

Haehnle Sanctuary News



Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary

Owned By Michigan Audubon

Maintained and Operated by The Jackson Audubon Society

Preserving and Protecting our Natural World

Fall 2016



Prescribed Burns, An Important Management Tool at Haehnle

By Ron Hoffman



Fire has played an important role in shaping Michigan's landscape for over 5,000 years. Two ecosystems once found at Haehnle, oak barrens (a savannah-like grassland) and prairie fens, were created and maintained by repeated burning prior to settlement by Europeans. Lighting started many of those fires that often burned large areas.

Fires were also started by Native Americans to maintain clearings favored by large game animals like bison and elk. They even burned to clear areas around their campsites as a defense against enemy attacks. Before the development of alfalfa and domestic clovers, farmers continued the practice of burning native grasslands for pasturing livestock. During the past century however, fires were all but eliminated from wild areas.

Fire-dependent ecosystems soon became endangered for a variety of reasons including the absence of periodic burning.

It has been estimated that more than 99% of oak barrens in Michigan have been lost, while prairie fens are now considered rare ecosystems both globally and locally. At the sanctuary, no oak barrens remained prior to 2003, and prairie fens had been reduced to just 130 degraded acres.

Fire has been prescribed at Haehnle since 2003 to create and maintain wildlife habitat for a variety of plants and animals that are adapted to periodic burning. Many native prairie grasses and wildflowers are resistant to fires because their extensive root systems penetrate deep into the soil in contrast to shallow-rooted alien species.

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Prescribed Burns (cont'd)



Before (left) and after (right) the burn

They also benefit from burning because nutrients are released into the soil giving a boost to new growth.

Sandhill cranes, bluebirds, field sparrows, and northern harriers are a few of the birds that forage in fire managed areas. Bees and butterflies, including monarchs, pollinate the wildflowers. Painted turtles and snapping turtles leave the wetlands to lay their eggs in the grasslands.

Burning involves more than just lighting a match. It starts months before with a habitat management plan that includes a clear objective such as restoring, enhancing and maintaining an oak savannah biotic community. Periodic burning is used because it retards woody plants and reduces invasive aliens, while increasing native plant diversity.

Conducting a prescribe burn requires people trained in fire control, specialized equipment and a burn plan. Fire breaks have to be established. A burn ignition plan considers the kind of fuel, weather, direction smoke will travel, etc. Fire retardant clothing, helmets, back-pack sprayers, drip torches, a truck with a water tank, and radios, are a few of the required equipment. Local fire departments and neighbors need to be notified. Above all, safety is the highest priority. For these reasons, almost all of the burning at Haehnle has been conducted by companies experienced with prescribed burns.

Prescribed burns have been used periodically at the sanctuary 23 times during the past 13 years to manage 50 acres of fire dependent ecosystems.

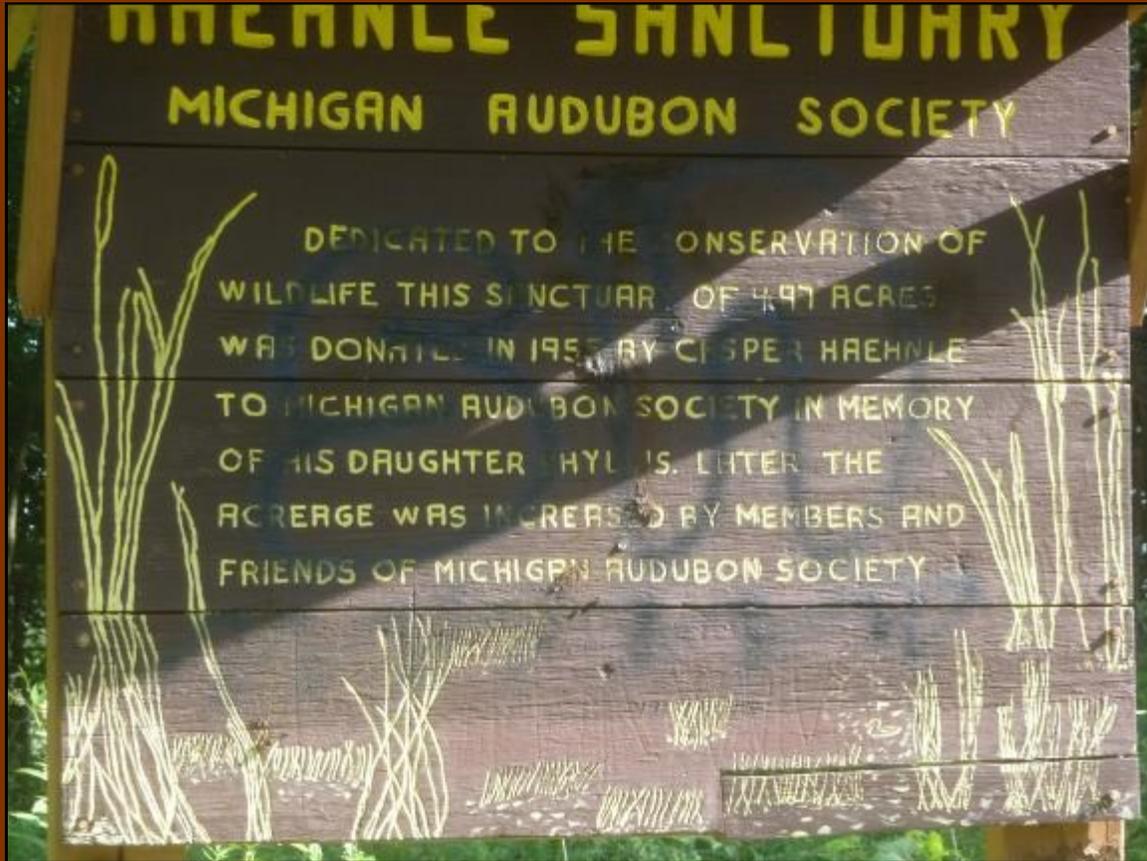
An individual management unit is scheduled to be burned every 3-5 years, but never is the whole unit burned at one time. This leaves some undisturbed habitat for wildlife while the burn area recovers. In the future, the use of fire will be expanded to the fen restoration area. The cost of hiring a company to burn is not cheap, averaging around \$180/acre so it is a major sanctuary expense.

