



The Nature Conservancy 

Protecting nature. Preserving life.

EFROYMSON RESTORATION AT
Kankakee Sands

Herpetologist team finding painted turtles in a Kankakee Sands wetland. Photo ©Jessica Gomez/TNC

SUMMER 2023

Indiana Academy of Science's 2023 BioBlitz

In early June, TNC partnered with the Indiana Academy of Science (IAS) to host this year's BioBlitz. More than 100 scientists, experts and nature enthusiasts from around the state came to Kankakee Sands for the 24-hour event. During a BioBlitz, as many species of living creatures as possible are inventoried during 24 hours. The annual event highlights Indiana's biological diversity, some of which would have gone unnoticed were it not for the time and effort of these individuals. Volunteers explored Kankakee Sands, surveying for ants, aquatic macroinvertebrates, bees, beetles, birds, fish, freshwater mussels, fungi, reptiles, amphibians, moths, butterflies, mammals, singing insects, snail-killing flies, spiders, and vascular plants. The findings are a snapshot of the biodiversity of species at Kankakee Sands and a peek into the health of our prairies.

The IAS organizes one BioBlitz each year. Kankakee Sands was also the site in 2012. During that decade between the two surveys, much has changed at Kankakee Sands: thousands of new acres have been planted, wetlands have been created, years of intensive management and prescribed fire activities have taken place, and bison have been reintroduced to the prairie.



The full results of this year's BioBlitz will be summarized by this fall and will be published in the Indiana Academy of Science Journal. We will report the findings in our winter newsletter, so stay tuned for more! If you'd like to learn more about the BioBlitz and possibly attend the 2024 BioBlitz, visit

indianaacademyofscience.org/resource-center/bioblitz-events-data/

TOP: IAS BioBlitz Organizer, Glené Mynhardt (center wearing black shirt), with the beetle team identifying live insects back at 'base camp' at the Kankakee Sands office. © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC.
MIDDLE: Spider team inspecting specimens netted from the vegetation. ©Alyssa Nyberg/TNC.
BOTTOM: Volunteer Casey Venable found this jumping spider (*Habronattus decorus*) at the BioBlitz—the first time this spider has been documented in Indiana! © Rick Malad.



New Staff Member: Nolan Fisher

Nolan Fisher, a native Hoosier coming to us by way of Clarksville, Indiana (right across the river from Louisville, Kentucky), joined our team in February. Nolan has spent the last decade working in the restaurant industry, with five of those years being spent as a sous chef in places like Glacier Bay National Park, Lake Powell National Recreation Area and coastal Maine. Nolan has an eagerness to learn, a positive attitude and a strong work ethic.

Nolan says, "I'm forever thankful for the opportunity to be working here. I've been looking for a way into this industry for a while now, and when I saw the posting for Kankakee Sands, I knew it was time for me to trust my gut and go with it. I've already learned so much from the wonderful people here, and I'm looking forward to getting as far into this career field as I can. I'm one of those people that has to find meaning and intention in my actions, and I can't think of a better way for me to enjoy doing exactly that than working for nature."



Nolan Fisher © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC

There is always so much to do and see at Kankakee Sands, and we're so glad that visitors are coming to enjoy it all! Kankakee Sands is free and open to the public every day of the year for non-consumptive use.

Student Conservation Internship



Kankakee Sands is part of a new, county-wide internship program for Newton County high school juniors and seniors—the Student Conservation Internship program. In partnership with the Newton County Soil and Water District, LaSalle Fish and Wildlife Area and Willow Slough Fish and Wildlife Area, TNC is jointly hosting four students this summer. A total of 24 students will participate in the program through our four agencies over the next three school years and summers. The interns will get well-rounded introductions to careers in conservation by working directly with us at our project offices and in the field, as well as leadership training, resume building, interview skills, outdoor skills and so much more.

THANK YOU to the Jasper Newton Foundation and Newton Co. Economic Development Commission for making this pilot program possible!

The summer 2023 interns are Alexis Wynn, Katelyn Bava, Madelyn Arrenholz and Shay Seibring. Katelyn Bava, a recent graduate from South Newton High School, is based out of our Kankakee Sands office and has already participated in 5:00 a.m. bird surveys, fish shocking, invasive species removal, seed harvesting, planting natives into the prairie, community outreach and the 2023 BioBlitz. Welcome, Katelyn—so glad you are spending the summer with us!

TOP: Our 2023 Interns (from left): Alexis Wynn, Madelyn Arrenholz, Katelyn Bava and Shay Seibring. BOTTOM: Katelyn Bava (with bird survey volunteer Tisha Tolle) during an early morning bird survey at Kankakee Sands. Photos ©Alyssa Nyberg/TNC



Improving Habitat & Biodiversity at Kankakee Sands

Olivia Schouten, Bison Manager at Kankakee Sands, is looking to better understand how grazing impacts plant and animal diversity on our prairies. Researchers have found that the diversity of plants can be increased by grazing bison and/or cattle. Both primarily eat grasses, which can allow space and nutrients for flowers to grow and thrive. When we have more flowers, we also have more pollinators and other insects, along with the wildlife that eat insects: birds, frogs, toads as well as cute furry critters!

Over the past two years, Olivia, helped by TNC staff and volunteers, began a multi-year vegetation survey to assess the species of flowering plants and the height of the vegetation throughout the growing season in Unit G at Kankakee Sands (the cattle grazing pasture). Very early in our restoration planting history (1998 and 1999), the site was planted with tall prairie grasses, such as Indiangrass and big bluestem. Over time, the tall grasses took over, limiting the flowering species. This spring, the seeds from 28 native flower species were spread in the cattle pasture after a prescribed burn, both in areas where the cattle have access and areas where they do not. Over the next few years, we will return to monitor the areas to determine which prairie flowers established well and which did not. This understanding will guide us in our work as we manage our prairies for native habitat and biodiversity.



TOP: TNC's Olivia Schouten and Ben Kusiak monitoring vegetation height in the cattle grazing pasture. © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC. BOTTOM: A group of calves in Unit G, standing in the patch burned and grazed in 2022. © Olivia Schouten/TNC

Outreach and Volunteering

In addition to our regular seed harvesting workdays in the summer, seed cleaning workdays in the fall, and National Bison Day in November, we will also

be co-hosting Bug Fest—a series of five FREE insect-related, family-friendly events. THANK YOU to Friends of the Sands for organizing and coordinating this awesome line-up of Bug Fest events at Kankakee Sands!

Stay tuned for information about our annual Volunteer Appreciation event later this fall. It's a relaxed afternoon of pizza and snacks, reflecting on our time together in 2023 making the world a better place and dreaming about all that we want to do together in 2024!

To find out more about our events, visit nature.org/indianavolunteer.



Kankakee Sands Wish List

- Atlas Fit 300 Rubber-Coated Gloves 12 pack, any size: \$35
- *An Introduction to the Aquatic Insects of North America* by R.W. Merritt, K.W. Cummins, M.B. Berg: \$200
- Two Polaris Ranger Hood Racks: \$380 each
- Stihl BT 45 Earth Auger and 3" drill bit: \$700
- Seeduro Small Batch tabletop seed cleaner: \$4000

Please contact Alyssa Nyberg at anyberg@tnc.org if you have a Wish List item you'd like to donate. Thank you!

If you would like more information about our conservation work or how you can be involved, visit us online at nature.org/kankakeesands or contact Trevor Edmonson at 219-285-2184 or trevor.edmonson@tnc.org. Thank you!