



# Landmarks

## Superior Greenway Grows by 100 Acres!

By Jack R. Smiley, SMLC Founder and Land Protection Committee Member

In April of this year, the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC) reached a major milestone with the purchase of 100.33 acres at the southeast corner

of Prospect and Cherry Hill Roads, immediately south of the Superior Township Hall.

This was a very important property to protect since it fulfilled SMLC's goal of protecting the core of the Superior Greenway: a 2-mile long corridor along the

east side of Prospect Road, from Geddes to Cherry Hill Road. Acquisition of this property also consolidated 1,277 acres of protected land and increased the total

protected acreage in the Superior Greenway to over 2,000 acres!

Protection of this property had long been sought by



The Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve features ¼ mile of open space along Cherry Hill and Prospect Roads and protects a high-quality tributary of the Rouge River. Photo by Charles Scott

SMLC due to its natural characteristics and key location. The property lies in the western-most headwaters of the Rouge River and is essential for the protection of downstream

water quality. Fowler Creek, a tributary of the Lower Rouge River, flows through the property and has been surveyed by Friends of the Rouge since 1998 for "benthic macroinvertebrates"--the tiny creatures that live on the stream bottom--such as mayfly, stonefly and dragonfly larvae. The types and abundance of these creatures are indicative of high water quality, and Fowler Creek has consistently been one of the best sites in the entire Rouge watershed.

The property also features a good amount of wetland and forest habitat, while much of the property is agricultural. SMLC plans to restore wetlands to some of the farm fields, much like was done at LeFurge

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### Superior Greenway's newest preserve named after SMLC's founder

Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy is proud to announce that our recently acquired nature preserve located in Superior Township has now been named: the **Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve**. The board honored Jack per this resolution: *To our founder, Jack R. Smiley: for your vision, leadership and perseverance, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy has named our newest land acquisition – 100 acres of woods, wetlands and farmland located at the corner of Prospect Road and Cherry Hill Road, in the heart of the Superior Greenway – in honor of you. Congratulations Jack and thanks for leading the charge that led to this incredible conservation legacy.*

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# Landmarks

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## Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy

8383 Vreeland Road  
Superior Township, MI 48198

734.484.6565  
734.484.0617 (fax)

[www.smlcland.org](http://www.smlcland.org)

[www.facebook.com/southeastmichiganlandconservancy](http://www.facebook.com/southeastmichiganlandconservancy)



# Message from the Executive Director

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

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### Our Staff

Jill A. Lewis

Executive Director

[jlewis@smlcland.org](mailto:jlewis@smlcland.org)

Wendy Pellerito

Office Manager

[wpellerito@smlcland.org](mailto:wpellerito@smlcland.org)

Scott Tyrrell

Stewardship Coordinator

[styrrrell@smlcland.org](mailto:styrrrell@smlcland.org)

### Our Mission

The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy conserves natural land and open space - including forests, wetlands, meadows, agricultural lands, and places of scenic beauty - to provide habitat for wildlife and to enrich the lives of people.

### Greetings.

A lot has been happening in SMLC's world this past year. See page 1 for information about SMLC's NEW Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve, 100 acres located in the heart of the Superior Greenway that has all of us pretty excited.

Please see page 3 for how you can help fund that purchase with a donation to the **Superior Greenway Expansion Project** – project gifts made by year-end will be matched by The Carls Foundation – so you can support a great project and double your gift at the same time!

### The Superior Greenway

is the theme of this *Landmarks* issue. More than 2,000 acres have been protected in the Greenway, a pretty stunning number when you consider that its location is in the midst of a heavily urbanized region. This issue focuses on the small things that make the Greenway a special place – from fragile spiders to our connection to place.

The Superior Greenway is a fabulous testament to the power of people and groups working together. The Greenway Partners: SMLC, the City of Ann Arbor, Superior Township, and Washtenaw County all worked

together protecting lands in the Greenway separately and together. The vision came from SMLC founder, Jack R. Smiley, but everyone else bought in and as the dream manifested, coalesced to make the Greenway a powerful model for other similar projects.

In fact, one outcome of SMLC's new Conservation Plan is creating that same kind of land-to-land connectivity on a large scale elsewhere in southeast Michigan. SMLC's board adopted our first-ever Strategic Plan and Conservation Plan this past July. Although the plans are internal resources, we have shared them with the funders who contributed to SMLC's planning process and with the funders we are

garnering contributions from today. This is but one example of how SMLC will share information from the plans with our partners and stakeholders – the plans help SMLC communicate our vision, direction and short-term goals.

