

# Seven Ponds Nature Center

## 2016 Annual Report



Seven Ponds Nature Center

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## **Mission**

The mission of Seven Ponds Nature Center is to conserve the natural environment of the nature center as a sanctuary for native plants and animals, as a living classroom for environmental education, and as a peaceful retreat for its visitors. The nature center's mission, further, is to foster an understanding and appreciation of our natural world, and to develop an environmental ethic in the people and communities of Southeast Michigan through education, service as a community resource, and responsible stewardship of nature center and adjacent lands.

## **Board of Directors for 2016**

Mary-Sue Weber, Chairman, Member-at-large  
Nan Toppin, Vice Chairman, Member-at-large  
Kelly Heyner, Secretary, Member-at-large  
Paul Messing, Treasurer, Macomb Audubon Representative  
Nancy Buck, Member-at-large  
Don Burlett, Oakland Audubon Representative  
Mike Butterfield, Member-at-large  
Mike Champagne, Executive Director  
Kathy Churchill, Member-at-large  
Emory Clark, Member-at-large  
Kathy Fulcher, Genesee Audubon Representative  
Richard Greer, Lifetime Member  
Gisela Lendle King, Detroit Audubon Representative  
Scott McDuffee, Member-at-large  
Mike Mercier, Lapeer Audubon Representative  
Joanna Pease, Grosse Pointe Audubon Representative  
Carole Porretta, Member-at-large  
Jocelyn Scofield, Member-at-large  
Susie Stroh, Member-at-large  
Charlie Turner, Member-at-large

## **Staff for 2016**

Mike Champagne, Executive Director  
Mike Grappin, Maintenance  
Dan Hayes, Office Manager  
Stacey Hollinsworth, Weekend Receptionist  
Nancy Kautz, Seasonal Naturalist  
Karen Page, Weekday Receptionist  
Diane Rankin, Office Manager  
Lois Rheume, Naturalist  
Connor Socrates, Summer Maintenance  
Carrie Spencer, Naturalist  
Cathy Wesley, Naturalist

# Seven Ponds Nature Center - The Year in Review - 2016

## Introduction

Seven Ponds Nature Center had another successful year in 2016, continuing its longtime mission of serving Southeast Michigan as a nature sanctuary, environmental education center, and peaceful retreat. It was an eventful year, with progress on many fronts related to the center's mission. It was an active year for stewardship, with a variety of improvements made to the nature center's natural areas. Thousands of school children once again visited Seven Ponds for field trips, with many of these programs made possible thanks to generous support from the community. The nature center also offered a busy schedule of walks, workshops, field trips, club meetings, and field tours to members and the general public. The programs provided environmental education activities for all ages and interests. The creation of an activity center for pre-school children, or "Nature Nook", was a significant addition to the center's Discovery Room. The year also saw the nature center entering a significant period of transition, as three long-time staff members prepared for retirement.

## Stewardship

During its 50 year history, Seven Ponds has carefully nurtured the land which makes up the nature center. As a result, the nature center is a living textbook of the natural communities found in Southeast Michigan. Nature center staff and volunteers continued their dedication to stewardship during 2016, putting in many hours to maintain the integrity of the center's natural communities and to improve their diversity. The mowing regime for the fields near the parking lot and in the North-80 were continued in order to maintain habitat for plant and animal species which require open areas. Nearly 100 bird houses were maintained in these fields for eastern bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and black-capped chickadees. These houses were once again monitored on a weekly basis during spring and summer by staff and volunteers. More than 40 additional nest boxes for wood ducks and eastern screech owls, erected in previous years, continued to provide nesting sites for these species. The osprey platform in the North-80 and the purple martin house near the parking lot did not attract residents in 2016, but we continue to have high hopes for future.

### Eastern bluebirds continued at SPNC



2016 was the fifth year of an ambitious tree planting project, designed to improve the woodland around the Interpretive Building and create a "Forest of the Future." More than 50 native trees and shrubs were planted during the year. Most were planted through an Eagle Scout Project by Luke Schlanderer of Boy Scout Troop #128 in Almont. Luke organized a series of work days during October which saw scouts, parents, and others removing non-



native plants and planting 50 trees. The species planted included white oak, black oak, red oak, witch hazel, sugar maple, bitternut hickory, American beech, serviceberry, and basswood. The nature center also planted two large sugar maples in front of the Farmhouse in honor of Elaine McDonald, replacing the large oaks which came down in recent years. In addition, the native planting in front of the building and the fern border outside the library window were both enriched with new species of plants.

