

WINGRA WATERSHED NEWS

Promoting a healthy Lake Wingra through an active watershed community.

Summer 2017 • VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 2

Monarchs for Kids in 2017— Connecting with Mexico

By David Thompson

In the library, a monarch butterfly rested on a small boy's hand. Suddenly it fluttered upward—zig-zagging over bookshelves toward a window. Four squealing children ran to where it landed on a windowsill. Catalina approached, coaxing it onto her fingertip. Her eyes flashed with uncertainty, bravery, and wonder. A big smile appeared. "Look what I caught! Does she want to go to Mexico?"

All around Madison last summer, children were getting to know monarchs up close, thanks to the Friends of Lake Wingra. "Butterflies at the Library" every week was one of our many summer events and workshops. We gave monarch eggs to more than 50 families.

In September, we distributed monarch eggs to elementary schools in four school districts: 118 classrooms received about 10 monarchs each. When bright orange butterflies emerged in October, the children went outdoors to release them to the sky. They would say, "Adios! You have to speak Spanish from now on!"

Monarchs bridge the boundaries between three countries during their extraordinary migration. Two years ago, when I went to see the monarchs wintering in Mexico, I visited two elementary schools near the butterfly reserves to set up exchanges with Madison

schools. Working with bilingual schools here in Madison—Midvale and Lincoln—eliminates the language barrier and provides an opportunity for children in both countries to understand common interests and connections. Saving monarchs (continued on page 2)

Feeding monarchs in the breeding tent





Teachers at the elementary school in Anganguero, Mexico.

(continued from page 1)
requires action in both countries.

When I visited the wintering butterflies again last March, two Midvale classes sent video files for me to deliver to their Mexican counterparts, while three Mexican schools returned the favor. On both sides of the border, teachers and students introduced themselves: “What games do you like to play? Do you have horses and goats, chickens and turkeys at your

house? My family grows avocados.”

This year, helping monarchs is more crucial than ever. In March of 2016, a devastating blizzard felled thousands of trees in the Mexican forest where monarchs spend the winter, freezing 7.4 % of the population. Before 2016, our program depended on a time-consuming hunt for eggs in the wild. After the storm, eggs here became even harder to find. So to continue despite this set-

back, I learned how to breed monarchs. This advance has allowed us to supply monarchs to even more schools than we originally imagined! The exchanges will provide motivation for everyone, while expanding the discussion about how to save the magnificent migration. It feels hopeful when everyone’s working towards the same goal, despite the miles and borders between.

For 2017, our goals remain the same. If kids get to know monarchs up close, they will want to help save them. Monarchs bring people together. If neighborhoods are healthy for monarchs, the city is healthy for people. Now that our methods have been tested, we need to find more volunteers to sustain the program. We need volunteers to breed monarchs, bring milkweed food to schools, show monarchs during summer events, raise monarchs at home with kids, and plant milkweed. Pick a role and climb aboard! Please contact our program manager, Casey at volunteer@lakewingra.org if you are interested in volunteering.

Volunteer with Friends of Lake Wingra

Let us know if you want to get involved with us to help improve the health and quality of our beautiful Lake Wingra. Sign up for our monthly e-newsletter by emailing info@lakewingra.org.

Opportunities include education programs, working with schools, rain garden installation/planting/maintenance, graphic design, newsletter editing, event planning, marketing and grant writing and review.

Friends of Lake Wingra Board Meetings

Friends of Lake Wingra board meetings are usually held the first Thursday of the month from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and are open to the public. Check our event calendar on our website (www.lakewingra.org/events) for the location.

If you have an item to discuss with the board please email info@lakewingra.org a few days in advance of the meeting to be placed on the agenda.

Become a Friends of Lake Wingra Board Member

Do you want to help Lake Wingra on a deeper level? Consider becoming a board member! Start off by attending one or more of our board meetings (1st Thursday of the month 6:30-8:30 p.m.) or by emailing your interest to info@lakewingra.org.

We can arrange a personal meeting with a current board member or staff person to explore opportunities.

Friends of Lake Wingra Participates in a Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey

by Ben Yahr

Friends of Lake Wingra has begun a new program to help understand and protect the amphibians that call our lake home. We are working with a group of volunteers to listen for frogs and toads near the Vilas Lagoon throughout the spring and early summer to learn when each species is most active in the shallow waters of the lagoon and shoreline where they live. This baseline data is necessary to help ensure that the City of Madison Parks Department and Dane County conduct weed harvesting in a responsible manner and at appropriate times so that they do not kill amphibians unnecessarily. Friends of Lake Wingra believes that this harvesting should be scheduled in a deliberate way that is based on data.

