

The Year in Review - 2010

Introduction

In 2010, Seven Ponds Nature Center celebrated its 43rd anniversary as a nature sanctuary, environmental education center, and peaceful retreat, serving Southeast Michigan. As always, the nature center maintained a busy schedule of stewardship activities and a variety of educational programs for schoolchildren, members, and the general public, thus continuing its longtime commitment to conservation and environmental education. It was the first full year for the center's recently renovated facility, and a time of finishing up a variety of projects and tasks related to the building project and successful capital campaign. It was also a time to address additional projects laid out in the center's 2007 Strategic Plan, as well as handle newly identified tasks. Items in this latter category included the cutting of formal ties with the Michigan Audubon Society. After 43 years as an affiliate of MAS, the nature center was asked to obtain its own 501(c)3 and become independent in a variety of administrative areas. By the end of 2010, this separation was largely complete. Seven Ponds plans to continue a mission based relationship with the Michigan Audubon Society, a relationship based on the common interests of the two organizations.

Education

The nature center continued its dedication to environmental education for children during 2010. 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. They came from public and private schools, home schools, and scout programs. Some children 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. New for 2010 was a series of "Field School Specials" for children wishing to learn about advanced topics. 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. The nature center served nearly 8,000 young people during 2010. This number was up from 2009, but still down significantly from the center's longtime totals. Schools continued to experience significant budget constraints which limited funds for field trip fees and transportation. Most schools have restricted the number of field trips for their classes, or eliminated field trips altogether. The nature center applied for and received a grant from the Four County Community Foundation and this provided funding for classes from five local school districts to come out to Seven Ponds on field trips.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs in 2010. The winter season saw the return 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 **Amazing World of Reptiles and Amphibians, A River of Birds, One More Tern around the Fort, Natural Resources of the Woodland Indians, and Orchids of Michigan**. The season also featured a Snowshoe Making Workshop with participants making their own Huron style snowshoes. Spring is probably the busiest time at the nature center. The season featured **Botanical Easter Eggs, Maple Sugar Magic, Seven Ponds Sketchers, Spring Break Nature Fun, Owl Prowls, Salamander Forays, An Earth Day Celebration, Invasive Plant Workdays, Getting it Right with Warbler Identification, The Return of Ospreys to Southwestern Michigan, Basket Weaving**

Class, Curious Canoers, and Spring Bird Walks. Spring of 2010 also marked the start of a new special event at the center on the first Saturday in May. **Naturefest** featured talks about butterflies, loons, and snakes, as well as a native plant sale and photography contest. When summer arrived, it was time for such programs as **Family Pond Dipping, Invasive Plant Removal Days, Butterfly Count, Nature Photography Workshop, Golf Cart Tours, Seven Ponds Sketchers,** and another session of **Curious Canoers.** Fall rounded out the year with programs titled **Paddle the Ponds at Sunset, Owl Moon and other Campfire Tales, Wee Readers, Fall Bird Walks, Invasive Plant Workdays, Birdseed Weekend, Prairie Seed Collecting Day, Handmade Natural Ornaments Workshop,** and a fall color version of **Curious Canoers.** 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, Beekeepers' Club,** and a **Photography Club** which began meeting at the center during the year. Sunday walks at 2:00 p.m. for members and the general public were offered on many weekends.

Seven Ponds completed four natural history field tours in 2010. In early May, the center offered a **Texas Hill Country Birding Tour.** The group taking part in this tour was treated to a variety of eastern and western bird species, including two very rare songbirds, the black-capped vireo and golden-cheeked warbler. The group also enjoyed the spectacle of millions of Brazilian free-tailed bats departing from a cave at dusk. A wet spring in the Hill Country produced a spectacular show of spring wildflowers in fields and along roadsides, providing an unexpected bonus for the trip. In May, birdwatchers headed to Northern Michigan to take part in the **Upper Peninsula Birding Weekend.** The group enjoyed loons, grebes, shorebirds, and a variety of songbirds moving through on their way north. Many warbler species were already on territory and the group was treated to the sight of a singing Connecticut warbler above a carpet of blooming pink lady slippers. In June, Seven Ponds members and friends took part in the **Lake Superior/Canadian Shield Tour.** This group explored the eastern shore of Lake Superior, learning about the area's geology, wildflowers, birds, and other wildlife. A special treat of this tour was a trek up the Michipicotten River via voyageur canoe. The group also visited ancient pictographs inscribed on granite walls above the crashing waves of the big lake. In early November, the center offered **Sandhill Cranes at Sunrise.** This field tour took participants to Southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana to watch birds, enjoy fall color, and visit some of the areas unique habitats. The highlight was a morning of watching and photographing thousands of sandhill cranes. Participants in the above 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 and the world.

