



# BIG OAKS

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

Winter 2007

## Refuge Manager's Corner

By Joe Robb

It's nearing the end of February and the ice has thawed for the moment and my thoughts turn toward spring. The Jefferson Salamanders and Wood Frogs began their breeding activities during the warm days of January, and the Chorus Frogs, Spotted Salamanders, Northern Crawfish Frogs, and Southern Leopard Frogs are waiting for a warm rain during the next several weeks. They will begin moving during the early evening hours to their breeding ponds amid the burrowing crayfish which walk about this time of year with their arms menacing anyone who approaches. The crayfish should be wary of me because I do enjoy a good crawfish boil, but I am uncertain how this particular species would be as table fare.

Dr. Tom Simon from the Bloomington Ecological Service Field Office and our summer interns studied the refuge's stream fauna as an index to the integrity and quality of the water and habitat. One of these interns, Justin Ridge, expanded on Dr. Simon's project for his Independent Study project at Hanover College. He investigated different methods for capturing these burrowing crayfish and differences in use of habitat of the several species captured. His work with Dr. Daryl Karns at Hanover and Dr. Simon was intriguing and he is pursuing graduate work in marine ecology after he graduates from



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Hanover College. Our work with over 55 interns over the past 8 years has been satisfying; especially so when we hear of their professional activities and progress after they leave the refuge. The Society should also be commended for aiding the careers of these future professionals through support of projects and occasional travel to workshops and meetings.

I also want to introduce Cydney Meadows, our new Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) participant. Cydney is enrolled at Southern Illinois University in a Master's of Science degree program; she will investigate relationships between our prescribed fire program and reptiles and amphibians that use our grasslands. Both Jason Lewis and I began our careers in refuges thru similar programs, and all the refuge staff is excited about having Cydney here for this program/project. We are also glad to have this year's seasonal firefighters who just returned from St. Marks NWR in Florida from a prescribed fire detail. They include Megan Baker (who was a summer/fall intern), Colleen Hawks, and Josh Duboise. Joe Parr who was a seasonal firefighter for us last year helped with their training, but will leave our refuge for a spot on the Augusta Hotshots Wildland Fire Crew in Virginia.

The upcoming public use season and fieldwork will be fun: Public Use Opening (April 20), Youth Turkey Hunt (April 21-22) Outdoor Women at Big Oaks (June 2), Take a Kid Fishing (June 15). We look forward to seeing our longtime friends and new visitors in 2007! Stop by and say hello and I encourage you to become involved with the Big Oaks Conservation Society; they have a variety of exciting projects and events planned for 2007 with possibilities of some new ventures.

## **Letter From The Editor**

**By Lisa Jones**

In spring of 2006, after several years of hard work and dedication, Jan Kleopfer resigned as editor of the Big Oaks newsletter. Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS) and the staff of Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge are very grateful for her devotion in creating an outstanding newsletter. Jan put together a professional newsletter that many readers looked forward to receiving twice a year.

As the new editor I plan to continue providing the same quality newsletter. BOCS along with Big Oaks NWR together agreed that it was time for a change, and decided that we would provide our readers with four shorter newsletters in a calendar year rather than two. We hope this will bring you information faster and keep everyone more up to date with what is happening both with BOCS and the refuge. We hope you like the change.

Sincerely,

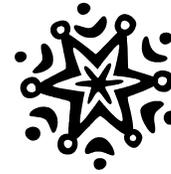
Lisa Jones  
Park Ranger  
Big Oaks NWR

## **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.



**Winter interns at Big Oaks with refuge staff**



**Cydney Meadows**  
**Student Trainee at Big Oaks NWR**  
**Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)**



**BIG OAKS NOTES**

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## **Another Volunteer Success!**

**By Dan Matiatos**

Volunteers continued to provide the Refuge with many hours of support during 2006. They did a tremendous job supporting and organizing youth hunting and fishing activities, Outdoor Women at Big Oaks, maintenance projects, wildlife surveys, and invasive plant control. Without the hard work of volunteers many refuge activities and projects could not be accomplished.

One project that requires special mention is the construction of a new shelter at Old Timbers Lake. The shelter was constructed by volunteers through the Big Oaks Conservation Society with financial support provided by a grant awarded to the Society by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Volunteers spent many evenings this fall constructing the shelter. A number of volunteers contributed to the success of this project. The construction expertise of Dave Bear and Lori Hoffman's efforts at organizing the work schedule were essential. The result is a beautiful new shelter that fits well into the refuge landscape and will be wonderful facility for conducting Kids Fishing Day and other educational activities at the lake. The Society and the hard working volunteer crew should take great pride in this addition to the Refuge.

