

Seven Ponds Nature Center - The Year in Review

In 2006, 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 20,000 people taking part in activities. 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 10,000 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. Home school programs were expanded in 2006 in order to provide a second year of programming for this group. We also offered a greater number of badge days for scout groups during the year. In addition to field trips to Seven Ponds, 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 2006. 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 **The Magnificent Galapagos Islands, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Hidden Habits of Humpbacks, Michigan's Valuable Wetlands, and Backpacking the Pacific Coast Trail**. We finished up the winter programs with a **Snowshoe Making Workshop**. Spring is always the center's busiest season, and this year featured a **Fly Tying Demonstration, Michigan Geology Workshop, An Earth Day Celebration, and Spring Bird Walks**. The nature center also held its first **National Trails Day**. When summer arrived, it was time for such programs as **Curious Canoers, the Butterfly Count, Golf Cart Tours, and Evening Prairie Wagon Rides**. Fall rounded out the year with programs titled **Birding in Brazil, All About Bird Nests, Birdseed Weekend, and Prairie Seed Collecting Day**. Fall was also time for the nature center's biggest special event of the year, Heritage Harvest Days, with nearly 2,000 people attending. This year's festival was one of the best in recent memory, with an excellent collection of old cars and tractors. 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, Seven Ponds Hiking Club, and the Beekeepers' 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 2007. In April, we traveled to the Texas Hill Country and Big Bend National Park in search of black-capped vireo, golden-cheeked warbler, Colima warbler, and a variety of other birds. In July, our naturalists led a trip to Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, where they enjoyed this area's rich wildflowers,

boreal birds, and beautiful lake country. In November, we traveled to Sonora, Mexico where we explored a variety of habitats in search of such tropical birds as mountain trogon, black-throated magpie-jay, and Aztec thrush. Participants in these trips not only enjoyed the special natural features of these locations, but were also exposed to conservation issues and efforts in the United States and bordering countries.

Seven Ponds made progress on many additional fronts during 2006. The nature center continued making plans to renovate the Interpretive Building. The year saw the hiring of an architect for the project, survey crews gathering information around the building, and significant progress for the upcoming capital campaign. Much work will be done on this project in 2007. Meanwhile, we worked on many, more immediate projects. Our work on invasive plants around the nature center continued, predator guards were added to many of the bluebird houses, a new furnace was added to the farmhouse, outdated computer equipment was replaced, and two projects to keep the center's beavers from flooding the trails were completed. In addition, major improvements were begun on the Woodland Wildflower Garden with help from 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 2006 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Used Book Sale, Stingers Rummage Sale, Heritage Harvest Days, Christmas for the Birds, Wildflower Sale, Buy-a-Garden Campaign, 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: "Dragonfly Year," "The Meadow-Bird," "The Path of my Paddle," and "Relics of Seven Ponds."

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.