**The Almont Boy Scout tree planting crew**



Non-native, invasive plants continue to have a significant impact on the natural communities of Seven Ponds. Nature center staff and volunteers worked on at least 15 species of invasive plants, including garlic mustard, glossy buckthorn, honeysuckle, crown vetch, Oriental bittersweet, autumn olive, Canada thistle, dame's rocket, and purple loosestrife in areas adjacent to the building, in the North-80, in Earl's Prairie, around the lakes, at Richie Pond Preserve, and at Jonathan Woods. Much of this work was done on the numerous **Invasive Plant Workdays** scheduled spring through fall and conducted by Naturalists Cathy Wesley and Carrie Spencer. The above mentioned Eagle Project by Luke Schlanderer also removed a large number of woody invasive plants from the area west of the Interpretive Building. By the end of the season, nearly 300 hours had been put in by staff and volunteers. Real progress is being made on some of the plant species, but many others continue to provide a formidable challenge.

Prescribed burns are another way which Seven Ponds manages the center's natural habitats. In April, the nature center staff and volunteers, assisted by members of the Dryden Township Volunteer Fire Department, conducted such a burn on the eastern two-thirds of Earl's Prairie. The burn not only destroyed woody vegetation moving into the prairie, but also promoted vigorous growth and blooms by removing dead vegetation and releasing nutrients into the soil.

**The 2016 prescribed burn**

The many forms of support for stewardship activities during the year were much



appreciated. Several garden clubs and many individuals contributed to these efforts through the summer Buy-A-Tree Campaign. The nature center also received financial contributions from family and friends of the Eagle Scout Award candidate.

## Education

The nature center continued its dedication to environmental education for children during 2016. 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 organizations to take part in **Seasonal Walks, Explorer Programs, and Scout Programs**. Some children received in-classroom presentations through the center's **Traveling Naturalist** program. Many of the area's 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. **Knee-high Naturalists**, for three and four year olds, was offered monthly throughout the year. The week-long program, "**Annie's BIG Nature Lesson**" again provided two classes of 6<sup>th</sup> graders from Dryden Elementary School an opportunity to

come out to the nature center. Staff naturalists Carrie Spencer and Cathy Wesley worked with the two Dryden 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to make this special week happen. All of these activities exposed students to the wonders of the natural environment, complemented school science curriculums, and helped raise the awareness of young people taking part.

### **The Annie's BIG Nature Lesson graduates**



The nature center served 7,993 children with programs during 2016. This number was up from 2015, with increases coming in several areas of programing. The number of children taking part in Explorer Programs, Traveling Naturalist Programs, Scout Programs, Homeschool Programs, Knee High Naturalists, and Birthday Parties all increased over the previous year. Unfortunately, schools in the nature center's service area continue to be impacted by the financial climate existing in the region. As a result, schools continue to experience significant budget constraints which limit funds for field trip fees and transportation. In addition, the numbers of students attending most schools served by the nature center continue to be lower than they were during most of the center's history. To make matters worse, many of the students who remain in the schools are economically disadvantaged. As a result, school administrators and teachers are reluctant to pass along field trip costs to students and their parents. For all of these reasons, getting students out to Seven Ponds on field trips continues to be a challenge.



Fortunately, Seven Ponds had several partners to help give its efforts a boost. The nature center once again received a grant from the Four County Community Foundation which provided funding for classes from eight local school districts to come out to Seven Ponds on field trips. This grant also funded a teacher workshop, and staff and teacher training for Annie's BIG Nature Lesson. The Foundation has funded these programs since 2010 and has thus made it possible for the nature center to maintain its longtime tradition of providing environmental education programs for local school children. In addition, the Kiwanis Club of Lapeer and the Lapeer Optimist Club made contributions which allowed students from the Lapeer Community Schools, Chatfield School, Bishop Kelly Catholic School, and St. Paul's Lutheran School, all in Lapeer, to come out to the nature center on field trips. This is the third year in a row that these two service clubs have provided such funding to Seven Ponds.



**Nature study can be hard work!**

Members and visitors were treated to a variety of programs during 2016. Each season brought new things to learn and new things to experience. The seasons unfolded as follows:

**WINTER** - The winter season saw the return of our very popular **Winterfest**, a day of ice skating, ice-cutting, animal tracking, snowshoeing, crafts, and winter nature study. Then, the Winter Lecture Series brought presentations titled **Bats of the World, From Sea Watch to Seward: Birding in Alaska, Beavers in the Burbs, Galapagos Islands, and A Winter Dweller's Celebration**. These Sunday afternoon programs were all free to members. The season also featured **Knee High Naturalists, Bird Study Merit Badge for Boy Scouts, Fun with Fossils, Nature Journaling, Snow Moon, Paint-A-Rock Animal, Winter Bird Walks**, and more.

