



Newsletter of the Gahagan Nature Preserve, Inc.
P.O. Box 421, Roscommon, MI 48653 • 989-275-3217 • www.GahaganNature.org
Issue #25 ~ Fall 2013

**You are cordially invited to our Annual Open House and Membership Meeting
on Sunday, September 22, 2013 from 4:00 to 7:00 PM**

As you know, the Preserve is always open to the public. At any time you can wind your way through the trails observing the huge pines, hemlocks and cedars, meander out to the gazebo to search for the beginning of Tank Creek, and linger by the pond listening to the sounds of nature. But by attending a program or event, are you truly able to grasp the heart of the preserve and appreciate its progression.

The Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve has grown in size and scope over the years. It is a volunteer organization. Its accomplishments depend on people who love the outdoors, value the environment and realize the need to educate our youth about the natural world.

Please plan on joining us to celebrate what our collective contributions have been able to accomplish. Our informal presentation will begin at 4:30, followed by fellowship and a guided walk should you desire.



The orioles' nest is deserted;

All summer it hung on a popple branch not a third of an inch thick.

There it hung, swinging in the wind;

Rock-a-bye-baby for the small feathered ones within.

Six inches long and knitted together with a knit-one-purl-one stitch,

Soft grasses woven in and out of the pouch-like nest ...

Strong,

Graceful.

On the edge of the swale ... a hornets' nest,

Paper light, almost a foot high and ten inches wide;

Gray, egg-shaped masterpiece hung on a branch,

It withstood rain, sleet, snow, wind and sun ...

Paper-thin,

Invulnerable.

Out in the swale ... muskrat houses

Tall mounds of branches, reeds, mud,

Delicately constructed ...

Warm and dry in the harsh north winter.

Architecture that has served them for a thousand years.

Homes - 9/22/54

*-From Pine Whispers: The Biography and Writings of
Marguerite Gahagan*

Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve Board of Directors ~ 2013

A 503(c) non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the balanced habitat that supports a wide-variety of plant and animal species.

Chairperson: Jeff Mellgren
Vice Chair: Troy Fairbanks
Secretary/Treasurer: Bobbie Werle

Paul Bertrand
Julie Borak
Joanne Bouck
Troy Fairbanks
Brian Hutchins
Jeremy Jones
George Maroney
Richard Silverman

Tom Dale, Education Director
275-8206
thdale@core.com

Tracy Bosworth, Exec. Director
989-390-0903
adm@GahaganNature.org
www.GahaganNature.org

2013-2014 Gahagan Schedule

Sept. 7: AuSable River Collection at 10am at the Gates Lodge
Sept. 9-Oct. 11: School Enviro Field Trips at Gahagan
Sept. 19: Family Night at the Firemen's Memorial
Sept. 22: Gahagan Open House from 4pm-7pm at Gahagan.
Oct. 30: Cabin closes for the winter
Feb.-April 2014: Visiting Naturalist Program
April 5: Cabin opens for Summer
April 19: Spring Clean-Up
April 28-June 6: School Enviro Field Trips at Gahagan
May TBA: Annual MGNP Bird Count
June 1: AuSable River Collection at 10am at Kirtland Community College
July 22-24: Nature Camp from 9am-Noon at Gahagan
July 24: Family Night at 7pm at Gahagan

Board of Directors meet on the 2nd Monday at 7:00 pm.
Everyone is Welcome to attend.

For up-to-date schedule, changes and event details visit
www.GahaganNature.org.

Get alerts and updates through our Twitter feed located at
@gahagannature.