The Refuge and The Big Oaks Conservation Society is always looking for additional people who would enjoy supporting the Refuge through a variety of volunteer activities. Many activities are conducted yearly with some special projects added each year. One new project for 2007 is the construction of the first portion of the first interpretive trail on the refuge. If you would like to volunteer and help the Society and the Refuge in their goal of building a community oriented refuge please contact the Refuge office.



## **The Audubon's Oriole: A Rare Feathered Visitor.**

By Jason Lewis

Birdwatchers from all around the country are constantly on the lookout for that rare bird; a bird so unusual, so out of the ordinary that it would attract the attention and awe of all whom hear of it's presence. The finding of such a rare bird is often the highlight of one's life, essentially becoming the story told to every friend and birdwatcher encountered. The story eventually takes on a life of its own with vivid details and accounts most non-birdwatchers find obsessive and absurd. However, it is the impossibility that fuels the passion and drives birdwatchers to scour the country side in search of the unknown. One never knows what lies at the end of the road or in my case, when the phone might ring.

On February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 while working diligently in my office, I received a phone call from Dale Sides, refuge volunteer. There was an excitement in his voice like a child on Christmas morning as he described in vivid detail a bird he observed at a neighbor's feeder. The neighbor turned out to be Bill Smock who ironically I had visited in the summer of 2004 following a phone conversation reporting another rare species on his property. That species turned out to be a chuck-will's-widow which was an exciting and rare report for Indiana. As I listened to Dale's description I was skeptical, I get dozens of calls like this and most turn out to be common resident birds. But it was Dale and I felt confident in his ability to know when he had something different, even if he wasn't sure what it was. Dale described a bird the size of a robin with a canary yellow body and black head. According to the bird field guide he had, the bird had to be an Audubon's Oriole, but that was impossible. The Audubon's is a Central American species very rarely reported in Texas and never reported in Indiana or other states. I told him I'd be right over.

The drive over was short, but seem to take forever given my heightened curiosity. Upon arriving at the Smock residence, I saw Dale standing in the window waving and pointing frantically toward a tree adjacent to the house. As I inspected the tree, I saw the bird in question. It was a brilliant canary yellow

with a black hood that extended to the back of the head, a beautiful bird and just as Dale depicted. I had never seen an Audubon's oriole, but the illustrations in the North American field guide provided no doubt or question of the bird's identification. As rare birds go, this was the holly grail. I proceeded into the house where I spent the next two hours photographing and watching the bird in awe. This story does not end here, others did come to view this rare wonder and it will be talked about for years to come. However, I will refrain from rambling on and telling you more of my story. If you see my out and about and have plenty of time, please ask me to tell you the story; I do enjoy telling it. There is a moral to this story, "if you feed them they will come."



**Meghan Baker with a Northern Saw-whet Owl.**

## **2006 Wildfire Season**

By David Jones

This year was a busy one for the Big Oaks fire staff, with wildfire training around the country and wildfires blazing in the west. Brian and I started off the wildfire season in late June with a two week engine detail to St. George, Utah. St. George had a very active two weeks while we were there. We assisted on seven fires across the southwestern part of Utah and the northwest part of Arizona known as the Arizona strip. The strip is a section of Arizona that is cut off from the rest of the state by the Grand Canyon.

While fighting fires there we camped out for seven days and acted as an initial attack engine for wildfires. We encountered many dry thunderstorms, which started numerous lighting fires in the area. Our engine and crew jumped from fire to fire trying to extinguish them while they were small. During this time we had limited use of shower facilities and warm meals, which made our jobs even harder to deal with. All in all from a wildfire fighter stand point everyone on the crew had a great time and no one was injured.

Region 3 of the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service worked in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management in Utah where they continued to keep fire engines from refuges in Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri and Michigan stationed in St. George well into September.

When the nation reached a Level 5 preparedness during the middle of the 2006 fire season, we decided to put Big Oaks' new type 6 fire engine on the availability list for a western detail. A Level 5 in fire means that there are many large fires or incidents throughout the nation that are spreading all fire-fighting resources very thin.

Our engine was selected by the Bitterroot National Forest in western Montana to act as an initial attack engine for two weeks. The engine crew consisted of Brian Winters, Joe Robb, and I. We assisted on a 15 acre fire the first three days of our detail and then spent the rest of the time patrolling for smoke or working on hazards fuel reductions in and around camping areas.

for this years prescribed fire season on the refuge and private lands. We have been writing burn plans as well as preparing and fixing equipment. We have also been spending the winter months going to additional training through out the United States and hiring this years seasonal fire crew. The new hires are Colleen Hawks, Megan Baker, and Josh Duboise. Cydney Meadows, a Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) participant, will also be assisting the crew in prescribed fires.

