

Seven Ponds Nature Center - The Year in Review

In 2003, 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 22,000 people taking part in programs. At the same time, additional progress was made toward the goals and objectives of the nature center's Strategic Plan, adopted in August, 2000.

The nature center continued to emphasize environmental education for children during the year, and served approximately 13,000 young people. Children from preschool age and up came out to Seven Ponds to learn about the natural world using the center's woodlands, fields, ponds, and prairie. Other school children received in-classroom presentations when our naturalists brought a bit of the nature center to their site through our Traveling Naturalist program. Many area young people also attended the center's Summer Field School program, coming out to the center for in-depth activities throughout the summer. All of these programs exposed students to the wonders of the natural world, complemented school science curriculums, and helped raise the environmental awareness of the young people participating in the activities.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs in 2003. Presentations titled **Snakes of Michigan** (Jim McGrath), **Snorkeling Michigan Inland Lakes** (Nancy Washburne), **Bats of the World** (Organization for Bat Conservation), **Gray Wolf Recovery** (Michigan DNR), **Travels of a Nature Photographer** (Alan Charnley), **Fly Tying** (Dale Vronch), **Critterman's Unhuggables** (Denny Olson), **Wood Ducks** (Roger Eriksson), **Birding from the Dakota Prairies to the Rocky Mountains** (Jim Simek), **Waterfowl of the Great Lakes** (Dave Stimac), and **Frogs of the Great Lakes** (Jim McGrath) provided excellent opportunities for learning. Staff and volunteers added workshops on **Taxidermy, Astronomy, Aquatic Plants, Trees, Natural Communities, Bird Identification, Winter Ecology, Bogs, Winter Weeds, Newfoundland Birding, Bluebirds, Woodpeckers, Ferns, Canoeing, Natural Wreaths, and Snowshoe Making**. Many additional educational activities were provided by the center's special interest groups: **Friends of Herbs, Butterfly Gardeners, Astronomy Club, Eastern Michigan Collectors, and the SPNC Birding Club**. Sunday walks at 2:00 p.m. for members and the general public continued as a regular feature in 2003. Finally, the nature center offered several special events during the year. This year's events were **Winterfest, Spring Festival, Heritage Harvest Days, and Birdseed Weekend**.

Seven Ponds completed four natural history field tours in 2003, traveling to South Texas, Southwestern Michigan, Isle Royale, and New Mexico. 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 worked on completion of the final two acres of Earl's Prairie in 2003. During the summer, brush was removed from the site and the soil prepared for planting. Seed was collected from existing prairie sections in October, and added to seed collected during previous years. In late November the area was planted by staff and volunteers. It will be exciting to watch this section mature over the coming years.

In March, the nature center accepted title to the 145 acre Jonathan Woods Nature Preserve from The Nature Conservancy. Seven Ponds has helped with the stewardship of this nearby preserve for many years and is pleased to add the area to the nature center. The preserve contains old growth forest, a leatherleaf bog, numerous woodland ponds, and spectacular topographic features. Seven Ponds members are enjoying hiking and birdwatching in this area.

The center worked on a variety of other projects on the grounds in 2003. We made additional progress on the natural landscaping demonstration at the Director's Residence, removed non-native plants, such as purple loosestrife and autumn olive, from center property, added prairie plants to the front beds of the Interpretive Building, and monitored over 100 nest boxes used by bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and others.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 2003 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Stingers Rummage Sale, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Weekend, Natural History Used Book Sale, Special Gifts**, and the **Holiday Auction**. These events were all very successful, thanks to lots of hard work and great participation.

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. Titles of this year's lead articles were: "Jonathan Woods Nature Preserve", "Summer's Dreams", "Trees of the Shadows", and "The Long Night Moon of December".

As always, the people of Seven Ponds really came through during the year. Our staff of nine (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. We had over 400 volunteers for Heritage Harvest Days alone! Our special thanks to each and every one for helping make the year 2003 a productive one at Seven Ponds.