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Annual Open House

Sunday, October 19th, 2025
1 p.m.—3 p.m.

Join us!

Annual Open House

October 19th, 1-3 p.m.

Join us as we celebrate an exciting milestone—the completion of the Preserve's new building addition! Finished over the summer, this expansion gives us the perfect reason to come together in the spirit of nature, community, and discovery.

From 1–2 pm, enjoy our Open House to see the progress firsthand and explore ways you can help shape our vision for the future. Then, **from 2–3 pm**, environmental engineer Allie Moffit will lead an engaging presentation on the impact of invasive species and the critical role that healthy waterways play in sustaining our local ecosystems.

We look forward to welcoming you and sharing this new chapter with all who help make the Preserve thrive.

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Newsletter of the Gahagan Nature Preserve



Issue #49 Fall 2025

Photo credit: Connor Ervans Photography

Greetings!

From Ken Elmore, Chair, Gahagan Nature Preserve Board of Directors

From the Board to all of our friends, members, and supporters. What a year we've had. With the completion of our new addition and the continued burgeoning of various programs, it has been a hectic but exciting time. We've reached a significant milestone in the history of the Gahagan Nature Preserve; without all of you, it simply could not have happened. Marguerite Gahagan's vision of preservation and education continues under the direction of a Board that I am humbled by every time we meet. I say this so that you may be confident that your support is overseen by a highly dedicated, educated, and diversely gifted group of individuals that continues on with our mission statement. In addition, our naturalist extraordinaire, Kalsa Parker Browning, continues to develop, innovate and educate our children, students, and community members alike. But enough of my rambling! Read on to Discover what's happening to your Preserve, and as you do so, give yourselves a pat on the back for supporting this gem of the North. Please continue to support us, for the trees that bud out, the flowers that will bloom, and the creatures that will reside in the future will only be there because of your generosity. Cheers!

Building Completed, Next Chapter Begins at Gahagan

We are thrilled to share exciting news: the new building addition at the Gahagan Nature Preserve is complete! After months of steady progress, the 2,240-square-foot expansion to Marguerite’s cabin now stands ready with a program and event space, additional restrooms, and a dedicated activities room that will serve our community for years to come.

While this milestone is a tremendous accomplishment, our work is far from finished. Right now, our new building is an unembellished space filled with potential.



To truly bring it to life, we need to enter into our next phase: transforming this building into a fully functional nature center, one that inspires curiosity, offers hands-on educational experiences, and becomes a gathering place for the entire community.

Why This Matters

We are fortunate to live in a region surrounded by incredible outdoor spaces and abundant opportunities for recreation—these natural areas are what make our community so special. Yet even with this richness, it is easy to take these gifts for granted. Too often, people—especially young people—lack the opportunities to truly connect with the land, learn about its ecology, and understand what it takes to care for it. Without meaningful experiences in nature, awareness of local ecosystems and the importance of stewardship can fade. Our goal is to help people not only enjoy these resources, but also appreciate them deeply and feel inspired to protect and maintain them for generations to come. With the new building addition, we now have the space to expand our reach—hosting larger public programs, welcoming more classrooms for field trips, and growing our summer nature camps. This expansion means we can better serve students, families, educators, and community members of every age.



Progress Already Underway

We’re thrilled to share that thanks to the generosity of donors and the pending support of grant funding, we’ve already begun securing some of the equipment we’ll need. We have been able to purchase tables, chairs, and other furnishings to create an event space that can be enjoyed by larger audiences. We have picnic tables for families, individuals and groups to pause and enjoy a meal at Gahagan. We will soon be able to add upgraded AV equipment to make programs engaging and accessible, additional storage to foster a functional learning environment, and we will be able to start developing some of our hands-on educational areas; like a children’s learning nook. These early gifts are helping us take important steps toward creating a space that will serve visitors and local schools in meaningful ways.

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2025 Kirtland’s Warbler Weekend Recap

By Mike Petrucha, Kirtland’s Warbler Festival Chair

Kirtland’s Warbler Weekend was back in Roscommon June 6–7, 2025. We started off Friday morning at 9 am with 28 people attending the bird banding demonstration, which included hummingbirds, at the Gahagan Nature Preserve. We caught and banded 11 birds, including 4 female hummingbirds. Festivities continued Friday afternoon with over 60 people at the Kirtland’s Warbler Festival Home Opener at Gahagan from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm. 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 Bakery. Thank you all! About 10 people took advantage of a bird scavenger hunt put on by Gahagan. Keynote speaker Allen Chartier put on the excellent presentation “Hummingbirds of the Great Lakes” to a packed house of about 50 people. The night ended with a live auction of original artwork by featured artist Carlotta Brandenburg.

