

## Seven Ponds Nature Center - 1999 in Review

by Mike Champagne

In 1999, Seven Ponds Nature Center had 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 more than 24,000 people took part in activities.

The nature center continued to emphasize environmental education for children and in 1999 served more than 13,000 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. A grant from the Four County Community Foundation in Romeo allowed the center to reach additional schools in 1999.

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 provide an in-depth look at the natural world. The Junior Naturalists spent their week learning about limnology, using the system of lakes at Seven Ponds.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs in 1999. Presentations on **Michigan Raptors** (Joe Rogers), **Music for Mother Earth** (Tom Hodgson), **Endangered Species and Extinction** (Science Alive), **Sonoran Sojourners** (Ernie & Annie Szuch), **Ferns** (Dr. Warren Wagner), **Fly Tying** (Dale Vronch), **Travels of a Nature Photographer** (Alan Charnley), **Purple Martin Conservation** (Richard Wolinski), **Hummingbirds** (Sharon Johnson), **Project WISE**, and **Project WILD** combined for a wonderful year of learning. Staff and volunteers added workshops on **Backpacking, Canoeing, Natural Christmas Ornaments, Cooking with Herbs, and Basketry**. Each season brings a variety of special events to the nature center. The 1999 special events were **Winterfest, Earth Day/Arbor Day, Lapeer County Birdathon, Heritage Harvest Days, and Birdseed Weekend**. 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 Boy Scout Explorer Post #007.

Seven Ponds completed four natural history field tours in 1999, traveling to the Smoky Mountains, South Manitou Island, Isle Royale, and Central Coastal California. These trips not only exposed participants to a variety of birds, wildflowers, and other wildlife, but also provided insight about conservation issues and efforts in other parts of the state and country.

In addition to the center's many educational activities, the center moved forward on a variety

of other fronts. The Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers continued the process of strategic planning for Seven Ponds, building upon the Mission, Vision, and Values Statements adopted in 1998. During the past year, the Strategic Planning Committee developed goals and objectives for each of the center's Lines of Business. These goals and objectives will be used to guide activities and budgeting over the next few years. Also in 1999, the nature center renovated the map table and other exhibits in the Interpretive Building, 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 over 100 nest boxes used by bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and others. The purple martin station near the Interpretive Building was also refurbished with hopes that these birds will return to the skies around the center. Though no nesting occurred in 1999, several pairs of martins checked the station out. We will continue our efforts to attract them in 2000.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 1999 including the **Spring Birdathon**, **Daylily Auction**, **Heritage Harvest**, **Birdseed Weekend**, **Special Gifts**, and the **Holiday Auction**. These events were all very successful, thanks to lots of hard work, wonderful participation, and nice weather.

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 about natural history and Seven Ponds. This year's articles were: "The Harbinger of Spring" (bluebirds), "North-80 Spring Journal", "Our Isle Royale Adventure", and "The Skeletons of Winter" (winter trees).

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.