

Seven Ponds Nature Center

2022 Annual Report



SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER

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Mission

The mission of Seven Ponds Nature Center is to conserve its natural environment as a sanctuary for native plants and animals and to serve as a community resource for environmental education that fosters an understanding, appreciation, and stewardship ethic for our natural world.

2022 Staff

Daryl Bernard, Executive Director

Carrie Spencer, Director of Environmental Education

Diane Rankin, Office Manager/Gift Store Manager

Katie McKiernan, Naturalist

Madison Christol, Naturalist

Gina Stoldt, Weekday Receptionist

Damian Goidich, Weekend Receptionist

Mike Grappin, Maintenance

Del Hunsinger, Maintenance (Seasonal)



2022 Board of Directors

Joanna Pease, Chairman, Grosse Pointe Audubon Representative

Kelly Heyner, Vice-Chairman, Member-at-large

Charlie Turner, Treasurer, Lifetime Member

Paul Messing, Secretary, Macomb 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

Greg Gossick, Oakland Audubon Representative

Rachel Hansen-Hervey, Member-at-large

Nancy Kautz, Member-at-large

Sally Kwaiser, Member-at-large

Gisela Lendle King, Detroit Audubon Representative

Julie Markgraf, Member-at-large

Diane Matheis, Member-at-large

Nan Toppin, Member-at-large

Lisa Yarema, Member-at-large

SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER

2022: The Year in Review

INTRODUCTION

The calendar year 2022 saw the nature center return to normal operations, with programs in full swing. Camp Seven Ponds and special events were well attended, field tours were conducted, and many school groups visited the nature center. And for the first time in three years, we held our Holiday Auction & Christmas Party for our members. 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 eleventh 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 2022, we planted 36 native shrubs, including red-osier dogwood, Michigan Holly, and American Hazelnut. These shrubs produce fruits (dogwood and holly)

or nuts (hazelnut) that provide important food sources for many birds and other wildlife. All were planted in Paul’s Woods and encircled with protective fencing to ward off browsing deer.

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. For the first time in more than twenty years the nature center's martin tower had tenants, as a pair of Purple Martins nested, laying five eggs and successfully fledging four young martins. We hope the birds will return in 2023.



The nature center maintains nearly seven miles of trails in Paul's Woods, Earl's Prairie, the North-80, and the areas around the interpretive building, providing access to a wide diversity of habitats for nature center visitors. The changes along the trail throughout the seasons provide visiting hikers the opportunity to enjoy the splendor of nature all year long. The trail system at nearby Jonathan Woods provides additional opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Our battle against non-native, invasive plants continued in 2022. 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 Naturalist Nicole Kopas, and then first-year Naturalist Madison Christol, who each coordinated efforts with other staff and volunteers.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

One of the most important aspects of our mission is to be a community resource for environmental education. In 2022, the nature center returned to normal operations after two years of partial services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, we were able to offer a full slate of weekend programs, seasonal events, school visits, and more.

The popular Winter Series took place, with presentations on five successive Sunday afternoons from the end of January through February. Topics during this year's series included *Quest for Survival* with Science Alive; *Controversial Coyote* with retired wildlife rehabilitator Holly Hadoc; *Wizards, Wands, and Potions* presented by the Sloan Museum; and *Citizen Science 101* with Seven Ponds Naturalist Nicole Kopas.

Our naturalist staff – under the leadership of Director of Environmental Education Carrie Spencer – developed programming that would provide high quality nature experiences for children, families. Environmental education offerings included Knee High Naturalists, Nature Study Series for Homeschoolers, School Field Trips, Traveling Naturalist, and scout programs. Several outreach opportunities were also taken, including Safari Club International-Flint Outdoor Expo, Blake's Lavender Market, IndigoFest (Imlay City), and Woods-N-Waters Outdoor Expo.



Camp Seven Ponds! once again 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 years old), Knee-High Naturalists (4-5 years old), Young Explorers (6-11 years old), and Junior Naturalists (12-15 years old) each getting their own chance to spend a week at Camp Seven Ponds!

