

Seven Ponds Nature Center - The Year in Review

In 2005, 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 approximately 25,000 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 2005. The winter season saw the coming of our very popular **Winterfest**, a day of ice skating, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and winter nature study. Then, the Winter Lecture Series brought presentations titled **Michigan Snakes, Tree Diseases and Insect Pests, Animal Adaptation, Travels of a Nature Photographer, and A Kenya Safari**. Spring is always one of the center's busiest seasons, and this year featured a **Fly Tying Demonstration, Nature Art Day, An Earth Day Celebration, and Spring Bird Walks**. As the warm days of summer arrived, it was time for such programs as **Curious Canoers, the Butterfly Count, and Golf Cart Tours**. Fall rounded out the year with programs titled **The Kirtland's Warbler, Natural Ornament Workshop, Birdseed Weekend, and Joe Rogers and Friends**. Fall was also time for the nature center's biggest special event of the year, Heritage Harvest Days, with nearly 2,000 people attending. 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**. In 2005 the center also added a **Hiking Club**. Sunday walks at 2:00 p.m. for members and the general public continued as a regular feature.

Seven Ponds completed three natural history field tours in 2005. In April, we traveled to the Smoky Mountains in search of birds, wildflowers, and amphibians. In May, our Alaska Birding Tour took us to Nome, the Kenai Peninsula, and the Pribilof Islands in search of birds, mammals, wildflowers, and glaciers. Isle Royale was our final field tour destination. In June we enjoyed birds, orchids, and geology in this wonderful national park. 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.

The nature center made progress on many additional fronts during 2005. The most exciting development was that we began to make plans to remodel the Interpretive Building. This

process will continue in 2006. Meanwhile, we worked on many, more immediate projects. Our work on invasive plants around the nature center continued, the old weather station was replaced, a farmhouse bathroom was remodeled, the A-frame bridge repaired, and a new tractor was purchased. In addition, new computer and audio visual equipment was purchased with a grant from the Four County Community Foundation. As in past years, 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 2005 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Used Book Sale, Stingers Rummage Sale, Heritage Harvest Days, Christmas for the Birds, Wildflower Sale, Buy-a-Board Campaign, Special Gifts,** and the **Holiday Auction**. In addition the Historic White Horse Inn, a restaurant in nearby Metamora, sponsored a benefit event for the nature center. **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: "Remembering Don Naish", "Whispers in the Woods", "Crow", and "The Path of my Paddle."

As always, the people of Seven Ponds were an important part of our success. 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. We had nearly 400 volunteers for Heritage Harvest Days alone.