**SPRING** - Spring is typically the busiest season at the nature center with many scheduled activities. During 2016, the season featured **Knee High Naturalists, Pastel Pine Flowers Workshop, Trees by Bark and Bud, Canoe Clinic: Care and Feeding of your Wood & Canvas Canoe, Saginaw Bay Birding, Natural History of Jonathan Woods, Owl Prowl, Salamander Forays, Flower Moon Night Hike, Curious Canoers, Nature Journaling, Spring Bird Walks**, and more. The special event of the season was **Eco Days**, which featured owl pellet dissecting, chalk murals, pond critters, a trail mix station, flower planting, bird house building, and presentations on organic gardening, astronomy, beekeeping, and photography.

**SUMMER** - When summer arrives, much of the center's time is devoted to **Summer Field School** for children. There were also many programs for adults and families during the season, including **Michigan's Medicinal Plants, Knee High Naturalists, Butterfly Count, Family Fun Day: Pond Dipping, Family Fun Day: Insect Netting, Golf Cart**

**Tours, Adult Nature Study Class on Pond Exploration, Build a Hypertufa Leaf Birdbath, Family Fossil Trip, Nature Journaling, Nocturnal Performances, Natural History of Jonathan Woods, Summer Bird Walks, Curious Canoers, and more.** The Organization for Bat Conservation put on a special **“Bat Night”** for the nature center which featured presentations, crafts, bat house making, and an echolocation demonstration.



**Nature study can be fun!**

FALL - Fall rounded out the year with **Blue Water Wanders, Fall Bird Walks, Prairie Seed Collecting in Earl's Prairie, Knee High Naturalists, Nature Journaling, Hands-On Nature Teacher Workshop, Natural Ornament Workshop, Curious Canoers** and more. September and October are a busy time for special events. The 40<sup>th</sup> annual **Heritage Harvest Days** went well, though once again there was rain on one of the days of the festival. This year, children 12 and under were again admitted without charge. Other fall special events were **Birdseed Saturday** and the 5th annual **Enchanted Woodland**. For this last program, families explored the nighttime forest, learning about nocturnal animals from staff and volunteers in costumes along the trail. The weather was perfect for the event and a record number of people attended. A new costume this year was an eastern newt, which was fabricated by our own talented Naturalist Lois Rheume. The nature center now has eleven great costumes for the event, with another new costume on the way for 2017.



**Nature Study can be intense!**

Many additional educational activities were provided by the center's special interest groups: **Friends of Herbs, Butterfly Gardeners, Astronomy Club, Eastern Michigan Collectors, Birding Club, Beekeepers' Club, and Camera Club.** After many years of declining membership, the Eastern Michigan Collectors decided to disband. The group plans to continue to help out at Heritage Harvest Days in September.



The staff continued to add exhibits in the Interpretive Building during the year. Thanks to a grant from the Lapeer County Community Foundation and a donation from the Rochester Garden Club, an activity center for pre-school children called the “Nature Nook” was added in the middle of the Discovery Room. The area contains a small table and chairs for pre-school children and a cubbyhole system with all kinds of puzzles, games, masks, and many natural history artifacts. This very “hands on” area immediately became a favorite destination for many of our members and friends that have young children or grandchildren. In addition to the Nature Nook, several additional live mounts were added to the ever-growing bird exhibit in the Hall of Michigan Birds. Longtime member Lee Scott also donated a variety of working and decorative decoys and these were added to the existing decoy exhibit. The many exhibits in the building continue to provide a focal point for nature center visitors.



**The Nature Nook**

Seven Ponds completed three natural history field tours in 2016. In May, the center conducted the **Southeast Arizona Birding Tour**. The tour took participants to locations around Tucson to explore deserts, grasslands, oak woodlands, and coniferous forests in search of birds. The tour featured visits to three very nice in-habitat lodges which allowed participants to step out of their rooms in the morning and begin birding. The trip was co-led by Executive Director Mike Champagne. In June, the **Isle Royale Experience** took participants to this spectacular National Park where they enjoyed hiking, botanizing, birding, and learning about the history of the archipelago. Participants stayed in the comfortable Rock Harbor Lodge and took day trips into different parts of the park. This tour was led by Seven Ponds naturalists Carrie Spencer and Nancy Kautz. In November, the nature center offered a **Southwest Michigan Birding Getaway**. This tour, led by Executive Director Mike Champagne and Naturalist Cathy Wesley, explored the Lake Michigan shoreline and several well-known inland locations. The highlight of this tour was a trip to Jasper-Pulaski Fish & Wildlife Area to observe thousands of sandhill cranes.



