spring as staff firefighters conduct prescribed fires on the refuge. These burns help maintain a diverse habitat on the refuge by keeping certain areas in grassland. These fires are usually set only in the spring. Last fall's extended dry spell created conditions that prompted unusual autumn burns. The first of those was unintentional. At the southern section of the Indiana Air National Guard range, surrounded by Big Oaks NWR, ordnance ignited a wildfire that burned 227 acres on the refuge before it was extinguished. Such fires are an anticipated event, so plans and personnel stand by ready to handle them. The unusually dry conditions also prompted the refuge staff to implement fall prescribed fires. Prescribed Fire Specialist Brian Winters explained that approval for the fall burn was obtained to test the theory that these fires would be more effective than spring fires in controlling woody successional vegetation (shrubs, small trees) that constantly encroaches upon the field/meadow ecosystems. Brian supervised the prescribed fires in which ten fire fighters burned 2 areas totaling 1,500 acres. He reported the burns went very well, and consumed the invasive vegetation the refuge would like to suppress. He and the refuge biologists look forward to seeing if the fall burns are more effective when regrowth starts this spring.



BOCS Helps Refuge Sponsor Northern Saw-whet Owl Study **George Terlinden & Jason Lewis**

Big Oaks established a saw-whet owl migration monitoring station in order to participate in an ongoing study coordinated by Project OwlNet. This Project was partially funded by Big Oaks Conservation Society. The monitoring involves capturing, banding, and collecting data on northern saw-whet owls, a species notable for its diminutive size (7-8½ in. height). The northern saw-whet owl is a boreal forest species characterized by a white facial disk, brown plumage streaked with white, and a dark bill. Due to the secretive nature of this species, there is a lack of information on its migration habit. Saw-whet owls migrate through Indiana heading south from the middle of October through early December, with a few individuals over-wintering on the refuge. The owls seem to have a preference for eastern red cedar stands, but will use deciduous tree stands with thick cover for perching. They forage by flying low through the forest at night preying primarily on small mice. The conditions most favorable for catching the owls are cloudy, dark skies with a slight wind from the north or northwest, which seem to occur with advancing cold fronts.

The owls were caught using an array of five 12-meter mist nets attached to poles, which were inserted over reinforcing rods. An audio-lure was used to attract the birds to the nets. All owls caught were banded with aluminum U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands. The birds were weighed, measured, and additional data collected in reference to their molt pattern, eye color, facial pattern, and overall health. The weight and measurement information were used to establish the sex of the owls, with larger owls being female.

Molt patterns indicate the age, for example HY (hatch year bird) or AHY (after hatch year bird). A majority of the saw-whet owls that are caught are hatch year or second

year birds. All the owls were released unharmed in the same area they were caught. A total of 10 saw-whet owls and 2 screech owls (one red phase and one gray phase) were captured and released. Of the 10 saw-whet owls, 9 were banded, and one was a recapture. The recaptured owl was caught and banded as a hatch year bird in Ontario, Canada just 65 miles northeast of Rochester, New York, in November of 2003.

Those involved in the first season of this program were: Jason Lewis, Dan Matiatos, Kristina Baker, Alison Mynsberge, Shawn Crimmins, David Watts, Bill Poindexter, Teresa Vanosdol, Karen Terlinden, and George Terlinden. A special thanks goes to the refuge and Big Oaks Conservation Society for the funds used to establish this program.

“WOMEN IN THE OUTDOORS”

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge **June 11, 2005**

Big Oaks Conservation Society and Big Oaks NWR, in conjunction with the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Indiana Air National Guard at Jefferson Range, will be holding a “Women in the Outdoors” event at the refuge on Saturday June 11. Participation will be limited to the first 100 to register. The fee of \$50 includes registration in 2 - 4 sessions, lunch, and a one-year membership to NWTf, and “Women in the Outdoors” magazine. Co-coordinators for the event are BOCS members Karen Terlinden, Jeanne Dugle and Jan Kleopfer. Registration forms will be available soon at the refuge office and the Big Oaks website. <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/bigoaks> For more information call 273-0783 or write to: Women in the Outdoors at Big Oaks NWR, 1661 West JPG Niblo Road, Madison, IN 47250

Possible classes to be offered are:

OUTDOOR SKILLS:

Backpacking, Camping & Hiking, Outdoor Cooking, Orienteering with Map-Compass & GPS, Outdoor Photography, Canoeing, Wilderness Survival

NATURE:

Wild Edibles & Wildflowers, Wildlife Tracking & Habitat, Backyard Wildlife Habitat, Tree Identification, Bird Watching, Drawing Nature

