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FEATURED

## Bobcat sighting at nature preserve like a thank-you to conservationists

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Chip Methvin | Courtesy photo

This bobcat was photographed by Chip Methvin on March 25 while he was walking along the boardwalk at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve in northern Monroe County.

A local birder ended up capturing more than birds with his Nikon D500 camera on a recent Saturday walk along the boardwalk at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve.

Chip Methvin saw, and snapped a picture of, a young bobcat that jumped onto the boardwalk about 20 to 25 feet in front of him.

"I was standing on the boardwalk, and it kind of stepped up on the boardwalk in front of me," Methvin said. "I was looking for birds, so I had a decently long lens on (the camera)," Methvin said.

The shot he got was a closeup of the bobcat with a 300mm lens that was more suited to looking for birds perched high in trees than at a bobcat in front of him.

"It ignored me at first, and once I got my camera up, it was shocked a little bit. It ran away shortly after I took my photos," he said. He took 10-11 photos, but they were all "pretty much the same."

Methvin shared the bobcat photo with officials at Sycamore Land Trust, which acquired the land in northern Monroe County. The nature preserve now covers more than 600 acres. It is known for its bald eagle nest, as well as frogs, woodpeckers and woodcock. The nature preserve began in 1995 with about 80 acres of land donated to Sycamore Land Trust by Barbara Restle, who also gave a nearby section of land to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That area is now managed as part of Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge.

"It's been a process of 40 acres here and 20 acres there," said Christian Freitag, executive director of Sycamore Land Trust, about the growth of the nature preserve's borders along Beanblossom Creek.

Some of the land was donated, some was purchased, all for the purpose of allowing the bottomland hardwood forest and wetlands to regenerate in areas that had been farmland.

"It's a sensitive wetlands area," Freitag explained. "That watershed is home to more than a dozen endangered species."

Those include the Indiana bat and the small Kirtland's snake. It's the bald eagles that bring Methvin out to Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve. "That's why I go there," he said. "It's a pretty consistent place to see eagles. There's an active nest there right now. I see an eagle every time I go there."

As for that bobcat on the boardwalk, Freitag was excited to hear one had been spotted on the property. He sees it as a good sign that restoring the environment to what it was centuries ago is working.

Most of the nature preserve was dedicated as an Indiana State Nature Preserve by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. It has also been designated as a state Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. The land is also part of the larger Beanblossom Creek Bicentennial Conservation Area that used \$1 million from the Bicentennial Nature Trust, a special fund to help celebrate the state's bicentennial by expanding conservation and public recreation areas.

Saving bottomland hardwood forest is important in part because that type of forest is one of the most rare types of forest, according to Freitag. Hardwood forests in wetland areas were some of the most popular acres for farming because of the fertile soil, which was enriched when the area flooded. Preserving the bottomland forests ensures that plants and wildlife still have a place to thrive. It also protects other areas when floods occur.

"It does just what a wetland is supposed to do — it slowed the water down," Freitag explained. The wetland area also acts to filter water.

Freitag, who has been with the land trust since 2000, remembers walking through the Beanblossom Bottoms area that year. Many of the trees didn't even come to his waist. Now those trees are 30 to 40 feet tall.

And about wildlife: "What you find in nature is if you build it, they will come," he said.

"Nature can't say thank you. You have to take your pats on the back from the things like that," Freitag said, adding that the bobcat serves as a "thank you" — and is better than any thank-you letter he could have received in the mail.

Freitag is excited that people are using the nature preserve and that Sycamore Land Trust members still are working to fund and preserve land across southern Indiana. His hope is that more people will understand the importance of contributing, and enjoying the nature preserves, and that more photos like Methvin's will be shared.

"Their pictures tell better stories than what we can tell," Freitag said.

### **Find out more**

For more information about Sycamore Land Trust, go to <http://sycamorelandtrust.org> to find information about upcoming events, as well as how to volunteer and support the land trust.

Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve is in northern Monroe County on Woodall Road. There is a 2.5-mile boardwalk trail through the wetland preserve that has four observation decks. For more information and directions, go to <https://sycamorelandtrust.org/beanblossom-bottoms>.

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