

Happenings at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Reporter

Volume 12, Issue 1

Winter 2008/2009

2009 Nurturing Nature Series and a Fish Dinner, Too

By *Becky Goche, Visitor Services Manager*

The ***Nurturing Nature Wednesday Series*** is back for another year. Many exciting and interesting programs are planned including live nocturnal animals, weekend canoeing in Michigan with author/canoeist Doc Fletcher, and updates on the refuge's Eastern Fox Snake and mussels studies. You will even have an opportunity to taste native fish at a reservation only fish dinner before a program about Michigan's fish in December, 2009!

Ten programs are planned during 2009, with no programs in June and July. A full schedule is inserted in this newsletter. All programs are held at the Green

Point Environmental Learning Center, beginning at 7:00 p.m. Admission is \$2 per person and free for members of the Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge and Midland's Chippewa Nature Center.

If you need more information or have suggestions for future programs, please call me at (989) 759-1669.



Volunteers Needed to Help with Boys and Girls Club Program

By *Becky Goche, Visitor Services Manager*

Staff at Green Point will continue working with the local Boys and Girls Club several days this winter. Programs planned include ice fishing techniques, cross-country skiing or snowshoeing, animal tracks, and creating artwork for the Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest. These activities will

be done at both the Boys and Girls Club and at Green Point.

We need volunteers who enjoy working with children. Experience with any of the programs we have planned would be helpful, but not necessary. Call Tom or Becky at (989) 759-1669, if you're interested.

Inside this issue:

<i>Wild Goose Chase 5K Run and Walk</i>	2
<i>Refuge Trail Closures for 2008</i>	2
<i>Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest</i>	3
<i>2008 Goose Hunt Results</i>	3
<i>Avian Influenza Study</i>	4
<i>Birders Break Michigan Record</i>	4
<i>Refuge Staffing Update</i>	5

Special Points:

- *Several guided cross-country ski tours or hikes (depending upon snow conditions) are planned. See the calendar for more information.*
- *Please note that during inclement weather when area schools close, the refuge headquarters and Green Point Environmental Learning Center may also close. You may want to call ahead.*

Runners and Walkers Flocked to the First Annual Wild Goose Chase 5K

By Becky Goche, Visitor Services Manager

There were 224 running shoes pounding the trails at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on Saturday, October 4, 2008, for a very unique event. The first ever **Wild Goose Chase 5 K Run and Walk** drew 112 participants, between the ages of 6 and 74, from all over the mid-Michigan area. Competitive runners and walkers and those that just came out for a leisurely stroll made up the pack.

Runners and walkers followed a route along gravel roads and hiking trails, some of it in normally closed areas that featured Canada geese flying overhead and deer all around. The overall winning runner with a time of 18:10.86 probably would have finished even faster if he didn't have to slow down a bit for an unsuspecting herd of deer grazing on the trail!

For many race participants, this was their first time on the refuge. Most said they were intrigued by the notion of having a running and walking race in the "wilderness." **Wild Goose Chase** Race Director Becky Goche said, "We heard numerous positive comments – great course, well organized event, cool t-shirt logo, nice prizes, and a good selection of finish line refreshments. We anticipate that next year's race will have even more participants as the word spreads among the running and walking circles."

Planning for this race officially began in February, 2008. Before that, the idea of having a race on the refuge was tossed around for years as a way for the Friends of Shiawassee NWR to raise money. The run planning committee made up of Becky Goche, Steve Kahl, Ed DeVries, and Tom Horb from the refuge and Susan Scott from the Friends was the driving force behind the **Wild Goose Chase**. With the help of a seasoned race director who coordinates one of the biggest races in mid-Michigan, talking with Squaw Creek NWR about their run, and working with a professional race timing company, everything was ready for a well planned race. Five partners, including the Friends group, came forward to help the refuge sponsor the **Wild Goose Chase**. On the day of the race, eight volunteers donated 43 hours working the registration table, taking pictures, helping at the finish line, and providing water and other refreshments to the runners and walkers. Six refuge staff also worked the event.



Ready, set, go! One hundred and twelve runners and walkers leave the start line at the first Wild Goose Chase 5 K Run/Walk at Shiawassee NWR. Photo by: Joy Clark/Refuge Volunteer; October 4, 2008.