FISHING:

Basic Fishing, Fly Tying, Fly Fishing

FIREARMS:

Firearm Safety, Gun Care & Cleaning, Sporting Clays

HUNTING:

Turkey Hunting, Basic Archery

Information about NWTf’s “Women in the Outdoors” programs can be found at www.nwtf.org/wito

BOCS Sponsors Big Oaks Interns at Midwest Conference in Indianapolis

In December, the Big Oaks Conservation Society was generous enough to provide funding for the four interns at Big Oaks NWR to attend the 65th Annual Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference. The event, which was held at the Westin Crown Center in Indianapolis, was a professional gathering of managers, researchers, educators, and students involved in the field of natural resources. The conference was also the first opportunity for three of us to attend a professional conference of this sort.

The conference provided an excellent opportunity for us to network with possible employers or advisors, and to attend several of the large number of technical sessions in which researchers from throughout the area presented the findings of their studies. The event seemed a bit overwhelming at first, as state biologists and regional directors can be somewhat intimidating to those just out of school. However, the staff at Big Oaks was more than happy to introduce us to many of their professional colleagues, and to encourage us to make contacts with professionals with whom we may someday enjoy working with.

The technical sessions provided a unique opportunity for us to get exposure to the wide variety of research that is being conducted in natural resources. The talks that were given covered a huge scope of topics ranging from white-tailed deer management and walleye biology to invasive species eradication and prairie restoration. Some of the more popular talks covered topics such as mountain lion ecology, river otter genetics, and barn owl habitat. We also had the opportunity to see University of Tennessee student and former Big Oaks intern, Dusty Varble, present some of the findings from the cerulean warbler and cicada studies conducted at Big Oaks. Given that our interests were as broad as the topics that were covered in the technical sessions, we rarely went to the same sessions and were able to attend the majority of the sessions offered.

The social events at the conference also provided us with a wonderful opportunity to network with professionals in a more relaxed setting. We spent the majority of the social events talking with possible employers about job opportunities or future research projects they may be embarking upon. Of course, none of us would have had the opportunity to make any of these connections if it was not for the generosity of the Big Oaks Conservation Society.

Overall, the conference was a wonderful experience that none of us will forget. The connections that we made will hopefully provide us with a means of future employment

or graduate school. Shawn Crimmons was actually able to get into a Master's program at Texas A&M through attending a previous conference, and we are all firm believers in the benefits of attending such events, especially for those of us just out of school and embarking on our professional careers. The interns at Big Oaks would like to thank the Conservation Society for providing the funding for us to attend this event; it was truly a wonderful conference for all of us. To all of the members of the Conservation Society, thank you.

Big Oaks Winter 2004 Interns

Kristina Baker, David Watts, Alison Mynsberge, Shawn Crimmins



Squirrel Hunting Opportunities

Jim Leveille

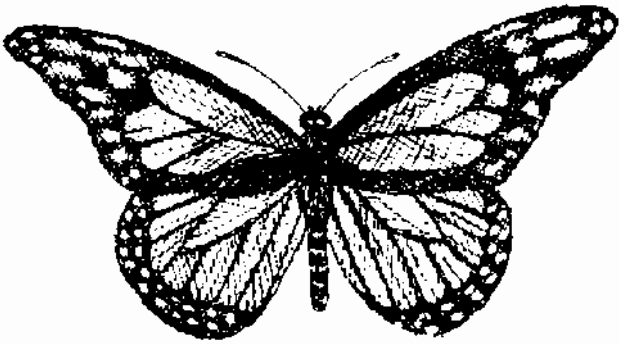
Fall 2004 marked the first time that squirrel hunting has been allowed on Big Oaks NWR. The season ran August 15th through the end of November. Ninety hunters harvested 154 squirrels. All Indiana state regulations applied while hunting on the refuge, with the addition of some Big Oaks specific additions. Either shotguns or .22 rim fire rifles were permitted. However, on the refuge, only standard non-toxic shot (ex. steel or bismuth) is allowed for shotguns. Squirrel hunting dogs are permitted only in the day-use area of the refuge. All pets are required to wear a collar displaying the owners name, address, and telephone number. Check in time is 7:00 a.m. and hunters must be checked out at the refuge office no later than 4:30 p.m. In addition to the refuge day-use area, other sections open to squirrel hunting include areas 46, 41, 36, 32, 30, 28, and 27. All are areas adjacent to the east perimeter road. Squirrel season for 2005 will run from August 15 to November 28.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

MONARCH BUTTERFLY

Teresa Vanosdol



The monarch butterfly is one of the most beautiful butterflies found on Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge. The bold orange and black markings and lazy flight pattern make it easily recognizable from other butterfly species. Monarch butterfly breeding grounds are found in New England, the Great Lakes Region, and the northern Rocky Mountains.