Joe Parr who returned from the 2006 seasonal fire crew, assisted with training the new seasonal hires. Joe would have been part of the 2007 crew, but was offered a permanent position with Augusta Hotshots Wildland Fire Crew in Virginia. We wish him all the best.



**Jason Lewis and Dale Sides during prescribed fire at Big Oaks**



**Joe Parr during prescribed fire at Big Oaks**

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Outdoor Women at Big Oaks

By Deanna Robison

On Saturday, June 3, 2006, a beautiful sunny, warm, Indiana spring day, the second annual Outdoor Women at Big Oaks (OWBO) event was held. Old Timber's Lodge, an impressive historic, log, timber, and stone house was the starting point for 94 ladies, who traveled to Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge to enjoy the day. The event was just for ladies to learn new, as well as brushing-up and fine tuning current, outdoor skills.

Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS), Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge and Indiana Air National Air Guard hosted the event. OWBO is an extension of BOCS's mission to support the goals of wildlife conservation and habitat restoration at Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, develop environmental awareness, and to encourage use and appreciation for the natural and cultural the natural and cultural assets unique to Big Oaks NWR.

"Outdoor Women at Big Oaks" is a one-day program that has been developed to offer women ages 14 and over a chance to learn and participate in outdoor skills and activities such as camping, backpacking, hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching, archery, outdoor photography, orienteering, nature journaling, canoeing, tree climbing and many skills. This year's most popular classes were Outdoor Dutch Oven Cooking, Basic Canoeing, and Tree Climbing and Rope Techniques. It was noted to include these classes and hopefully more sessions of them, during next year's event.

The first event, held in 2005, was host to 55 ladies. This year's event nearly doubled the amount of participants to total 94 ladies. Of the participants, there was a wide variety of ages ranging from teens to seventies. Some traveled from as far as Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky and many ladies traveled from various parts of northern and southern Indiana.

There was an abundance of effort on the part of BOCS volunteers, Big Oaks National Wildlife staff, instructors and various community members. With all the planning for the event, the one thing that could not be controlled is the weather and fortunately, everyone enjoyed a beautiful warm, sunny,

early summer Indiana day.

A big thank you, is justified for all the community businesses and organizations who supported the event. The generosity of local businesses and organizations allowed a number of door prizes to be given to participants as well as offer a very successful raffle. The proceeds of the raffle provide funds for the event, future OWBO events and other educational programs offered by BOCS and Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge.

Planning for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Outdoor Women at Big Oaks event began in October 2006. If you are interested to help plan the event, in any capacity, we would be happy to have the help. Please email [deannarobison@hotmail.com](mailto:deannarobison@hotmail.com) for more information regarding volunteering.

Don't forget to **"save the date: Saturday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007"** for next year's event. We are hoping for an even more successful event next year.

### Outdoor Women at Big Oaks Sponsors 2006

Ace Hardware	Lowe's
Anderson's Sales and Service	Madison Precision
Back to Nature	Mary Jones-Mary Kay
Bass Pro Shops	Cosmetics
Bear's Furniture Gallery	Mundt's Candies
Big O Tires	Nature's Back Porch
Book Warehouse	North Madison Veterinary
Book World	Clinic
Buchanna's Fitness Center	NRCS Office Switzerland
Century 21	County
Christy's Candles and Gifts	Orscheln Farm and Home
Clifty Inn & The Falls Restaurant	Pepsi
Clifty Inn Garden Center	Ponderosa
Clifty Inn Gift Shop	Rainbow Stained Glass
Craig Buick Toyota	Red Pepper Deli
Dairy Queen	Southeastern Indiana Solid
Dave Bear	Waste District
Dick's Sporting Goods	Staples
Dr. Bob Canida	The Bird House
Dr. Ivan J. Rimstidt	The Birdy Shop
Fit for the King	The Black Family
Gifts from the Heart	The Book Nook
Glass Blower's Gifts and Gallery	The Herron Family
Hats and Such	The Jones Family
Holiday Inn Express	The Pines Restaurant
Key West Shrimp House	Thomas Family Winery
Kirlin's Hallmark	Things Remembered
Koehler Tire	Tractor Supply
Kroger	Vern's Heating and Air



