



Friends of the Limberlost

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The Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites, which includes Limberlost State Historic Site, is currently experiencing budget cuts, leading to layoffs and potential service reductions. The state's new budget, approved in April and effective July 1, includes reduced operational and programmatic funding for various state agencies, including the museum. This has resulted in the museum cutting staff and affecting some community events at its historic sites.

According to Shaun Payne, Limberlost Site Manager, tours of the Limberlost Cabin will now be offered at 11:00 am and 2:00 pm as a result of staffing changes at the site. Shaun also stated, "as in years past we will try to accommodate guests outside of our designated tour times, but to ensure your place on tour, we recommend you purchase tickets ahead of time online at Indianamuseum.org/limberlost, or call Limberlost at 260-368-7428." Regular operating hours for Limberlost State Historic Site remain the same, Wednesday thru Sunday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm.

DNR REORGANIZATION AFFECTS NATURE PRESERVES

Information provided by Tom Hohman, President, Indiana Parks Alliance (IPA)

Effective Monday, June 9, the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves no longer exists as a separate division within the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The division has been merged with the Division of Fish & Wildlife. The new division will be called the Division of Fish & Wildlife and Nature Preserves. Nature Preserves staff and responsibilities for the preserves that they manage have all been incorporated within this new division.

Ron Hellmich, former Director of Nature Preserves, will assume the position of Assistant Director of the Office of Public Lands, which includes management of all properties within the division. Andrew Reuter, former Assistant Director of Nature Preserves, will supervise the Nature Preserves Section, which will be one of the sections under Ron. The Indiana Natural Heritage Data Center, which inventories and monitors rare plants and natural areas throughout the state, was relocated to the Office of Science and Research in the new division, under Brad Feaster.

The change was apparently made with the intent of improving management efficiencies for all properties involved while continuing to meet the requirements of the Nature Preserves Act. Nothing in this reorganization changes the legal protections of dedicated state nature preserves, and new nature preserves for properties that meet the standards of the Act will continue to be established.

IPA believes that state nature preserves are special places, as recognized by the Nature Preserves Act, and advocacy for their protection is part of our mission. While there appears to be no significant short-term impact on these protections, we are concerned about the long-term impacts of the change and will monitor that in the future.

AUGUST— SEPTEMBER 2025—PROGRAMS AT LIMBERLOST

CYANOTYPES: PHOTOS WITHOUT A CAMERA

Description: Aspiring solar artists are invited to harness the power of the sun to create nature prints! While our works of art develop, we will learn how Gene Stratton-Porter used photography to bring Limberlost Swamp to the masses. Visitors will also be able to peruse reproductions of Gene’s award-winning photographs. Paper treated with UV-reactive chemicals will be available to all participants, with canvas tote bags available for an additional fee.

Age: All ages

Date/Time: August 9th; 3:30-5:00 pm

Cost: \$8 / 25% discount for ISMHS members

Option to purchase canvas tote bag to print on for \$10



BIRD WALK AT RAINBOW BOTTOM

Description: Don your binoculars as we look to the sky for migrating birds! Join a Limberlost naturalist for a slow-paced hike along the Wabash River at Rainbow Bottom. Bird enthusiasts of all skill levels are welcome and there will be a few pairs of binoculars available for participants to borrow. We will meet at Limberlost State Historic Site and caravan to the Rainbow Bottom parking lot.

Age: All ages, but 10+ recommended

Date/Time: September 6, 8:30-10 am

Cost: \$5 / 25% member discount



HOMESCHOOL DAYS: INCREDIBLE INSECTS

Description: Homeschool students are invited to dive into a world of investigation and discovery during these two-hour classes designed for ages 6-12. Adults will join their learners for an interactive family experience. Please note the location of each program, as Homeschool Days will be taking place at both Limberlost State Historic Site in Geneva, IN, and Gene Stratton Porter State Historic Site in Rome City, IN.



