

# Refuge Reporter

Volume 9, Issue 2

Spring 2006

## Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest Deadline is March 15

By Becky Goche, Park Ranger



Entries for the 2005-2006 Michigan Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest are due by March 15, 2006. All entries must be sent to Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, 6975 Mower Road,

Saginaw, MI 48602. The Junior Duck Stamp Program uses art and science to teach students the value of wetlands and the waterfowl that use them. This program is available to school children in grades K-12 and to home schoolers. It is modeled after the Federal Duck Stamp Program and gives students an opportunity to create a design for a stamp. The artwork must be of a North American duck, goose or swan.

Last year, over 300 Michigan students participated in the program. The Junior Duck

Stamp Program is run annually in each state – approximately 30,000 students participate throughout the country. At the state level, students are judged in four groups according to grade level. Each participant receives a certificate. In addition, prizes will be awarded to first, second, and third place and honorable mention winners in each group. Judges select the “Best of Show” from the 12 first place winners, which is then submitted to the national Junior Duck Stamp Competition. The first place winner from the national contest is used to create the Junior Duck Stamp for the following year.

To learn more about the Junior Duck Stamp Program, download curriculum, or get the entry form and rules, visit the refuge’s website at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee> and click the “Jr. Duck Stamp” button. You can also contact me at (989) 759-1669.

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### Special Points:

- *Be sure to check out the 2006 “Nurturing Nature Wednesday Series” flyer inside—offering a glimpse of a pioneer trip into the mid-Michigan wilderness, bird calling, a look at Great Lakes creatures and nature poetry*
- *Friends group is planning photography workshops, birding tours, stargazing, wildflower hikes, soap making and more. If you have any suggestions, contact Janet Martineau at [jmartineau@thesaginawnews.com](mailto:jmartineau@thesaginawnews.com)*

## Live Theater Comes to Green Point on March 8

By Janet Martineau, Friends Board Member

Step back in time on Wednesday, March 8, when a Midland nature historian/actor recreates the startling images of the Saginaw Valley in the fall of 1837. “An Evening with Bela Hubbard,” finds Chippewa Nature Center historian Kyle Bagnall portraying the real life, 23-year-old surveyor who kept a

descriptive diary detailing his month-long wilderness journey, on foot and by canoe, from Detroit to Midland and back, with a memorable stop in Saginaw and other mid-Michigan sites. Bagnall’s performance is fully costumed and travels with a campfire set. It is part of the Nurturing Nature Series and begins at 7:00 p.m. at Green Point. The Castle Museum of Saginaw County History is co-sponsoring the program.

