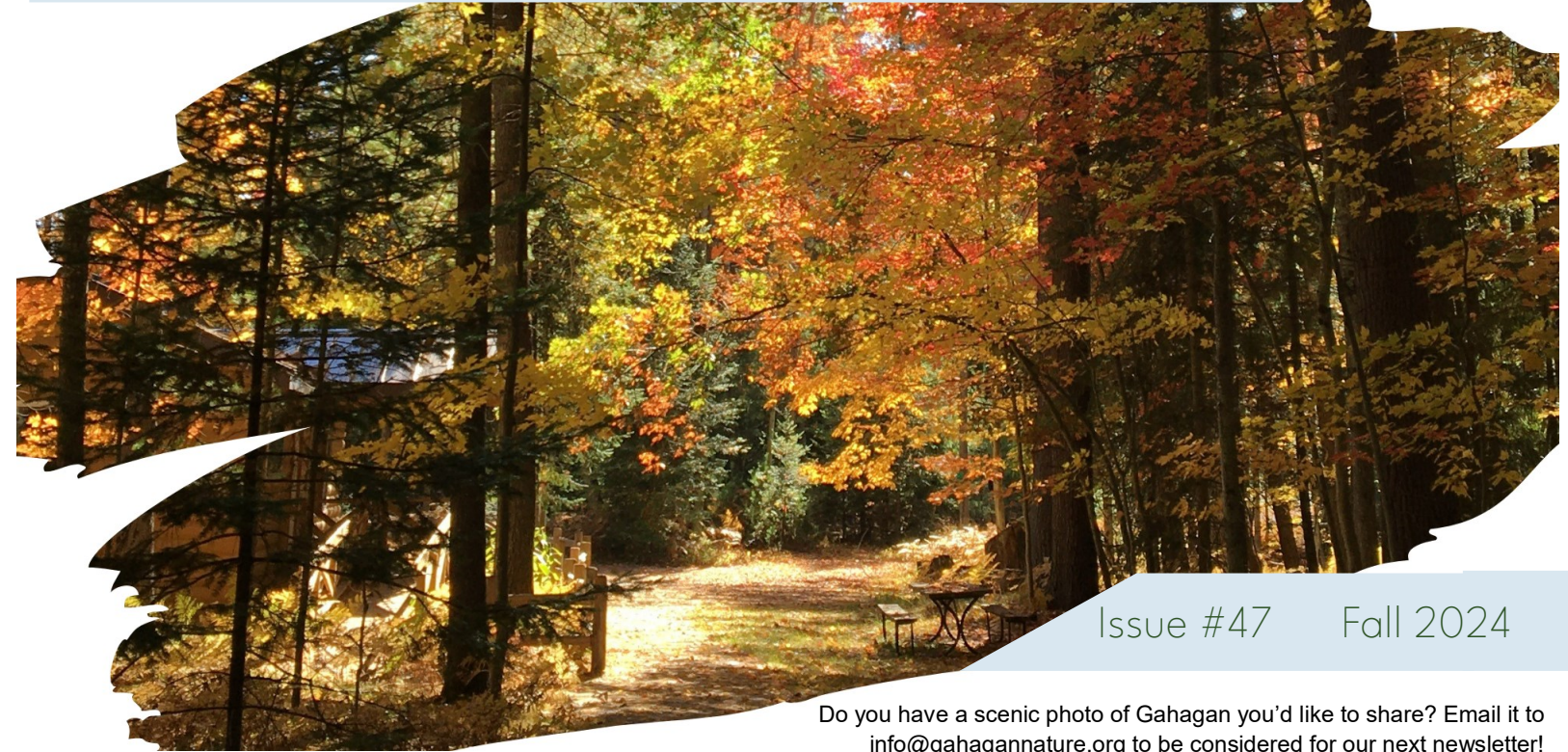




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Newsletter of the Gahagan Nature Preserve



Issue #47 Fall 2024

Do you have a scenic photo of Gahagan you'd like to share? Email it to info@gahagannature.org to be considered for our next newsletter!

A Summer of Activity at the Gahagan Nature Preserve

This summer at Gahagan was filled with much excitement! The Preserve welcomed youth for four different weeks of camp, two weeks in partnership with AuSable Outdoor Learning who used the Gahagan Nature Preserve as their site for their camp program, and two weeks of Gahagan's signature Nature Camp experience. It was wonderful to have the Preserve full of so much action throughout the summer months!

The weeks of June 25-27 and July 23-25, Gahagan hosted our camp program from 9am-noon. Campers spent time exploring the Preserve and learning about the interesting critters that live within these woods.