Thursday Sept. 4	Incredible Insects	LIMBERLOST Loblolly Marsh	Investigate insects up close and personal and discover how they support life on planet earth!
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Age: Grades 1-6 / 6-12 years old

Date/Time: September 4, 10 am – 12 pm

Cost: \$10/student; 15% member discount – participants **MUST** register ahead for this program

NOTE: This “INCREDIBLE INSECTS” program is part of a larger Homeschool series happening once per month at both the GSP Site in Rome City and at Limberlost in Geneva. 3 of the 6 programs will be at Limberlost and the other half will be at the GSP site in Rome City, IN. For more information about the 6 programs in the Homeschool series (dates, times, etc.) contact Rachel Moorman-Minton, call:260-368-7428, or email: rmoomanminton@indianamuseum.org

White Oak Ag Restoration Update 6/20/25

In mid-May ACRES Land Trust and the Division of Nature Preserves (DNP) demonstrated their commitment to restoring and protecting natural areas in Indiana by partnering together to plant over 10,000 trees in the DNP-owned 17-acre ag field adjacent to White Oak Cemetery Nature Preserve in northern Jay County.



Frequent rainfall since planting has ensured the soil remains moist enough to aid the trees through these initial few weeks post-planting when they are most vulnerable as they adapt to their new environment.

The rain and sun have done their job of waking these trees up. Unseen beneath the soil, the trees, so long held dormant in cold storage to mimic a prolonged winter, are extending fibrous networks of roots through the warm and damp soil anchoring the trees and providing them with access to the stores of nutrients and water available therewithin.



As a result, the small saplings are leafing out (as shown in the picture to the left) extending new green twigs, and taking the slow process of reforestation into their own hands...er branches. It's almost as if they are as eager to see this bare ground transformed into a diverse and thriving environment as we are.



The next step in the restoration process will be dormant seeding of native herbaceous plants between the trees to compete with non-native plants and provide native cover amongst the burgeoning forest. The Friends of the Limberlost have generously provided the funds to acquire these seeds—a cost of \$8,716.41 paid to Spence Restoration Nursery in Muncie, IN, by the Friends.

As the trees grow, DNP staff will shepherd them to maturity by keeping competing vegetation mowed short and managing invasive species. However, after receiving a jumpstart in the process of succession via the planted trees and seed, this land will take the reigns from here and grow back into a natural wet woodland like what would have been growing here in the time of Gene Stratton-Porter.

A huge thanks is owed to ACRES Land Trust for their hard work and generosity in lending a hand to help make this planting a success and to Friends of the Limberlost for the purchase of the native seed.

The Green Dragon, by Curt Burnette and Terri Lehman (Friends of the Limberlost members)



You are hiking one of the trails through moist woods or a floodplain in the Limberlost Conservation Area Nature Preserves. You feel calm and peaceful in this beautiful natural environment. But as you walk along, looking here and there along the trail, you suddenly encounter a GREEN DRAGON!

Don't panic! Remain calm and peaceful. This Green Dragon (*Arisaema dracontium*) is a native plant to this area, although not common. The Limberlost Conservation Area has the perfect habitat for the plant—it likes damp woodlands. The green dragon has been seen in 3 of our preserves: Rainbow Bottom, Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve, and Loblolly Marsh Nature Preserve.

On May 23, East Central Regional Ecologist, Ryan Smith, led a hike at the Loblolly Marsh Nature Preserve for the DNR Nature Preserves. During the walk, Ryan located a green dragon. It was a nice find.

The Green Dragon is an unusual-looking plant. It has only one leaf which has 5 to 15 unequal leaflets which form a semi-circle shape. A separate flower stalk holds the perennial blossom, a green long-tipped spadix “dragon’s tongue,” hence the name Green Dragon. Orange-red berries will follow.

The pictures included in this article, and the following description of the the Green Dragon plant are from Wikipedia online: *Normally, a plant produces one leaf with a long petiole, its leaf is composed of 7 to 13 leaflets, with its central leaflet being the largest one and with leaflets becoming smaller as they are produced distally, the leaflets are held out horizontally over the plant. During flowering in spring, a single slender, green spathe 3–6 centimeters (1.2–2.4 in) long is produced; it covers a tapering, long thin spadix. The tail-like spadix grows out around the top of its spathe. After flowering, up to 150 berries are produced in a club-shaped column (as pictured to the right). In late summer, the green berries turn orange-red, and each berry produces 1 to 3 seeds.*



The green dragon is closely related to the Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) which is also found in the Limberlost-area, in moist forest environments, and it is much more common than the Green Dragon. They share similar habitats and bloom times, but each has distinctive leaves and characteristics. The Jack-in-the-Pulpit will also produce orange-red berries.