SMLC is able to do this great work because of your support. If you haven't already, **please make your gift to SMLC today** – your gift will count towards SMLC's "We Care" campaign and support our annual operations.

Thank You.

Jill



Photo by Charles Scott

# Superior Greenway Expansion Project: Fundraising for Our Future

By Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

If you are new to SMLC you might not know about our recent major land acquisition. See page 1 for the story behind this 100-acre purchase. The new **Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve** located in Superior Township is getting a lot of our attention this year and for good reason. This preserve is special already and we want to keep it that way.

**The Superior Greenway Expansion Project** is raising \$300,000 to pay back the loans some of our members gave us for the purchase. The funds raised will also reimburse SMLC for our project costs and pay for future stewardship projects at this preserve and other SMLC protected sites.

**The Carls Foundation** has already signed up to help by awarding SMLC a challenge grant: for every dollar up to \$75,000 that we raise for this project by December 31st -- gifts from local contributors like you -- the Foundation will match those dollar-for-dollar. That means SMLC could raise \$150,000 or half of our project goal by year-end.

Your gift will maintain beautiful scenic views, improve local air and water quality, and give animals a place to call home. The fact that you can do all this while doubling your gift at the same time makes a lot of sense. **Please help** by making your donation today – see the form on the back page or visit [www.smlcland.org](http://www.smlcland.org) to make an online donation.



Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve. Photo by Charles Scott

## Greenway Grows

*Continued From Page 1*

Woods Nature Preserve. This should attract birds such as Sandhill Cranes, Sora and Marsh Wrens, while also providing a home for wildlife ranging from mink to eight species of frogs. What is particularly unique about this property is that early surveyor notes indicate that it was historically a tamarack swamp. All of the tamarack trees were since cut down, as evidenced by the tamarack rafters in the Conservancy's barn. If possible, it would be wonderful to return this vanished habitat type to the Superior Greenway.

Nice topographical features and historical significance were also prime considerations. The Michigan Archaeological Atlas (1931) indicates that a Native American trail traversed the area, running parallel to present-day Prospect Road. SMLC

plans to emulate this historic trail by establishing the Superior Greenway Nature Trail as the main north-south trail through the site. This trail will connect to the Conservancy Farm, the County's Meyer Preserve and the LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve, yielding 720 acres which will be open to the public for hiking, bird watching and nature study. Several miles of nature trails will offer some of the best wildlife viewing and public hiking opportunities in the region.

SMLC is truly fortunate to have been able to acquire this key property. This is a wonderful property which will serve as a tremendous legacy of our collective efforts to protect land for the benefit of wildlife and people.

# More Superior Greenway News

## Landscape Level Conservation and Species Sustainability

By David Clipner, Leslie Science and Nature Center's Chief Naturalist

Autumn is taking over and I find myself dreaming of cider and donuts, rustling leaves and wearing my favorite sweaters. As is true with many people, I will be visiting all of my favorite nature areas to watch them change and prepare for the winter. In doing so, I am actually fortunate enough to say I am simply doing my job.

I am the Wildlife Curator and Chief Naturalist at the Leslie Science and Nature Center (LSNC) in Ann Arbor; just a few short miles from SMLC's Superior Greenway as a crow flies. LSNC is a nonprofit organization providing science-based education to all ages and I wear many hats at the center. One of those includes ensuring that our staff is kept up to date with the latest scientific research status of current environmental issues. This includes local conservation efforts such as the SMLC Superior Greenway.

One of the easiest ways to educate our staff is to take them to a nature preserve and simply let the natural world itself woo them. In my opinion, SMLC provides some of the most awe-inspiring scenes I could ask for. Whether it is taking our naturalists to witness wild Short-eared owls for professional development, or bringing budding college science students out to listen to wood frogs, SMLC nature preserves make my job easier.

Within the scientific community, growing gaps in habitat ranges and subsequent decreasing population concentrations make it difficult to do meaningful research. In fact, as species disappear from their historic ranges, researchers are increasingly being forced to write about the lack of available habitat

and gaps between those areas rather than the actual populations they intended to study. To reverse this trend, it is imperative that conservation work occur at a larger landscape level that re-establishes critical connectivity between habitats. The Superior

Greenway is an example of a place that still has the scale to allow ecosystems to function relatively well.

Too often, while trying to save the world one place at a time, we may not realize some of the amazing ways we are impacting other groups in the community who have very similar missions. At LSNC, I see the importance of having good quality, diverse habitat every day and the connection between the work that both LSNC

and SMLC do. And so, I take this opportunity to applaud SMLC's efforts and thank you, the reader, because by supporting land conservation you are taking an active role in protecting our natural heritage. While I have many favorite natural areas to visit, I am sure much of my time this fall will be spent meandering through conservancy protected land and I hope to see you out there!



