

Seven Ponds Nature Center

2021 Annual Report



SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER

3854 Crawford Road

Dryden, Michigan 48428

810-796-3200

spnc@sevenponds.org

www.sevenponds.org

www.facebook.com/SevenPondsNatureCenter

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.

2021 Board of Directors

Nancy Buck, Chairman, Member-at-large

Joanna Pease, Vice-Chairman, Grosse Pointe Audubon Representative

Paul Messing, Secretary, Macomb Audubon Representative

Greg Gossick, Treasurer, Oakland Audubon Representative

Daryl Bernard, Ex Officio, Executive Director

Terri Chapdelaine, Member-at-large

Kathy Churchill, Member-at-large

Sandy Cornell, Member-at-large

Ruthanne Flory, Member-at-large

Kelly Heyner, Member-at-large

Nancy Kautz, Member-at-large

Gisela Lendle King, Detroit Audubon Representative

Julie Markgraf, Member-at-large (interim)

Diane Matheis, Member-at-large

Mike Mercier, Lapeer Audubon Representative

Nan Toppin, Member-at-large

Charlie Turner, Lifetime Member

Lisa Yarema, Member-at-large

2021 Staff

Daryl Bernard, Executive Director

Carrie Spencer, Director of Environmental Education

Diane Rankin, Office Manager

Mike Grappin, Maintenance

Stacey Holinsworth, Weekend Receptionist/Gift Store Manager

Nicole Kopas, Naturalist

Katie McKiernan, Naturalist

Dominique McKillop, Naturalist

Krincy Rice, Weekday Receptionist

SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER

2021: The Year in Review

INTRODUCTION

The calendar year 2021 saw the nature center return to nearly normal operations, with programs in full swing, Camp Seven Ponds, special events, field tours, and visits by school groups, among many other activities. Additional seasonal staff were brought on board. Many projects were completed on our grounds. As always, visitors looked to Seven Ponds as a place to seek respite and commune with nature.

LAND STEWARDSHIP

For more than five decades the staff and volunteers of Seven Ponds have worked to nurture and care for the land and water around the nature center. As such, we are the proud stewards of nearly 500 acres of forests, fields, grasslands, ponds, and wetlands. The nature center serves as a living textbook of the natural communities found in Southeast Michigan.



Working to preserve native species, remove invasive species, and maintain the trails, nesting boxes, prairies, and woodlands is an ongoing challenge and requires the efforts of the entire naturalist staff, maintenance crew, and numerous volunteers.

This marked the tenth year in a row of our “Forest of the Future” tree planting project. Funds obtained through the nature center’s “Buy-a-Tree” campaign were used to purchase a variety of native tree species. In 2021, 100 northern white cedar trees were planted in the cedar swamp area near the A-Frame Bridge, augmenting those planted the previous year. Additional trees and shrubs planted around the nature center included silver maple, paper birch, hackberry, serviceberry, alternate leaf dogwood, American hazelnut, spicebush, white oak, red oak, and black oak.



Well over 100 nest boxes for songbirds and Wood Ducks were managed by nature center staff. Songbird boxes were utilized by Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and Black-capped Chickadees. Volunteers checked the nest boxes in their assigned section, monitoring the boxes weekly over several months, with results and data submitted to *NestWatch*, a national project coordinated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. By participating in the NestWatch program, Seven Ponds contributes to the scientific endeavor to better understand the status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds. In addition to songbird nest boxes, Seven Ponds maintains more than 40 larger nest boxes, which are utilized by a

wide range of birds and other animals, including Wood Ducks, Eastern Screech-Owls, Gray Squirrels, and other critters.

Between Paul's Woods, Earl's Prairie, the North-80, and the areas around the interpretive building, nearly seven miles of trails provided access to a wide diversity of habitats for nature center visitors. The trail system at nearby Jonathan Woods provided additional recreational opportunities.