The Kirtland’s Warbler Festival on Saturday started out with Kirtland’s Warbler tours at 7:30 am and 10:20 am and the 36 total participants all had excellent looks at multiple Kirtland’s and heard their bubbly song. The rest of the festival festivities began at 10 am, with a ceremony recognizing Roscommon as Michigan’s First Bird City followed by the unveiling of the World’s Largest Kirtland’s Warbler statue! The Kids’ Tent was busy all day with activities provided by Gahagan Nature Preserve, Nature Discovery, and Michigan Loon Preservation Association. Thanks to our featured artist Carlotta Brandenburg, and featured author Richard Rensberry. Mikenauk Rock and Gem Club had a big display next to the Kids Tent. William Rapai from the Kirtland’s Warbler Alliance led the Kirtland’s Warbler migration game. The 2025 U.S. Forest Service’s Young Artists’ Contest winning artwork was on display and calendars were available for purchase. There was live music from Doug Thomas and 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. Presentations included Dr. Steve Roels, Dr. David Evers and Jim McGrath from Nature Discovery.

An estimated 450 people were estimated to have attended. **We hope to see you next year, June 5-6, 2026, in Roscommon.**

Attendees of the Bird Banding Demonstration got a up-close look at science in action!
Photo credit: Connor Ervans Photography



Program Picture Show Continued



We have been busy with public programs, including our expanded Nature Camp program! We hosted two separate, themed weeks this year: Mad Scientists Week, and Mud Masters Week—taking place for the full day from 9am-3pm. We were also glad to host a two-day Summer Camp Incentive program for Roscommon Area Public Schools (RAPS), open to students who attended summer school.

Photos, clockwise from top: Campers create sand volcanos and watch the baking soda and vinegar eruptions. Volunteer Heather Beach instills a love of mushrooms into campers during a hike. Campers check out pond creatures under a microscope for Mad Scientists week. RAPS students decorate walking sticks during time in Nature Space (everybody's favorite spot!)

2025 Gahagan June Bird Count

By Mike Petrucha

On June 14th, four participants met in the Gahagan parking lot at 8:00 AM with cloudy and 53-degree weather along with 8 mph ENE winds. It was a great morning to be out on the trails enjoying all the nature Gahagan has to offer including deer, squirrels, chipmunks, and blooming Blue Flag Iris. We formed two groups to cover Gahagan, finding 108 individuals of 37 species in 1.5 hours of counting. All birds were counted by sight and sound. The number of species found was above the 14-year average of 34, and the number of individuals was below the 14-year average of 127. Pine Warbler was the most numerous species with 9 individuals found. We added one new species to the count, Dark-eyed Junco, bringing the total number of species found on the June count to 79. The results of this year's count can be seen at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S250234768>. 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 2026. Details will be posted on the Gahagan Nature Preserve website.

Junco... Continued from Page 3

ing territory. In courtship, the pair may hop about on ground with wings drooped and tail spread widely to show off white outer tail feathers. The female chooses the nest site and builds the open cup nest of grass, weeds, leaves, lined with fine grass and sometimes with hair or feathers. She lays 3-6 eggs, which take 12-13 days to hatch. After hatching, the young stay in the nest for another 10-13 days before leaving. Juncos eat primarily insects in the spring and summer, and grass and weed seeds in the fall and winter. They feed their young primarily insects. During winter and migration, they use a wider variety of habitats including open woodlands, fields, roadsides, parks, and gardens. Over most of the eastern United States, they appear as winter sets in becoming frequent visitors to bird feeders. During the breeding season, Juncos are typically found in the nearby Kirtland's Warbler breeding area. If you watch Gahagan's bird feeders, you most likely will find them there.

Gahagan Nature Preserve adds 14 acres thanks to Wyckoff Family

We are so excited to report that Gahagan has been able to add an adjacent piece of property to the Preserve. On a brief visit to Roscommon in 2022, we had the pleasure to meet Mark Wyckoff and his mother, Adeline Wyckoff. Many years ago, Mark had inherited a 14-acre parcel from his grandfather, Forest R Wyckoff. It was Forest who sold Marguerite Gahagan the ten 10-acre parcel that established Gahagan Nature Preserve.