**Arizona Birding Tour participants**



Participants in Seven Ponds Nature Center's three field tours experienced the special natural features of the locations visited, enjoyed the camaraderie of other trip participants, and were 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*, produced by Office Manager Dan Hayes and other staff members. Titles of this year's lead articles were: **"Those Darned Squirrels"** by Lois Rheume, **"Bombus"** by Nancy Kautz, **"The Daily Toil"** by Carrie Spencer, and **"The Ever Wily Coyote"** by Cathy Wesley. The newsletter also provided information on the center's projects, volunteers, and fundraising efforts. A variety of information about Seven Ponds and its activities could be found in digital format in 2016. The center's website, [www.sevenponds.org](http://www.sevenponds.org), managed by Office Manager Dan Hayes, provided many people with an introduction to Seven Ponds. The nature center also provided information about its activities on its Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/SevenPondsNatureCenter](http://www.facebook.com/SevenPondsNatureCenter). Naturalist Carrie Spencer and other staff members provided these updates. The nature center continued its monthly e-newsletter, *The Great Blue Heron*, which was sent out to both members and non-members by Executive Director Mike Champagne.

### **Buildings and Grounds**

Staff and volunteers worked hard during the year on many regular 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. Staff members spent several days clearing dead trees and brush from the Sanborn Drain in the North-80 in conjunction with the Lapeer County Drain Commission's efforts to maintain this feature.

### **Finances and Fundraising**

The nature center's annual finances continued to be affected by the state of the economy in Southeast Michigan during 2016. Board and staff worked hard to maintain income levels, however, and the nature center was able to maintain staff and program levels similar to recent years, take on the projects listed in this report, and handle several expenses related to staff transitions. The nature center finished the year with a small deficit. A full breakdown of the 2016 finances can be found later in this report.

The nature center conducted a number of fundraising events in 2016 including the **Lapeer County Birdathon, Native Plant Sale, Wine Tasting Fundraiser, Stingers Rummage Sale, Buy-A-Tree, Heritage Harvest Days, Birdseed Saturday, Stingers Bake Sales, Special Gifts, Used Book Sales**, and the **Holiday Auction**. Staff and volunteers worked very hard to put on these many special events and all went well. The 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Wine Tasting Fundraiser, organized by the Development Committee and held at Metamora Golf & Country Club, was a big hit and raised nearly \$7,000.00.

### **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 time, three part time, and three seasonal) worked very hard, often putting in extra effort during busy seasons or before special events. With all staff members returning in 2016, the nature center had the luxury of having a group of experienced staff

members who had worked together for many years. As 2016 came to a close, three long-time staff members, with a combined total of 80 years at Seven Ponds, prepared for retirement. Office Manager Dan Hayes retired at the end of December after 38 years at the nature center. His replacement, Diane Rankin of Imlay City, joined the staff in mid-December and was able to work with Dan for three weeks and benefit from his knowledge and experience. Executive Director Mike Champagne announced in June of the year that he would retire in March of 2017, after 25 years heading up the nature center. Soon after, the SPNC Board of Directors formed a Search Committee to create a job description, interview candidates, and make a recommendation to the full board. In December of the year, the Board of Directors hired Daryl Bernard to be the next Executive Director of Seven Ponds. Daryl would begin his tenure in February of 2017, giving him a month to work with outgoing Executive Director Mike Champagne. Naturalist Lois Rheame plans to retire in April of 2017 after 22 years of service. Her replacement will be chosen sometime in the spring of the year.



**Daryl Bernard**



**Diane Rankin**

The nature center again received thousands of hours of work 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.

Sadly, the nature center lost one of its best friends and supporters with the passing of Dick Greer on November 18<sup>th</sup> of the year. Dick joined the nature center as a member in 1981, and through the years became more and more involved in the center's activities. He served on the Board of Directors for many years and was recently elected to the position of Life Member to this body. He also volunteered at Heritage Harvest Days and the Holiday Auction. He was a real "people person" who was loved by all.

## **Seven Ponds Nature Center Investment Funds**

### **Endowment Fund**

Market Value on 1/1/2016	\$2,150,015.48
Market Value on 12/31/2016	\$2,224,364.58
Income to General Account in 2016	\$102,125.72

### **Reserve Fund**

Market Value on 1/1/2016	\$321,172.97
Market Value on 12/31/2016	\$334,053.25
Income to General Account in 2016	\$15,255.72