

Seven Ponds Nature Center - 1998 in Review
by Mike Champagne

In 1998 Seven Ponds Nature Center celebrated another successful year as a nature sanctuary, environmental education center, and affiliate of the Michigan Audubon Society. The nature center offered a wide variety of programs and opportunities for schools, members, and the general public during the year, and nearly 23,000 people took part in activities.

The nature center continued to emphasize environmental education for children and in 1998 served more than 12,000 young people. School classes came out to Seven Ponds for such programs as *Boatmen to Beaver*, *Stuck in the Muck*, *What's Bugging You*, *Native Americans in the Web of Life*, and *Life in the Prairie*. These programs make use of Seven Ponds excellent natural diversity to convey important ecological concepts. Other school children received such in-classroom programs as *Wild Versus Tame*, *Exploring Michigan Animals*, *Predators and Prey*, and *Energy and You*. These programs bring important conservation issues into the classroom via topics which complement school science studies.

Summer Field School programs were once again popular, with over 250 children taking part in 16 week-long sessions. Sessions titled *PeeWees and Parents*, *Wee Walkers*, *Young Explorers*, and *Junior Naturalists* served children ranging in age from 2 to 14. These children netted insects in the center's fields, studied pond critters in the Seven Ponds wetlands, hiked through the center's tallgrass prairie, and took part in other activities which provided an in-depth look at the natural world.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs in 1998. Presentations on *Michigan Frogs* (Jim McGrath), *Antarctica* (Dave Stimac), *Wildlife Rehabilitation* (Jan Salisbury), *Insects of the Great Lakes* (Gary Dunn), *Michigan Butterflies* (Dr. Warren Wagner), *Fly Tying* (Dale Vronch), *Natural Landscaping* (Tom Smith), and *Prairie Propagation* (Esther Durnwald) combined for a wonderful year of learning. Our own staff added workshops on *Field Sketching* and *Canoeing Basics*. Unfortunately our annual Winterfest had to be canceled due to the warm winter weather and lack of ice on the lakes, but other special activities such as *Earth Day*, *Spring Fling*, *the Lapeer County Bird Count*, *Fall Boat Tours*, *Heritage Harvest*, *Astronomy Night*, and *Birdseed Weekend* kept us hopping. Many additional educational activities were provided by the center's special interest groups: the Friends of Herbs, Astronomy Club, Eastern Michigan Collectors, Ewenique Spinners, and Explorer Post #007.

Seven Ponds completed four natural history field tours in 1998, traveling to the Smoky Mountains, Northern Colorado, the Pacific Northwest, and Niagara Falls. This year's trips not only exposed participants to a variety of birds, wildflowers, and other wildlife, but also some of the country's most spectacular natural features.

In addition to the center's many educational activities, we moved forward on a variety of other projects. The Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers continued the process of strategic planning for Seven Ponds, combining the best efforts of the past with many ideas for the future to set a course for the nature center as we approach the next century. Also in 1998, the nature center renovated the old farmhouse located on the grounds, continued work on a natural landscaping demonstration at the Director's Residence, removed non-native plants, such as purple loosestrife and autumn olive, from center property, and

monitored nearly 100 nest boxes used by bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and others.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 1998 including a birdathon, rummage sale, Heritage Harvest, Birdseed Weekend, Special Gifts, and the Holiday Auction.

Throughout the year, members and friends of Seven Ponds were kept abreast of the nature center's programs, projects, and fundraising efforts through the quarterly newsletter, *Heron Tracks*. The newsletter also contains articles on natural history and Seven Ponds. Topics for articles in 1998 included hummingbirds, milkweeds, land changes at Seven Ponds, and snow crystals.

As always, the people of Seven Ponds really came through during the year. Our staff of ten (full and part time) worked very hard, often putting in extra effort during busy seasons or before special events. The nature center again received thousands of hours from hundreds of volunteers. The Assistant Naturalists (ASNATS), women's auxiliary (Stingers), Board of Directors, and others contributed many hours of time in education, habitat management, trail and garden maintenance, clerical work, fundraising, and governance. Our special thanks to each and every one for making this past year a successful one.