MEMBERS

Members from Fall 2012 to Fall 2013

Paul Bertrand
Bob and Julie Borak
Mark and Tracy Bosworth
Jack and Joanne Bouck
Sherwood Boudeman
Gary and Sharon Boushelle
Julie Boushelle
Neil Burchett
Mark Burger
Brian & Janet Carson
Martha Clapp
Tom and Phylliss Dale
Mark and Jo Ann Doyle
Karen Demers
Caryl and Ed Fischer
Mike and Sue Glover
David and Kate Gott
Don and Elaine Granzine
Susan Huffman
Nadyne Hunt
Mary and Brian Hutchins
Mary Lou and Tom Jennette
Jeremy and Lois Jones
Art Ketelhut
Gwen Krupp
Nathan Krupp Family
Diane Lippert
Nancy Martindale and Troy Fairbanks
Kelly McCarthy-Tubbs
George and Mary Lu Maroney
Millie and Jeff Mellgren
Pam and Steve Miller
Tom and Patti Moreau
Susan Moy
Doug Nagel
Jackie and Tom O'Brien
Beverly and Carl Peters
Merrill Pete Petoskey
Bruce and Betty Phillips
Raye and Tom Polasek
Stu Powrie
Roscommon Veterinary Clinic
Ralph and Nancy Rucinski
Bob and Virginia Schaeffer
Richard Seton
Carol and Richard Silverman
Vicki and Pat Springstead
Carol Stauffer
Dan and Lisa Sutton
Bob and Dawn Tupper
Kathy VanderMolen / Gary Holmes
Kathy and Mike Wahl
Eleanor Washburn
Jerry and Darlene Weinrich
Gerald and Roberta Werle
Arlene Westwoven
Karrie Williams
Susan Worden
Rebecca Yaske
Tom and Joyce Zeneberg

More Than A Whisper

by Brian Hutchins

Despite winning prestigious national awards for her work as a beat writer at The Detroit News, it is likely Marguerite Gahagan would consider the founding of her The North Woods Call as the defining act of her 50-year professional writing career. Through The Call, Marguerite informed the citizenry of important conservation issues and pressured politicians and state bureaucrats to follow the science when setting natural resource policy. One woman conceived, produced and wrote Michigan's most important conservation publication - an amazing feat! And sixty years later, The Call continues today with its third owner.

Gahagan's biography, northern Michigan history, stories from The North Woods Call and poetic excerpts from her writings – find all of this in the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve's 192-page book, *Pine Whispers: The Biography and Writings of Marguerite Gahagan*. The title *Pine Whispers* comes from the title of her personal column found each week in The Call. But as you come to understand Marguerite, you'll see that her voice was more than a whisper. It spoke loudly, positively affecting her Michigan and the natural world we love. It is no wonder she left her most prize possession as a nature preserve for all to enjoy.

Gahagan's writings are another gift left to us. The Preserve published *Pine Whispers* to build on her legacy and as a fundraiser for our environmental education programs. It's perfect for the history buff, naturalist or poetry lover. Consider it for your friends and family at gift giving time - also great for the coffee table at the cabin. Buy it on GahaganNature.org where you can find additional details on the book and Gahagan Preserve programs.



Marguerite working on an early issue of the North Woods Call from her Johannesburg home

From the Executive Director

Tracy Bosworth

During my 25 year tenure as a middle school teacher, I sometimes felt my administrators were out of touch with the needs of the classroom. For the past 6 months, as the new administrator for Gahagan, I have familiarized myself with the financial software, the books, the bills, the accounts, building maintenance, publishing the newsletter, community events and many other business end tasks. Then it occurred to me that I had neglected the "classroom." In six months I had only walked the trails at Gahagan once. I needed to get in touch with Gahagan's "classroom."

I have traversed the trails several times now and have attempted to survey the property with a critical eye. There is much to appreciate. The paved path is quite an achievement. Yes, the ferns poke through and flip a nugget of asphalt away from the surface requiring a yet to be determined intervention; it's still ensures terrific access. The white trail is currently interrupted by the fire plow line and the green trail is still challenging to navigate, but the other trails are fabulous! The tall pines along the orange trail are majestic, the cedar swamp along the boardwalk is a verdant carpet, and the massive exposed root system of the red pines (just past the bridge on the red trail) is incredible to behold.

