President’s Column by June Summers, President of GVAS

What I Learned at the Healing Our Waters Conference

Healing Our Waters is a coalition of over 100 environmental organizations concerned with restoring and protecting our Great Lakes. This year the conference was in Sandusky, OH, Sept. 20 – 22, at Cedar Point, right on the shore of Lake Erie.

This conference covered topics like conservation in urban areas, water as a resource for all, restoration projects, and lessons we can learn from other watersheds. During the first plenary session the panelists discussed the specific challenges and questions around diversity goals, environmental justice efforts, and race. How do we get people in urban centers to appreciate and protect nature and help to keep our water clean when these people are trying to find fresh food and not get killed by a gun? We as environmental groups need to engage with the communities and listen to what they need. Some environmental groups have done that and helped city residents put in gardens to grow food before helping them put in rain gardens.

One session I attended was on the nine habitat restoration projects done in the St. Clair River. The restoration goals were habitat enhancement and connectedness with projects ranging from shoreline restoration to in-river spawning reefs to tributary restoration. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the EPA removed bulkhead revetments for cooperative land owners and replaced them with rock pile walls/living walls and secured large tree stumps with fine root structure that support fish and other aquatic life. Flat rock shelves were built on the floor of the river as spawning reefs and habitat for sturgeon and other fish.

Another session was on the lessons that have been learned from the work done on the Chesapeake Bay and which best management practices can be used on the Great Lakes. For forty years the Chesapeake Bay watershed struggled with setting limits for nutrients nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) as well as sediment; agreement and time limits came and went. When the EPA imposed the TMDL (Total Max Daily Load), water quality began to get better. The TMDL set was to reduce nutrients by 40%.

Agricultural animals have increased in the watershed as well as field crops. Middle River dumps 94% of the E.coli into the bay. Cover crops can be used to help manage nutrient loading when the fields are not in production. Funding is being provided under the TMDL to plant trees and study precision conservation practices – to measure which buffer projects work best to filter nutrients.

These practices could be used along the Great Lakes and our tributaries to prevent the E.coli loading we have in the Genesee River and Lake Ontario. It would also prevent or reduce the probability of toxic algae blooms that happened in Toledo, OH last year.
Programs

NOVEMBER PROGRAM

Braddock Bay Raptor Research: How Their Data Contributes to Our Knowledge of Raptors

Tuesday, Nov. 15, 2016 7:30 p.m.
Brighton Town Hall, Downstairs Meeting Room
2300 Elmwood Avenue, Brighton

For over 30 years members of Braddock Bay Raptor Research (BBRR) have counted raptors as they pass over Braddock Bay Park during the spring migration. On the other side of the bay BBRR has been banding hawks and Saw-whet Owls for years as well. Daena Ford, President of BBRR, will enlighten us as to how the hawkwatch data has been used in the Raptor Population Index project, and in some research related to climate change and timing of migration. She will also cover some of BBRR’s banding results.

Native Plants for Birds

In September the National Audubon Society (NAS) released the Audubon’s Native Plant Database, http://www.audubon.org/native-plants, which you can use to bring birds to your home. This database gives you the resources to find the best plants for the birds in your area. Growing bird-friendly plants will attract and protect the birds you love while making your space beautiful, easy to care for, and better for the environment. Explore all of NAS’s native plant resources at http://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds.

Field Trips

Mendon Ponds Park
Chickadee Walk, Nov. 5, 9:30 a.m.
Come and join Joni & Jon Dubner for a walk in the woods, no more than 2 hours in Mendon Ponds Park. Walk a trail and feed the chickadees, tufted titmice & nuthatches while enjoying nature. Fun for the whole family!! All are welcome to participate in this outdoor adventure on Saturday, November 5, 2016. We will meet at 9:30 am in the Nature Center Parking lot on Pond Rd off of Clover St (the southernmost of the 3 park entrances off Clover). Dress for the weather (wear boots, warm clothes, etc.). Seed will be provided – donation optional.
FYI – Wild Wings is holding a Pancake Breakfast ($6) this same Saturday from 8-11 a.m. at the Henrietta United Church of Christ at 1400 Lehigh Station Road. Join Jon & Joni there at 8 a.m. for breakfast before the hike!

Montezuma Wildlife Refuge
Nov. 12, 8:00 a.m.

In the fall thousands of geese and waterfowl come back through the Montezuma Wildlife Refuge on their way south to wintering grounds. In mid-November, waterfowl numbers peak–geese number 50,000 and ducks over 100,000! Also eagles and other birds of prey stop at the refuge as they make their way to open water and/or winter grounds further south.

Join Genesee Valley Audubon Society as we observe some of these migrating birds on November 12, 2016. We will start at 8:00 a.m. at the Montezuma Wildlife Visitor Center. See you there!

