

Haehnle Sanctuary News



Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary

Owned By Michigan Audubon

Maintained and Operated by The Jackson Audubon Society

Preserving and Protecting our Natural World

Spring 2018



Haehnle's Restored Wet Prairie A True Haven for Wetland Wildlife



Prairies usually are thought of as being large upland grasslands, but they can also be found in level, seasonally flooded lowlands. In the early 1800s, U.S. government surveyor Joseph Wampler described in his notes a lowland one quarter mile north of Eagle Lake as a prairie before coming to a river (later called the Portage River).

Several times he used "bad marsh" to describe this area. Farmers call them mowing marshes, for others they are just swamps while biologist call them wet prairies. They cover a significant portion of the sanctuary, have undergone dramatic changes through the years and are home to some noteworthy animals.

Wet prairies should not be confused with emergent marshes or fens. They are dominated by grasses and sedge where the groundwater is high and seasonally flooded by rivers. .

In emergent marshes the water is deeper, usually permanently flooded, and often dominated by cattail and bullrush. Some fens have a zone of vegetation similar to wet prairies, but have less fluctuating water levels.

History has not been kind to wet prairies. Early settlers found the bluejoint grass, cordgrass and sedges growing there provided forage for their livestock. Cattle could be pastured with less effort in the treeless wetlands than in uplands that had to be cleared of trees.

Marsh hay, while not as good forage as alfalfa and clovers that would come later, was harvested and taken to barns for use as bedding and forage during the winter. Often the settlers burned the marshes to stimulate new growth in the spring.

Continued on Page 2



Early Farmers mowed and harvested wet prairies for their “marsh hay”

It wasn't long before these hay marshes at Haehnle became victims of drainage. First small drainage ditches and later in 1921-22, the Portage River was deepened and channelized, transforming hay marshes into cropland.

Onions, potatoes, carrots, lettuce and other crops replaced native vegetation on the nutrient rich muck soils. It didn't take long before Greater Prairie Chickens (last reported in by L.H. Walkinshaw in 1939), Sedge Wrens, bitterns, Massasauga Rattlesnake and many other wetland species disappeared.

Farming began to decline in the 1950s due to a combination of factors. Increased runoff, sediment and trees falling into the Portage River caused widespread flooding. Farmland was abandoned not only because of the flooding, but also crop depredation by wildlife and depressed crop prices. Grass now replaced cultivated crops, but often with non-native reed canary grass. With the absence of fire, willows and other trees and shrubs encroached into the wetlands.

Work at Haehnle to restore about 140 acres of wet prairie began in 2001 when 340 acres were enrolled in the Wetland Restoration Program. Ducks Unlimited, MDNR Wildlife Division, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service helped with the restoring wetlands and surrounding uplands.

Drain tile were broken, ditches plugged, water control structures built and uplands were planted with native vegetation.

Slowly native plants began to replace some of the reed canary grass in the wetlands. Invasive willows were sprayed with a herbicide. However, many of the problems that originally caused the wetland degradation are outside the sanctuary. The Portage River remains channelized and suffers from excessive runoff from upstream areas containing sediment and nutrients.

In spite of the challenges faced to restore these wetlands, they are some of the best places at Haehnle to see birds. Walking the Portage River Trail, starting at Wooster Road in the spring, one can see a variety of birds, including warblers, Rusty Blackbirds and migrating waterfowl.

Pied-billed Grebes, Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Hooded Mergansers, and Sandhill Cranes are just a few of the birds using the area during nesting season. Later, large numbers of Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons come to feed on small fish trapped in pools left by receding flood water. Today the remaining wet prairie at Haehnle is a small reminder of what Joseph Wampler saw in 1825.

By Ron Hoffman

North America's Largest Woodpecker Making a Comeback



Female

Male

Before the settlers arrived in Jackson County, most of the local upland terrain was covered with hardwood forest, prime habitat for what is now North America's largest woodpecker. This crow-sized bird with its flaming red crest and maniacal call would later become the inspiration for the cartoon character "Woody Woodpecker."

Pileated woodpeckers need mature trees both for nesting and to find carpenter ants, their primary food source. When the forests were cut, our local pileated woodpeckers all but disappeared. Fortunately, remnant populations persisted in those few areas that escaped the axe and saw.

Woodpeckers are called primary cavity builders; each usually building and using its nest cavity just once, and then leaving it behind for other animals that cannot make their own. Bluebirds, titmice, chickadees and wrens all rely on these abandoned nest cavities. The pileated woodpecker's nesting cavity is so large it can accommodate screech owls, squirrels, wood ducks and even raccoons; and can be up to three feet deep. Both the male and female work in shifts for almost a month to complete it. In addition they also create roosting cavities used by one member of the pair while the other is incubating eggs.



The sexes of pileated woodpeckers are similarly colored, but the male has a red mustache, while the female's is black. Red covers the entire crest on the male, but only part of the crest on female.

Thanks to the maturing forests at Haehnle and the nearby Waterloo Recreation Area, these birds are making a comeback. They can now be seen and heard almost daily at the Sanctuary.

Their oblong feeding holes can be seen on a large cherry tree along the main entrance to the nature trail next to the fen.

To listen to these birds click here: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/PileatedWoodpecker/sounds,

Smith Property Acquisition Update

We have wonderful news to share! In the last issue of this newsletter, we alerted you to a parcel of land owned by George Smith and bordering the north-west end of Eagle Lake that we wished to purchase.

Thanks to a large and generous donation by the J. A. Woollam Foundation, we have secured the necessary funds to purchase the property. Obviously, we are very excited by this news.