The Green Dragon may not breathe fire like a mythical dragon, but if you eat it—you will feel as if your mouth is on fire! This plant is poisonous since it contains calcium oxalate crystals, which cause irritation and a burning sensation in the mouth, throat, and digestive system. These symptoms can be severe and even a small amount can cause problems. All parts of the plant are poisonous.

If you want to see monstrous, scaly, fire-breathing dragons, go to the movies. But if you want to see an unusual and interesting local forest green dragon, go to the Limberlost.

History Repeats Itself in a Most Unusual Way in Geneva

By Curt Burnette



On Monday, June 9, 2025, an unusual occurrence took place in Geneva, Indiana. If this occurrence had taken place in say, Florida or Louisiana, it would not have been unusual at all. But since it did take place in Geneva, Indiana, it qualified as being out of the ordinary. The incident was unusual, but not unprecedented. Something similar happened once before, a long time ago, and it probably had a connection to Geneva's most famous resident—Gene Stratton-Porter.

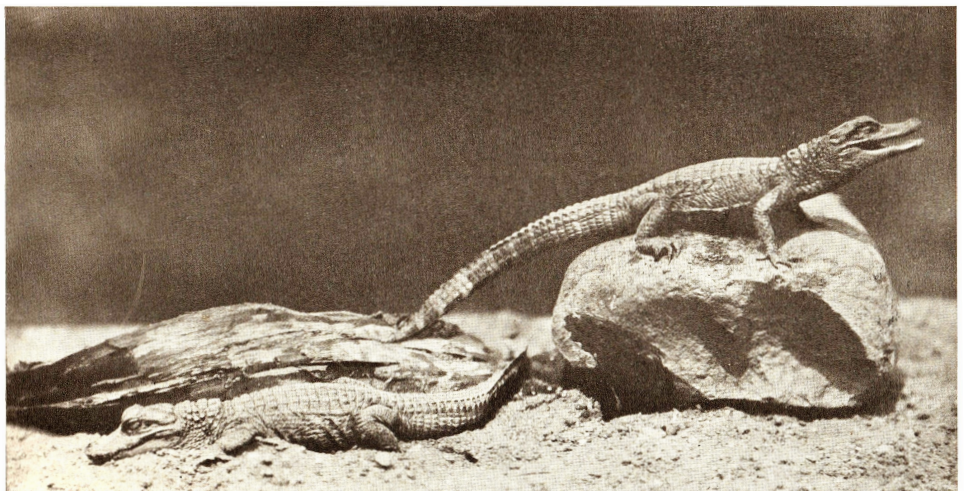
The front page of the Wednesday, June 11, 2025, edition of *The Berne Witness* displayed a photo of Geneva deputy Mike Padgett holding an approximately three-foot long alligator (with its mouth taped shut) which was on the loose in Geneva, and which deputy Padgett helped catch. It was the pet of a Geneva resident and had escaped from its owner's backyard. However, this wasn't the first time an alligator had been loose in Geneva.

And this is where our story now connects with Geneva's world-famous author.

Let's go back in time and look at a small item in the Geneva column of the *Decatur Democrat* published August 31, 1899. It's just a single sentence: "There is an alligator loose on east Shackley street, and everybody is roosting high these nights." So now we know why it can be said that history repeated itself with our current alligator incident, but how does Gene Stratton-Porter fit into this?

In her biography of her mother titled "Lady of the Limberlost," Jeannette Porter Meehan mentions that while she was growing up in the Limberlost Cabin in Geneva, the Porters had two little alligators that someone her father knew sent in a cigar box from Florida. It's not known when the Porters received them, how long they had them, or what eventually became of them, but East Shackley Street is the next street north of the Limberlost Cabin. Perhaps one of the Porters' gators escaped and wandered a block north? The Porters moved into the Limberlost Cabin in early 1895, so they would have received the gators after that. It seems to be too much of a coincidence that a loose alligator showed up one block north of the Limberlost Cabin very likely at the same time the Porters had alligators.

There was no picture of the 1899 Geneva alligator in the newspaper, but there is a picture of the two pet alligators that belonged to the Porters. Gene Stratton-Porter included a photograph of them in her children's book, Morning Face, she also included a little poem titled, *John and Jane Alligator*, and above the poem is this photo of two young alligators. Did one of these become the Shackley Street gator? I guess we'll never know for sure but—probably.



Sandhills and Whooping Cranes, by Terri Gorney Lehman

On May 22, Sam Urquidez, an outreach biologist assistant for the International Crane Foundation, presented a program called "Cranes Over Indiana" for the Northeast Indiana Master Naturalists (IMN) Alumni meeting. She gave an excellent PowerPoint presentation and had several interesting items on display.