David shows folks a garter snake at the 2012 SMLC Annual Picnic at the Farm; one of many species that benefit from relatively large, connected habitats like those found in the surrounding nature preserves.

Photo by Jim Robertson

### Nature Preserves in the Superior Greenway

- Cherry Hill Nature Preserve (Superior Township)
- The Conservancy Farm (SMLC)
- Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve (SMLC)
- Kosch-Headwaters Preserve (Washtenaw County)
- LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve (SMLC)
- Meyer Preserve (Washtenaw County)
- Springhill Nature Preserve (SMLC)

\*all preserves are open to the public daily from dawn to dusk

## Big Green Big Year (BGBY)

By Andy Dettling

BGBY, what is that? BGBY is a challenge to see as many species of birds as you can in one year without using fossil fuel. This year I decided to do a BGBY in Superior Township, Washtenaw County. Superior Township is a great location for a BGBY, as many roads are not heavily traveled by cars, making it safer for bicyclists. Each species uses a different type of habitat and that has caused me to comb over the Township map in search of places I'm more likely to find

uncommon birds. Some of the best habitat in the Township is open space now protected by SMLC and Washtenaw County.

In January, at the County's Kosch-Headwaters Preserve, I was shocked to hear and see a Pileated Woodpecker. This past winter was fantastic for state endangered Short-eared owls at the Brookside Farm Easement, with up to 7 owls visible at the same time.



A Pileated Woodpecker is one of the 186 species Andy Dettling has spotted so far in Superior Township during his Big Green Big Year.

Photo by Lillian Stokes

The Conservancy Farm was host to Meadowlark, Bobolink and great views of a Grasshopper Sparrow.

In the early spring LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve had large numbers of Rusty Blackbirds, a bird species that is in decline. In May, LeFurge Woods had a very cooperative Sedge Wren, Clay-colored Sparrow and many Orchard Orioles, likely breeding. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo at the Township's Schroeter Park was a June treat. The Township's Cherry Hill Nature Preserve provided migratory stopover habitat for 23 species of warblers this spring and fall,

including an elusive Connecticut Warbler.

As of September 26<sup>th</sup>, I have ridden my bike more than 1,200 miles in search of birds in Superior Township. I currently have seen 186 species of birds and I hope to add four or more species by the end of the year. The work that SMLC has done to preserve habitat is crucial for all the birds that I have seen this year. Thank you SMLC.



L to R: Stephen Kelley-MNA President, Jill Lewis- SMLC Executive Director, Paul Steiner-MNA Operations Director, Hal Newnan-Edna Newnan's son, Garret Johnson- MNA Executive Director, Katherine Hollins-MNA Regional Stewardship Organizer.

Photo by Jim Bloch

## Preserve Dedication

In June, the Michigan Nature Association (MNA) hosted a dedication of the **Edna S. Newnan Nature Sanctuary** and unveiled the new preserve sign. The sign shows that MNA accepted donation of the land and that SMLC is the conservation easement holder. The property is located in Wales Township, St. Clair County near I-69. However, shortly after exiting the freeway, the visitor is transported into a quiet and beautiful rural setting. SMLC is grateful to have received this donation from Henry Newnan, Edna's son, and we look forward to our new relationship with MNA.

# SMLC Stewardship News

by Scott Tyrrell, Stewardship Coordinator

In addition to constructing a new foot bridge and boardwalk (see article on page 7) volunteers accomplished many things needed for SMLC to be a good steward of the land we care for. Here are some highlights:

This spring, SMLC hosted 13 garlic mustard pull and search party events. Volunteers gave 124 hours to pull 77 bags (a little over a ton!) of this troublesome invader, and it's millions of seeds, out of our nature preserves. Special thanks to **Madonna University's Ecological Volunteer Organization** for coming out again to the Bell Creek Nature Preserve in Livonia and to **Smith Group-JJR** for helping out at Washtenaw County-owned Kosch-Headwaters Preserve near Ann Arbor.

The hot summer temperatures this year may have slowed grass at the Conservancy Farm but not the weeds - or our volunteers. **Carla Bisaro** kept decorative gardens around the farmhouse alive and looking great while **Ellen Molony** did a terrific job keeping the lawn neatly trimmed. Ellen also did a truly awesome job cleaning and maintaining the woodwork in the farmhouse. Volunteers **Jack Smiley** at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve, and **Jon Taylor** at Morris-Reichert Nature Preserve kept the trails mowed and accessible to all.

