

Winter 2015

THE WILDSIDE

A newsletter for the supporters of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge



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ABOUT DRIWR & IWRA



The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) is located along the lower Detroit River and western shoreline of Lake Erie. Established in 2001 as the first International Wildlife Refuge in North America, it includes islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals, and waterfront lands along 48 miles of shoreline. Its unique location in a large urban area allows significant opportunities for the public to experience fish, wildlife and plants in their natural habitat. The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization - a "Friends" organization that works to support the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in the development of the DRIWR. We invite you to become a supporter of IWRA.

Visit iwralliance.org, www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river and www.drhawkwatch.org for more periodic updates.

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A Message from the Alliance Chair

Congratulations to the Honorable John D. Dingell for receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom! 2015 promises some exciting things for the Refuge: the construction of a new Visitor Center and a fishing pier that will bring people in great numbers.

Thanks to all who continue to support this effort and the annual benefit dinners. Planned for May 8, 2015, the 10th Annual Benefit Dinner in support of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge at Silver Shores in Wyandotte, Michigan. It will be an evening of great entertainment with Friends in conservation. Hope to see you there!

Richard Micka, Chair
International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board



A Note from Steve Dushane, Assistant Refuge Manager



Get Your Goose On!

In the future when someone asks me to pose for one of my infamous action shots, I should really consider what it might be used for. This time, at least, it is for a harmless, yet very important reason . . . to promote the unique places on the refuge.

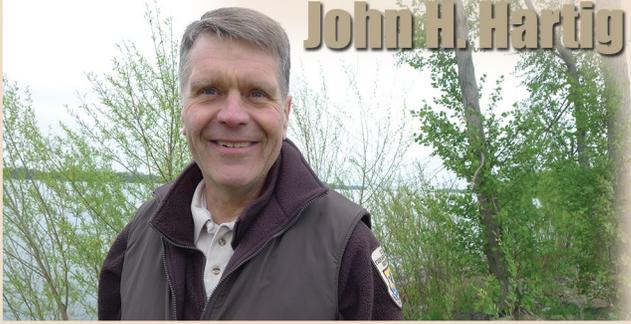
Can you guess "Where Steve is"?



Hint: Very old (for our region) oak and hickory trees with newly re-discovered grasses and sedges which are remnants from a time when our landscape was very different than it is now. After 9 years at the refuge, every time I am in the field there are new discoveries and learning experiences. So, get out to one of our scheduled events and "Get Your Goose On"!

From the Refuge Manager

John H. Hartig



Fighting Island Reef Expansion Successful

What fish thrived when dinosaurs were at the height of their development, resided in the Great Lakes 10,000 years ago, and are still revered by Native Americans today? If you guessed the lake sturgeon you are correct. Essex Region Conservation Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and 15 other U.S. and Canadian partners first built a successful sturgeon spawning reef off Fighting Island in the Detroit River in 2008. Based on the success of this fish spawning reef,

scientists and resource managers expanded it in 2013, nearly doubling the size of spawning habitat for the threatened lake sturgeon and other fish species. Monitoring performed by U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service showed that the reef was an immediate success. Monitoring data showed that viable lake whitefish eggs were present on the expanded reef bed in the fall of 2013 and that walleye, lake sturgeon, and native sucker eggs were also present there in the spring of 2014. Larval lake sturgeon were also captured downstream of the expanded reef, confirming that the reef is producing both lake sturgeon eggs and larvae.

This truly is an amazing story that lake sturgeon are recovering because the lake sturgeon population in the Detroit River is estimated to be about one percent of its former abundance. Over the past century, fish productivity in the Detroit River has been greatly reduced by channelization, loss of coastal wetlands, filling/armoring shorelines, water pollution and dredging of limestone bedrock that was spawning habitat for lake sturgeon and other native fish species. These new data confirm that the current restoration strategy is yielding positive ecosystem results, and that this small, remnant population of lake sturgeon may one day be restored to a higher level of abundance in the Detroit River. Congratulations to all the partners in this compelling conservation accomplishment and for being an outstanding model of trans-boundary conservation of a threatened species in North America.