My critical eye did notice a few things that could use some work. The seats used for schoolchildren in our outdoor circle are logs on end. While very quaint, they are not practical for squirmy bottoms. Moldy, damp and unstable are not the adjectives we are looking for in seating arrangements. Part of the problem with the green trail is poor marking. We will rectify that soon. The other issue is a definite project. In order to fully follow the trail, we need to construct a boardwalk. We have nice supply of pine milled from our own trees, but cedar will need to be purchased. Of course there will be equipment and labor needs. Nearly all of the current boardwalk portions of

our trail network have been construction projects completed by Eagle Scout candidates. The costs can be a burden for the scout and his family, and has previously caused some discouragement towards taking on a project at Gahagan.

One of my former administrators once said, "Tracy, people will help, if they know what you need." So there you have it. Two distinct needs of the Gahagan "classroom." Seating and seed funds for Eagle Scout candidates. Are you able help?



Exposed root system of a pine along the red trail

What is an “ELF” Doing at a Nature Preserve?

If you have been receiving and reading our newsletter regularly, you probably know that our ELF is not a short green being or a relative of Will Ferrell. Project ELF, which stands for Environmental Learning for the Future, is an award-winning environmental education for elementary-aged children program developed by the Vermont Institute of Natural Science. ELF has been a very popular and successful program for getting parents and grandparents into elementary classrooms for nearly 30 years. The ELF program is in hundreds of schools around the country, including five in our area. Roscommon Elementary, Collins Elementary, Houghton Lake Middle School, Our Lady of the Lake School and St. Joseph’s Catholic School all participate in the ELF program.



Many of the over 80 ELF kits are stored in the garage at Gahagan

ELF encompasses five ecological concepts: Habitats, Cycles, Adaptations, Designs of Nature, and Earth and Sky. Each ELF school focuses on one concept each year. Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve has assembled approximately 80 ELF teaching kits to cover the 5 concepts. Each ELF teaching kit contains multiple activities complete with resource materials such as slideshows, mammal and bird skull sets, audio tapes, puppet shows, rock collections, games, etc.

To be successful, each ELF school needs a committed team of volunteer educators. The volunteer educators attend a one-hour training workshop each month at their school. MGNP provides the training workshop and helps volunteers develop teaching skills and adapt the lessons to various grade levels. The volunteers then

go into the classroom for 60 – 90 minutes each month to share the lessons and activities included in that month’s particular kit.

Additional parent, grandparent or community volunteers are needed for Roscommon, Houghton Lake and Our Lady of the Lake schools for the 2013-2014 school year. Volunteers are the lifeblood of this program. Please consider sharing your time with the youth of our communities. If you would like more information, please contact Tracy Bosworth at adm@GahaganNature.com or call (989) 390-0903.

Speaking of Snakes...Here’s Sammy

Sammy is Gahagan’s only captive critter.

Sammy is a Black rat snake who was gifted to the preserve seven years ago by Jim McGrath. The Black rat snake is the most common of the many species of rat snakes, as well as the one most frequently found in Michigan. As the name states, the Black rat snake is completely black, except for its white chin. A full-grown adult averages between 3 1/2



Veteran snake charmer, Ellie Harms, with a six foot Black rat snake

to 6 feet long. This snake’s habit of pursuing rats and mice for food makes it one of the most beneficial reptiles for humans. It is an excellent climber. Often it goes rather high up into trees, where it uses cavities or hollows formerly occupied by other animals such as birds or mammals. Black rat snakes mainly hibernate in winter. They prefer rock crevices, often in the company of other snakes.

Like most snakes, rat snakes are egg layers. They will begin to emerge from the winter’s hibernation between March and May. After a few weeks, usually in late April, May or early June, the snake will begin to seek out a mate. Five weeks after mating, the female will lay from 12 to 20 eggs. The female lays her eggs in a hidden area, under hollow logs or leaves, or in abandoned burrows. The eggs will hatch 65 to 70 days later. The

hatchlings of common rat snakes are voracious eaters and will double their size rather quickly. If conditions are good, females will sometimes produce two clutches of eggs a year. Their typical life expectancy is 20 years. Rat snakes tend to be shy and, if possible, will avoid being confronted. If these snakes are seen and confronted by danger, they tend to freeze and remain motionless.