ROC THE DAY

Have you ever wished you could make a donation to Genesee Valley Audubon Society with your debit or credit card? Well, there is one day a year when you have that opportunity, it’s “ROC the Day.” ROC the Day is the United Way’s 24 hours of giving. You can donate to GVAS or Rfalconcam during this event that will be held on “Giving Tuesday November 29, 2016.”

Donations can be made online at www.roctheday.org or by phone 1-800-242-0238. You can pay with any major credit card or debit card or through a PayPal account. Plus the United Way will chose a handful of lucky donors to be ROC Stars and their charity will receive a free $500 donation. Please give on ROC the Day and take a chance at being a ROC Star.

Braddock Bay Restoration Project

On Sept. 24, 2016, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held the ribbon cutting for the Braddock Bay restoration project. The project includes potholes and channels in the cattail marshes to add diversity to the landscape for bird and fish habitat. The barrier beach across the mouth of the bay to protect the wetland from erosion was started in August and will be finished by November. The barrier beach will be planted with bushes and grasses in the spring.
Youth Team at Montezuma Muckrace

by Lisa McKeown

Once again this year Genesee Valley Audubon Society and the Rochester Birding Association co-sponsored a youth team in the Montezuma Muckrace held on September 16-17, 2016. The Montezuma Muckrace is a 24-hour birdathon that takes place at the Montezuma Wetland Complex located east of Rochester. Each team counts how many different species of birds they can identify either visually or by sound from 7 p.m. on Friday until 7 p.m. on Saturday within the boundaries of the wetland complex.

Our team was named Birds R Us and consisted of four young men: Robert, Nick, Ty and Chan. Robert and Nick were the senior members, having participated last year. While Ty and Chan were new to the Muckrace this year, they certainly proved themselves with their bird identifications. Robert and Nick were definitely the team leaders and this year they had a plan.

Nick informed us that we had to be on the Wildlife Drive on the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge NO later than 6:50 p.m., so they could start counting the shorebirds in the wetland area near the visitor center at exactly 7:00 p.m. The Birds R Us team was set up and ready to start counting before the 7:00 p.m. start time along with a half a dozen other teams. Soon they were counting; Canada Geese, Mallard Duck and Killdeer were checked off the list. Then the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs were added to the list. Soon we were off in pursuit of more birds, the sun was starting to set, and the full harvest moon was rising as we approached the Benning Marsh area of the refuge. The list was growing; Wood Duck were checked off, as were Great Blue Herons and Common Gallinules.

Next stop on the itinerary was Van Dyne Spoor Rd to listen for bitterns and rails. It was a warm evening with a gentle breeze, and the crickets and frogs were chirping away, making it difficult to hear any nocturnal night calls. We headed back towards the wooded section of Van Dyne Spoor Rd and were successful in calling in a Barred Owl. The total for the team was above 25 species already. We made a couple more stops before heading back to the Montezuma Audubon Center around 11:00 p.m. Time to catch a little shut eye, before the 3:00 a.m. wake up call.

By 4:00 a.m. the team of young men and only two of the five adult chaperones were on Howland Island listening for birds under the full harvest moon.

In the distance we heard a Great Horned Owl, while a Screech Owl was closer to us. Once daylight was upon us we were off to search for birds on Howland Island. Soon we were adding Catbird and Common Yellow Throated Warbler to the list of birds seen. Then an American Bittern and Bald Eagle were added to the list. By 9:30 in the morning the entire team was reunited. Onwards we searched. A Peregrine Falcon and Osprey were soon added to the list. The Sandhill Cranes remained elusive for the Birds R Us team.

Later Saturday afternoon everyone was delighted to see the Eurasian Widgeon at Mays Point. And we finally were able to check off a Rock Dove in the same area. The team headed back to the wildlife refuge to look for some shorebirds we were missing. Thanks to Chan’s sharp eye and superb photography skills the team was able to find the Dunlin in the wetlands by the visitor center. In the final hour of the birdathon we stopped at the Deep Muck Marsh and were successful in seeing a Black-crowned Night Heron that a Northern Harrier flushed from the marsh.

We returned to the Montezuma Audubon Center by the 7:00 p.m. ending time. The Birds R Us youth team was successful in identifying 104 species of birds and WON the youth division of the 2016 Montezuma Muckrace! There is only one way to describe this year’s team of young men and the 20th anniversary of the Montezuma Muckrace and that is AWESOME!
Genesee Valley Audubon Society
Meadowlark
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GVAS: A chapter of the National Audubon Society
The vision of Genesee Valley Audubon Society (GVAS) is to promote environmental conservation. Our mission is to educate and advocate for protection of the environment, focusing on birds, wildlife and habitat.

Keep up-to-date with our web site, www.gvaudubon.org

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