

Seven Ponds Nature Center - 2001 in Review

by Mike Champagne

In 2001, 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 maintained its usual busy schedule of day-to-day activities for schoolchildren, members, and the general public, with over 20,000 people taking part in programs. At the same time, the nature center tackled several new projects identified in the center's Strategic Plan, adopted in August, 2000.

The nature center continued to emphasize environmental education for children during the year, and served over 11,000 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. Grants from the Ford Motor Company Fund and the United Way of Lapeer County were received in 2001 to support these "Traveling Naturalist" programs.

The nature center again offered a variety of in-depth programs for children. Summer Field School programs were once again popular, with 305 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 15. 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 up-close look at the natural world. The Junior Naturalists spent their week learning about natural communities and this included a field trip to Jonathan Woods. Additional programs for children included **Winter PeeWees and Parents** and the monthly sessions of **Wee Readers**.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs in 2001. Presentations titled **Belize, Beautiful Birds and Beasts** (Terri Chapdelaine), **Starlab** (Lewis E. Wint Nature Center), **Birds of Prey** (Howell Nature Center), **Native American Culture** (Kelly Kay), **Wildflowers and Showy Orchids** (Light Play Arts), **Fly Tying** (Dale Vronch), **Butterflies and Dragonflies** (Paul Desjardins), **Spiders** (Gary Pace), and **Prairie Planting Workshop** (Bill Schneider of Wildtype) provided excellent opportunities for learning. Staff and volunteers added workshops on **Taxidermy, Astronomy, Deer Ecology, Frogs and Salamanders, Fossils, Botanical Easter Egg Design, Bird Identification, Bird Nests, Canoeing, and Hawk Identification**. Many additional educational activities were provided by the center's special interest groups: **Friends of Herbs, Astronomy Club, Eastern Michigan Collectors, and Ewenique Spinners**. Sunday walks at 2:00 p.m. for members and the general public continued as a regular feature in 2001. Finally, the nature center offered several special events during 2001. This year's events were **Winterfest, Earth Day Concert by Will Danforth, Spring Festival, Heritage Harvest Days, and Birdseed Weekend**.

Seven Ponds completed four natural history field tours in 2001, traveling to the Platte River, the Smoky Mountains, Isle Royale, and Southeast Arizona. Participants in these trips not only enjoyed the special natural features of these locations, but were also exposed to conservation issues and efforts in other parts of the state, country, and world.

Seven Ponds completed or started a number of projects during 2001. The center replaced several 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. Work also began on construction of a boardwalk trail in the Paul's Woods, the woodland south of the A-frame Bridge. This trail will create a loop trail for visitors hiking in the woods. A design for moving and revamping the Herb and Butterfly Gardens was also completed, and this project will proceed in 2002.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 2001 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Weekend, Special Gifts,** and the **Holiday Auction.** These events were all very successful, thanks to lots of hard work and great participation. For the second year in a row, however, we had rain during Heritage Harvest Days. This prompted one volunteer to suggest that we hold the event in July, when farmers need rain.

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. Topics for this year's lead articles were: trilliums, poisonous plants, monarch butterflies, and life under the ice.

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 helping make the year 2001 a productive one at Seven Ponds.