2008 Refuge Trail Closures Due to Deer Hunting

Cass River Unit in Bridgeport Township

December 1 – 5, 2008

December 27 – 31, 2008

Ferguson Bayou Trail at Curtis Road

December 1 – 5, 2008

December 12 – 15, 2008

December 20 – 21, 2008

December 27 – 31, 2008

Woodland Trail at Stroebel Road

December 12 – 15, 2008

December 20 – 21, 2008

Be a Part of the 2009 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest

By Becky Goche, State Junior Duck Stamp Coordinator

It's time to start working on your entries for this year's Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest. Thousands of students nationwide participate in this program and art contest each year. Last year 321 students in grades K through 12 participated in Michigan alone!

The Junior Duck Stamp Program is based on the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the "Duck Stamp." Federal Duck Stamps are pictorial revenue stamps and although called "stamp," they are not valid for postage. Created in 1934 as the Federal migratory waterfowl hunting license and as a way to purchase and conserve our Nation's wetlands, Federal Duck Stamps also serve as an entrance pass to national wildlife refuges that have an entrance fee. Since it started, the sales of Federal Duck Stamps have generated more than \$670 million, which has been used to help purchase or lease more than 5.2 million acres of waterfowl habitat in the U.S. These lands are managed by the refuges just like Shiawassee NWR. Proceeds from the Junior Duck Stamp support conservation education and provide awards and scholarships for the students, teachers and schools that participate in the program.

The Junior Duck Stamp Program uses art to teach students about wetland conservation. Using scientific and wildlife observation skills, the program helps students communicate visually what they have learned by creating an entry for the Junior Duck Stamp art contest. A prime location to help students visualize and artistically represent waterfowl in its habitat is the Shiawassee NWR!

Students submit their artwork to the refuge by March 15 each year. Students at the state level are judged in four groups according to grade level: Group I: K-3, Group II: 4-6, Group III: 7-9, and Group IV: 10-12. Three first, second, and third place winners are selected for each group. In addition, 16 honorable mention winners are picked 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 Contest. The first place design from the national contest is used to create the Junior Duck Stamp for the following year.

All students who enter the contest receive a certificate of participation. Winners receive special ribbons and prizes. All artwork is returned to the students. The Best of Show entry is included in a national traveling display. In addition, the top winning artwork in Michigan will travel around the state for up to one year following the contest.

To learn more about the Junior Duck Stamp Program and download the entry form and rules, visit the refuge website: www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee and click on the Junior Duck Stamp link. If you do not have computer access, I can mail you a copy of the information. Call me at (989) 759-1669.

2008 Goose Hunt Results

By Tom Horb, Park Ranger

For the third year the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge offered goose hunting four days per week from October 11 through November 2. Fewer days per week seems to work better because the geese are much more likely to fly into decoyed fields because they are not under daily hunting pressure. This was the first year in quite a while that hunters were allowed a two goose per day limit.

The weather during this year's hunting season was more suited to playing golf, rather than hunting geese. Warm, sunny days made up a majority of the hunt period. Even mosquitoes were a problem at times! On one of the 14 days of the hunt, none of the 26 hunters shot a single goose. Refuge staff cannot remember the last time this has happened, if ever. Altogether 504 hunters harvested 267 Canada geese and one snow goose for a 53 percent hunter success rate.

Don Poppe, Biological Technician, sampled most of the geese that hunters shot as a part of the avian influenza study he is working on. You can read more about that study elsewhere in the newsletter.

Avian Influenza Study Overview and Progress

By Donald Poppe, Biological Technician

Avian influenza (AI) or “bird flu” is caused by a virus that infects both domestic and wild birds. AI can come in two forms: Highly pathogenic (HPAI) and low pathogenic (LPAI). HPAI is very infectious and often fatal to domestic birds, while LPAI occurs naturally in wild bird populations without causing illness. LPAI can however mutate into HPAI in rare cases. HPAI does not currently exist in the United States. Early detection of the virus’s presence is crucial and thus avian influenza surveillance has been implemented in all 50 states.

In 2008 Shiawassee NWR began sampling wild geese and ducks for avian influenza. Live bird samples are taken while banding. Hunter killed birds are sampled as hunters return from the field at the refuge’s own goose check station and at the neighboring Shiawassee River State Game Area. As of November 5, 2008, the refuge had sampled 90 live birds and 201 hunter killed birds. Mississippi flyway primary and secondary candidate species that have been sampled include: American green-winged teal (*Anas crecca*), Canada goose (*Branta Canadensis*), mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*), northern pintail (*A. acuta*), and northern shoveler (*A. clypeata*). Samples are taken from individual birds by swabbing the cloaca and oral cavity. The samples are packaged and shipped on ice for testing to the National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) in Madison, Wisconsin. The NWHC is administered by the United States Geological Society.