State threatened species like rattlesnake master, cup plant, and compass plant are now found in the grasslands. They, along with the spectacular display of wildflowers and native grasses north of the kiosk (see below) this summer are proof that burning is worth it.



Vandals Inflict Considerable Damage at Haehnle

By Lathe Claflin



So Sad!!! Vandals defaced Haehnle sign at main parking lot with paint and feces, and damaged the kiosk, benches, other signs and nest boxes.

I start off this article with a depressing incident at the Sanctuary. We had some significant vandalism at Haehnle in late July, much more than we have ever had before. Someone or a few people tore the registration box at the kiosk off its post, defaced the plexiglass window of a display case, broke rails in our fence, and spray painted and defaced the handmade, historic Haehnle sign in the main parking area off Seymour Rd.

Even more important, they ripped four bluebird nest boxes in the overlook grassland off their posts, two of which had young birds in them. This is a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is difficult for us to understand this senseless and pointless destruction.

We notified local law enforcement agencies, posted "Report Vandalism" signs at the Sanctuary, and contacted WILX TV who did a short piece on their morning show.

The response has been impressive and heartwarming. The publicity was originally designed to help us increase surveillance at Haehnle, but a number of people also supported us financially by donating enough money to cover the cost of the damage (see list of donors at the end of the newsletter).

The repairs should be finished by the time you read this. The committee is extremely thankful for the many positive responses.

Joint Project at Haehnle Helps Save Monarch Butterflies

By Lathe Claflin

This Spring we were involved in a joint project with Michigan Audubon, the Jackson Audubon Sanctuary, and Monarch Watch to increase the number of milkweed plants on our property.

Monarch butterflies throughout the United States have suffered serious decline nationwide in recent years. While we can do little to offset chemical destruction of monarchs or winter kill in Mexico, we can help improve their habitat by providing an abundance of host plants for them (we already have a fair amount of common milkweed).



Above one of about 300 individual milkweeds planted at Haehnle this summer.



Monarch caterpillars like the one above will be able to feed and grow on the abundant supply of milkweed at the sanctuary. Toxins from the milkweed make them unpalatable to most vertebrate predators.

After two weeks of feeding they transform into beautiful emerald green chrysalids like the one to the right. In another ten to twelve days the adult butterflies emerge to begin their long journey to Mexico for the winter. The sanctuary committee is excited to be a part of this important effort. We all can help by making milkweed a part of our own flower gardens.

So in June we planted more than 300 common, whorled, and swamp milkweed seedlings in the grassland below the kiosk and the neighboring wetland to the east. Seedling plants were supplied free by Monarch Watch.

The early summer drought affected some of the plants, but many survived and are doing well. Milkweed plants can take two to three years to bloom, so don't expect to see flowering plants next year. But, by the year after we should see some results and hopefully an increase in Monarchs at Haehnle.



Annual Nest Box Report

By Steve Jerant

Well, this was not a good year for our nest box tenants. Fluctuations in temperature in May & June, increased house sparrow activity, and human vandalism on 4 nest boxes in July contributed to a rough season for our target eastern bluebirds and tree swallows.