As the weather cooled, many volunteers have been coming out to control invasive phragmites reeds in SMLC wetlands and invasive shrubs



22 volunteers from the University of Michigan Indian American Student Association came out in October to remove invasive buckthorn from a meadow at the Conservancy Farm.

Photo by Scott Tyrrell

such as buckthorn in the meadow areas. Special thanks to **Henry Ford Community College Student Environmental Association**, **U of M Circle-K** student volunteer organization and **U of M Indian American Student Association**. We got tons of work done thanks to you!

**Marilyn Gilbert**, **Marjorie Pasqualle**, **Nancie Loppnow** and **Steven Miller** helped get the word out about SMLC by hosting an outreach table at various fairs and events around the region.

And extra special thanks goes to **Ellen Molony**, **Bryan Garrow** and SMLC Volunteer of the Year **Chris Fielding** for all the extra help with maintenance tasks needed around the farm and out on the preserves this year. You are truly awesome for working so hard to keep SMLC going. **Thank you all!**

## Filing Project

Twenty-four years of paperwork, promotional materials, and legal documents is a lot of paper to sort through! But that's what Jill Lewis's mom, Mary Charron, did from April – September this year. Mary gave 94 hours of volunteer time on "the Filing Project". She created physical file structures following the staff's outlines. She then re-filed SMLC's property and easement files, and fundraising files into their new home. She also spent time on our marketing



and Executive Director office files. SMLC is very grateful for her service and the board honored her recently with a resolution: *The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy Board of Directors wishes to express our sincere gratitude to you for contributing 94 hours of volunteer service toward establishing a new recordkeeping system for the organization. Because of your dedication to this project over the past year, our ability to carry out the mission will be enhanced well into the future. Thanks Mary!*

# Trail Improved Thanks to REI and Volunteers

by Scott Tyrrell, Stewardship Coordinator

Visitors to LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve now have a terrific new bridge and boardwalk to ease hiking along a typically wet portion of the hiking trail on the north end of the preserve. This is due to a generous grant from outdoor retailer REI and help from 54 volunteers over the spring and summer months.

Located near the Vreeland Road trail head, the bridge project started in May with construction of a 20-foot span to cross a stream that runs through the preserve. The new structure replaces an old one that became dilapidated and unusable. Just a few steps south of the bridge, the 80-foot long boardwalk crosses a swale that, at times, can have up to 6 inches of standing water. Both structures are wheel chair accessible and have been built to provide many, many years of service.

A big thank you goes to REI for awarding a grant to SMLC and promoting the project in their stores, emails and newsletters. We got quite a few new volunteers through their

outreach in addition to SMLC's efforts. And of course, many thanks to all the volunteers who braved the extraordinary heat this summer and made the project happen. Because of this terrific combined effort, both of these amenities will be enjoyed by preserve visitors for a long time to come.



Volunteers secure the boardwalk deck at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve in July.  
Photo by Scott Tyrrell

## SMLC Celebrates Legacy and Generosity

by Jill A. Lewis, Executive Director

At the annual **Picnic at the Farm** this past September, SMLC acknowledged two important people with honorary awards:

**Bill Secrest** received the **Jack R. Smiley Legacy Award** for his many years of vocalized passion for local land conservation, his vision to startup the Superior Land Conservancy (SLC) chapter of SMLC, and for his organizational leadership. Bill is the co-chair of SLC and has been an SMLC board director for the past 20 years. He is also a proponent of conserving land in your backyard, especially in Superior Township where he resides. Jack Smiley, SMLC's Founder, states, "Bill Secrest has been the heart and soul of SMLC's work in Superior Township. His inspiration and dedication have truly been the hallmarks of our success in protecting land for the benefit of people and wildlife." **Congratulations Bill!**

Long-time volunteer and handyman extraordinaire, **Chris Fielding**, received a long-overdue, **SMLC Volunteer of the Year Award**. Chris has been volunteering with SMLC for many years. He is someone the staff can count on to do a variety of important and mundane tasks. He has posted preserve signs, fixed warped walls on old farm outbuildings, repaired antique furniture, hung plastic to winterize the farmhouse windows, and many more tasks. All of this greatly helps the small busy staff stay on target with their own workloads. "Chris's versatility and willingness to help out wherever we've needed him has been invaluable to the organization through the years," says Scott Tyrrell, SMLC Volunteer Coordinator. **Thank You So Much, Chris!**



## Local Chapter News

### Superior Land Conservancy

*By Brenda Baker, SLC Co-Chair*

2012 has been another busy year for the Superior Land Conservancy Chapter, and we're not done yet.