This year’s sampling will continue through the end of Michigan’s waterfowl season. The refuge hopes to include other groups of birds, such as shorebirds, in their 2009 avian influenza surveillance efforts.

For more information on avian influenza visit the United States Department of Agriculture’s website: www.usda.gov/birdflu



Biological Technician Don Poppe prepares a sample taken from a mallard on the refuge that had been captured for banding. Photo by Steve Kahl, USFWS.

Birders Break Michigan Record for “The Big Sit!”

By Steve Kahl, Refuge Manager

On October 12, 2008, a team of five birdwatchers called the Shiawassee Blue Geese set a new Michigan record for the most birds seen on “The Big Sit!” The team, comprised of Saginaw Valley Audubon Society members and refuge volunteers Larry Abraham, Steve Gasser, Jeff Sommer and Carolyn Szaroletta, and refuge manager Steve Kahl, were stationed atop Grefe Tower at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. The team recorded 78 species, surpassing the previous record of 72. Especially noteworthy finds on the count include trum-

peter swan, bald eagle, short-eared owl, barred owl, and Lincoln’s sparrow.

Bird Watcher’s Digest organizes this global bird count described as “birding’s most sedentary event.” The object is to find as many bird species as possible during the calendar day from within a 17-foot diameter circle. Grefe Tower is an optimum location for the refuge’s circle because it overlooks thousands of acres of marsh, open water, grasslands, croplands and forest. Further, it affords excellent views of the horizon and open sky.

Refuge Staffing Update

By Steve Kahl, Refuge Manager

Many faces have changed at the refuge in 2008. After providing 29 years of service, Engineering Equipment Operator Marion "Butch" Nowosatko retired in January. Throughout his career, the work Butch performed led to the addition, preservation, and improvement of critical refuge equipment and facilities, including dikes, roads, water control structures, buildings, trails, bridges, parking lots, signs, gates, boundary, a boat launch, pumping stations, excavators, bulldozers, backhoes, graders, tractors, boats, dump trucks, vehicles, ATVs, and much more. Consequently, the refuge was enhanced immeasurably for wildlife and the people that enjoy it.

In this challenging fiscal period, the refuge was very fortunate to begin the process to fill the Engineering Equipment Operator vacancy within a few months. The refuge did not have to look far to find someone capable of filling such large shoes. David Peters became the new Engineering Equipment Operator in September after working as the refuge's Biological Aid and Tractor Operator since 1990.

Thomas Horb was hired as a temporary Park Ranger in June. Tom has been a tremendous asset in improving and expanding programs at the refuge's Green Point Environmental Learning Center (GPELC). Hiring Tom enabled the refuge to open GPELC on weekends for the first time since 1996. Tom brings many years experience as a teacher and principal to this important environmental education job.

The refuge hired temporary Biological Science Technician Donald Poppe in July. Don graduated from Lake Superior State University where he majored in Fisheries Wildlife Management. Don worked for the USFWS East Lansing Ecological Services Field Office on the Kirtland's warbler recovery program. He worked as a technician on PhD research on white-tailed deer for Southern Illinois University. Don also worked as a technician at the Shiawassee River State Game Area and was a Youth Conservation Corp member at the refuge.

New Refuge Law Enforcement Officer Joseph Hughes will enter on duty in December. Joe brings a tremendous amount of experience to the position after working at Yosemite and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, Pinnacles National Monument, and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. These positions make Joe especially suited to provide the important combination of resource

and public protection services required at Shiawassee Refuge.

We will see some additional faces at the refuge in 2009. We recently were informed that the refuge will host Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) employee Natasha Urban. Natasha is a master's degree candidate at Purdue University. We have initiated the paperwork to hire a temporary part time Maintenance worker. We also hope to get approval to begin the process to fill the Tractor Operator position vacated by David Peters soon.



REFUGE REPORTER

Published quarterly by the Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge for the refuge.

Volume 12, Issue 1

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

Biological Technician—Donald Poppe

Private Lands Biologist—Michelle Vander Haar

Visitor Services Manager—Becky Goche

Park Ranger—Tom Horb

Administrative Officer—Mary Ann Gillette

Maintenance Staff—David Peters

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)



2009 Nurturing Nature Program Series Announced



Beat the Winter Blahs—Schedule a Field Trip or an In Classroom Visit

By Becky Goche, Visitor Services Manager

Once the holiday concerts and parties are over, for many students there is little to look forward to until the end of the school year which seems so far away. Don't despair, Green Point staff can help you put the "win" back into winter for your students! Green Point offers many different programs for you and your students to come and explore the outdoors. There is no better time to study animal interactions and their tracks than after a fresh dusting of snow.