Limberlost has had as many as 400 Sandhill Cranes at one time flying through our area during fall migration. For the past several years, a few cranes have been spotted during the summer months at the Limberlost preserves. Last summer, it was confirmed that a pair had successfully nested at Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve. The parents were seen with the juvenile until late fall.

The Sandhill Cranes have six subspecies. We have the Greater Sandhill Cranes in Indiana. The others are the Lesser, Canadian/East Coast, Cuban, Mississippi, and Florida. The Greater, Lesser, and the Canadian/East Coast are the migratory birds. The Cuban and the Mississippi are considered endangered.



Picture of a Whooping Crane on the left and Sandhill on the right, taken in Nov. 2018, when the "whooper" was traveling with a flock of sandhills that landed in the Limberlost area. Notice tracking devices attached to the whooping cranes legs.

In the world, there are fifteen species of cranes. The longer the beak on the crane, the more dependent they are on wetlands. The Sandhill and Whooping Cranes have long beaks, which is why the Limberlost Conservation Area wetlands are an ideal place for them.

At five feet tall, the Whooping Crane is the tallest bird in North America. It has a wingspan of seven feet. Several years ago, we were lucky enough to have one at Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve. He arrived with a flock of Sandhill Cranes and stayed several days. Whooping Cranes are endangered, and it is a special treat to see one in Indiana. Because of this status, only the county is noted to the general public and not the exact location to avoid harassing the bird. When viewing Whooping Cranes in the wild, it is important to give them at least two football fields (200 hundred yards) of distance as they are very sensitive to human disturbance.

The red on the head of the crane is not feathers but a bald spot that can flush with extra blood based on their emotional state, such as if they feel threatened or during mating season.

Cranes are long-lived birds and can live to be up to 40 years. The juveniles will band together in "bachelor" flocks until they are about three to five years old, which is when they will find a mate and begin nesting. All crane species lay two eggs in each nesting attempt. Normally, only one chick survives to fledge (gets adult plumage). Cranes typically only have one nest a year but can renest if conditions are suboptimal during their first nesting attempt, such as high incidences of parasitic black flies, destruction of the nest, or loss of both eggs.

In the early spring and late fall, you can hear their calls as they fly over. Normally, they can be heard first before they are seen. Cranes fly with their head and legs straight out, making them easy to identify from Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, or other waterfowl that fly with their neck scrunched close to their torso.

For more information on Cranes visit this website: savingcranes.org/Indiana

To see if Whooping Cranes have been spotted in your area: <https://whoopermap.savingcranes.org/>

Email address for Sam Urquidez: surquidez@savingcranes.org

FYI: On Saturday, December 6, 2025, the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC) is sponsoring a program on Cranes, presented by Sam Urquidez. It will be held at the Geneva Library, starting at 3pm. The program is free to everyone who participates in the Wabash River watershed litter pick-up event that takes place earlier on the same day beginning at 12:30 pm. More on this December 6 event, "Clean-up the Wabash River Watershed in Adams County" will be in the Fall 2025 Friends of the Limberlost newsletter, due out in Sept. 2025.



Devil's Urn, Mushrooms, and Fungi

by Willy De Smet, Friends of the Limberlost, President

Earlier this year (mid-April) I was clearing a tree where it had fallen on a path through our woods. I noticed this dark shape among the dead leaves. I got a little closer and cleared some dead leaves away. Then I went back to the house to get my camera.

This is a Devil's Urn, *Urnula craterium*. They start off shaped like fingers or a pear, with a jelly-like texture, but after they split open they quickly become dry and leathery, going from urn, goblet to cup shape. An urn is generally a tall and fairly narrow vessel, while a crater is a more shallow and wider type of bowl. (In ancient Rome it specifically was used to mix water and wine.)

The cup usually gets to 1.25 to 2.5 inches in diameter. Devil's Urn is generally not considered poisonous or edible.

I did recognize it quickly, although I had only seen it in pictures before, in mushroom guides. So yes, it is a mushroom.

A mushroom, you say? When most people think of a mushroom, they picture the classical stem and cap, like the kind you eat. They would not call the Devil's Urn a "mushroom." It depends on who you ask what a mushroom is. A mushroom is the fruiting body of a fungus. Compare it to a flower. It's how the fungus reproduces and spreads. The rest of the fungus is made up of a mycelium, a network of thin threads, sometimes described as "cottony".