The four clubs that bear the Seven Ponds name – Astronomy Club, Beekeeping Club, Birding Club, and Photography Club – held meetings at the nature center throughout the year, returning to normal operations after nearly two full years of virtual meetings.



Carrying on a tradition dating back to 1992, the nature center offered three field tours to unique regions across the country. In April, a group of birders traveled to Colorado on a quest for spring chickens. During the tour the group saw 123 bird species, and enjoyed varied scenery including grasslands, high sage desert, canyonlands, and snow-capped mountain peaks. Late June found a group of Seven Ponds birders trekking across

the New England states of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine – in a quest for birds from the mountains to the coast, including two boat trips to see puffins and other seabirds. In October our naturalists led a group to the Little Smokies of Southern Ohio, where they enjoyed the vivid fall colors and spectacular geology of this scenic area. Field tours provide participants an opportunity to explore special places with expert guidance, and revenue generated from these tours helps support the nature center's education and stewardship efforts.

SPECIAL EVENTS

WinterFest, hosted by Naturalist Katie McKiernan on Saturday, January 29, was the coldest winter event the nature center has held in a long time. With morning temps in the crisp single digits, the day was shaping up to be lovely, windless day of winter fun. The ice on Treetop Pond was nearly a foot thick this year and made for some impressive blocks when cut away with traditional ice harvesting tools. Three campfires blazed – one on the ice and two up near the nature center. The extreme cold made for some interesting times at the food station with frozen Nutella making a surprise appearance on the menu. Life was found below the frozen surface via pond dipping. Ice skaters carved patterns onto the cleared portion of Treetop Pond. With the help of a cadre of volunteers a good time was had by all.



EcoDay & Native Plant Sale was held on Saturday, May 14. EcoDay was hosted by Naturalist Nicole Kopas, and included numerous activities geared for the entire family, including owl pellet dissecting, chalk murals, aquatic critters from the ponds, nature scavenger hunts, and color bingo, along with several craft opportunities – including

Build Your Own Bird House, Make Your Own Flower Press, Summer Windmills, and more. 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 and Resale Shoppe, and the Friends of Herbs held an herb sale.

Corks & Caps, the nature center's keystone fundraising event, was held on Friday, June 17, under pleasant skies at the Metamora Golf and Country Club. Over 200 people attended this event, which featured a wonderful dinner, beer and wine, raffles, live auction, and the beautiful setting of the country club. Due to the large attendance and generosity of those present, the nature center netted just over \$42,000 at this event. Special thanks go to Rick Fleming and his staff at the country club for providing an outstanding venue and service, and to Brian Rowley of Rowley's Auction Service for donating his professional auctioneer services during our live auction.



Party at the Ponds – a celebration of prairie, woods, and waters – was held on Saturday, August 6. This event is an open house, with admission waived and all activities offered free of charge for all attendees. Activities included naturalist-led trail walks, field netting, pond dipping, and canoeing the ponds. A children's area included old-time games. The Stingers held their Resale Shoppe and a bake sale. Some Seven Ponds clubs were present for demonstrations and club information.

The Enchanted Woodland took place on Saturday, October 1. Costumed woodland characters were stationed along a lit trail, entertaining young and old alike with fun facts and information about the creature. A craft room was available for families

waiting for their turn on the trail, and donuts and apple cider were available once the trail walk was completed. The evening was hosted by the entire staff, and as always, the event relied heavily on the help of numerous volunteers to make it all happen.

The Holiday Auction and Christmas Party returned for the first time in three years. Held on Saturday, December 3, the members-only gathering consisted of great food, wine and beer, a wide array of silent auction items, and a live auction conducted by professional auctioneer Brian Rowley, who once again donated his services to the nature center. Over 160 friends of the nature center attended, and it seemed as

though a good time was had by all. As a fundraiser, the event netted more than \$16,000 for the benefit of Seven Ponds. It was a great way to end the year.

