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A view of Treetop Pond at Michigan Audubon Society's new nature center shows the transition from marsh to deciduous forest.

## A Story of Seven Ponds

By DOUGLAS W. SCOTT

**W**ith hard work and careful planning, the Michigan Audubon Society has put into operation—in only one year—a promising new nature center. The Seven Ponds Nature Center, 40 miles north of Detroit, already has a professional staff, a trail system, an exhibits building and a schedule for school class visits.

The 100-acre site at 3854 Crawford Road near Dryden, Mich., has varied habitats: open water, cattail marsh, woody swamps, fields and pastures, an abandoned orchard, deciduous woods and a newly established pine and spruce plantation. These habitats within a compact site afford great potential for nature center programs.

In spring the deciduous woods are strewn with fresh green mayapple leaves which vie with showy trilliums for attention. Nearby, the golden blossoms of great clumps of marsh marigolds rise above the wet ground of a dense swamp. The deep ponds close at hand are reminders of the epoch when glaciers shaped the Michigan terrain. At the shore is a swamp thick with red-osier dogwood; a short distance inland is a cedar swamp. Deciduous forest takes over a few feet higher, while up the hill the new plantation's pine and spruce contrast with the natural growth.

Only a year ago, a couple who owned the land expressed interest in establishing a nature center. At

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first the Michigan Audubon Society leased the land and started planning for the center. The owners then donated the site in full title to the Michigan Audubon Society in February 1967. Part of the deed stipulated that "the premises conveyed hereby shall be used solely for purposes of nature study, nature education and hiking . . . which terms shall not include . . . any . . . use inconsistent with preservation of said premises as a natural area."

The state society delegated the development and management of the nature center to its Pontiac, Genesee County, Lapeer County and Grosse Pointe Audubon chapters. A governing committee representing these local groups was established.

Committees were organized to develop both the grounds and an interpretive building, to prepare an educational program, and to handle public relations. Edward Brigham III of Atlas, vice-president of the Michigan Audubon Society, volunteered to act as director and oversee daily operations.

From the start, the center benefited from the considerable time and talent of volunteers from local Audubon groups. A preliminary trail system was laid out, and a small building constructed for exhibits and class use.

Early last summer, recognizing that the center would require more time and effort than volunteers could provide, the governing committee hired Walter Jones, a former Ohio state wildlife biologist, as assistant director and resident naturalist. He assumed full-time respon-

sibility for the work of the center in cooperation with the volunteers.

Several day session natural history field schools were held during the summer, and plans were made for regular school class visits beginning this fall.

To insure that the center would reach its full potential, the governing committee asked the Nature Centers Division of the National Audubon Society to prepare a comprehensive development plan for the Seven Ponds site. The division's four-man planning team spent more than a week in field study, followed by several more weeks of planning and mapping. The result was a master plan that integrated physical development, program planning, resource management and operations.

The plan recommends a three-stage effort during the next seven years. The services and programs of the center would expand only as physical development of the site progressed.

The hard work and planning is already paying dividends. The Seven Ponds Nature Center has made the transition from a dedicated volunteer force to a full-time staff, and a well-organized education program is under way.

As the Nature Centers Division plan noted: "With this shifting of gears from a volunteer effort to a professionally staffed operation, those who have guided and worked for the project may recognize that their long and dedicated efforts have borne fruit and that a nature center program of service to the community is assured. ■"