Visitor Service News

Full Circle – The Career of a Visitor Services Manager
Our new Visitor Services Manager, Jody DeMeyere, is no stranger to southeast Michigan. A native of Southfield, Michigan, Jody has worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) since 1999. Michigan has always been on her mind - even as her career took her deep into the swamps of Louisiana; in float planes searching for moose in northern Alaska; and on the trails to connect with the throngs of people on Long Island, New York. As the saying goes “There is no place like home!”

Jody has assisted in the opening of three visitors centers across the country, solicited thousands of volunteers to aid in the work the Service does and connected many urban youth to the joys and discoveries that can be found on national wildlife refuges. She is thrilled to join the team and invites you to connect with her at jody_demeyere@fws.gov or (734) 692-7649.

Jennie Braatz- New Park Ranger at DRIWR
Unlike our new Visitor Services Manager, our new Park Ranger, Jennie Braatz WAS a stranger to southeast Michigan until the day she drove into town this past autumn. No longer a stranger, Jennie has fallen in love with all things Michigan and is proud to call Downriver home. Jennie has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service since 2009 as a park ranger at the Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR. Jennie’s passion for wildlife began before she can remember and has remained a constant her whole life. Jennie is eagerly immersing herself in the southeast Michigan landscape, learning the language of the Detroit River habitat, and the wildlife that call it home so that she can in return share these incredible resources with visitors. You can reach Jennie at jennifer_braatz@fws.gov



**Meet our
new staff**

**Jody DeMeyere
Visitor Service Manager**



**Jennie Braatz
Park Ranger**

Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge
Trenton, Michigan



Visitor Center

May 2013



THE REFUGE GATEWAY: DRIWR'S FRONT DOOR"
Catherine Dennis, Landscape Designer



Regional Accessibility

With the construction of the Visitor Center, the Refuge Gateway will soon become a hub for public use and visitor orientation on the refuge. These visitors will come by car from I-75 and by bus from metro-area schools, but many, we hope, will also arrive by bike, on foot, and maybe even on roller skates via a regional network of non-motorized paths known as the Downriver Linked Greenways. This network has been growing and becoming ever-more connected, and now over 50 miles of linked trails are included. A project announced this year will further intensify this system, running the greenway north-south on W. Jefferson and connecting the Refuge Gateway south to Lake Erie Metropark, north to Wayne County's Elizabeth Park, and to many other local destinations. Within the Refuge Gateway, as well, we're making significant efforts to welcome non-motorized visitors.

"Walking the Walk" of Sustainability

The Monguagon Boardwalks, which have been under-construction this season and completed in 2015, will link a paved pedestrian/bike trail from W. Jefferson all the way up to the Visitor Center and eventually out to the Boat Dock and Fishing Pier. Thanks to generous support from corporate and community partners, we were able to design these boardwalks in a sustainable and creative way that will become an educational and interesting feature all their own. The posts supporting the structures are repurposed telephone poles donated by DTE Energy, which have been rammed into the ground to serve as the base. With funding from the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition and generous donations from Lowe's Home Improvement, we were also able to use sustainable and environmentally preferable lumber: the decking and railings are constructed entirely from "ChoiceDek" composite lumber, which is made of 95% recycled content and has a longer lifespan than standard wood decking. These boardwalks have been installed through yet another partnership: the refuge crew, including some of our tremendous volunteers, have partnered with Lowe's employees from regional stores! Not only has this been a great opportunity to connect with local businesses, it has been great fun for us all. We can't wait to finish them up this spring!

Habitat Use and Activity of Harvestmen at Humbug Marsh

Cara Shillington, Department of Biology,
Eastern Michigan University

Harvestmen or daddy-longlegs are ubiquitous in many terrestrial ecosystems where they can be very diverse and can also be found in high densities. These animals are close relative of spiders; they have eight legs similar to spiders but only one body segment (compared to two for spiders).

