

The Year in Review – 2012

Introduction

In 2012, Seven Ponds Nature Center continued its important work 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. It was an especially eventful year, with progress on many fronts related to the nature center's mission. There was new property to develop and explore, a new program for families wishing to explore the natural world at night, a new initiative to improve the forests of the nature center, and revisions of the nature center's bylaws, Articles of Incorporation, and personnel handbook. It was also a time of transition for the Seven Ponds family with the passing of longtime member, volunteer, and Board Member, Georgia Reid.

Education

The nature center continued its dedication to environmental education for children during 2012. 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. This again included Field School Specials for children wishing to learn about advanced topics. In addition, Knee-high Naturalists, for three and four year olds continued through the year. All of these programs exposed students to the wonders of the natural environment, complemented school science curriculums, and helped raise the awareness of young people taking part in the activities. The nature center served over 7,600 children during 2012. This number was up a bit from 2011, but still down significantly from the center's longtime average annual totals. Schools continued to experience significant budget constraints which limited funds for field trip fees and transportation. Most area schools have restricted the number of field trips for their classes, or eliminated field trips altogether. Considering the funding problems facing local school systems, the nature center's school visitation numbers for the year were respectable. The nature center's efforts once again received a boost from a grant from the Four County Community Foundation which provided funding for classes from seven local school districts to come out to Seven Ponds on field trips.

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs in 2012. The winter season saw the return of our very popular **Winterfest**, a day of ice skating, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horse-drawn sleigh rides, and winter nature study. Then, the Winter Lecture Series brought presentations titled **Native American Program**, **Animals from Around the World**, **Forgotten People of McKeen Lake**, **Historic Barns of Lapeer County**, and **The Mysterious World of Meat-Eating Plants**. The season also featured a **Snowshoe Making Workshop** with participants making their own Huron style snowshoes, a **Wood Carving Workshop**, and **Winter Bird Walks**. Spring is always a busy time at the nature center. The season featured **Botanical Easter Eggs**, **Drawing from Nature Classes**, **Owl Prowls**, **Family Nature Days**, **Evening Paddle on the Ponds**, **Salamander Forays**, **Invasive Plant Workdays**, **Curious Canoers**, and **Spring Bird Walks**. The special event of the season was **Naturefest**, which featured talks about landscaping with native plants and

reptiles and amphibians, as well as a native plant sale, nature crafts, pond dipping, and a photography contest. When summer arrived, it was time for such programs as **NestWatch**, **Giant Silk Moths of Michigan**, **Invasive Plant Workdays**, **Butterfly Count**, **Great Lakes Photo Tour Photo Excursion**, **Family Fun: Pond Dipping**, **Native American Beadwork**, **Golf Cart Tours**, **Seven Ponds Sketchers**, **Pond Adventures**, **Summer Bird Walks**, and another session of **Curious Canoers**. Fall rounded out the year with programs titled **Drawing from Nature Classes**, **Tree Planting Day**, **Evening Paddle on the Ponds**, **Fall Bird Walks**, **Invasive Plant Workdays**, **Natural Pinecone Wreath Workshop**, **Prairie Seed Collecting Day**, **Project Learning Tree**, and a fall color version of **Curious Canoers**. Fall special events were **Heritage Harvest Days**, **Birdseed Saturday**, and new event titled **The Enchanted Woodland**. For this last program, families explored the nighttime forest, learning about nocturnal animals from staff and volunteers in costume along the trail. 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 **Photography Club**. Sunday walks at 2:00 p.m., for members and the general public, were offered on many weekends.

Seven Ponds completed three natural history field tours in 2012. In mid-April, the center offered **The Southern Appalachian Adventure**. The tour allowed participants to explore Great Smoky Mountains National Park and nearby locations to enjoy spring wildflowers, southern breeding birds, salamanders, cultural history, and spectacular scenery. In May, the nature center took a **Northern Michigan Birding Tour**, visiting locations in the Lower and Upper Peninsulas of the state to find Kirtland's warbler, spruce grouse, black-backed woodpecker, Connecticut warbler, LeConte's sparrow, and many other northern nesting birds. In June, the nature center offered an **Algonquin Provincial Park Getaway**. This tour explored Ontario's oldest provincial park on foot and by canoe to enjoy northern wildflowers, nesting warblers, loons, geology, and spectacular scenery. 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 North America.

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: "**The Birds They are A-changin**" "**Beautiful Browns**," "**Odoriferous Skunk**," and "**Turtles on Ice**." The newsletter also provided information on the center's projects, volunteers, and fundraising efforts. A variety of information about Seven Ponds and its activities continued to be available on the center's website, www.sevenponds.org, and people could also like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SevenPondsNatureCenter.

Buildings and Grounds

A number of large projects were taken on during 2012. With the addition of the 18-acre Richie Pond Property at the end of 2011, much work had to be done to make this property ready for use. During the year, the home on the property was torn down, driveway improved, fence and gate erected, and signs posted. People on bird walks, members of the Birding Club, and Sunday Walk participants enjoyed observing nesting bobolinks and meadowlarks on the property.

Another large project which was undertaken during the year was tree planting in the woodland around the Interpretive Building. Seven Ponds member and friends made contributions during the summer to a special fundraising appeal titled "Buy-A-Tree." These funds were then used to plant nearly 60 native trees and shrubs between the building and the lake, as well as build wire cages to protect the small trees from browsing by white-tailed deer.

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. 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. Some of this work was planned and completed by an Eagle Scout candidate, his fellow scouts, and parents. 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, and Oriental bittersweet. As in past years, over 100 nest boxes used by bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and other cavity nesters were monitored by staff and volunteers.

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. As a result, the center continued to struggle on some levels. Despite this, 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 with a small deficit. An important part of the year's finances were the grants from the Four County Community Foundation and The Carls Foundation. A full breakdown of the 2012 finances can be found later in this report.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 2012 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Native Plant Sale, Stingers Rummage Sale, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Saturday 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. In addition, most of the outstanding pledges from the Capital Campaign came in.

Staff and Volunteers

As always, the people of Seven Ponds were an important part of the center's success. The staff of ten (four full and six 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 (MAS) and had representatives from Detroit Audubon Society and five chapters of MAS (Genesee, Grosse Pointe, Lapeer, Macomb, and Oakland) on the center's Board of Directors.