Our battle against non-native, invasive plants continued in 2021. A small field crew in place from spring through fall and dedicated to treating and removing invasive plant species certainly enhanced our management efforts. At least thirteen species of invasive plants were targeted, including multiflora rose, spotted knapweed, phragmites, Japanese barberry, garlic mustard, glossy buckthorn, honeysuckle, crown vetch, Oriental bittersweet, autumn olive, Canada thistle, dame's rocket, and purple loosestrife, in areas throughout the nature center's property, including near the building, in the North-80, in Earl's Prairie, around the lakes, at Richie Pond Preserve, and at Jonathan Woods. The effort against invasive plants was spearheaded by first-year Naturalist Nicole Kopas, who coordinated efforts with her field crew and volunteers. A prescribed burn was conducted in Earl's Prairie in early April.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

A key part of our mission is to act as a living classroom for environmental education. After a frustrating year of program cancellations, we were able to resume much of our normal educational offerings. These included school field trips, homeschool programs, scout programs, Knee-high Naturalists, and Traveling Naturalist programs, as well as outreach, seasonal walks, and other special programs for children and families, as well as a full summer of Camp Seven Ponds.



The popular Winter Series took place, with presentations led by nature center staff on four successive Sunday afternoons. Topics during this year's series included *Whoooo Goes There? Michigan's Magnificent Owls!* with Executive Director Daryl Bernard; *Rabbits of North America and the World* with Naturalist Katie McKiernan; *Let's Go To The Beach!* with Naturalist Nicole Kopas; and *How the Americas' Indigenous People Shaped the World* with Director of Environmental Education Carrie Spencer.

Our naturalist staff – led by Director of Environmental Education Carrie Spencer – worked hard to develop programming that would provide high quality nature experiences for children, families, and adults while still maintaining a safe environment for participants and program leaders. Environmental education offerings included Knee High Naturalists, Nature Study Series for Homeschoolers, and Traveling Naturalist. Several outreach opportunities were also taken, including Indigo Lavender Farm's Midsummer Night's Dream, Blake's Lavender Market, and Woods-N-Waters Outdoor Expo.



Camp Seven Ponds provided children ages 2 to 15 an opportunity to embrace nature through games, crafts, stories, art, investigations, hikes, and canoeing. Groups were arranged by age, with Pint Sized Explorers (2-3), Knee-High Naturalists (4-5), Young Explorers (6-11), and Junior Naturalists (12-15) each getting their own chance to spend a week at Camp Seven Ponds.

With the arrival of the fall the nature center began welcoming groups of school children, who participated in environmental education provided by our expert naturalist staff. Unfortunately, many area schools are still restricting off-campus activities, and our school group visits were much

lower than normal. When possible, our naturalists took the nature center to the schools, coordinating programs with area teachers to provide outdoor nature education in the school yards in our service area.

Utilizing a grant from the Four County Community Foundation, two additions enhanced the nature center this year. A new, expansive enclosure provided more space and natural habitat for our two Eastern Box Turtles. Outside, a Hymenoptera Hotel provided solitary bees with a place to raise their offspring, giving these important native pollinators a better chance at survival and giving our visitors another learning opportunity.

The four clubs that bear the Seven Ponds name – Astronomy Club, Beekeeping Club, Birding Club, and Photography Club – continued to offer programs and opportunities for their members and guests. Most meetings were held outdoors or via ZOOM, though clubs did offer indoor, in-person meetings with some precautions in place.



Due to uncertainty heading into the year, no field tours were initially planned for 2021. As the year progressed, we determined that we could offer field tours, taking into consideration any restrictions we might face due to local COVID precautions and mandates. In September, eight participants joined us in Washington for a birding field tour, led by Executive Director Daryl Bernard and guided by

local birding guide Scott Atkinson of *SeaQuest Adventures*. Come November, a group of twelve birders joined us in Texas for a birding field tour to the Lower Rio Grande Valley, led by Daryl Bernard along with guide Ken Blankenship of *East West Birding Tours*. After a year of no field tours, it was nice to revive the long-standing Seven Ponds tradition of offering small-group, high-quality field tours to our members and supporters.