The volunteers will be briefly visiting the park each night after

sunset, and will make note of the weather and which frogs or toads they hear calling. The data is collected to document the phenology of the lake. Phenology is the study of the natural cycles and schedules — understanding what happens each spring as plants and animals wake up from their winter sleep and respond to the warmer spring weather. Plants and animals follow patterns, though each year the exact timing is different. Phenology documents these differences and helps us understand the impacts of changing weather and climate on our surroundings.

The Lake Wingra watershed is likely home to nine of Wisconsin’s twelve frog and toad species. From the small spring peepers that announce the end of winter each year to the large bullfrogs that are seen in the Lake, these amphib-

ians are an important part of our ecosystem. According to DNR Amphibian Specialist Rori Paloski, the shallow waters of the Vilas Lagoon are especially important to frogs and toads for breeding, in part because they lose their ice before the rest of the lake. The macrophytes (weeds) that grow in the lagoon offer habitat for frogs and toads, places for them to lay their eggs, and space for tadpoles to grow. The tadpoles even eat the algae that is found in the lagoon. When frogs and toads feel threatened, they seek shelter in weeds, which can be a problem if a large mechanical weed harvester is taking away their homes. We hope that weed harvesting can be responsibly scheduled in early spring before frogs and toads are active in the lagoon, or later in the year when tadpoles have matured enough to avoid the machinery or have moved out into the lake.

The phenology program is part of the Wisconsin Aquatic and Terrestrial Resources Inventory (www.wiatri.net), specifically the Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey (WFTS). The program is one of the longest running amphibian monitoring projects in North America, and Friends of Lake Wingra is proud to be a part of it! If you are interested in helping out, please contact us at info@lakewingra.org.



Photo by Cuyahoga Ico

Tips & Tricks for Composting



by David H. Thompson

Compost is like chili—everyone has their own recipe. You throw in what you find in the fridge, it takes a while to cook—and it always smells good when it's done.

Compost is much better for your garden than chemical fertilizer. It adds structure to soil and releases nutrients slowly. In many ways, it's one of the last free lunches—at least for your plants. Even the purchase of a compost bin pays for itself when it saves you from buying just three bags of lawn fertilizer. Can you almost taste those juicy 'free' tomatoes?

Spring is the perfect time to consider composting because lawn

debris makes a great base to get things cooking!

Here are some Best Practices (in rough order of importance) to get you started, or keep you going:

1. MIX IT (UP). Put in all types of organic matter – from your lawn, from your refrigerator, from the pizza crusts under your teenager's bed. Just no meat or pet waste! Variety will keep things from compacting and maintain air flow for optimal decomposition.
2. HYDRATE IT: Like Goldilocks – medium is just right: damp but not soaked. If you see mold spores scatter when you turn it,

it's too dry. If it stinks, is tightly packed, looks wet and glossy, or has water dripping off, it's too wet. If you're not using a lid, make sure the pile is shaped with a depression on top to capture water.

3. STIR IT. Turn it at least once a year to mix in bugs, yard waste, oxygen and moisture. Experts often use two bins, turning from the first into the second.
4. SEED IT. Increase microorganisms by adding leaf litter, compost or soil to get things brewing.
5. HEAT IT. The warmer it is, the faster it decomposes. Black bins absorb the sun's heat, so put

them somewhere sunny. A lid also helps retain heat. Composting is actually just slow combustion.

6. WORM IT. The open bottom of the bin needs to be in contact with soil to allow worms and moisture to get in.
7. ASH IT. Wood ash from your fireplace will speed composting—but mix it in well.
8. SORT IT. Sticks, bark, corncobs, pine cones and similar coarse items will take much longer to break down. Start a separate "slow compost" pile, or CHOP IT so these materials will break down faster.
9. CHOP IT. Chopped lawn debris can be put directly into your compost and small bits break down quickly. Mulching lawn mowers are the best way to go because they can handle more than just grass which will add healthy variety to your compost.

You can even compost black and white newspapers pages, paper towels, tissues, and sawdust. You should not compost plastics, metal, glass, or anything toxic (like lead paint chips). Remember, don't place food waste in the bin unless it's very secure against animals!

Finally, if you're just starting out, don't expect too much at first. It's hard to start a batch in spring and have it ready by fall.