The Black rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*) is listed as special concern in the state of Michigan. Their habitat is slowly being reduced due to land development and the cutting of trees. However, they do continue to maintain a healthy population in many areas. Due to people's lack of knowledge and fear of snakes, rat snakes continue to be the victim of human persecution. As such, Sammy is an important teaching tool. As children interact with Sammy, they quickly lose their initial trepidation and fear of snakes and recognize the importance of preserving snakes in their natural habitat.



Turtles and Frogs and Snakes, Oh My!

Jim and Carol McGrath from Nature Discovery in Williamston, Michigan brought 15 live reptiles and amphibians to Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve on July 18th for a high-energy performance. The audience was treated to up close and personal views of many species of Michigan native frogs, turtles and caterpillars. In addition, seven different snakes were distributed to willing audience members to hold. The snakes ranged in age from a one month, 12 inch albino to a seven year old, 6 foot black rat snake. Most all of the children and several adults participated in holding the snakes in their hands or having one strung over their shoulder. Nature Discovery is dedicated to enhancing the awareness of Michigan's diverse living resources through natural science education. Our thanks go out to Jim and Carol for this wonderful presentation.

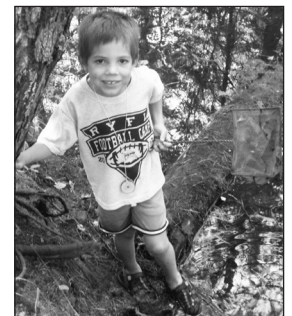
Gahagan Nature Camp is now a Teenager

Our 13th Nature Camp was held on July 16-18 at Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve in Roscommon. 20 six to eleven year olds explored the theme, "Life in the Forest." A nature trail hunt, rotting log discovery activities, a salamander hike (with huge precaution that salamanders should never be handled with dry hands,) puppet shows, great snacks, t-shirt art and "frogging" in the pond filled the three busy mornings.

Our veteran camp leaders, Karen Demers and Tom Dale, were joined this year by Ashley Denis. Ashley is a Roscommon native who is a sophomore in the Environmental Education program at Michigan Technological University. Ashley remembers fondly the field trips that she took to Gahagan over the years when she attended Roscommon Elementary School. We are happy to have her back and pleased that Gahagan helped to inspire Ashley's study of nature.



Campers Aiden Yaske and Ben Dodge craft the design for their Nature Camp T-shirt.



Nature camper Branden Morley edges his way along the pond.



A favorite catch and release activity at camp is froggin' in the pond.



Devon Harms applies the final touches to his t-shirt



Ashley Denis (center) manages the aquarium just before releasing the frogs

And then we realized

By Tom Dale

Right from the start (1996), we have been working from the point of view that preserving nature at Gahagan Nature Preserve meant saving the brush. If a tree was blown down or just died and fell down, we would leave it right there, unless of course it was blocking a trail, which happens a lot! It was habitat for wildlife. Our efforts were really successful; we had lots of squirrels, chipmunks, woodpeckers, and nuthatches right on our doorstep. We could turn over a log near the cabin and find salamanders and bugs of all sorts. We even had chickadees on the TV (But that's another story). It tended to look all cluttered and messy, "just like nature intended." On spring clean-up days in past years, discussions would usually end with the brush piles left where they lay. And then it happened....

Earlier this year, a small wildfire spread from the adjacent village/township recycle center onto a portion of our Preserve. No one at Gahagan Nature Preserve knew anything about it at the time. The DNR fire crew had it out in no time. A major lasting effect will be the scar from the plowline made to prevent further advance of the fire. The fire crossed one of our trails, which will be temporarily impassable because of fallen trees as well as the plowline.