Our June session had the theme of Insects – campers learned about these six-legged creatures, and the similarities and differences they have between other creepy crawlies – such as arachnids, other arthropods like centipedes and millepedes, and annelids (the squishy critters like worms and slugs!). We spent time in the woods catching all sorts of these critters – especially slugs, which were plentiful and left our critter-catching containers with lots of fascinating orange goo!

July was all about Birds as our theme for the week – we spent time learning about bird beaks and how each function differently depending on its form. Campers collected “food”

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Fall/Winter Events Calendar

All events and registration information can be found at: www.gahagannature.org/calendar. Please register in advance. Registrants will be notified of any event changes.

Oct. 20: **Annual Open House**, 1-3 p.m.

1 p.m.—*Soup Showdown—bring your best soup recipe, and BYOB (Bring Your Own Bowl!)*

2 p.m.—*Hydrology of Gahagan with Don James*

Oct. 29: **What Animals Do in the Night**, 7-8:30 p.m.

Nov. 6 **Fall Fairy Houses**, 6-7:30 p.m.

Dec. 12: **Owl Prowl**, 6-7 p.m.

Jan. 18: **Snowshoe Hike**, 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Feb. 4: **Snow Glow Scavenger Hunt**, 6-8 p.m.

Feb. 8: **Snowshoe Hike**, 10:30-11:30 a.m.

March 1: **Women in the Woods, Wetland Hike**

10 a.m.-12 p.m. (Adult)

March 6: **Owl Prowl** 6-7 p.m.

Visiting Gahagan

New address, same great place!

Have you ever been taken to the wrong location when searching our address on Google Maps? Well, we hear that a lot— therefore we have registered a new physical address on Southline Road to avoid confusion with our previous street address on West Maplehurst. Our new registered address is:

585 Southline Rd.
Roscommon, MI 48653

Our Mailing address has not changed:

PO Box 421 Roscommon, MI 48653

(989) 275-3217 | info@GahaganNature.org

www.GahaganNature.org



2024 Nature Camp

Continued from page 1

with their beaks – the hummingbird used its straw-like beak to collect sugar water from a container, while the duck collected pond plants using its slotted-spoon-like beak. Each camper had to select the best tool for the job, sometimes using trial and error when it came to figuring out which beak is best.

This week we also spent loads of time in our Nature Play Area (which you might find remnants of our fun out at the Outdoor Classroom near the Blue and Orange trails!). Campers had a blast using their imagination in this zone building forts, and creating games all on their own. It may have been as much fun for the adults, watching the creativity and teamwork of these youngsters as they used the natural world for creating their own works of play. A common interaction heard this week was “can you help me with this?”, and the response of “yes!” – in a world where sometimes it seems uncommon to hear this type of exchange, it was wonderful to see how this environment elicited this type of cooperative and imaginative play in not just this group, but every group of youth who spent time in this space this summer.

Many Thanks to our Supporters

A huge thank you to our volunteers for spending time encouraging youth to connect with the natural world at Gahagan: Karen Demers, Tracy Bosworth, Tom Dale, Kami Boik and Lindsay Gonska – we couldn’t do it without you!

And another thanks to those who have given to our Nature Camp Scholarship Fund – this year we were able to provide camp scholarships to youth who would otherwise not be able to attend camp. If you would like to donate to this fund as well, donations can be made online at <https://givebutter.com/GahaganNatureCamp> or via mail to PO Box 421, Roscommon, MI 48653.

Exciting Changes Coming to Gahagan

The next few months will bring some exciting changes to the Gahagan Nature Preserve. The pieces are falling into place for us to begin work on a new addition to Marguerite’s cabin. The design will preserve the historic value of the current building, and greatly expand our ability to host educational programs and events throughout the year by adding a large interpretive space to the building. We are grateful to all the volunteers who have made this possible, and importantly, grateful to Larry Dashner whose donation of his estate has provided us the opportunity to further the goals and mission of the Preserve.

Stay tuned to our emails, website, and social media pages for important updates about this project. We are excited to begin this endeavor, and create an enduring resource for our community!



Come Join Us at the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve!

The Gahagan Nature Preserve operates as a non-profit organization run by volunteers and funded by its members, donors and the endowment left by Marguerite. Your generous contributions play a vital role in preserving this rich and diverse habitat, allowing us to expand the areas we protect, providing a beautiful recreational space in the Roscommon area, and supporting our educational programs for the community. Please join us and help keep the Preserve and its programs moving forward.

Yes, I/we want to support the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve.

Members (up to \$30)	Supporters (\$31-\$249)	Partners (\$250-\$499)	Stewards (\$500-\$999)	Patrons (\$1,000 and up)
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Enclosed is a donation of \$ _____
Please accept this donation __in memory / __in honor of _____

Name: _____ Ph: (____) _____
Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
E-Mail: _____ @ _____

Please write checks to Gahagan Nature Preserve, Inc. and mail to PO Box 421, Roscommon, MI 48653 •
Thank you for your support!
You can also donate, join or renew your membership online at www.givebutter.com/SupportGahagan

Did you know? You can make a Big Impact by Becoming a Monthly Donor!