Most of the time we can't see the mycelium as it is in the ground or in a tree ⁽¹⁾. The mycelium can get quite extensive and connect multiple trees. (There is a Honey Mushroom mycelium, *Armillaria ostoyae*, in Oregon, the "humongous fungus" that extends over 2000 acres. It is estimated to be over 2400 years old and to weigh over 660 tons! It is likely the largest known - and oldest - living organism. Look it up! ⁽²⁾ This connecting mycelium network allows trees to share vital nutrients and even to communicate; for instance in the case of an impending insect attack.

Just like a flower, the mushroom is not there all year round; but the mycelium is. If you see the same mushroom coming up in the same spot in your yard every year, it's a good bet the mycelium is in the soil all year round.

Like flowers, some fungi "bloom" very briefly, some over a longer period. On the other hand, some of the wood shelves/brackets become dry and woody and last for years.

Back to the Devil's Urn. They are not really rare, but they are pretty good at hiding. They often just look like holes in the leaf litter from a distance.



Urnula craterium often grows on rotting sticks of broad-leaf trees. If the sticks are buried in the soil, the mushroom may appear to grow out of the soil ⁽¹⁾. The fungus is a parasite when it lives on a live tree. It causes a canker of oaks, hickories, basswood, beech and other hardwoods. After the infected branches or logs fall off to the ground we consider the fungus a saprophyte because it no longer lives on and damages live wood, but it is now clearing up dead wood. Fruiting bodies (mushrooms) may show up in early spring. This is one of the first mushrooms to appear in spring in the East. Often just before (or while) morels appear. In fact, I found some morels (at a different location just two weeks later. **(continued on next page)**

Side note:

Some fungi have a mutually beneficial (symbiotic) relationship with a tree ⁽³⁾ in a mycorrhizal association. The spreading mycelium of the fungus increases the surface of the effective root system and helps the tree take in water and minerals like nitrogen and phosphorus (up to twice the amount as a root system without that help.) The fungus in return gets more complex molecules (like sugars) that the tree has made through photosynthesis and that the fungus itself is not able to produce. Most mycorrhizal associations are symbiotic, though some are parasitic.



When we look at a tree, we may see a bird's nest in a tree and realize birds are living in/on the tree. But there are probably also spiders, centipedes, beetles, moths, bugs, lichens, algae,... all living on that tree, which we don't usually notice. There also could be a large mycelium growing in there that we don't see. We only see it when it "blooms" into a mushroom. There is a lot of hidden life around us.



(1) The distinction between a mushroom growing on wood or one growing in soil can be helpful in identifying it. E.g. the Pear-shaped Puffball, *Lycoperdon pyriforme*, is the only Puffball in our area that grows on wood.

(2) Yes, Pando – the monoclonal aspen colony - is heavier, but doesn't cover quite as much territory; so it's smaller.

(3) A specific fungus may be limited to a specific tree species. So, if you try to identify a mushroom it is often very helpful to take note of the species of tree it

FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST NEW MEMBERSHIP & MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

As a member you receive our quarterly newsletter. You get one free tour of the Limberlost Cabin, a 10% discount on Limberlost Gift Shop purchases, and you get a 15% discount on your purchase of a membership with the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. As a member you help us preserve the legacy of Gene Stratton-Porter and help us restore the environment by bringing back the Limberlost Swamp.

If you have any questions about your membership, please call or text Randy Lehman, membership chairperson: Phone: 260-849-0308 or email randylehman@comcast.net

Make checks payable to: FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST

Mail check & form to: PO BOX 571, GENEVA IN 46740

STEP ONE

Select which mission of the Friends Group you want to support by checking a box to the right

- ☐ Limberlost Historic Site Friends—dues and any additional donations you make supports Limberlost State Historic Site and associated events, projects, & programs
- ☐ Limberlost Swamp Remembered Friends—dues and any additional donation you make supports Limberlost wetland restorations projects managed by the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves
- ☐ Combination Limberlost Historic Site and Swamp Remembered Friends—dues and any additional donation are equally shared by both groups

STEP TWO

Check a box below

☐ Older Adults—\$10 ☐ Other Individuals—\$20 ☐ Family—\$35 ☐ Business—\$50 ☐ Lifetime—\$1,000

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