



Nature's Adventures

By Steve Linenfelser • Outdoors writer



PHOTO COURTESY MIKE BAIRD WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



ABOVE AND BELOW: PHOTOS COURTESY MDF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



From top: The American coot, a pied-billed Grebes and a double-crested cormorant



This is Andra Gaige and Richard Rohn. The neighbors live on Wolf Lake and showed me the birds on their lake.

What is the Michigan Nature Association and what do they do around here?



The sign "slow, smoke hazard" warns drivers to be aware of the smoke ahead from the recent prescribed burn at the Michigan Nature Association's Goose Creek Sanctuary, just south of Cement City. Photo courtesy John Minar.

Migration season

Identifying ducks not all its quacked up to be

I was driving in to work in Toledo about a week ago when I got a call from an avid reader of the Exponent. It was a very nice lady by the name of Andra Gaige. She explained to me that she lives in Lenawee county off of U.S. 12 and witnessed these strange "ducks" landing, swimming, and then diving behind her house in the waters of Wolf Lake.

She explained that at first she witnessed just a few of these unknown aquatic birds, but then a flock of about 100 showed up later. Mrs. Gaige and her husband Charles did not know what they were, so Andra decided to give me a call to see what they

might be. When I heard her describe them, I first thought they might be Double Crested Cormorants due to the large number of birds landing and diving for food. Cormorants primarily nest in northern Michigan or Canada and would be returning from their winter migration from Central America, Mexico, or the southern United States. They are voracious eaters of fish and are not always popular with commercial fishermen.

When I finally made my way out to the Gaige's, I first met with Charles. He instructed me to wander out back and meet with his wife Andra. There I met both

Andra and a neighbor by the name of Richard Rohn. They were most friendly and were eager to tell me about their encounter. There was only one problem: The birds that they witnessed on the lake earlier were gone! "There was a bunch of them here this morning," said Richard. Andra agreed, and we chatted for a bit and discussed the possibilities of what type of birds they saw. Just as I was about to leave, Richard and Andra both pointed at the lake and said "There they are!" I had a camera, but these birds were over a hundred yards away and I couldn't zoom in close enough to

See *Nature* page B2

By John Hummer
Exponent staff writer

Maybe you live near or pass by the Cement City area and are vaguely familiar with the Goose Creek Grasslands Nature Sanctuary just south of the village or the Columbia Nature Sanctuary at the corner of Dearmyer and Taylor roads. Or maybe you live further north in the Napoleon area and often drive by the Lefglen Nature Sanctuary on Wolf Lake Road near Little Wolf Lake.

Maybe you've never stopped to explore these areas (and there are many more throughout the state), but they are some of the most priceless pieces of land in the state of Michigan. Fortunately for the residents of and visitors to the state, these lands will be protected forever thanks to an organization called the Michigan Nature Association.

People. Land. Legacy. That's what the organization is all about. People protecting land and leaving a legacy for the next generation.

Under the visionary leadership of Bertha A. Daubendiek, what started in 1951 as a small bird study group became a statewide land conservation organization with a mission is to protect the state's rare, threatened and endangered species and imperiled natural communities for future generations. This mission was revised over time as the organization expanded its ideology to accommodate land acquisition and conservation.

For six decades, the organization has acquired and protected an unparalleled network of more than 170 nature sanctuaries across the state from the Indi-

See *MNA's local impact* page B6

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Michigan DNR to host a hunter safety class

The Michigan DNR is hosting a hunter safety class May 6 and 7. This class is open to anyone who needs a hunter safety certificate or is interested in learning firearm or archery safety. Parents are encouraged to attend the class with their child. All students 11 or younger must be accompanied by an adult in the class. Pre-registration is scheduled Saturday, April 22 at 9 a.m. at the Lenawee County Conservation League, 1404 Sutton Road, Adrian.

Students are not required to be present at registration. When registering, individuals must have the date of birth and emergency phone number of the individual they are registering. They may also pick up their study guide at the time of registration.