## **BOCS Hosts Third Annual Take a Kid Fishing Day**

By Jim Leveille

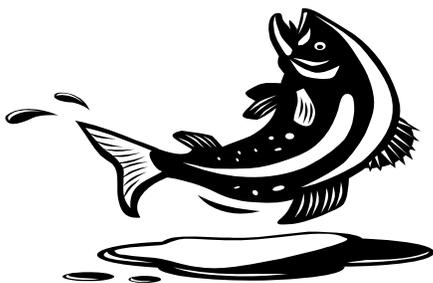
On June 17, 2006, Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge hosted its fourth annual Take-A-Kid Fishing Day at Old Timbers Lake. The 165-acre lake provided plenty of action for the youth and their families on a perfect weather day.

The refuge event was co-sponsored by the Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS), which prepared free meals and organized the event. Madison's Wal-Mart provided a grant for food. Jean Green, Wal-Mart's Sporting Goods Department Manager, facilitated the store's donation of bait. Volunteers from Versailles Boy Scout Troop 607 helped with set up, bait distribution and clean up. Additional prizes and free fishing tackle were generously donated by RKO Enterprises of Madison. Every participant received a free fishing supply kit.

This year prizes were awarded in two age groups: 10 and under and 11-16. The largest fish caught was a 15-inch bass by Marcus Stubbins. The award for most fish went to Zeth O'Neal, who caught nine during the course of the event.

The annual event encourages families to visit the refuge lake and to fish at no charge. Volunteers assist inexperienced anglers and the Refuge provides rods and reels, as well as bait, free of charge. Refuge manager, Dr. Joseph Robb, noted that the event has grown steadily in popularity with this year's attendance being fifty-five kids and sixty adults.

The Take-A-Kid Fishing Day for 2007 has been scheduled June 16th. Please contact the refuge for more information.



**Fishing contest winners from 2006 Take-A-Kid Fishing Day**



**Learning to fish like Grandpa at Old Timbers Lake**



**Boy Scout Troop 607...Thanks for all your help!**

### **Annual Membership Drive and Fish Fry**

On October 7, BOCS hosted yet another successful annual fish fry. An estimated 200+ people came out for this year's event. People enjoyed all you can eat free fish and snacks. The staff of Big Oaks provided guided tours of the refuge and filled three vans with passengers. We received some new memberships during the event..



## A Murder, Bazaar, or Parliament - What do You Call a Group of Birds?

Submitted by Lori Hoffman



**Birds in general** - A flock of birds - A dissimulation of birds - A volery of birds

**Bitterns** - A siege of bitterns, A sedge of bitterns

**Chickens** - A peep of chickens

**Choughs** - A chattering of choughs

**Coots** - A cover of coots, A raft of coots

**Cormorants** - A flight of cormorants

**Cranes** - A sedge of cranes

**Crows** - A congress of crows, A murder of crows

**Curlews** - A herd of curlews

**Doves** - A dule of doves, A flight of doves, A dole of doves, A cote of doves, A piteousness of doves

**Ducks** - A paddling of ducks, A raft of ducks, A team of ducks, A dopping of ducks

**Dunlin** - A fling of dunlin

**Eagles** - A convocation of eagles

**Eggs** - A clutch of eggs

**Falcons** - A cast of falcons

**Finches** - A charm of finches, A trembling of finches

**Flamingos** - A flamboyance of flamingos

**Geese** - A gaggle of geese, A skein of geese

**Goldfinches** - A charm of goldfinches

**Goshawks** - A flight of goshawks

**Grouse** - A brace of grouse, A covey of grouse

**Guillemots** - A bazaar of guillemots

**Gulls** - A colony of gulls

**Hawks** - A cast of hawks, A kettle of hawks, A cast of hawks

**Hens (chickens)** - A brood of hens

**Hérons** - A siege of herons

**Hummingbirds** - A charm of hummingbirds, A troubling of hummingbirds, A hover of hummingbirds

**Jays** - A band of jays, A party of jays

**Kingfishers** - A concentration of kingfishers

**Lapwings** - A deceit of lapwings

**Larks** - An exaltation of larks

**Loons** - A raft of loons

**Magpies** - A tiding of magpies

**Mallards** - A sord of mallards, A flush of mallards, A puddling of mallards

**Nightingales** - A watch of nightingales

**Owls** - A parliament of owls, A wisdom of owls

**Parrots** - A company of parrots

**Partridges** - A covey of partridges

**Peacocks** - An ostentation of peacocks, A muster of peacocks

**Penguins** - A colony of penguins, A huddles of penguins, A pride of penguins

**Pheasants** - A bouquet of pheasants, A covey of pheasants, A nye of pheasants, A nide of pheasants, A nest of pheasants