SEASONAL ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS

For more than five decades the nature center's naturalists have offered a full slate of fun and educational seasonal programming. This year was no different!

Winter activities and programs offered in 2022 included Coffee with a Naturalist, Sunset Walk, Wee Readers: *In The Snow – Who's Been There*, Sunday Walk, Natural Ornament Making, National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, Dinner Time, Boxing Day Walk, Jonathan Woods Hike, Winter Kisses Snowflake Wishes, Let It Snow, Winter Nature Journaling, Snowshoeing, Managing Invasive Species 101, Snow and Shoes, Night-time Senses, Game Night, Winter Craft Day, Family Trivia, Winter Scavenger Hunt, Kids Trivia Night, Wee Readers: *Stranger in the Woods*, Campfires and Constellations.

Spring activities and programs offered in 2022 included Spring Scavenger Hunt, Wee Readers: *Abracadabra – It's Spring*, Full Moon Exploration, two Invasive Species Work Days, Journaling in Nature, Painting at the Ponds, Salamander Foray, North-80 Exploration, History of Seven Ponds Walk, Seven Ponds Challenge Hike, Spring Wildflowers Walk, Yoga at the Ponds series, Birding for Beginners, Frog and Toad Survey, Morning Paddle at the Ponds, Walk on the Wildflower Side, Jonathan Woods Hike, Bringing Pollinators Home series, five Spring Bird Walks.



Summer activities and programs offered in 2022 included Teddy Bear Walk, Peaceful Reflections, five Invasive Species Work Days, The End of Spring Sunday Walk, Yoga at the Ponds series, Morning Paddle at the Ponds, Insect Extravaganza, Messy Mud Day, Butterfly Count, Morning Canoe Paddle, Story Time in the Garden, A Brush with Baby Wildlife, Hop-Run-Fly Let's See Jonathan Woods in July, Earl's Prairie Excursion, Topsy Naturalist, Campfire Evening, Prairie Walk, Family Field Netting, four Summer Bird Walks.

Autumn activities and programs offered in 2022 included Prairie Walk, Yoga at the Ponds series, two Invasive Species Work Days, Seasonal Walk – Change is in the Air, Spider Discovery Walk, October Trail Walk in Paul’s Woods, Fall Paddle on the Ponds, Autumn Hike in Jonathan Woods, Vibrant Fall Sunday Walk, Hike Around the Ponds, Owl Prowl, Sunday Naturalist Walk, Prairie Seed Collecting, Thanksgiving Weekend Walk, four Fall Bird Walks.



MEDIA & COMMUNICATION



Volume 55 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. The newsletter is written and compiled by the staff and includes an informative natural history article written by a Seven Ponds naturalist, a seasonal program schedule, acknowledgement of grants, gifts, donations, and memorials, club information, fliers for upcoming events, field tour details, 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 Mighty Oak’ (Nicole Kopas), ‘A Sweet Surprise’ (Dominique McKillop), ‘Fish Musings’ (Katie McKiernan), and ‘Nature Play’ (Carrie Spencer).

The Seven Ponds Nature Center website, www.sevenponds.org, continued to be a source of information, updates, and program offerings. The site was constantly 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 or other donations.

Receptionist Gina Stoldt 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 strong relationship with our local newspapers, particularly the *Tri-City Times* and *The County Press*. These local newspapers provided nearly weekly support for the nature center, advertising our programs and highlighting the great happenings at Seven Ponds.

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

Our staff worked on a few key projects during 2022. Once again, Del Hunsinger, our seasonal maintenance employee joined us during the warmer months and doubled our maintenance crew, which moved these projects forward considerably.

North-80 Teaching Platform

A new teaching platform was installed in Waterfowl Pond in the North-80. Located near the observation tower, the platform will provide a place for our naturalists to conduct pond dipping with students, and will be a place visitors can get a close-up view of the cattails and pond life in Waterfowl Pond.