Distributions of harvestmen are influenced by many factors including climate and habitat structure. They are found in a variety of habitats including in soil, leaf litter, under rocks and stones and on vertical surfaces such as tree trunks and also running over tall vegetation. General trends suggest that fewer species are found in open habitats and typically within these habitats there is one or a few dominant species that are resistant to the stressful conditions in these habitats (e.g., low humidity and high temperatures). Because of the variety of different habitats at Humbug Marsh and the active management of the site to create more open areas, this is an ideal location for studying harvestmen.

Starting in July 2013, we set up pitfall traps to collect harvestmen in different habitats throughout Humbug Marsh. Habitats include old growth forest, open meadows, herbicide treated forests, urban forest (dominated by dogwoods) and lowland swamp. Pitfall traps were open for one week July through October in 2013 and 2014. Diversity and richness (i.e., total numbers count and numbers of different species) will be compared among the different habitats and across the two years. Across the two years, animals are most active in July through September, which a sharp decline in numbers in October.

There is also higher diversity in the old growth and urban forest areas compared to open meadows and lowlands swamp regions. The low numbers in more swampy areas is surprising because studies have suggested that areas of high humidity are preferred by many species of harvestmen. I am currently working with several graduate and undergraduate students at Eastern Michigan University on species-level identification of the collected animals.



Master Naturalist, Dorothy McLeer AKA Humbug Marsha Receives National Award

Perhaps you recognize our "Humbug Marsha", Ms. Dorothy McLeer, from the University of Michigan-Dearborn Environmental Interpretation Center. She recently was the recipient of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) Master Front Line Interpreter Award for 2014. The award was presented at NAI's national workshop on November 22nd in Denver, CO.

Dorothy has demonstrated a mastery of interpretive techniques and creative projects in the Refuge and beyond. She never passes an opportunity to share her insights and enthusiasm about current natural events with any and all who come to her or offer her the opportunity to make a presentation. Dorothy's interpretations of natural flora, fauna, and ecological processes are current and up-to-date because of her many professional experiences with such field activities as banding hawks at the Holiday Beach Migration Observatory, recording birds of prey, and assessing wolf populations in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Dorothy has an impressive depth of knowledge in these areas due to her perseverance and long-term commitment to the field study of natural history. We are fortunate to have this enthusiastic, fun-loving Master Front Line Interpreter involved with the Refuge!





SAVE THE DATE: MAY 08, 2015



10TH ANNUAL
DETROIT RIVER
INTERNATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE
BENEFIT DINNER

WWW.IWRALLIANCE.ORG
IWR_ALLIANCE@YAHOO.COM



THE EVENING WILL FOCUS MORE ON A SOCIALIZING ATMOSPHERE; COME AFTER WORK, ENJOY A BEVERAGE WITH FRIENDS 5 - 6 PM SOCIAL HOUR AT THE BISTRO TABLES ALONG THE MAJESTIC WATERFRONT OF THE DETROIT RIVER . . .

THE EVENING WILL BE FILLED WITH MUSIC AND FOOD 5 -10 PM - ENJOY 5 FOOD STATIONS FROM THE SALAD EXTRAVAGANZA TO THE MAMA LUCCI PASTA STATION TO ICE SCREAM YOU SCREAM SUNDAE BAR

LIVE AND SILENT AUCTIONS WITH OVER 150 ITEMS - RAFFLES GALORE - AND JUST A GREAT EVENING TO BY ENJOYED ALONG THE BEAUTIFUL DETROIT RIVER WITH FRIENDS.