SPECIAL EVENTS



WinterFest was held on the last Saturday of January. Cold temps leading up to the event ensured the ice was thick enough for skating, traditional ice cutting, and a toasty fire on frozen Treetop Pond. The snow was too cold and powdery for snowballs or snowman-building, but fun to play with and hike through. A fire up near the building provided all the heat necessary for roasting hot dogs and toasting s'mores, and attendees enjoyed both. Registration for the event was limited due to COVID-19. WinterFest was hosted by Naturalist Katie McKiernan, and – as always – volunteers made the event possible.

EcoDay & Native Plant Sale was held on a Saturday in mid-May. EcoDay was hosted by Naturalist Nicole Kopas, and included numerous activities including owl pellet dissecting, chalk murals, aquatic critters from the ponds, nature scavenger hunts, and color bingo, along with several craft opportunities. Attendance for EcoDay activities was limited due to COVID-19. The Native Plant Sale was hosted by Director of Environmental Education Carrie Spencer, and featured a large array of native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs for sale. The Stingers held a bake sale, book sale, and Resale Shoppe, and the Friends of Herbs held an herb sale.

Corks & Caps, normally held in early June, was postponed until early August. The event was held at the Metamora Golf & Country Club, and included wine, beer, dinner, raffle, and live auction. Jim Siudara acted as Master of Ceremony, and auctioneer Brian Rowley entertained the crowd during the live auction. Nearly 200 guests were in attendance.



Party at the Ponds – a celebration of prairie, woods, and waters – was held on the first Saturday in August. As this event is an open house of sorts, admission and all activities were offered free of charge for all attendees. There was a children's area with old time games, a Stingers Resale Shoppe, Seven Ponds club demonstrations and information, naturalist-led trail walks, field netting, pond dipping, golf cart tours, and canoeing on the ponds.



The Enchanted Woodland, which was cancelled the previous year due to COVID-19, was back again much to the delight of children and parents alike. Costumed woodland characters were stationed along a lit trail, regaling young and old alike with fun facts and entertaining information. A craft room was available for families waiting for their turn on the trail, and donuts and hot apple cider were available once the trail walk was completed. Naturalist Dominique McKillop hosted the event and relied heavily on the help of numerous volunteers to make it all happen.

Unfortunately, due to ongoing concerns about COVID, our Holiday Auction and Christmas Party was cancelled for the second year in a row, much to the disappointment of the Seven Ponds staff and board.

SEASONAL ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS

Once again, the nature center's naturalists offered a full slate of fun and educational seasonal programming.

Winter activities and programs offered in 2021 included Sunset Winter Walk, Tree Painting, Let's Walk on the Wild Side, Lapeer County Christmas Bird Count, Winter Walk Around, Winter Scavenger Hunt, Animal Track Detectives, Winter Night Hike, Jonathan Woods Snowshoe Trek, Family Pond Dipping, Full Moon Exploration, and three Winter Bird Walks.

Spring activities and programs offered in 2021 included Spring Awakenings, Shamrock Planter Building, Yoga at the Ponds, Invasive Plant Work Day, Spring Stroll, Salamander Foray, North-80 Hike, Morning Paddle at the Ponds, Jonathan Woods Hike, Demonstration Garden Work Day, Dog Walk at the Polly Ann Trail, Frog and Toad Survey, Morning Paddle on the Ponds, Budding Birders, Garlic Mustard Work Day, Evening Paddle on the Ponds, A Brush with Baby Wildlife, Wee Readers, Topsy Naturalist, and ten Spring Bird Walks.

Summer activities and programs offered in 2021 included Moth Exploration, Invasive Work Day, Glow Walk, Yoga at the Ponds, Native Pollinator Exploration, Butterfly Count, Prairie Stroll, Hop Run Fly – It's Jonathan Woods in July, Pond Dipping, Walk Around the Ponds, Afternoon with a Naturalist, Family Field Netting, Morning Paddle at the Ponds, Roving Naturalist, and six Summer Bird Walks.