The monarch butterfly is commonly known as the milkweed butterfly. Monarchs deposit eggs exclusively on milkweed plants that contain a potent heart poison (cardiac glycosides). The caterpillar feeds on milkweed plants thereby taking up and storing the poison and becomes noxious to most predators. The adult stage of the monarch acquires its toxicity to predators via the caterpillar stage. The adult version and the caterpillar stage are both brightly colored. These bright colors are a way of signaling to predators that they are harmful in some aspect; and in the monarch's case, it equates to being unpleasant to eat. A mimic of the monarch butterfly, the common viceroy, takes advantage of this trait. The viceroy is not poisonous to predators, but due to the similarity in coloration, predators avoid them because they have likely encountered a disagreeable tasting monarch.

Another interesting aspect of the monarch butterfly is their ability to migrate. Monarchs cannot survive freezing temperatures. They fly south to spend the winter season in a warmer climate. Monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains over-winter in Central Mexico, and monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains over-winter along the Pacific coast from San Francisco to near San Diego. Migration of the monarch butterfly is different from avian

migration. The monarch individuals that make it to the wintering grounds do not return to their birthplace. Rather, the individuals reproduce on the wintering grounds and their offspring make the return flight to the summer grounds. The innate ability of the offspring to navigate back to the summer grounds has perplexed biologists and is still under investigation. It is one of the mysteries of biodiversity that should be protected.

Monarchs were once a quite common butterfly, but the use of insecticides, threat to winter habitat, weed management practices that alter milkweed plant populations, habitat loss, topical spraying of Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) in organic farming, and crop genetic modification are all playing a role in their population decline.

The monarch butterfly is fairly common during the summer on Big Oaks NWR. Large congregations of migratory monarchs have been observed using the refuge in the past. Refuge staff and volunteers participate annually in the North American Butterfly counts held in July. As many as 47 species of butterflies have been



noted during the counts, and has included rarities such as the little yellow, meadow fritillary, salt and pepper skipper, sleepy orange, and the impressive giant swallowtail. If you are interested in participating in the survey, give the refuge staff a call. You will not only learn your butterflies, but you will also experience the summer beauty of Big Oaks!



Photos by Jan Kleopfer

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

The annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner was held at The Pines in Madison.

“VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR” **JIM LEVEILLE**

Joe Robb (L) presenting Jim Leveille with “Volunteer of the Year” appreciation gifts.



5000 HOURS of SERVICE

George Tilley

George receives awards from Joe Robb. George also received Presidential Recognition.



Dan Matiatos, George Tilley, Joe Robb

HISTORY FEATURE

A Winter Walk to the Site of Otter Creek Baptist Church

Ken Knouf

A poignant chapter in the cultural history of Big Oaks NWR relates to the government takeover of people’s homes and farms when the Army established Jefferson Proving Ground in 1940. It was particularly sad that as an additional burden, the residents realized that they would lose their churches, and that even their loved ones buried in the local cemeteries would be re-interred.

Among the churches affected was the Otter Creek Baptist Church, located a mile and a half south of Nebraska, IN. Eleven members established the church and adjoining cemetery in 1848. A 30’x 40’ frame structure was constructed in 1859 and served residents for 81 years. Sue Baker, in her popular history book “Echoes of Jefferson Proving Ground,” wrote that men were paid 50 cents an hour to dismantle the church in 1941. The lumber was then used to build a barn that still sits along US Highway 421 in Ripley County.

On a cool Friday morning with a light snow on the ground (ideal for historic site searches), pastor Dennis Ferguson and several friends from the present Otter Creek Baptist Church met me at Gate 13 for a half-mile hike to see what remained of the old church site. We walked 20 minutes east along the old firebreak that originally was a country road and then noticed a large spruce tree towering above some second, or maybe even third growth hardwoods. Going into the woods, we immediately encountered the foundation of the church building and an open stone cistern. The site was beautiful and overlooked Otter Creek. A member of our little expedition who attended church some 65 years earlier shared with us his memories of how things looked in 1940. He told us about the terrific pitch-in meals that were served outside under the shade of a big beech tree. And not far away was the cemetery with many large earthen depressions where ancestors once lay. The periwinkle still grew.

Almost in silence, our party separated, and individuals paused to contemplate the meaning of all this...tangible evidence of a far more simple time.