Pavilion

The addition of a pavilion has long been on our wish list, and a significant donation specifically targeted to the project helped bring that wish to fruition. Construction began mid-summer and by fall our pavilion was in place. Located at the back end of our secondary parking lot, the pavilion will be utilized in numerous ways, including visiting school group lunches, special events, outdoor gatherings, and teaching. The general public may use the pavilion for informal gatherings as well.



Naturescape

A nature play area, where children can run, climb, crawl, build, create, imagine, and explore has been something Carrie Spencer, our Director of Environmental Education, has been dreaming of for many years. A sizeable donation, along with support from the Lapeer County Community Foundation, finally made that dream a reality. Fitting the work in between other tasks, our maintenance crew – with help from staff members and some volunteers – worked on the project throughout spring, summer, and fall, installing a bouldering wall, A-frame fort, balancing logs, spider web, water feature including old-fashioned hand pump, and more. The Naturescape finally reached completion in early November, and thus has not yet been utilized by a large number of children. We are eagerly anticipating seeing children enjoying the structures in 2023.



FINANCES & FUNDRAISING

The nature center benefitted from several sources of revenue in 2022. Three field tours helped generate important funds. Corks and Caps – our biggest fundraising event – was held in June. Our Holiday Auction and Christmas Party returned in December. And our members and supporters once again came through during our year-end Special Gifts Campaign, providing critical funds to move us into the new year. Additional fund raisers included our spring Bird-a-Thon, Stingers Rummage Sale, Stingers Resale Shoppe, and Stingers Bake Sales.

The nature center's investment funds – the Endowment Fund and Reserve Fund – both saw a reduction in their respective balances due to the downturn in the market.

STAFF, BOARD, & VOLUNTEERS

Seven Ponds' small, dedicated staff are the heartbeat of the nature center. With fewer than ten employees, everybody is expected to step up and do what is needed to help keep Seven Ponds the special place that it is. In 2022 the staff continued to work hard to meet the many challenges they faced and to serve the community.

The naturalist staff is led by Director of Environmental Education Carrie Spencer. Katie McKiernan entered her sixth year as a full-time Naturalist. During the year, Seven Ponds lost two naturalists, as full-time Naturalist Nicole Kopas accepted a position in her home state of Virginia, and part-time Naturalist Dominique McKillop took a full-time position elsewhere. In August, Madison Christol joined the nature center staff as a full-time Naturalist. Madison moved to Michigan from her home state of Georgia to join us and has blended in perfectly at Seven Ponds.

Diane Rankin remained the nature center's Office Manager, administering payroll and bookkeeping among other duties; Diane also began managing the Rookery Gift Shop in 2022. The nature center welcomed two new receptionists in March, as both Stacey Holinsworth and Krincy Rice moved on to other jobs. Stepping into those positions were Gina Stoldt (weekday receptionist) and Damian Goidich (weekend receptionist) who both quickly adapted to their roles and accepted additional responsibilities. We are fortunate to have them both. Mike Grappin oversees the maintenance of the building and grounds; Del Hunsinger worked as a seasonal maintenance employee. Daryl Bernard completed his sixth year as the nature center's Executive Director.



The Board of Directors welcomed new members Rachel Hansen-Hervey and Sally Kwaiser; the term of Nancy Buck expired in March. The following officers were elected: Joanna Pease as Chair, Kelly Heyner as Vice-chair, Paul Messing as Secretary, and Charlie Turner 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. A subcommittee met throughout the year to work on the nature center’s Strategic Plan. A membership task force met multiple times to work on membership retention and recruitment strategies.

Volunteers once again made a big impact on the services and activities around the nature center. The Friends of Herbs and the Butterfly Gardeners continued their efforts to enhance the nature center grounds, maintaining the Herb Garden and Butterfly Garden, respectively. The Stingers held their annual rummage sale in June, along with bake sales and Resale Shoppe at multiple events. Additional volunteers helped with animal care, trail maintenance, special events, and general housekeeping. With such a small staff, we depend on our wonderful volunteers to help make everything happen at Seven Ponds.



