

## Seven Ponds Nature Center - The Year in Review

In 2004, 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 11,000 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. Children came from public and private schools, home schools, and scout programs. Some 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 2004. Presentations titled **Fire and Ice** (Mad Science), **A Travelogue of the Canadian Rockies** (Gordon Lonie), **All About Loons** (Luann Jaruzel & Joanne Williams), **Bugs on Wheels** (Young Entomologists' Society), **Michigan is Cougar Country** (Dennis Sijalkowski), **Fly Tying** (Dale Vronch), **Four Seasons of Michigan Birds** (Jim Simek), **Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas** (Ray Adams), **The Kenyan Birding Experience** (Kip Miller), and **All About Hummingbirds** (Allen Chartier) provided excellent opportunities for learning. Staff and volunteers added presentations or workshops on **Woodpeckers, Butterflies, Upland Game Birds, Birding in New Mexico, Herbs, Native Skills, Living with Wildlife, Botanical Easter Eggs, Fall Wildflowers, Interpretive Techniques, and Bird Identification**. Many additional educational activities were provided by the center's special interest groups: **Friends of Herbs, Butterfly Gardeners, Astronomy Club, Eastern Michigan Collectors, SPNC Birding Club and the Beekeepers' Club**. Sunday walks at 2:00 p.m. for members and the general public continued as a regular feature in 2004. Finally, the nature center offered several special events during the year. This year's events were **Winterfest, Heritage Harvest Days, and Birdseed Weekend**.

Seven Ponds completed three natural history field tours in 2004, traveling to Southern California and Alabama on birding tours, and to the beautiful Bruce Peninsula in search of ferns, wildflowers, birds, and geological features. 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 portions of North America.

Seven Ponds continued to battle invasive plants on the property in 2004. The nature center received a grant from the Four County Community Foundation to assist with this work and as a result, significant progress was made against these plants during the summer. Autumn olive was removed from large areas in the North-80, opening these areas up for such species

as eastern bluebird, American woodcock, and field sparrow. Other invasive species that were worked on included purple loosestrife, dame's rocket, oriental bittersweet, garlic mustard, and multiflora rose.

The nature center made progress on many additional fronts during 2004. School program offerings were reviewed and revised where necessary, new tables and chairs were purchased for the Interpretive Building, the farmhouse kitchen and bathroom were remodeled, one of the nature trails across Crawford Road was rerouted, storage cases for our natural history collections were purchased, and over 100 nest boxes used by bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and others were monitored.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 2004 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Stingers Rummage Sale, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Weekend, Wildflower Sale, Buy-a-Chair Campaign, Special Gifts**, and the **Holiday Auction**. In addition the Historic White Horse Inn, a restaurant in nearby Metamora, sponsored two benefit events for the nature center. **What's Cooking for Charity**, held in May, featured lunch and a cooking demonstration. **Corks and Forks**, held in October, was an evening of fine food and winetasting. 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: "Voices from the Ponds", "Harbingers of Twilight", and "Great Blue Heron Memories", and "Sun Dogs, Ice Pillars, and other Sky Optics."

As always, the people of Seven Ponds really came through during the year. Our staff of eleven (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 nearly 400 volunteers for Heritage Harvest Days alone.

The year at Seven Ponds ended on a sad note with the November passing of one of the nature center's founders, Don Naish. Don, his wife Bee, and Rip and Patty Schemm were the people who got the nature center off the ground in 1966. During the subsequent 38 years, Don was instrumental in much of the progress and success of the nature center. He supported the nature center in so many ways, including service as Director, board member, and advisor. He was also a wonderful friend to Seven Ponds' members, volunteers, and staff. In so many ways he exemplified the many special people who have made Seven Ponds what it is today. He will be missed very much.