Becoming a monthly donor for the Gahagan Nature Preserve is a simple yet powerful way to amplify your impact at the Preserve and in our community. By committing to a regular contribution, you help us to better plan for the future and allocate resources effectively to support our programs and improvements at the Preserve.

When you choose to donate to the Gahagan Nature Preserve, your contribution becomes a powerful force for protecting and sharing this natural place. Because of our small size, every dollar donated has an immense impact on our ability to carry out our mission of protecting habitat and providing hands-on environmental learning.

It only takes a few minutes to set up your monthly donation through our secure online platform, and you can choose an amount that fits your budget. You can also take care of membership dues via monthly giving. Donors will receive receipts for tax purposes after the end of the calendar year.

Thank you for supporting Your Preserve!



Gahagan Nature Preserve Board of Directors

Chairperson: Ken Elmore
Vice Chair: Julie Crick
Secretary: Irene Borak
Treasurer: Tracy Bosworth
Kami Boik
Alecia Catrell
Tom Dale
Patrick Demers
Dale Ekdorn
Sue Huffman
Kerensa Huffman
Don James
Mike Petrucha

Staff:
Kalsa Parker Browning,
Education Director

Directors meet the 2nd Monday of the month, 6 p.m.
All are welcome to attend.



2024 June Bird Count

By Mike Petrucho

On June 8th, three participants met in the Gahagan parking lot at 8:00 a.m. with cloudy and 58 degree weather with 10 mph southwest winds. It was a great morning to be out on the trails enjoying all the nature Gahagan has to offer, including a close encounter with a skunk by one group. We formed two groups to cover Gahagan finding 125 individuals of 35 species in two hours of counting. All birds were counted by sight and sound. The number of species found was above the 13-year average of 33, and the number of individuals was just below the 13-year average of 127. Blue jay was the most numerous species with 18 individuals found. We added three new species to the count, great blue heron, wood thrush, and house sparrow, bringing the total number of species found on the June count to 78. New high counts were established for blue-headed vireo (3) and red-breasted nuthatch (5). If you would like to see previous count results, go to <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1175836/activity?yr=all&m=> and look for the June Gahagan Birds checklists. Please consider joining us on the next count, sometime during early June 2024. Details will be posted on the Gahagan Nature Preserve website and Facebook page.

Invasive Phragmites Eliminated on New Property

By Julie Crick

When you travel down County Road 100 just west of the Roscommon Post Office, it's hard to miss the patch of tall, showy invasive phragmites growing just off the road on Gahagan's newly purchased 34 acres. Due to its ability to quickly spread and take over an area, elimination of the plant was first one of Gahagan's first priorities for the new section of the Preserve. In 2023, Gahagan hired the Huron Heartland Invasive Species Network, or HHISN, to complete the first year of treatment on the invasive plant, knowing full well that two years of treatment would likely be necessary. In 2024, a few stragglers were found, and a second treatment occurred in August 2024. Gahagan would like to thank the HHISN for using grant funds for the cost of the 2023 treatment, and the Michigan DNR Forest Resources Division for providing funds for the 2024 treatment. We appreciate the efforts to preserve Roscommon's native ecology!



Phragmites australis or Common reed is frequently found along roadsides in wetland areas. It is a large perennial reed grass that crowds out native species.

Program Picture Show

23-24 School Programs

Between in-classroom programs and field trips, we served over **450 unique individuals** in **19 classrooms** during the 2023-2024 school year!

Photos: Top left—Water Quality was the focus of our middle-school program. Students learned about watersheds, ground and surface waters, and wastewater treatment. A rich learning experience, this program impressed upon youth the need for

responsible stewardship of our water resources here in Michigan.

Top right, bottom right—Our K-5th program focused on Adaptations, structural or behavioral characteristics that plants and animals have evolved over time to better survive in their environment—some of our favorite topics where Teeth and Skulls and Amazing Insects!

Bottom left—Students from Shannon House's 4th grade class visit the Preserve for a hands-on field trip. The class poses for a photo before a hike in the woods.



Spring and Summer Public Programs

With so many fun and engaging nature-education happenings at the Preserve, it's hard to cover them all! Here are just a few of our favorite events from this spring and summer. Clockwise from top:

Bird Banding Demonstration attendee Julie releases a chickadee after board member Mike Petrucho bands this bird.

Participants test their tree ID skills after the **Blooms and Buds Tree ID hike** with board member Julie Crick.

Mom and daughter pose for a photo next to their freshly decorated creation at the **Spring Fairy House** program.