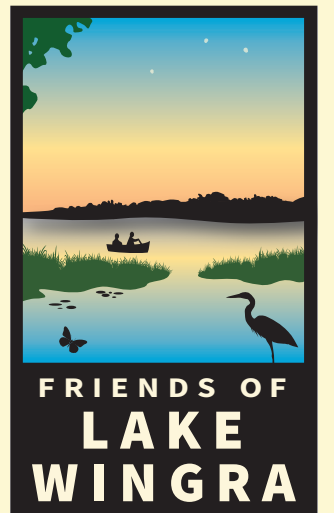
As always, we're here to help. Feel free to contact us about getting started, buying materials (there are great deals online), or any other questions!

Mission

We promote a healthy Lake Wingra through an active watershed community.

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Become a Friend

To become a Friend of Lake Wingra, send your tax-deductible contribution to:

Friends of Lake Wingra, Inc.
c/o Office of Advancement
Edgewood College
1000 Edgewood College Drive,
Madison, WI 53711-1977.

Please make checks to: "Edgewood College - FOLW."

Friends of Lake Wingra, Inc.

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www.lakewingra.org

Wingra Watershed News

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Meet Our New Program Manager



Friends of Lake Wingra is happy to introduce our new program manager, Casey Hanson. She is a UW-Madison alumna where she obtained her bachelor of civil and environmental engineering. Casey is a long-time Madison resident, aside from the last few years where she pursued her master of community and regional planning at the University of Oregon and in her previous role as coordinator for the Cambridge Compact for a Sustainable Future in Cambridge, MA. Casey is excited to return to Madison; it has always felt home to her and she could not stop talking about Madison summers when she was away!

Q: Why are you passionate about Friends of Lake Wingra?
A: Watershed protection efforts, especially in the urban environment,

are multifaceted and cross disciplinary – it forces you outside of traditional thinking! Figuratively speaking, many times practices or projects face barriers because we are so accustomed to managing “types” of water in different silos. The resulting technical, social, economic, regulatory, and cultural barriers are especially prevalent in watershed communities. The work Friends of Lake Wingra does allows for creative solutions and approaches and lets you interact with a wide-array of people and professionals!

Q: What other types of projects or roles have you had?
A: In my previous role I coordinated a local government, business, and nonprofit partnership that focused on climate change initiatives. I

have also developed surface water management programs for rural communities, conducted a quinquennial statewide Oregon survey about water rates, and researched how different groups overcome barriers to innovative water projects.

Q: What do you like to do in your free time?
A: I love hiking all over the country and enjoy all water activities, but I think boogie boarding is my favorite. You can also find me making homemade ice cream, playing soccer, and playing Hot Wheels and Legos with my son, but I think he enjoys it more.

You can reach out to Casey at volunteer@lakewingra.org

New Watershed Exhibit at Henry Vilas Zoo

by Adrienne Marvin

The zoo has a new exhibit! While it may not be as breathtaking as a polar bear, we are still pretty excited about it! The new attraction is an interactive watershed model that lets children (and children at heart!) explore and create their own landscapes and water flows. In a sandbox, you can design your own topography of hills, mountains, rivers and plains. A computer sensor above the box analyzes your creation and projects light indicating what is land and what is water. When you wave your hand above the box, the computer generates a storm on your landscape and shows you how the rain water would flow through it.

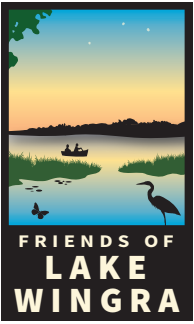
This interactive model is a great way to show the community how watersheds work and reinforce the idea that water connects us all. It can be difficult to describe to people what a watershed is and why it is so important. It seems simple to say that rain flows downhill and collects in a body of water. What’s difficult to capture is the community that is created within a watershed. This tool will help children visualize how what we do to water in one area can genuinely impact places near and far. We are so pleased that this new exhibit will get people thinking about the importance of the zoo’s home watershed – Wingra. By

preserving local waterways, we contribute to the health and well-being of all the plants, animals, and even people who live within the watershed boundaries. The sign that accompanies the new exhibit even explains how tiny watersheds, like Wingra, are located within larger ones, like Yahara. When we start to think about water in terms of watersheds, the world becomes smaller and more connected. If you haven’t had a chance to check it out yet, be sure you make it to the zoo soon! The watershed model is located in the Discovery Center and is sure to provide you and the kids with a fun and educational experience.



Photo by Casey Hanson

In the interactive watershed sandbox blue indicates bodies of water; green indicates low elevations and the color transitions from yellow to orange as the elevation increases.



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