# Replacing Corn Borer Moths with Pistachio Emerald Moths

By David Peters, Tractor Operator

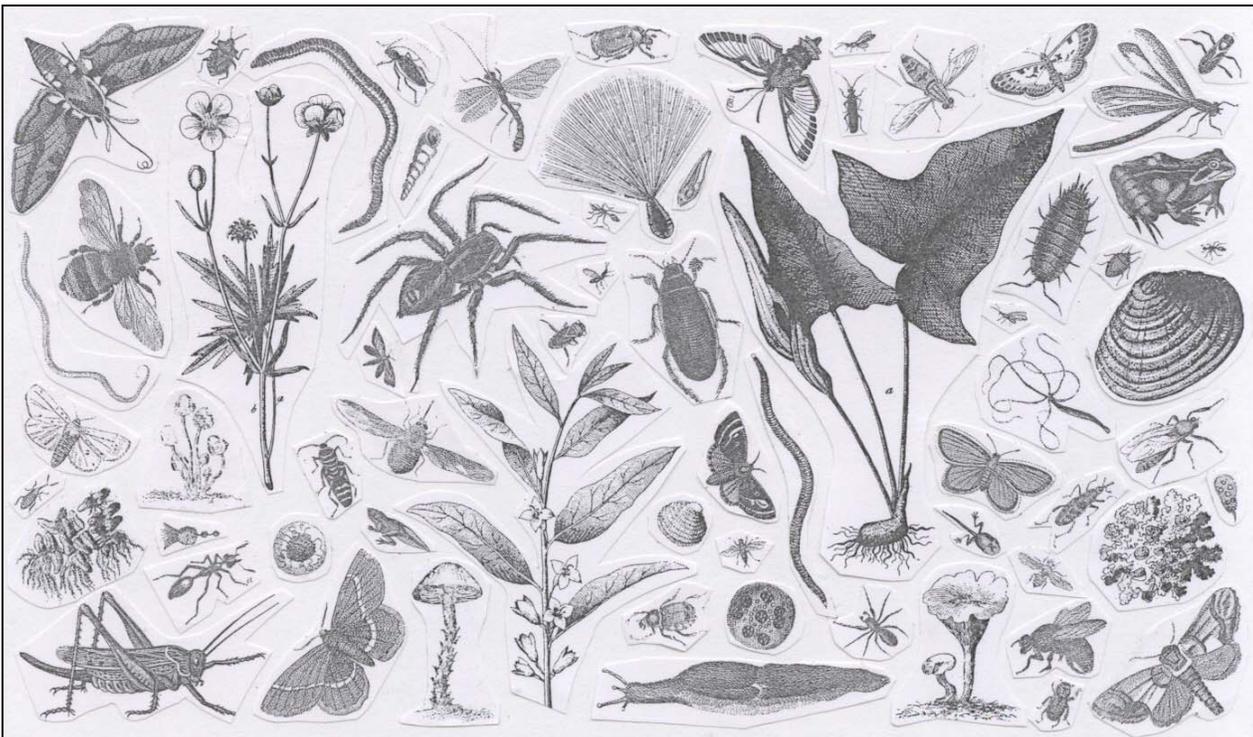
One of the habitat goals of Shiawassee NWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), which sets guidelines for refuge management through the year 2016, is the reduction of cropland acreage. In the years ahead, existing refuge cropland and any cropland that is acquired will be converted to natural wetland, grassland, and forests; with a long term goal of eliminating cropland from the refuge land use pattern. However, the section of the CCP that describes this objective goes further to rationalize refuge croplands than it does to explain biological imperative for reducing them. The reader is provided only minimal insight as to why croplands are not in the best interest of conservation at Shiawassee NWR.

Shiawassee NWR was authorized under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, and meeting the needs of migratory birds remains the top priority of management activities. In the early days of waterfowl management at the refuge, croplands were chosen as a method to provide food resources for migrating waterfowl, Canada geese in particular. But unlike humans, waterfowl have not become dependent upon agriculture for their food. Like their ancestors that filled the skies in pre-settlement America, today's ducks, geese, and swans

prosper on a diet of the natural foods found in the marshes, ponds, and shallowly flooded fields they flock to. Lack of these seasonal and permanent wetland habitats has a far greater negative impact on waterfowl populations than does a shortage of short-term supplemental food resources.

While waterfowl comprise the largest group of the birds at the refuge in terms of total numbers, they constitute only around 15% of the 200 or so migratory bird species that visit the refuge annually. Of the wading birds, raptors, shorebirds, songbirds and others constitute the remaining 85%, all thrive either exclusively, or at least far better, in natural habitats. Though some incidental use of refuge cropland by a few of these birds does occur, the same could be said of nearly any land use, including industrial. With only limited acreage to achieve it's goals, the refuge needs to maximize its potential for effectively contributing to the conservation of the variety of migratory bird species that breed and migrate through its boundaries each year.

Meeting the needs of birdlife is only the beginning of the conservation gains that will result from reducing refuge cropland. Natural habitats are home to a diversity of flora and fauna – grasses and flowering plants, bees and katydid, snails and frogs, mosses and algae,



A tiny sample of refuge inhabitants. Collage by David Peters.

## Replacing Corn Borer Moths... Continued

the list goes on and on. Together they form biological communities that function through an untold number of complex interactions. Comparatively, life in an intensively cropped field is impoverished. Typically consisting of a large solid block of one genetically identical plants and a few non-native invasive weeds that have escaped herbicide applications, croplands lack floral diversity and hence a drastically reduced number and variety of other creatures as well. An opportunity to conserve not only birds, but an abundance of other wonderful and equally significant plants and animals is overlooked when refuge land is used to grow crops.

Conserving the soil itself provides significant biological incentive for eliminating agriculture on the refuge. The soils of the refuge naturally sustain plentiful populations of creatures such as ground beetles, millipedes, ants, worms, nematodes. They live off the ever available supply of dead plant and animal materials, processing it into a layer of rich organic material. Also present within the soil are mycorrhizal fungus. They thrive on compounds exuded by plant roots, and in doing so, transfer, or "fix" the carbon energy produced by the plants back to the soil. In return, these funguses assist the plant's roots in obtaining nutrients and water. 90% of plant species benefit from these funguses.