Autumn activities and programs offered in 2021 included Morning Paddle, BioBlitz Weekend, Land Stewardship Work Day (2), Prairie Walk, Yoga at the Ponds, Autumn Hike in Jonathan Woods, Fungi with a Fun Gal, The Big Sit, Painting at the Ponds, Evening Paddle on the Ponds, Prairie Seed Collecting (2), Beginner Phone Photography, Birch Bark – Leaf Décor, Curious Nature Detectives, Owl Prowl, Hike Around the Ponds, Tree Painting, and six Fall Bird Walks.

MEDIA & COMMUNICATION



Volume 54 Number 1 of the nature center's newsletter *Heron Tracks* was published in the spring, continuing a tradition of sending our quarterly publication to all Seven Ponds members. With the retirement of Karen Page in 2020, formatting and editing duties were transferred to Executive Director Daryl Bernard, who had to learn the InDesign program from scratch. As usual, the newsletter consisted of an informative natural history article written by a Seven Ponds naturalist, a seasonal program schedule, acknowledgement of grants, gifts, donations, and memorials, club news, fliers for upcoming events, field tour information, volunteer news and opportunities, and information about many other happenings at the nature center. The staff worked hard to meet writing and publication deadlines to get *Heron Tracks* in the hands of our members at the start of each season. Lead articles included 'The Fungal Connection' (Nicole Kopas), 'I am Depending on You' (Daryl Bernard), 'A Symbol of the Northern Wilderness' (Katie McKiernan), and 'Colors of Animals' (Carrie Spencer).

Our website, www.sevenponds.org, continued to be a source of information, updates, and program offerings. We endeavored to keep the site updated with the most recent information and programs. Visitors to the site could conveniently register for upcoming classes, programs, and events. Members could renew their memberships online, and new memberships could be started as well. Many supporters utilized the web site for their annual giving during our Special Gifts campaign.

Naturalist Dominique McKillop took over the nature center's social media presence, including Facebook and Instagram. These internet mediums were used for education, information, and as a means of highlighting the happenings at Seven Ponds.

Seven Ponds maintained a great relationship with our local newspapers, particularly the *Tri-City Times* and *The County Press*. These local newspapers provided almost weekly support for the nature center, advertising our programs and highlighting the fun things happening at Seven Ponds.

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

Several projects were the focus of our small maintenance crew during 2021. The addition of a seasonal maintenance staff member doubled our crew and was instrumental in our completion of these projects.

Treetop Pond Dock

A much-needed overhaul of the dock on Treetop Pond was carried out during the summer. The task of removing the old structure and decking was time consuming but paved the way for a brand-new dock. This new dock is an additional 6-8 inches above the water, so should eliminate the flooding that the old dock suffered occasionally.



Rain Barrel Marsh Boardwalk

Rain Barrel Marsh is located just south of the curve of Crawford/Calkins roads. It's a beautiful area of the nature center, featuring a cattail marsh where Swamp Sparrows nest. Unfortunately, the trail through the marsh is often quite mucky. Solid decking from the old dock was salvaged to construct a boardwalk through the marsh, which will provide solid footing for visitors taking the trail through this unique area.

Canoe & Kayak Launch

After the completion of the new dock on Treetop Pond, a canoe/kayak launch was installed alongside the dock. This launch provides convenient and safe access to and from Treetop Pond for Seven Ponds members who like to paddle the ponds. The launch will also enhance the loading and unloading process for our naturalist-led canoe programs.