Throughout the year, members and friends of Seven Ponds also received information about the natural world and the nature center's programs through the quarterly newsletter, *Heron Tracks*. Titles of this year's lead articles were: "**Bird's Eye View,**" "**Golden Tresures,**" "**Borderland of Invisibility,**" and "**Ice Age Travelers.**" The newsletter also provided information on the center's projects, volunteers, and fundraising efforts. A variety of information about Seven Ponds and its activities was also available on the nature center's website, www.sevenponds.org.

Buildings and Grounds

There were still many small projects related to the building renovation project which needed

attention during 2010, and staff and volunteers also made progress on a variety of other tasks related to buildings and grounds. Many hours were spent keeping the miles of trails at Seven Ponds and nearby Jonathan Woods in good shape, with mowing, wood chipping, tree clearing, trimming, and boardwalk maintenance. Special projects including the staining of the quarter mile long boardwalk in Paul's Woods and the replacement of a large section of boardwalk leading to the A-frame Bridge. Land management efforts continued in the North-80 with seasonal mowing and brush removal, providing habitat for such species as eastern bluebird, tree swallow, and American woodcock. Work on invasive plants around the nature center continued with work days devoted to removal of autumn olive, purple loosestrife, garlic mustard, dame's rocket, saw-toothed sunflower, and Oriental bittersweet. As in past years, over 100 nest boxes used by bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and other hole nesters were monitored by staff and volunteers. Reproductive success has increased since predator guards were placed below nest boxes, starting in 2008. In addition to the above work, trail markers were erected in Jonathan Woods as part of an Eagle Scout project by a boy scout from a Lake Orion scout troop. In the fall of the year, approximately 70 native trees and shrubs were planted in front of the Interpretive Building by staff and representatives of Wildtype, a native plant nursery in Mason, Michigan. Additional plants will be added to this area in 2011.

Finances and Fundraising

The nature center's annual budget results continued to be affected by the state of the economy in Southeast Michigan and beyond. In addition, fundraising for the Capital Campaign continued to affect the center's regular fundraising efforts, as supporters finished off their final pledge payments. As a result, the center continued to struggle on some levels. Fortunately, a bequest from a longtime supporter gave the finances a much needed boost on the income side of the ledger. The nature center maintained staff and program levels of recent years and this resulted in expenses similar to those years. The net result was that the center finished the year in the black and was also able to add to the Endowment Fund. Growth of the Endowment Fund will help provide increased income during 2011 and beyond. A full breakdown of the 2010 finances can be found later in this report.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 2010 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Native Plant Sale, Stingers Rummage Sale, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Weekend with Stingers Bake Sale, Special Gifts,** and the **Holiday Auction**. Staff and volunteers worked very hard to put on these events and all went well with the exception of a very rainy Saturday during Heritage Harvest which put a damper on this annual event. In addition to the above, Red Knapps American Grill in Oxford and The Historic White Horse Inn sponsored Dining for Dollars events for the nature center.

Staff and Volunteers

As always, the people of Seven Ponds were an important part of the center's success. The staff of eight (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, Stingers, Friends of Herbs, Butterfly Gardeners, Board of Directors,** and others contributed many hours of time for education, habitat management, trail and garden maintenance, clerical work, fundraising, and governance. Members of the center's various special interest clubs also helped with education programs and special events. In a typical year, approximately 500 people volunteer

at the nature center.

Seven Ponds also networked with the people of a variety of other organizations during the year. The nature center continued its association with 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.

On a sad note, 2010 was also marked by the death of longtime member, birdwatcher, Assistant Naturalist, board member, Capital Campaign Co-chairperson, and all-around volunteer, Nancy Murray, who died in February of the year. The nature center lost a great friend and supporter with her passing. Her life was celebrated during a memorial program with her family and friends at Seven Ponds in early May. The above mentioned planting of bird friendly, native trees and shrubs was done in her memory. All agreed that this was a fitting memorial for Nancy, and we look forward to the day when the planting attracts eastern bluebirds, cedar waxwings, robins, and other bird species to feed and nest.