And then we realized that leaving all that "nature" on the ground near the cabin and garage just added fuel to any future wildfire and constituted a fire hazard. It had to be cleaned up and hauled away.

Matt Murray, a teacher at Second Chance Academy in Roscommon, happened to mention that the summer school students were looking for a community service project. The date was selected, and on July 10th, sixteen middle and high school students and 3 adults, arrived and went to work on the accumulated dead brush adjacent to the cabin. After a couple of hours we took a break for pizza and then worked for another hour and a half and moved all that brush.

We still need to get a wood chipper in to finish the job, but it was a good day and we are all very grateful to that group of hard working students from Second Chance Academy.



Second Chance students hard at work.



DNR Plow line as it crosses the White trail

Our 10th AuSable River Day: September 7th

By Tom Dale

The Upper AuSable River Watershed Monitoring Project, which began in 2007, samples the river's 6 major tributaries twice each year in June and September. When we first began the project, which includes participation and support from every river centered organization in the neighborhood, Irene Borak and I took part in a MiCorp training at CMU in Mount Pleasant. As part of that training, our class of beginners visited the Chippewa River for some sampling practice. Everyone had nets and try as we might, the entire group was only able to find a dozen or so "bugs." That contrasts quite sharply with our experiences so far in our efforts to monitor the mighty AuSable River.

In studies of river ecosystems, high bug diversity translates as high watershed quality.

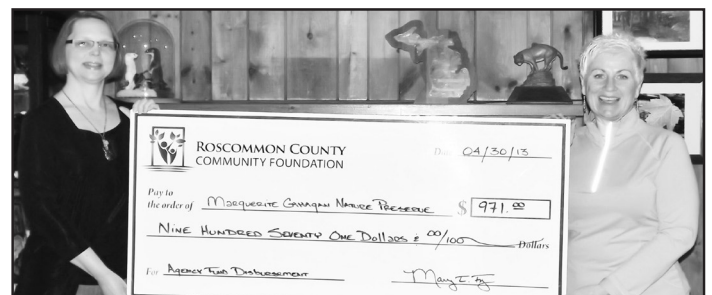
In 54 sampling events (9 river day events times 6 sites) we have never failed to collect at least 11 varieties of benthic (bottom dwelling) macroinvertebrates; our average is 24.5; a high value for a single site was 38. That was from the Big Creek at North Down

River Road. Our absolute diversity value, that is, the total number of benthic macroinvertebrate families found in all 54 samples is 83!! When data from each site is used to compute the MiCorp water quality score, our average value is 50.9, well above a level that would indicate excellent water quality. The water in some of Michigan's rivers is so contaminated that latex gloves must be worn when collecting samples. That's what makes monitoring the AuSable River watershed so much fun. It is wonderful water and we all intend to keep it that way.

The AuSable River project began with a grant from MiCorp, the Michigan Clean Water Corps. In our grant proposal we identified two broad objectives for the project. The first objective was to collect water quality data to monitor the health of the watershed, both for short and long term. The second objective was to enlist a large cadre of volunteers who love the river to work together to guard and protect it. We need everybody and that means you. It's fun. Why not join us?

RCCF Investment Distribution

The Gahagan Nature Preserve General Fund is an investment fund within the Roscommon County Community Foundation. Yearly withdrawals from the invested capital are used to support and maintain the nature preserve and to encourage awareness of the need and value of conserving natural habitats and wildlife. We are grateful for our association with the RCCF.



Left, Susan Luck from RCCF with Tracy Bosworth

Fall Field Trips

The scheduling of field trips for the fall season is in full swing. Slots are available from September 9th until October 30th, and they are filling up already. As always field trips can be tailored to meet the objectives of each particular grade level. Please contact Tom at thdale@core.com to get your class on the schedule.

Ever stop to think and forget to start again?