Parents and kids built boats at **Nature-Play Friday** from all natural objects, tied together using string. Then the boats are put to the test in the Gahagan pond.



Birds of the Gahagan Nature Preserve

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*)

By Mike Petrucha

Wood Thrushes are reddish-brown above and white with bold black spots on their undersides with a pot-bellied profile like an American robin. They are secretive birds, so you are likely to hear their flute-like song before seeing them. Wood Thrushes breed in the U.S. east of the Mississippi River in deciduous and mixed forests with large trees, a moderate understory, and abundant leaf litter for foraging. They forage on the forest floor, flipping over leaves in search of insects, snails, and sometimes small salamanders. They will also eat small fruits, especially in the late summer and fall while building up fat for migration.

Males arrive on the breeding grounds first, staking out a territory of up to several acres. The female arrives several days later, and the pair court in a series of circular flights and mutual feeding sessions. The female chooses a nest site, usually in a young tree or shrub less than 20 feet above the ground. The cup nest is made of mud, dead grasses, leaves, stems, and sometimes paper or plastic. A total of 3-4 turquoise-green eggs are laid, which hatch in 12-15 days. As the male helps feed the young, the female has time to start a second nest. After the next brood fledges in 12-15 days, the pair divides the broods up and feeds them at separate sites in the territory. Almost half of all mated pairs raise two broods.

Wood Thrush populations have declined by approximately half between 1966 and 2019. Habitat fragmentation on their



breeding and wintering grounds is thought to be one reason for their decline. Although Wood Thrushes will nest in wooded suburban areas, they have reduced breeding success in smaller forest patches due to cowbird parasitism, and nest predation from jays, crows, raccoons, and domestic cats. Another factor is the effects of acid rain, which can leach calcium from the soil, which robs the birds of calcium-rich prey that are vital for eggshell creation. In the winter, they are found in mature lowland tropical forests in southern Mexico and Central America.

The best spot at the Preserve to find a Wood Thrush: along the eastern side of the White Trail where it runs north and south through the mature deciduous forest.

Kirtland's Warbler Weekend

By Mike Petrucha, Kirtland's Warbler Festival Chair

Kirtland's Warbler Weekend was back in Roscommon May 31–June 1, 2024. Kirtland's Warbler Weekend started off Friday morning at 8 a.m. with a bird banding demonstration at the Gahagan Nature Preserve. Festivities continued Friday afternoon with over 60 people at the Home Opener at Gahagan from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. There was wine and beer tasting with a nice variety of Michigan made products donated by 5th Street Wines, appetizers contributed by Family Fare, and cookies donated by The Bird and The Bear. Thank you all! About 25 people took advantage of a scavenger hunt put on by Gahagan. Keynote speaker Kaitlyn Kelly put on the excellent presentation "Fight for Survival: Michigan's Endangered Butterflies" to a packed house of about 50 people. The night ended with a live auction of original artwork by featured artist Sherry Nelsen.

The Kirtland's Warbler Festival was on Saturday at the CRAF Center from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This year the festival was again part of Summer-Fest along with the Downtown Car Show and Village Cornhole Tournament. The weather was near perfect this year. The morning started out with Kirtland's Warbler tours at 7:30 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. and the 24 total participants all had excellent looks at multiple Kirtland's and heard their bubbly song.

The rest of the festival festivities began at 10 a.m. The Kids' Tent was busy all day with activities including face painting, skulls and furs, and live reptiles. Activities were provided by the Gahagan Nature Preserve, Nature Discovery, and the Michigan Loon Preservation Association. Several natural resources agencies and nature organizations were there to answer questions. Sherry Nelsen, the featured artist, was there with a display of her artwork. Featured author Dave Evers donated several books to the festival for fund raising. William Rapai from the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance led the Kirtland's Warbler migration game twice. The 2024 U.S. Forest Service's Young Artists' Contest winning artwork was on display and calendars were available for purchase. There was live music from the Au Sable River Dixieland Jazz Band and Fite Family Music sang their catchy Kirtland's Warbler song along with a couple of others. The Kids Market was a big hit with a lot of traffic. Fred's of Roscommon donated pizzas for the volunteers and Tracy from the Higgins Lake-Roscommon Chamber provided hot dogs for the Kids Market entrepreneurs.

Programs started at 12:30 p.m. and went until 3:45 p.m. Dr. Steve Roels presented Seeing the Jack Pine Forest for the Species. Dr. David Evers spoke about Loons as Indicators of Mercury in the Environment: Local Beginnings to Global Interests. Jim McGrath from Nature Discovery, always a crowd favorite, gave a program on Michigan Turtles in Trouble.

350-400 people were estimated to have attended with good audience numbers for the presentations. We hope to see you next year, June 6-7, 2025, in Roscommon!