Don't want your students to experience the icy cold of winter, no problem! We can bring some programs to your classroom! Imagine, a real, live park ranger interacting with your students in your school.

There are also 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 call to schedule a time to pick one up from Green Point.

You can view a listing of our programs at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/shiawassee>, click on the Environmental Education link. Or you can call Green Point at (989) 759-1669 to request a copy of the Educator's Guide be sent to you in the mail. 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. Best of all, the programs are free! Let us help you beat your students' winter blahs.

Calendar of Events

Nurturing Nature Wednesday Series

- All programs begin at 7:00 p.m. and last 60 – 90 minutes.
- Held at the Green Point Environmental Learning Center, 3010 Maple Street, Saginaw, unless otherwise noted.
- Admission: \$2. FREE for members of the Friends of the Shiawassee NWR and Midland's Chippewa Nature Center.

December, 2008 – No Program

How Birds Survive Winter

January 7, 2009

Those fluffy feathers just aren't enough when winter hits. Janea Little, a senior naturalist at Midland's Chippewa Nature Center, discusses how birds have much more than warm feathers in their arsenal against the cold temperatures and long nights of winter.

An Introduction to the Freshwater Mussels of the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

February 4, 2009

This past summer the refuge conducted its first investigation of the mussels found within its 18 miles of rivers. Eastern North America hosts the greatest diversity of the world's ecologically vital freshwater mussels, with 45 species found in Michigan. David J. Peters, an engineering equipment operator at the refuge, provides an introduction to freshwater mussels, many of them endangered, and discusses the results of the refuge's survey.

Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest

Deadline is March 15, 2008

Contest is for students in grades K-12. See article inside for more information.

For more information, contact Green Point Environmental Learning Center at (989) 759-1669.

Guided Cross-Country Skiing or Winter Hiking

Bring your own skiing equipment. If there is not enough snow, there will be a hike instead. Dress for the conditions. Trips will be cancelled in the event of local travel advisories or severe winter weather conditions. If you need more information, contact Park Ranger Tom Horb at (989) 759-1669.

January 10, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

Evon Road parking lot (west end of road, off of highway M-13, south of Saginaw)

Ski through parts of the refuge normally closed to the public.

January 14, 2009, 6:00 p.m.

Green Point ELC

Winding, flat trails. Part of this tour may be under the light of the moon. Hot chocolate will be served afterwards.

January 24, 2009, 8:00 a.m.

Evon Road parking lot (west end of road, off of highway M-13, south of Saginaw)

Once again you'll be in a closed area.

February 7, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

Woodland Trail (at corner of Center and Stroebel Roads)

March 7, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

Green Point ELC

Hot chocolate will be served afterwards.

FRIENDS OF SHIAWASSEE NWR MEMBERSHIP PAGE

Friends of Shiawassee NWR Membership

Renewal New membership

General Membership

\$12 – Individual (1) vote.

\$25 – Family (2) votes. (Member, spouse and children under age 18)

- Each membership receives quarterly newsletter - "Refuge Reporter."
- Each membership includes voting rights and opportunity to hold office.

Supporting Levels (includes 1 year individual membership): "Goose" \$50, "Blue Heron" \$75, "Owl" \$100, "Bald Eagle" \$125 & over

No membership at this time, but please accept my contribution.

*Membership is for calendar year.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Make checks payable to "Friends of Shiawassee NWR", PO Box 20129, Saginaw, MI, 48602.

Contributions to the Friends of Shiawassee NWR, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, are tax deductible according to IRS guidelines.

Friends' Volunteer Opportunities

Do you have any of these skills?

_____ Staffing Trailhead Store

_____ Leading walking tours

_____ Helping with workshops

_____ Assisting with refuge auto tours

_____ Doing outreach events, i.e. fairs

_____ Assisting with First Wednesday

_____ Writing newsletter articles

_____ Writing/developing grants

_____ Serving as Committee member

_____ Leading children's activities

_____ Developing trails

_____ Computer skills

_____ Photography

_____ Carpentry skills

_____ Business organizational skills

_____ Research

_____ Artistic skills

_____ Fund raising

_____ Grant writing

_____ Researching/Ordering merchandise

_____ Other – please list:

Board meetings held quarterly, on the second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Green Point Environmental Learning Center, 3010 Maple Street in Saginaw. The annual meeting is held in January of each year. Friends Board of Directors Officers are:

President – Charles Hoover

Vice President – Susan Scott

Secretary – Janet Martineau

Treasurer – Wil Hufton II