Nature Playscape – Breaking Ground

Early in the year we received a very generous donation intended for an educational project. After conferring with the donor, we opted to utilize the funds to create a long-hoped for nature playscape, to be located just south of the secondary parking lot. The first step was clearing all the invasive plants and small trees, so a forest mower was hired to clear the area. Next our maintenance crew spent time removing select trees. Fence posts were placed around the perimeter of the area, though the fencing won't be installed until further into the project. A well was dug, which will be connected to a hand pump for use with a water feature. Other features will either be built in-house or purchased as we move toward a summer 2022 opening.

Boathouse Roof

After more than fifty years of service, the cedar shake roof of the boathouse needed replacement. Due to the excessively high cost of cedar shakes, we next considered a metal roof. Unfortunately, the cost of a new metal roof exceeded our budget as well. Ultimately, we opted for a standard asphalt shingle roof. Our maintenance crew removed the old cedar shakes and replaced them with asphalt shingles – pedestrian but functional.



Handicap Parking

The lines marking our handicap parking area were overdue for a paint job. Beautiful blue paint was purchased, and our maintenance crew spent a couple days taping and painting. A small job, but necessary, nonetheless.



Stairs on the Berm

Wooden stairs were built on the berm, connecting the Butterfly Garden area with back parking lot and future Nature Playscape and pavilion.

FINANCES & FUNDRAISING

The nature center missed out on anticipated revenue in 2021 due to cancellation of our annual Holiday Auction caused by COVID-19. However, other fundraisers were very successful, including our Bird-a-Thon, Corks & Caps, and our year-end Special Gifts campaign. Two unplanned field tours were conducted, bolstering our revenue. The staff initiated a hike-a-thon fundraiser in August called Trek the Trails.

Seven Ponds was awarded a second \$50,000 Payroll Protection Program loan, which was fully forgiven due to funds being used completely for payroll expenses. To our great benefit, these funds were utilized to hire seasonal staff, including a receptionist, a maintenance person, field crew personnel for invasive species management, and seasonal naturalists for Camp Seven Ponds.

Our year-end Special Gifts Campaign significantly exceeded our goal of \$35,000, netting nearly \$55,000. The response by our amazing members and supporters was – once again – both heartwarming and humbling. These funds will help the nature center through the first part of 2022.

STAFF, BOARD, & VOLUNTEERS

Seven Ponds' small, dedicated staff are the heartbeat of the nature center. In 2021 they continued to work hard to meet the many challenges they faced and continued to serve the community by adjusting programming and operations as needed.

The naturalist staff is led by Director of Environmental Education Carrie Spencer, and consists of full-time Naturalists Katie McKiernan and Nicole Kopas, along with first-year part-time Naturalist Dominique McKillop, who joined the staff permanently after her stint as Seasonal Naturalist during Camp Seven Ponds. Diane Rankin is the nature center's Office Manager, administering payroll and bookkeeping among other duties. Gift Store Manager Stacey Holinsworth also serves as the center's Weekend Receptionist. Krincy Rice joined the staff in the spring as the nature center's Weekday Receptionist. Mike Grappin oversees the maintenance of the building and grounds. Daryl Bernard is the Executive Director.

As mentioned in the section pertaining to finances and fundraising, Seven Ponds benefitted from the addition of several seasonal staff, made possible with the acceptance of a sizeable Payroll Protection Loan (which was subsequently forgiven in full). Krincy Rice was hired in the spring to fill the role of our weekday receptionist; she quickly enhanced our welcome desk and has since been retained as a permanent employee. Del Hunsinger was brought on to bolster our maintenance staff, and his presence helped make possible the completion of several projects and improvements. Two seasonal naturalists (Dominique McKillop and Heidi Couch) and one naturalist intern (Jasmine Brock) were hired to help facilitate camp; Dominique was subsequently offered a permanent, part-time naturalist position with Seven Ponds, which she accepted. A number of individuals were hired to serve as our invasive plant species field crew. Ultimately Mike Klingensmith, Luke Childs, and Kyle Freeland remained with the nature center throughout the field crew season.

