

Seven Ponds Nature Center - The Year in Review

In 2007, Seven Ponds Nature Center celebrated its 40th anniversary as a nature sanctuary, environmental education center, and peaceful retreat, serving Southeast Michigan. The nature center maintained a 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, significant progress was made toward the goals and objectives of the nature center's Strategic Plan, adopted in August, 2000. The Strategic Plan itself was updated by board members, staff, and volunteers and passed by the Board of Directors at the August, 2007 board meeting.

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. The number of children served was up slightly from 2006, but many schools continued to experience budget constraints relative to field trip fees and transportation costs. Some of the school classes which were unable to plan a field trip to Seven Ponds, received in-classroom presentations through the center's 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 environment, complemented school science curriculums, and helped raise the awareness of the young people taking part in the activities.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs in 2007. 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 **Quest for Survival, We're Birding in Alaska, Critter Control-When Good Animals Go Bad, Florida Adventures, and Native American Life and Technology in Michigan**. Spring is a favorite time for many nature center visitors. The season featured a **Fly Tying Demonstration, Botanical Easter Eggs Workshop, Salamander Foray, Owl Prowl, Curious Canoers, An Earth Day Celebration, and Spring Bird Walks**. When summer arrived, it was time for such programs as **Golf Cart Tours, Butterfly Count, Evening Prairie Walk, Family Night Hike, Family Pond Dipping**, and another session of **Curious Canoers**. Fall rounded out the year with programs titled **Joe Rogers and Friends, Photography of Alan Charnley, Natural Ornament Workshop, Birdseed Weekend, Prairie Seed Collecting Day**, and a fall color version of **Curious Canoers**. The 31st annual Heritage Harvest Days also took place in the fall. Nearly 2,000 people attended and the show had an excellent selection of activities, vendors, and antique tractors and cars. 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 were offered on alternate weekends.

Seven Ponds completed four natural history field tours in 2007. In early May, the center traveled to Southwest Michigan where participants enjoyed a wonderful combination of

wildflowers, birds, and ecology. The displays of Trillium were particularly striking. In late May, the center traveled to Alaska for a 14 day birding tour. The group visited numerous areas, finding the small town of Gambel on St. Laurence Island especially interesting. A second Alaska tour was run in late July, this one covering all aspects of natural history. The group enjoyed wildlife, wildflowers, glaciers, geology, and more. The last tour of the year went to the Eastern Upper Peninsula, and included day trips to Les Cheneaux Islands and Drummond Island. Participants in the field tours not only enjoyed the special natural features of the locations visited, but were also exposed to conservation issues and efforts in other parts of the United States.

Seven Ponds made progress on many additional fronts during 2007. The nature center continued making plans to renovate and add to the Interpretive Building. Schematic drawings for the project were completed and the Board of Directors voted to move forward with a \$1.8 million Capital Campaign to fund the improvements and related endowment. A Construction Manager was also hired to work with the architect on construction drawings. Work will continue on this project in 2008. Meanwhile, staff and volunteers worked on a variety of other projects. Our work on invasive plants around the nature center continued, predator guards were placed on additional bluebird houses, and significant improvements were made to the Woodland Wildflower Garden. 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 2007 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Stingers Rummage Sale, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Weekend with Stingers Bake Sale, Wildflower Sale, Special Gifts,** and the **Holiday Auction.** These events were all very successful, thanks to 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: **"Relics of Seven Ponds," "From Seven Ponds to the Sea," "The Buzz About the Nature Center,"** and **"Native vs. Alien."**

As always, the people of Seven Ponds were an important part of our success. 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, Friends of Seven Ponds, 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.

Seven Ponds also networked with the people of a variety of other organizations during the year. The nature center continued as an affiliate of the Michigan Audubon Society and had representatives from the Detroit Audubon Society and five chapters of the Michigan Audubon Society (Genesee, Grosse Pointe, Lapeer, Macomb, Oakland) on the center's Board of Directors. Members of the Master Gardeners assisted with duties in the Butterfly Garden and the center worked with a variety of groups to put on Earth Day programs in Lapeer. Seven Ponds staff also participated in activities of the Upland Hills Ecological Awareness Center, Oakland County Wild Ones, and the Flint River Watershed Coalition.