Forest R. Wyckoff and Mae Taylor married in 1922 and were well established in Roscommon when they welcomed children Harold, Forrest C., Beverly and Judy. Through the depression, Forest R. fixed cars in the evenings while working as a mechanic at the State of Michigan transportation garage just outside of Roscommon. He eventually began a lumber company that would support his family throughout his life. Although the name has changed, the lumber company still operates today in Roscommon. Mae and Forest's hard work also allowed them to purchase quite a bit land in the area. Their second son, Forrest C. Wyckoff, graduated from Roscommon High School in 1944, attended Central Michigan University and then The Chicago College of Optometry. Forrest returned to Roscommon where he had a small practice, saved every dollar, and honed his skiing at Skyline Ski Resort. Forrest eventually purchased a practice in Port Huron where he met and married his wife Adeline in 1961. They welcomed sons Mark and Paul and daughter Mary and the family of five made many trips back to Roscommon where Forrest taught his children to ski. "My brother Paul, my sister Mary, and I are each quite proud of the Wyckoff tradition in Roscommon and the role our family, namely Forest R., has played in the history of the Nature Preserve," responded Mark Wyckoff. "Not surprisingly, since Forest's R's time spent with the CCC during the Depression years, to his long-term business success with Wyckoff Lumber, we have become a family of woodworkers. I would love to build our new fireplace mantle out of a cedar tree harvested from the Wyckoff Property."

Gahagan is so very pleased to have worked out a favorable agreement to secure this property. We are also extremely grateful to donors, John and Betty Colwell, Tom Shupbach and Lanette and Scott VanWagenen for making this possible.

We are truly thankful for the long-time relationship between the Wyckoff family and Gahagan Nature Preserve. While travelling from Reno, NV to Michigan for a Wyckoff family wedding this summer, Mark was indeed able to harvest a cedar for his mantle.

Featured Bird: Dark-eyed Junco (Junco hyemalis) By Mike Petrucha



Dark-eyed Juncos are one of the most abundant forest birds of North America. This year they were a new addition to the Gahagan June Bird Count list. They have many color variations, but those east of the Great Plains are gray on their head, back, sides, and top of the tail. The outer tail feathers are a bright white as is the bird's underside. Their eyes are dark and their beak and legs pink. This form is also called Slate-colored Junco. Gahagan sits at the extreme southern end of their breeding range in the east. Dark-eyed Junco breeding habitat is primarily coniferous forests and occasionally in mixed woodland, usually at edges of clearings. Males sing, their chipping trill sounding similar to Chipping Sparrows and Pine Warblers, from high perches to defend the nest-

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Next Chapter...Continued from Page 2

What’s Still Ahead

Even with this great progress, there is still plenty of work to be done before the center is fully ready. Our to-do list includes:

- Adding interpretive signage and interactive exhibits for hands-on learning
- Creating outdoor learning spaces with hardscaping and gathering areas
- Landscaping with native plants to support pollinators, birds, and other wildlife
- Installing gutters to keep the building in excellent condition for years to come
- Other improvements to Marguerite’s historic cabin such as replacing windows and re-staining the building and porches

How You Can Help – Community Nature Center Fund

To continue with this strong momentum and truly transform our building into a community nature center, we need your support. Your financial contributions for this project will directly fund educational signage, exhibits, furnishings, and outdoor improvements. Every dollar matters to our small organization, and with the help of our many dedicated volunteers who give their time and talents, your gift stretches even further. Together, we can complete this next phase and ensure Gahagan becomes a place where learning, discovery, and stewardship flourish.

Be Part of Gahagan’s Future

The completed building is a powerful symbol of what our community can achieve when we come together. Now we invite you to help us take the next step and transform it into a thriving nature center—a place where children learn, families connect, and our community grows closer to the natural world.

Standing inside the new building, it’s easy to imagine the laughter of school groups, the curiosity of families gathered around exhibits, and the hum of activity as our community comes together to learn and celebrate nature. That vision is closer than ever, and with your support, it will soon become reality.

We are so grateful to all of you—our friends, neighbors, and supporters—who have helped us get this far. Together, we’re not just building a facility; we’re building a legacy of connection, education, and stewardship for our community.

Pictured: Concept art for educational displays throughout the building, and a dedicated children’s learning nook. Help us make these dreams a reality!



Come Join Us at the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve!

Your generous contributions play a vital role in helping us to meet our mission of preserving this rich and diverse habitat, and supporting our educational programs for the community. Please help us keep the Preserve 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)

Enclosed is a donation of \$ _____
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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

Program Picture Show



Our in-classroom program, Environmental Learning for the Future (ELF) served over **545 unique individuals** in **22 classrooms** during the 2024-2025 school year! The year’s topic was **Designs of Nature**, students learned all about the relationship between form and function while being inspired by designs found in the natural world!

We also welcomed **487 students in 21 classrooms** to the Preserve for hands-on field trips. Students visiting the Preserve on field trips experience nature in powerful and memorable ways. They explore forests, ponds, and wetlands while learning about local plants, animals, and the web of life that connects them all.

Photos: Kindergarteners learn about the life cycle of butterflies (and become butterflies themselves!). This

was a popular program this year, we welcomed five different classrooms from Grayling Elementary for this lesson!

Photo, lower left: A mixed-age homeschooling group visits the Preserve to learn about the diversity of trees found here. And develop a tree-hugging-worthy appreciation!