SAVE THE DATE - MAY 8, 2015 - RESERVATIONS NOW BEING TAKEN THROUGH THE IWRA WEBSITE, IWRALLIANCE.ORG OR CONTACT THE OFFICE AT 734-692-7671 / IWR_ALLIANCE@YAHOO.COM



Refuge Stewardship Update Greg Norwood Refuge Wildlife Biologist

Here at Detroit River IWR, we protect a variety of fish and wildlife habitats of the lower Detroit River and along western Lake Erie and often actively rehabilitate them through

It was September 15, 1998 and the seating capacity limit was exceeded by the time the Gibraltar fire marshal shut the doors on one of the public hearings regarding the proposed land development of the privately held Humbug Marsh. A traffic jam with people waiting to attend extended nearly two miles to Interstate-75. One could hardly script a more engaging story – whoever side of the story you take. Since November voters hardly turn out in these numbers, one cannot deny that there were emotional strings that this proposed land development pulled to draw this many people and organizations to voice their objection. Most interesting was that the originally proposed 340 luxury homes, private golf course, and marina were slated in a natural area that was never public space. So one must assume the mile-long undeveloped shoreline of Humbug Marsh had deep symbolic and cultural meaning to residents, but hardly any of these people likely ever hiked in it.

Over the following few years through a number of turn of events, Humbug Marsh became protected Federal land as a unit of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

Today the mostly soggy rustic trails and observation decks sit behind locked gates with only limited public events, but not for long. For the first time in its storied history, Humbug Marsh will be open, public land. Visitors will be able to start at the Refuge’s new visitor center just north of the property at the Refuge Gateway (Wayne County land). The Visitor Center will be the administrative and information hub for all of the Refuge’s 5,800 acres and will be opened by 2016.

Behind Humbug’s locked gates is a treasured “living landscape” to borrow from ecologist Doug Tallamy and Rick Darke’s new book of the same name, with many layers of cultural and ecological history that define where and how we lived. But land conservation allows us to also see how the land serves us today in living white oak trees that were casting shade even prior to the War of 1812. On display is a living freshwater coastal wetland, unhindered by steel sheet-piling, dikes, or docks. One will view a living, intact forest with the same species as Joseph Fletcher, surveyor the United States General Land Office recorded in 1817 when he walked the township section lines noting the natural features. Most importantly, visitors will be encouraged to make Humbug’s living landscape a regular part of their lives through their own explorations and see for themselves the countless benefits of allowing these last great spaces to keep living.

Since 2007, behind those locked gates, has been a slow “rehabilitation”. Local volunteers and over two hundred organizations have spent countless hours repairing its natural ecosystems by reversing the negative impacts from historical drainage ditches, farming, grazing, and recent brushhogging in late 1998. The most consistent presence over the last few years has been the Refuge’s stewardship crew under the daily supervision of volunteer Dick Skoglund, who has planted trees, removed invasives, and blocked drainage ditches to start a new era for Humbug Marsh - one that honors its many cultural and ecological layers through stewardship and by inspiring visitors to finally experience it firsthand. Individuals interested in field work are welcomed to contact Refuge Biologist, Greg Norwood Greg_Norwood@fws.gov.

2015 Spring - Summer Calendar of Events

The 2015 DRIWR staff, IWRA staff and supporting volunteers welcome you to another great year of fun and activity!



January 31, Saturday

Eagle Tour in partnership with DTE Energy

This once a year event allows you to experience the beauty of the bald eagle in its winter habitat. If the river is frozen, expect to see over 50 mature eagles on site. If the waters are open, expect to see the eagles soaring above you as you stand on the marsh dikes, an experience to be remembered. Registration Required. Registration opens Thanksgiving Day, closes January 5. A lottery will be conducted to select participants for the two tours, 9:00 am and 1:00 pm.

February 7, Saturday

Shiver on the River Shiver

Presented by

Friends of the Detroit River on Belle Isle, Detroit, MI.
www.detroitriver.org

March 18, Wednesday

Volunteer Outreach Event (6:00 – 8:00 pm) Location TBA

An open house event for those interested in being a part of the growth of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. There will be information on how you can put your time, skills and passion to use for the refuge. A great way to get involved and learn before we open our doors to the public and participate in the first days of the refuge's openings. Come experience wildlife as a volunteer!