Only a small portion of this soil life exists in refuge croplands. The layer of nutrient rich organic material that once enriched these soils is gone. Other than the crop itself, the ground is more or less bare year round, with only a minimal of debris. Without a sufficient layer of decomposing material for soil dwelling invertebrates to live in and feed on, they perish. More changes take place down in the soil. Corn and wheat crops have been bred to secure most of their carbon in the harvested grain, rather than their roots where Mycorrhizal fungus can absorb it and return this important energy source to the soil. As a result, carbon levels and mycorrhizal fungus populations decline, and are replaced by unnaturally high levels of nitrogen and bacteria.

On occasion, the public and media incorrectly refer to Shiawassee NWR as the "game reserve". If this was really the case, and simply raising an abundance of game was the refuge's goal, then row crops might very well be a wise use of refuge land. But the mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is to conserve and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of the American people. Managing natural habitats and pre-

servicing the rich diversity of life that they support; in the skies and the waters, on the land and in the land; is of the greatest benefit to all citizens. Replacing refuge croplands with wet meadows, cattail marshes, brushy fields, and hardwood forests will allow Shiawassee NWR to advance further towards achieving its habitat objectives, and provide the public an even more pleasant place to experience it.

### Don't miss it—A Spring Night Hike!

Meet Volunteer Steve Gasser at the Ferguson Bayou Trail parking lot at west end of Curtis Road on April 28 at 7:00 p.m. He will lead the group on a 5-mile hike on refuge trails. Dress for the weather and bring a flashlight.

#### REFUGE REPORTER

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Editor: Becky Goche

#### Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Established in October, 1953 and administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Shiawassee NWR provides resting, nesting and feeding habitat for waterfowl and other birds. Its mission is to preserve or manage an undeveloped expanse of floodplain forest, marshes, rivers, and associated habitat within an agricultural and urban landscape through habitat management, encouraging public stewardship, educational programs, and private lands activities.

Refuge Manager—Steve Kahl

Assistant Refuge Manager—Ed DeVries

Biologist—Jim Dastyck

Private Lands Biologist—Michelle Vander Haar

Biological Science Technician—Vacant

Park Ranger/Volunteer Coordinator—Becky Goche

Administrative Technician—Mary Ann Gillette

Maintenance Staff—Marion "Butch" Nowosatko and David Peters

Law Enforcement Officer—Jonathan Priday and Kevin Shinn

#### Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

A nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization established in 1999 to promote the preservation of the natural and historical resources of the Refuge, foster its use and enjoyment by the public consistent with the protection and preservation of its environment, and engage in such educational, scientific and civic activities as will assist the management of the Refuge in carrying out its mandates.

Refuge Website: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee>

Shiawassee NWR  
6975 Mower Rd.  
Saginaw, MI 48601  
Phone: 989-777-5930  
Fax: 989-777-9200  
Hours: M - F, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

We're on the web!

[Http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee)



***Live Theater is Coming to the Green Point in March***



## Schedule a Spring Field Trip to Green Point Today

*By Becky Goche, Park Ranger*

Spring is just around the corner and that's a perfect time to bring your students to Green Point for a field trip! Green Point offers many different programs for you and your students to come and explore the outdoors. We have programs for all ages—you can pick a program appropriate for your class or we can suggest one based upon the grade level you teach.

We also offer programs for in your classroom—we come to you! How cool would it be for a real, live Park Ranger to visit your classroom? We always bring lots of interesting stuff for your students to see and touch.

Green Point has many educational trunks covering a variety of natural resources-related topics that you can

borrow for a two-week period. Each trunk contains a variety of items to enhance your curriculum including books, videos, posters, puppets, skulls, and more. All you need to do is contact Green Point to pick one up.

The refuge's environmental education programs are FREE! You can view a listing of these programs on our website (<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee>) or you can call Green Point at (989) 759-1669 to request a copy be sent to you in the mail.



# 2006 Nurturing Nature Wednesday Series

- All programs begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Green Point Environmental Learning Center, 3010 Maple Street in Saginaw.
- Admission: \$2 for individuals or \$5 for a family and FREE for Friends members.
- Sponsored by Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Friends of the Shiawassee NWR

## **The Lake Sturgeon: Past and Present February 1**

Jim Boase, a fishery biologist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service resource office in Alpena, will discuss his work last summer with sturgeon in the Great Lakes, including research done on the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge and its surrounding rivers.