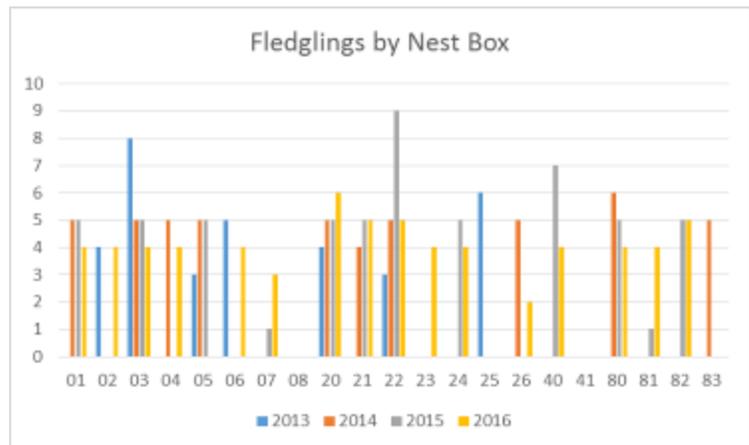
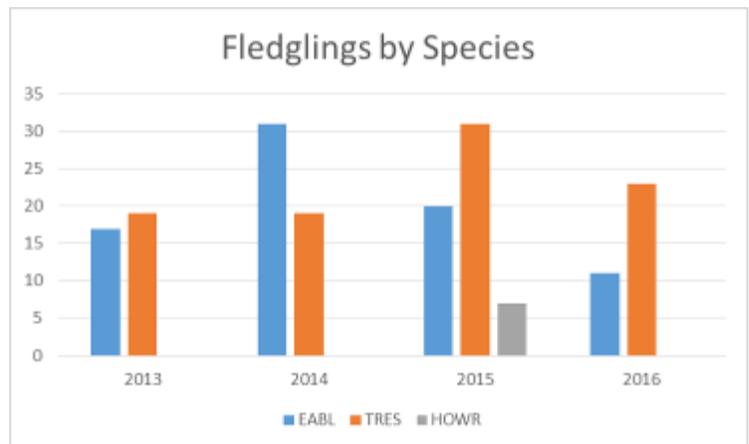
The number of fledglings was the lowest since I started tracking in 2013, down to 34 from a high of 58 last year.

Tree swallows (TRES) continue to out breed the eastern bluebirds (EABL) at Haehnle, however, when compared to the 2016 data available from Cornell's Nestwatch (<http://nestwatch.org/>), our success rate of about 30% pales in comparison to the Michigan rate of 70%.

Our bluebird nesting success rate of 75% is well above the Michigan average of 65% for this year. I did have one nest attempt by house wrens (HOWR), it did not result in eggs laid. They tend to make a lot of extra nests in the neighborhood.

This season we saw good activity in most of the boxes, including the new boxes in the Wooster prairie and continued to draw breeders. New nest boxes will be installed in the four locations where they were destroyed by vandals in July. Some aging nest boxes in other parts of the property will also be replaced.

Our data for the monitoring has been submitted to Nestwatch and the Michigan Bluebird Society (<http://michiganbluebirds.org/>). These are both excellent organizations that can provide information on observing, managing, and monitoring nesting birds.



If you want to watch some slightly larger birds, be sure to visit the Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary this fall to for the annual migration of Sandhill Cranes.



Haehnle Family Activity Corner

By Robyn Henise

Take a Walk at Haehnle

It is easy to explore nature with your children. Here is a simple activity you can do with your family while walking the nature trail.

Try and catch a rainbow. As the season of autumn approaches, the colors at Haehnle will come alive. Bring the family, walk the nature trail and see if you can "catch a rainbow." Look for the colors of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet) in the world around you - in the changing colors of the leaves, the colors of the flowers and on the birds you see.

Get out and enjoy the outdoors!

Some Colors To Look For This Fall





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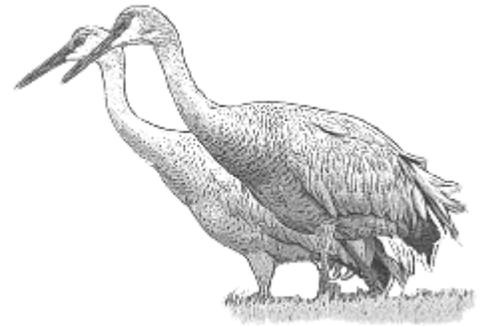
*Thank You,
Your Support is Greatly Appreciated!*



*Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary
c/o Jackson Audubon Society
P.O. Box 6453
Jackson, MI 49204*



*Official News Letter
For The
Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary*



We wish to thank the following people who have generously supported the sanctuary during recent months.

Donations to Jackson Audubon for Haehnle

Barbara J. Stowell
Chris VanLonkuyzen
Joan and Daphne Mitchell

Supporting Vandalism Repair

Hugh Zernickow
William Butler &
Tamara Hew
Kim Cinko
Zachary Coeman
Linda Etter
Jennifer Fike
Joyce Peterson
Harvey Juster
Diane Krause
Karen Newcomb
Vedran Radojcic
Susan Rosegrant
Sally K. Scheer

Dates To Remember

Saturday September 24

Fall Work Bee, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

Meet at the main parking lot on Seymour Rd. A wide variety of activities will allow all to participate. Bring gloves, loppers, pruners, hand or chainsaw if you have them.

Saturday, October 15

Cranes, Color, and Cabernet Festival

Please come and join us for a celebration of sandhill cranes, fall colors, and Sandhill Crane Vineyard's opening of their new Cabernet Sauvignon.

Nature Walks at Noon and 2:00 p.m.

At 4:00 p.m. a short talk will be given at the kiosk followed at 4:30 p.m. by an auto tour to view cranes in local fields.

The nearby Sandhill Crane Vineyards on Walz Rd. will be open till 7:00 p.m. for late crane watchers. For more information about their schedule for the day, call the Vineyard at 515-764-0679.