Please don't stop to think about your membership and then forget to take care of it. Dues are one of the biggest sources of revenue for our organization. We need to hang on to every membership we currently have and we need to grow. We have approximately 320 addresses on our mailing list, but many individuals and families are just not current with their dues. Individual memberships are just \$15 per year and family membership dues are \$25. If you are a paypal user, you can log on to www.GahaganNature.org and quickly take care of your dues through the paypal link. So please, don't forget to join us by updating your membership today. Thank You!



ARK to the Rescue

ARK stands for The Association to Rescue Kritters. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of orphaned, injured, and displaced wildlife. ARK is located in St. Helen and receives hundreds of calls each year from people needing advice about animals they have encountered. ARK also receives many baby birds and mammals, most of whom should have been left alone.

ARK came to our rescue this summer by providing a large supply of feeder mice. Why mice? Well you've read about Sammy and must realize a growing captive snake requires a decent supply of food. And in case you were wondering, we keep that supply of meat fresh over time the same way you do. Yep, they are in the freezer. **Our thanks to the ARK.**



ELF Volunteers Rock!

"I love doing ELF for the kids. I really like how I've been able to get to know some of my kids' classmates and be involved with their schooling, which is not easy when you're a working parent. ELF has given me that opportunity. The lessons are very easy to follow and it is all laid out for you so you don't actually have to know anything about the topic beforehand. The kids are so excited when I come in. It is really cool to be a part of their enthusiasm and help foster their interest in their environment."

Kathy VanderMollen

-Kathy is an ELF volunteer in Houghton Lake. She has a daughter in the fourth grade and a son in the second grade. Thank you Kathy for your continued support and zeal!

ELF Schedule for 2013-2014

Roscommon: "Cycles" theme

Kits: Insect Lives, Meet a Tree, Seed Dispersal, Fly Away or Stay, Galls. Winter Twigs, Bird Songs, Inside a Flower, Dandelions

Houghton Lake and Our Lady of the Lake Schools: "Earth and Sky" theme

Kits: Finding Your Way, Erosion, Pebbles and Rocks, Breath of Life, Sound Symphony, Water, Wind and Clouds, Sun Power

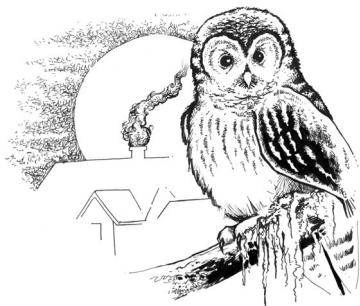
St. Joseph Catholic School: "Designs of Nature" theme

Kits: Spiders and Webs, Variations on a Leaf, Cones, Snow and More, Tracks and Traces, Winter Weeds, Camouflage, Honeybees

Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve

P.O. Box 421

Roscommon, MI 48653



Gahagan Open House

Sunday September 22!

Program begins at 4:30 PM - Beverages and Finger Food.
Your invitation and details begin on Page 1

Come Join Us at the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve!

Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve operates as a non-profit organization run by volunteers and funded by its members, generous donors and the endowment left by Marguerite. Did you know that it provides environmental education for many of the schools in the surrounding counties? Did you know that the 60-acre preserve is open to the public for hiking, snowshoeing, birding and many other uses? Did you know we have an asphalt and boardwalk trail that is wheelchair friendly? It travels through woods and wetlands and along the beginnings of Tank Creek. Interested in learning and helping? Please join us!

Yes, I/we want to join Marguerite Gahagan Nature preserve. Enclosed is my/our yearly membership.

\$15 ☐ Individual / \$25 ☐ Family / \$50 ☐ Organizational \$_____ Donation

I am making a donation of \$_____ ☐ in memory of, ☐ in honor of _____

Name: _____ Ph: (____) _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-Mail Address: _____ @ _____

Please make checks to Gahagan Nature Preserve, Inc. and mail to P.O. Box 421, Roscommon, MI 48653

You can also donate, join, or renew your membership on-line at www.GahaganNature.org