## **An Evening with Bela Hubbard March 8**

In September 1837, 23-year-old surveyor Bela Hubbard kept a diary detailing his month-long wilderness journey, on foot and by canoe, from Detroit to Midland and back — with a memorable stop in Saginaw and other mid-Michigan sites. Kyle Bagnall, Chippewa Nature Center's manager of history programs, assumes the guise of Hubbard in dress, speech and campfire set to relive that journey. (Program is co-sponsored with the Castle Museum of Saginaw County History and will also be presented at noon, March 7, at the Museum, 500 Federal in Saginaw.)

## **Emerald Ash Borer: Introduction and History April 5**

Dan Keane, the Emerald Ash Borer education coordinator for the Saginaw branch of the Michigan State University Extension Office, will examine the imported insect that is threatening the state's ash trees and what can be done to keep trees healthy as well as provide the most current information about the infestation.

## **Introduction to Wildlife Calls and Calling May 3**

Whether you are hunting, taking photographs, learning behavior or just want to get closer to wildlife for viewing, knowing the calls of animals and how to call them is helpful and fun. Chippewa Nature Center naturalist Tom Lenon offers helpful hints on how to call animals into closer range and become aware of how each species communicates.

## **Underwater Creatures in the Great Lakes June 7**

Videographer and diver Ric Mixer has been exploring beneath the surface of the Great Lakes for more than 15 years. Come see images of some of the strange creatures he encounters — from the giant sturgeon to the eel-like burbot.

## **Archaeological Findings on the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge July 12**

Jeffrey Sommer is the curator of archeology at the Castle Museum of Saginaw County History and an active "digger" on the rich refuge. He'll show slides of his expeditions and some of the artifacts found.

## **Fungi and More August 2**

Chippewa Nature Center senior naturalist Janea Little has attended two courses on fungi at the University of Michigan's Biological Station. She will share pictures of the many mushrooms she encountered

there, as well as other scenes from the station and fungi from the Upper Peninsula and mid-Michigan.

## **Michigan's Junior Duck Stamp Program September 6**

Michigan's Federal Junior Duck Stamp contest came to Saginaw to roost this year as Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge Park Ranger Becky Goche was named its coordinator.

Her presentation will offer an overview of the program, images of this year's winners and hopefully comments from some of the mid-Michigan entrants.

## **Deer Management at the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge October 4**

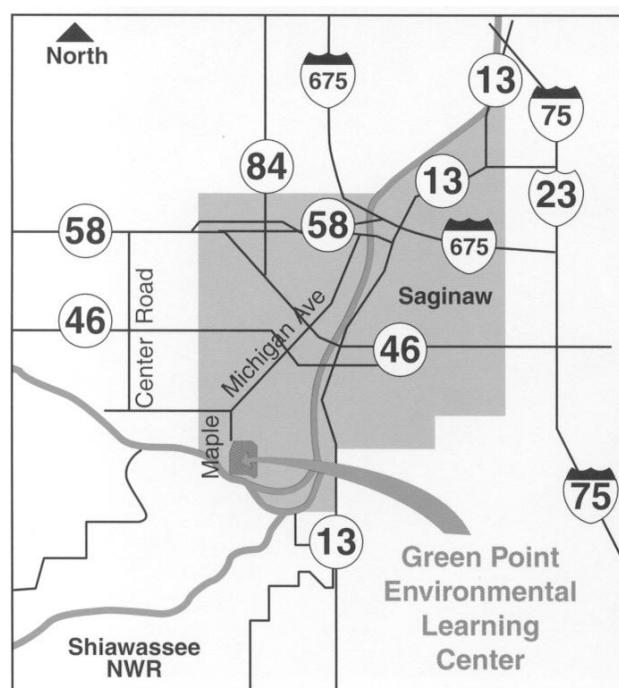
Jim Dastyck, biologist at the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, will discuss how the refuge manages its deer herd and review the refuge's hunting policies.

## **A Winter Resort for the Birds November 1**

Chippewa Nature Center senior naturalist Janea Little will detail the variety of food, sleeping quarters, windbreaks and secured acres that will attract a diversity of wintering birds to your back yard.

## **Poems and Pictures from the Natural World December 6**

Members of the River Junction Poets and a nature photographer will explore the natural world in words and imagery. Free cocoa and cookies.



For more information call Green Point Environmental Learning Center, (989) 759-1669 or visit the refuge's website at [www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee)