**Quail** - A bevy of quail, A covey of quail

**Pelicans** - A squadron of pelicans

**Plovers** - A congregation of plovers, A wing of plovers, A leash of plovers

**Ravens** - A conspiracy of ravens, An unkindness of ravens, A constable of ravens

**Rooks** - A building of rooks, A parliament of rooks

**Snipe** - A walk of snipe, A wisp of snipe

**Sparrows** - A host of sparrows, A quarrel of sparrows

**Starlings** - A murmuration of starlings

**Storks** - A mustering of storks

**Swallows** - A flight of swallows

**Swans** - A ballet of swans, A bevy of swans, A herd of swans, A whiteness of swans

**Teal** - A spring of teal

**Turtledoves** - A pitying of turtledoves

**Turkeys** - A rafter of turkeys, A muster of turkeys

**Waterfowl** - A plump of waterfowl

**Woodcock** - A fall of woodcock

**Woodpeckers** - A descent of woodpeckers



**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.gov  
 Website: [www.fws.gov/midwest/bigoaks](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/bigoaks)

**REFUGE STAFF**

**Dr. Joe Robb** - Refuge Manager  
**Dan Matiatos** - Refuge Operations Specialist  
**Janet Pike** - Administrative Technician  
**Jason Lewis** - Wildlife Biologist  
**Brian Winters** - Prescribed Fire Specialist  
**David Jones** - Fire Program Technician  
**Travis Robison** - Park Ranger LE  
**Lisa Jones** - Park Ranger  
**Beth Black** - Park Ranger  
**Laura Lake** - Park Ranger  
**Kim Brinson** - Maintenance Worker  
**George Tilley** - Volunteer  
**Colleen Hawks** - Seasonal Firefighter  
**Meghan Baker** - Seasonal Firefighter  
**Josh Duboise** - Seasonal Firefighter  
**Cydney Meadows** - SCEP

**BIG OAKS NWR**  
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 Lisa Jones

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 Big Oaks Staff

Contributing Members



**BIG OAKS**  
**Conservation**  
**Society**  
**Membership**  
**Benefits**

-  10% discount on merchandise
-  opportunities to participate in special refuge events
-  contribute to the improvement of the refuge for all visitors
-  Big Oaks Newsletter

**Reminder!** BOCS' membership year runs from October 1 through September 30 of the next year. Please pay you dues on time - the Society depends on dues to help fund the Youth Events, etc.

If you would like to join, or rejoin, the **Big Oaks Conservation Society**, to support the refuge, please fill out this membership form and send along with your check to:

<b>Big Oaks Conservation Society</b>	Check here if this is a renewal
<b>P.O Box 935</b>	_____
<b>Madison, IN 47250</b>	

Yearly Membership Form (Oct. to Sept. 30) Please select a category.

___ Youth \$5	Name(s) _____
___ Individual \$15	Address _____
___ Family \$25	City _____
___ Supporting \$25	State/Zip _____
___ Lifetime (per Individual) \$150	Phone _____
___ Corporate \$500	E-mail _____

**BIG OAKS  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
2007 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

<b>January</b>	<b>River Otters slide in the snow</b>
<b>February</b>	<b>Great Horned Owls nest</b>
<b>March</b>	<b>Prescribed burning</b>
<b>April</b>	<b>Migrating birds, wildflowers, turkey hunt, fishing begins</b>
<b>May</b>	<b>Sign up for a refuge tour!</b>
<b>June</b>	<b>Outdoor Women at Big Oaks, Take a Kid Fishing Day</b>
<b>July</b>	<b>Butterfly survey</b>
<b>August</b>	<b>Squirrel season starts</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>Migration begins!</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>Deer archery season, Annual Fish Fry</b>
<b>November</b>	<b>Deer shotgun season, Youth Deer Hunt, last chance to fish</b>
<b>December</b>	<b>Christmas Bird Count</b>



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

**Board Members**

**George Terlinden - President**  
**Dave Bear - Vice President**  
**Lori Hoffman - Secretary &  
Business Manager**  
**Deanna Robison - Treasurer**  
**Dan Herron - Board Member**  
**Jim Leveille - Board Member**  
**Ed Schaefer - Board Member**  
**Joe Robb - Executive Secretary**

**[www.bigoaks.org](http://www.bigoaks.org)**



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1661 West JPG Road  
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