The Board of Directors welcomed new members Terri Chapdelaine, Nancy Kautz, and Julie Markgraf, as the term of Jocelyn Scofield expired and members Susie Stroh and Terry Toland resigned. The following officers were elected: Nancy Buck as Chair, Joanna Pease as Vice-chair, Paul Messing as Secretary, and Greg Gossick as Treasurer. The board met six times throughout the calendar year to discuss nature center business and policies, review finances, and consider future opportunities. Two committees – the Finance Committee and the Development Committee – met several times during the year (sometimes virtually) to discuss pertinent issues and opportunities.

After a year in which COVID restrictions greatly reduced our ability to utilize volunteers, in 2021 we were able to once again depend on the help of others to get things done around the center. The Friends of Herbs and the Butterfly Gardeners,

were able to carry on their efforts to enhance the nature center grounds, maintaining the Herb Garden and Butterfly Garden, respectively. The Stingers were able to hold their annual rummage sale in June, along with bake sales at multiple events. Other volunteers helped with animal care, trail maintenance, special events, and general housekeeping. We truly appreciate our wonderful volunteers and were happy to welcome them back to the nature center once again.

CONCLUSION

Seven Ponds staff, supported by the Board of Directors, worked to overcome challenges and ensure that high quality programs were offered, the building and grounds were well-maintained, and visitors had a safe place of respite and escape. Going forward, we hope to bolster our efforts in these areas and remain a valued resource for our community.



Seven Ponds Nature Center Investment Funds

Endowment Fund

Market Value on 01/01/2021	\$2,712,411.21
Market Value on 12/31/2021	\$2,920,770.62
Income to General Account in 2021	\$121,854.84

Reserve Fund

Market Value on 01/01/2021	\$370,268.83
Market Value on 12/31/2021	\$404,332.63
Income to General Account in 2021	\$16,511.04

2021 Seven Ponds Nature Center Activity Report

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL	2020	2019
School and Youth Groups															
Seasonal	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	23	0	93	0	0	137	24	559
Explorer	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	93	176	104	13	407	0	2417
Traveling Naturalist	170	166	84	204	613	532	0	33	0	0	0	51	1853	1537	2793
Scouts	7	0	9	20	38	21	0	0	0	47	3	4	149	48	336
Homeschool	16	10	21	31	20	0	0	0	32	93	79	0	302	119	186
Birthday Parties	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	30	20	139
Annie's Big Nature Lesson	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1032
SUBTOTAL	193	176	114	255	683	595	0	56	143	409	186	68	2878	1748	7462
Misc. Adult/Fam Programs															
Nature Center	0	0	0	0	6	0	15	0	0	7	0	0	28	33	267
Outreach	20	0	35	25	3	36	602	2	173	98	0	0	994	57	3399
SUBTOTAL	20	0	35	25	9	36	617	2	173	105	0	0	1022	90	3666
Member & Public Activities															
Camp Seven Ponds	0	0	0	0	0	31	155	0	0	0	0	0	186	0	176
Knee-High Naturalists	7	4	8	4	8	0	0	0	10	12	6	4	63	51	139
Pgms/Videos/Etc.	38	46	55	89	94	43	56	25	56	135	21	27	685	426	934
Special Events	50	0	0	0	200	0	0	233	0	96	0	0	579	228	1291
Field Trips	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
Field Tours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	12	0	20	0	54
Rentals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53	0	0	0	0	53	0	0
SUBTOTAL	95	50	63	93	302	74	211	311	74	243	39	31	1586	705	2626
Volunteer & Interest Groups	42	13	41	44	98	116	118	92	162	189	82	17	1014	860	2451
Casual Visitors															
Members	126	63	204	196	246	160	238	173	246	150	81	141	2024		
Non-Members	170	112	555	570	661	653	647	497	444	361	211	169	5050		
SUBTOTAL	296	175	759	766	907	813	885	670	690	511	292	310	7074	5667	5977
TOTAL	646	414	1012	1183	1999	1634	1831	1131	1242	1457	599	426	13574	8886	22182