Once we have finalized the purchase, which will be later in the Spring, we will recognize all the wonderful donors and announce the time and place of the dedication. ***Once acquired, the parcel will be known as the Peter and Gwyneth Schroeder Tract of Haehnle Sanctuary.***

So why this name? A little background information first. You might remember that Dr. Woollam was instrumental in helping us acquire the Klee parcel in 2013.

As you might suspect, Dr. Woollam has strong roots in Michigan. He was born here. He attended Kenyon College for his baccalaureate but then returned to MSU for his M.S. in physics and Ph.D. in solid state physics.

His Ph.D. thesis advisor at MSU was Dr. Peter Schroeder who had a marked impact on his scientific career. It is this man and his wife whom Dr. Woollam wishes to honor with a named tract at Haehnle Sanctuary.

Dr. Woollam's career path took him to the University of Nebraska where he is a professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. He returns to sail on Lake Michigan during the summers and maintains a strong interest in preserving native habitat in our state.

By Lathe Claflin

Haehnle's Smallest Mammal



Photo and article by Ron Hoffman

Sharp-eyed Robyn Henise recently noticed a small mouse like critter lying along a path in one of Haehnle's grasslands. It was dead. With a long pointed nose, beadlike eyes, along with other features helped identify it as a Masked Shrew. In spite of its small size - barely 3 1/4 inches long, and weighing

a whopping 1/5 oz. - it is a vicious predator. Routinely eating its own weight every 24 hours, mostly insects, earthworms and other small animals. Although they are common, this was the first report of masked shrews at the sanctuary. Of the 20 mammals observed at Haehnle it is easily the smallest.

Is This What We Want In Michigan?



Last October the Michigan House of Representatives passed HR 154 that permits the hunting of Sandhill Cranes in Michigan. The Michigan Natural Resources Commission (NRC) is now considering this resolution, listening to input from the public, either in person or by mail. (The NRC is a politically appointed body which has no wildlife biologists as members.)

If the NRC gives its stamp of approval, it will go the US Fish and Wildlife Bureau, who will make the final decision, since Sandhill Cranes are currently protected under the 100-year-old federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Why is this not sustainable? What can you do to voice your opinion? Please read on....

While there are many reasons bird watchers and other lovers of wildlife are against this proposal, it is not sustainable because of the life cycle of the cranes. Only 2 colts (young cranes) are born per year to crane couples and on the average less than one survives. These young do not mature and mate for four years. Following the math, it is obvious that the population will be depleted sooner than later.

We all know the history of the Sandhill Cranes in Michigan. These birds bordered on extinction when the Migratory Bird Act was passed 100 years ago, which outlawed their hunting. Just a few facts: a 1932 survey found 17 pairs in southeastern Michigan; in a 2016 survey by the US Fish and Wildlife Service 18,825 cranes were counted in the state. Clearly the suppression of hunting of cranes has resulted in a healthy rebound.



The Michigan Audubon Society has released the following Position Statement on Sandhill Crane Hunting in Michigan.

Michigan Audubon opposes the proposal of a Sandhill Crane hunt. We believe these birds should continue being protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Cranes and the habitats they use are valued and supported by wildlife enthusiasts, farmers, and other landowners.

Some will protest that Sandhill Cranes cause damage to emerging crops. This "problem" has two existing solutions: 1) the USFWS issues permits to farmers experiencing damage; and 2) Avipel, which is a new seed coating product available for \$5/acre, irritates the guts of cranes and deters the birds from eating the emerging crops.

What can you do to support the continued safety of Sandhill Cranes?

Become Informed. Visit the website of Michigan Audubon at michiganaudubon.org, especially visiting the Conservation Impact pages and Advocacy Work. The Songbird Protection Coalition at songbirdprotection.com is another organization that has worked tirelessly to inform the public, organize them to speak up at NRC Meetings, write letters, and arrange group visits to legislators to defeat this proposal. Become involved. Please express your views.

Find your House Representative at
<https://www.house.mi.gov/mhrpublic/frmFindARep.aspx>

Find your Senator:
<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/fysbyadd>

Contact the Natural Resources Commission:
Natural Resources Commission
Cheryl Nelson, Assistant
Phone: 517-284-6237
NRC@michigan.gov

By Helena Robinovitz



Haehnle Family Activity Corner

By Robyn Henise

Take a Walk at Haehnle

It is easy to explore nature with your children. Here is a simple activity you can do with your family while walking the nature trail at the main entrance, or on the Portage River trail on Wooster Road.

Go on a spring sound safari! Bring the family to Haehnle and go on a sound safari. Walk the nature trails and encourage your kids to record everything that they hear.

Have a doodle pad handy so your kids can list and draw pictures of what they hear. Listen for birds, frogs, insects, airplanes, the wind, etc. This activity doesn't end at Haehnle. The pictures they draw can be colored at home.

Get out and enjoy the outdoors!

Sounds To Listen For On Your Walks At Haehnle This Spring



Spring Peeper

Click Here To Listen

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZX9uODHi0zg>



Leopard Frog

Click Here To Listen

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUdeEw2BPqQ



Chorus Frog

Click Here To Listen

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x171BHpf1_I



Gray Tree Frog

Click Here To Listen

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kd5c4p8-0M



American Toad

Click Here To Listen

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6-8pC8o5fw>

(You need to connect to the internet to hear these sounds.)



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***Thank You,
Your Support is Greatly Appreciated!***



*Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary
c/o Jackson Audubon Society
P.O. Box 6453
Jackson, MI 49204*



*Official News Letter
For The
Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary*



***Thanks to the following for their
unrestricted donations to the Haehnle Sanctuary:***

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