

Merry Lea: Environmental Education Takes Many Forms

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center is an impressive 1,150-acre nature preserve located just south of Wolf Lake in the southwestern corner of Noble County. Like many other preserves, Merry Lea offers hiking trails, open free of charge, from dawn to dusk. Casual hikers will find a diversity of ecosystems to explore: prairies, woodlands, oak savannah, swamps, bogs, fens, shrub-carr, marsh, and wet meadows.

For those who desire a little more structure or guidance, Merry Lea is a great place to learn from professional naturalists. Staff members hold degrees in environmental education, ecology, entomology, forestry, and agriculture. Public programs include guided hikes, canoe trips, nature photography workshops, and more. “NatureFest”, held each spring, is a great weekend overview showcasing much of what Merry Lea has to offer. This family-friendly event focuses on the plants, animals, and ecosystems of northern Indiana. It offers hikes and workshops for all ages on topics such as wild edibles, geocaching, geology, and just enjoying the beautiful setting. Overnight camping is an option.

Tours are also available of the award-winning Rieth Village, Merry Lea’s environmentally friendly field station for undergraduate studies that has earned Indiana’s first platinum rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

For a complete listing of public programs, go to <http://www.goshen.edu/merrylea/merrynews/Upcoming.php> or contact Jennifer at 260-799-5869 or email jenniferhs@goshen.edu.

Black Pine: Up Close

BY LORI GAGEN

Children today could easily believe that lizards, snakes, parrots, and tortoises all come from pet stores or private breeders. Black Pine Animal Park is helping to teach people that only in recent years have such animals been so widely available to the general public,



TAMI KREAGER

and how their actions can help wildlife stay where many feel it should be, in the wild.

Exotic, colorful birds such as macaws, Amazon parrots, and cockatoos are captured by the thousands from exotic lands, but few survive the long journey to private homes. Rare reptiles, monkeys, and other non-domestic species are traded as “pets” and wind up victims at the hands of people who don’t understand their needs, behaviors, or the health dangers they pose. In the U.S. alone an estimated 600,000 exotic animals are illegally imported every day.

So what can a small, rural non-profit sanctuary do? By providing an opportunity for people to observe up close and hear the personal stories of animals that have been born, bought and sold, then displaced from private homes, they hope to plant a seed of awareness that will help affect real change.

Black Pine Animal Park currently houses more than 85 exotic displaced “pets” and retired performers. Visitors will see Bengal tigers, leopards, chimpanzees, monkeys, birds, reptiles, llamas, donkeys, bobcats, and more representing nearly 50 species. Many of the animal residents that found permanent refuge at Black Pine are endangered species. The opportunity for

people to learn how animals like these can be so easily obtained, often legally, is alone an educational experience that pulls at heart strings and raises awareness that real change is needed.

Black Pine is open daily to the general public from Memorial Day through Labor Day, and selected dates during the off-season. A minimal admission fee is charged for ages three and up to help fund the ongoing care for the animals. A largely volunteer staff runs the day to day sanctuary operation. For more information or to plan a visit go to www.blackpineanimalpark.com or call the park office at (260) 636-7383.

Gene Stratton-Porter: Early Environmentalist

BY DAVE FOX

Going Green and environmental education are relatively new concepts – or are they? Gene Stratton-Porter lived from 1863 to 1924, yet her life, literature, and photography warmly embraced the environment from the Limberlost Swamp in Adams County to Sylvan Lake in Noble County as well as many other nearby areas.

Her love of the outdoors and the creatures and plants that filled the woods, streams, and prairies was the inspiration