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This magnificent aerial photo of MNA's Goose Creek Sanctuary depicts the recent prescribed burn to knock out the glossy buckthorn, a European invasive species. MNA stewardship organizer Rachel Maranto predicts a vibrant flush of early summer wildflowers at the sanctuary as a result of the burn.

MNA's local impact from page B1

ana/Ohio border to the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula in the Upper Peninsula. It is the largest network of natural areas owned and maintained by a nonprofit conservation organization in Michigan.

"The sanctuaries must have enough high-quality habitat features that house these imperiled species," said Rachel Maranto, regional stewardship organizer for the Southeast Lower Peninsula in describing what lands the MNA seeks to acquire and protect.

MNA has invested a lot of resources into its stewardship staff to care for the many properties the group now owns. One staff person covers all of MNA's U.P. sanctuaries, another covers northern lower Michigan, while two others cover southwest and southeast lower Michigan. Maranto covers the latter, including the Jackson and Lenawee county areas. A total staff of 10 works hard to make it all happen.

The organization also carries on a program of natural history study and conservation education. It has recently started to put more resources into outreach and education and has added long-time Michigan conserva-

tionist and land trust professional Julie Stoneman to the staff. She has responsibilities in outreach, fundraising and education programming.

"We're trying to reach more schools, universities, and the general public," Maranto said. The organization works with schools and teachers across the state to inspire children to

"Some of our properties, like Lefglen, have a marked trail and parking area," says Maranto. "That's sort of our maximum visitor amenities. Other sanctuaries, like Columbia, are a bit harder to access and only have roadside parking and do not have marked trails." Maranto recommends a map and compass to navigate around unmarked sanctuaries like Columbia.

"It all depends on what your comfort level is with exploring," she said. Maranto encourages people to get ahold of her for maps or tips on getting around MNA properties.

MNA's newest acquisition is the McCulley-Bastian Nature Sanctuary, a 70-acre parcel that lies within a priority land protection area along the River Raisin off of M-52 and Sutton Roads between Tecumseh and Adrian. The property is primarily southern floodplain forest and provides excellent nesting habitat for neotropical migratory birds and supports wildlife migration as well. The sanctuary currently has no marked trails or other amenities.

On Saturday, May 6, MNA is hosting a "Bio Blitz" at McCulley-Bastian where they gather local experts in different taxonomic groups to identify as many species as they can. However, no experience is necessary if you'd like to help. Contact Maranto (contact information included at end of story) if you are interested.

Typically, when we acquire new properties, we know there are one or two rare species of interest, but we don't have the full picture," she said. "This is our attempt to generate the species list for the sanctuary."

Typically, a prescribed burn promotes stimulation of the native seed bank and the ash from the fire provides good nutrients for the soil.

"You get this really vibrant flush of early summer wildflowers," said Maranto. "Goose Creek is a great place for viewing wildflowers anyway, but I'm anticipating this to be something like wildflowers on steroids. Where you typically get one or

two wood lilies poking out, we might get 50. That's the scale I'm hoping for anyway."

To capitalize on the predicted flush of wildflowers at Goose Creek, MNA – along with the Huron Valley chapter of the Michigan Botanical Club – is co-hosting a wildflower walk-a-bout hike on Sunday, June 4 from 1 to 4 p.m.

"Each land conservancy has a different mission, so it's a different piece of the conservation puzzle," she said. "Not every land owner is a perfect fit for us, but maybe they're a great fit for another [land conservation organization]. We work together to find the right fit for a property – who's the best fit for caring for the land in perpetuity. Wherever possible we try to seek out opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration."

Without this management technique, it would turn Goose Creek – which is a prairie fen,

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White squirrel spotted

We see black squirrels, red squirrels, grey squirrels, fox squirrels and occasionally flying squirrels, but white squirrels not-so-much. The reason is that not only are they rare, but they do not last long in the wild as they do not blend in well with their surrounding, making them easy prey. The squirrel above was photographed by Parrish Stahl in Jackson.

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