April 25, Saturday

Monroe County Earth Day Expo

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Monroe County Earth Day Expo event with the theme, "Healthy Planet, Healthy You". Come celebrate with us on April 25th from 10:00am-2:00pm at the Monroe Bank & Trust Expo Center, Monroe, MI.

April 28, Tuesday

Presentation in the Trenton Village Theater TBA

May 2, Saturday

Open House at Humbug Marsh

Includes naturalist led early morning (7:30am) and mid-morning (11:00 am) bird hikes with family friendly bird activities (12:00 – 3:00 pm)

The first open house of the season is an extra special day with guided tours highlighting and celebrating the migration of nearly 350 species of migratory birds as they return to their nesting habitats in North America after their tropical winter vacation.

May 9 and 10, Saturday and Sunday

International Migratory Bird Day Event at Lake Erie Metro Park

Learn about migratory birds and how they fly thousands of miles each year to their breeding and wintering grounds.

June 6, Saturday

Open House at Humbug Marsh (1:00 – 4:00 pm) in honor of National Trails Day

Come visit your local Humbug trail system. Connect with nature on our orange and green trails!

June 13, Saturday

Kids FREE Fishing Day 8am-Noon

Rivertown Detroit Kids Fishing Fest at Milliken State Park & Harbor in partnership with the Rivertown Detroit Association and partners. This free event is designed to give families in the greater Detroit area the opportunity to enjoy the fun of fishing along the Detroit riverfront while building community, creating family memories, enjoying the great outdoors, and learning about water stewardship and sustainability. 1900 Atwater Street, Detroit, MI.

June 20 and 21, Saturday and Sunday

Detroit River Days Event

Detroit Riverfront – from the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority Terminal & Dock just west of the GM Renaissance Center, to Rivard Plaza and the William G. Milliken State Park. River Days is a celebration of Detroit's River Walk with land and water based activities.

July 19, Sunday

Sundaes on a Sunday in the Refuge

Open House at Brancheau Unit (1:00 – 4:00 pm)

Join us to learn more scoop on the Brancheau Unit of the DRIWR and how water management techniques are used for invasive species control with Steve Dushane, Assistant Refuge Manager. Then, enjoy a delicious Sunday afternoon treat with Independent Dairy Ice Cream. Meet at the Swan Creek Boat Club, 6332 Brancheau St., Newport, MI.

August 1, Saturday

Open House at Humbug Marsh (1:00 – 4:00 pm)

Come visit Humbug Marsh trails for an afternoon, visit the gem at your backdoor.

Did You Know?

Jennie Braatz, Park Ranger

Cedar Waxwings (*Bombcilla cedrorum*)

The Cedar Waxwing loves fruit! They can actually live for months entirely on berries. You often see them eating berries in the winter. The Cedar Waxwing do sometimes go overboard with the fruit. Sometimes a flock will land in an over-ripened berry patch, eat it up and get tipsy. This can lead to injury and death if they aren't careful. Because of this inherent danger, Cedar Waxwings have a better sense of smell than other birds. If they can smell the berries fermenting they can avoid intoxication. They like fruit so much that the parasitic Brown-headed cowbird babies (often found in the nest of Cedar Waxwing) may not survive the berry-rich diet.

That being said, Cedar Waxwing hatchlings actually do need insects in their diet for their development and will add more insects to their diet during the summer months. The Humbug woods are full of berry-laden trees and shrubs making it a great place for these beautiful birds to visit. Some berries Cedar Waxwings eat are purposely avoided until a certain time when these berries are more easily digestible, such as dogwood and hawthorn.

Cedar Waxwings have all the fun! Not only do they feast on delicious fruit, but are also very social. They flock in large groups and will also build nests close by to others, creating a community of nest. The "waxy" red tips on the secondary feathers actually feel more like plastic than wax. Cedar Waxwings have been photographed catching snowflakes out of the air.



Photo: usfws



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