REPRESENTATIVES FROM BOCS & BIG OAKS NWR ATTEND NATIONAL REFUGE FRIENDS CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON D.C.

Three representatives from Big Oaks NWR attended the 2005 National Friends Conference the weekend of February 4-7. The attendees were BOCS members Jim and Sara Leveille and Refuge Operations Specialist Dan Matiatos of Big Oaks NWR staff.

The conference was held in Washington D.C. at the Grand Washington Hyatt. It provided a forum for refuge friends groups and Fish and Wildlife Service personnel from all over the nation to meet and discuss refuge issues.

The conference speakers' presentations by government, academic and friends group representatives were on social, political and economic trends affecting our refuge system. Emilyn Sheffield of California State University at Chico briefed the conference on demographic trends impacting projected refuge use over the next century. She highlighted the point that as our society becomes more urban and diverse, Americans' view of refuges will change. Traditional users of refuges, such as hunters, are declining in numbers, while non-consumptive users such as "wildlife viewers" are increasing.

Anne Smith, president of "Friends of Black Bayou" in Louisiana spoke about her group's successful efforts to renovate an old planter's home into a refuge visitor center and to raise funds for a wetlands learning center. A key point of her presentation was coordination with the refuge staff. Speakers from the government side of the refuge included Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior, and Bill Hartwig, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Both discussed the challenges of tightening federal budgets and the importance of leveraging dollars spent to the greatest effect. The importance of friends groups contributions in both labor and dollars was a key point stressed by all speakers.

In addition to the presentations, multiple classes were offered with an aim to increase the effectiveness of friends groups' activities. Dan, Sara and Jim attended seminars on board development, fundraisers, grant writing, and forming community partnerships. A highlight of the trip for the Big Oaks attendees was a lunch roundtable session with Nita Fuller, Chief of Refuges for Region 3. She

was very supportive of friends groups and pointed out that our region has more friends groups than any other (31). The Region 3 meeting ended with the group supporting a regional meeting of our friends groups in 2006 as the guests of the Friends of Necedah/Minnesota Valley in Minnesota.

On Monday the 7th, Jim, Sara, Bill, and Laurie Kendrick from Muscatatuck NWR visited Capitol Hill to act as advocates for the refuge system and inform the staff of our specific refuge's needs. Meetings were conducted with staffs of Senator Lugar, Senator Bayh, and the newly elected representative, Michael Sodrel.

The meetings were productive and Big Oaks representatives felt they had established a good rapport with our districts' Congressional delegation.

After a busy three days Jim, Sara, and Dan returned. All were pleased with the conference and highly encourage friends and staff to attend the next conference, which is tentatively scheduled for 2007.



Jim Leveille, Nita Fuller (Chief of Refuges - Region 3), Sara Leveille at National Friends Convention in Washington D.C.

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge
1661 West JPG Niblo Road
Madison, IN 47250
 Phone: 812-273-0783
 Fax: 812-273-0786
 E-mail: bigoaks@fws.com
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/bigoaks>

REFUGE STAFF

Dr. Joe Robb - Refuge Manager
Dan Matiatos – Refuge Operations Specialist
Jason Lewis - Wildlife Biologist
Teresa Vanosdol - Wildlife Biologist
Janet Pike - Administrative Technician
Brian Winters - Prescribed Fire Specialist
David Jones - Fire Program Technician
Travis Robison - Park Ranger

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BIG OAKS
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Big Oaks Newsletter

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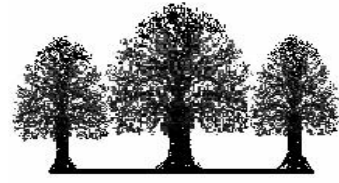
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<input type="checkbox"/> Youth \$5	Name(s) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$15	Address _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25	City _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting \$25	State/Zip _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (per Individual) \$150	Phone _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$500	E-mail _____

2005 CALENDAR of EVENTS

March	Big Oaks is smokin' – prescribed burning
April	Migrating birds, wildflowers, Turkey Hunt, fishing begins, Youth Turkey Hunt, morels
May	International Migratory Bird Day, cerulean warbler field work
June	Breeding bird surveys, "Becoming an Outdoors Woman" "Take a Kid Fishing Day"
July	Butterfly survey
September	Fall migration begins!
October	Deer archery season
November	Deer shotgun season, Youth Deer Hunt, last chance to fish
December	Christmas Bird Count
January	River otters slide in the snow
February	Great horned owls nest





BIG OAKS
Conservation Society
P.O. Box 935
Madison, IN 47250

2005 Board Members

Rick Collier, President
Jim Gilley, Vice President
Kirsten Carlson, Secretary and
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