The Seven Ponds community was deeply saddened by the death of Mike Mercier, who passed away in January. Mike was a genuinely kind person who served the nature center in many capacities over the years, including Assistant Naturalist and longtime member of the board of directors. Mike was a steadfast member, volunteer, supporter, friend, advocate, and promoter of the nature center, always willing to lend a hand whenever and wherever it was needed. He was also a talented photographer, and his images helped capture the beauty of Seven Ponds and the impact this place has had on so many. Mike was a valued member of the Seven Ponds family, loved by all, and he is greatly missed.

CONCLUSION

Seven Ponds staff, supported by the Board of Directors, came through the challenges of the past two years and emerged strong. Everybody worked hard to ensure that high quality programs were offered, improvements were made to the building and grounds, and visitors had a safe place of education and respite. As we look ahead, we believe that Seven Ponds Nature Center will continue to be a treasured community asset.



Seven Ponds Nature Center Investment Funds

Endowment Fund

Market Value on 01/01/2022	\$2,920,770.62
Market Value on 12/31/2022	\$2,400,124.12
Income to General Account in 2022	\$134,331.92

Reserve Fund

Market Value on 01/01/2022	\$404,332.63
Market Value on 12/31/2022	\$321,291.24
Income to General Account in 2022	\$18,382.62

2022 - Seven Ponds Nature Center Activity Report

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	2022	2021	2020
School and Youth Groups															
Seasonal	0	51	0	69	36	148	33	65	16	92	0	0	510	137	24
Explorer	270	0	51	61	436	207	0	0	94	104	196	23	1442	407	0
Traveling Naturalist	38	85	0	458	852	231	0	129	0	0	0	0	1793	1853	1537
Scouts	16	8	15	97	0	0	0	0	48	14	18	0	216	149	48
Homeschool	16	9	16	16	16	0	0	0	22	111	14	0	220	302	119
Birthday Parties	0	0	0	0	20	15	0	6	0	0	0	17	58	30	20
Annie's Big Nature Lesson	0	0	0	142	0	0	0	0	253	0	0	0	395	0	0
SUBTOTAL	340	153	82	843	1360	601	33	200	433	321	228	40	4634	2878	1748
Misc. Adult/Fam Programs															
Nature Center	0	15	14	0	13	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	48	28	33
Outreach	15	0	441	46	87	0	70	103	202	75	85	0	1124	994	57
SUBTOTAL	15	15	455	46	100	0	70	103	208	75	85	0	1172	1022	90
Member & Public Activities															
Camp Seven Ponds	0	0	0	0	0	56	156	0	0	0	0	0	212	186	0
Knee-High Naturalists	6	7	18	11	10	0	0	0	6	10	8	9	85	63	51
Pgms/Videos/Etc.	51	117	30	102	96	64	61	21	44	58	31	0	675	685	426
Special Events	71	0	0	0	150	454	0	111	0	158	0	162	1106	579	228
Field Trips	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Field Tours	0	0	0	6	0	0	8	0	0	10	0	0	24	20	0
Rentals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	0	0	0	39	53	0
SUBTOTAL	128	124	48	119	256	574	225	132	89	236	39	171	2141	1886	705
Volunteer & Interest Groups															
	162	123	184	166	195	221	166	144	157	258	137	144	2057	1014	860
Casual Visitors															
Members	103	89	181	197	233	225	252	147	383	194	168	147	2319	2024	
Members (12 and Under)	30	36	59	36	40	69	99	62	48	63	46	37	625		
Non-Members	106	91	263	219	298	327	411	497	266	494	161	99	3232	5050	
Non-Members (12 and Under)	49	57	112	96	125	155	178	246	77	160	97	50	1402		
SUBTOTAL	288	273	615	548	696	776	940	952	774	911	472	333	7578	7074	5567
TOTAL	933	688	1384	1722	2607	2172	1434	1531	1661	1801	961	688	17582	13574	8886

Casual Visitors 2022