In February, the local chapter helped SMLC with refreshments for the Winter Walkabout. As winter turned to spring, we assisted SMLC working with Friends of the Rouge and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation at two stewardship events at the County's Kosch-Headwaters Preserve.

We hosted the annual Spring has Sprung at Springhill nature walk at Springhill Nature Preserve in early May. With the unusually warm winter, spring had already sprung for many of the forest wildflowers; but walkers were treated to Sandhill Cranes, Swallowtail butterflies, Crayfish, and more.

The weather also nixed our plans to plant native prairie plants in the Pollinator Meadow at Kosch-Headwaters—the dry ground was just too hard! Happily, County Naturalist Shawn Severance was on hand to share her knowledge, and frequent photo



Hiking through the Springhill Nature Preserve forest at the 2012 Autumn Spectacular Nature Walk. Photo by Stephen Cook

contributor Charles Scott was able to experiment with techniques for photographing insects and bugs.

Just as spring turned to summer, SLC participated in our first fair of the year—the Superior Township Green Fair. It was also time to begin compiling our summer newsletter. In August, SLC again participated in the Dixboro Fair in Dixboro (an unincorporated village within Superior Township), followed two weeks later by the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival (3 days) in Ypsilanti. A total of 25 people volunteered, in two-hour shifts, to staff our table/booth at the three fairs. Thank you!

Our final event in 2012 was the Autumn Spectacular nature walk at Springhill Nature Preserve in October.

Behind the scenes, SLC has been assisting SMLC with fundraising associated with acquisition of the Jack R. Smiley Nature Preserve, and working on our Chapter renewal letter to go out in November (please renew!).

### Monroe County Land Conservancy

*By Peter Fales, MCLC Chair*

Things have moved quickly on the Academy Preserve project in Monroe and there have been some important changes. After completing all of the steps required by the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, the Friends of the Academy Preserve (which includes members of the Monroe County Land Conservancy) were ready to meet with the IHM Sisters to negotiate the sale of the 127-acre parcel along the Raisin River in the City of Monroe. Unfortunately for the Friends, the IHM Sisters chose to sell to La-Z-Boy Incorporated, a hometown national corporation, instead.

The Friends of the Academy Preserve were not deterred and were able to communicate quickly with La-Z-Boy and the Trust Fund regarding the original plans for the site and their hopes to still preserve some of that site. La-Z-Boy and the Friends of the Academy Preserve along with Monroe County are now focusing on protecting a 40 acre parcel that includes oak savannah, part of the original site. This parcel would be owned by the County with a conservation easement held by the Friends of the Academy Preserve.

# Conservation Profiles

## Richard Kent

By Dennis Rymarz

As a park planner with the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation department since 1998, Richard Kent—Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC) board member (for 10 years) and SMLC Land Protection Committee chair—has extensive experience regarding land.

“If you know anything about landscape architecture,” said Richard, “the profession is about stewardship of the land, and it just seemed like a good fit between my work and this organization.”

Richard’s job for Washtenaw County includes reviewing land that the County is considering for purchase, and setting up the appropriate appraisals and surveys. If the County ultimately buys the land, Richard supervises the subsequent development. In addition, he works on the five-year plan for the County’s parks.

Born in Canada, Richard received an undergraduate degree in biological science from the University of Windsor, as well as graduate degrees in landscape architecture from the University of Guelph (MLA) and the University of Michigan (PhD). After teaching at the University of Connecticut, Richard moved to Livonia and soon after joined the SMLC.

“I like the people, and I think the projects we’ve done have been interesting,” he said. “I live in the area, and I figure this is a way I can have some input and make an impact. You know, I think what we’ve been doing is important; we’ve been adding land on a continuous basis, and it keeps building up.”

“Now I’m actually one of the old-timers on the board, and I feel people sort of look to me for my expertise and value my opinions. I like giving my opinion.” He laughed. “Some places I give my opinion, they don’t care. They seem to care at SMLC.”

He said he’s seen many changes over the years, including new board members, the purchase of the Conservancy Farm, and going from a completely volunteer organization to one with a full-time

Executive Director.

“It’s really matured and become more professional than it was initially,” he said. “Initially, it was all volunteers.”

“My favorite project is definitely the Kosch-Headwaters Preserve. It is a good conservation project and a great example of collaboration between the County and SMLC. Other projects are often hard to get going but, with SMLC’s help, the County was able to purchase this 160 acre property without a hitch. It’s connected to SMLC’s

Springhill Nature Preserve and is a big part of the Superior Greenway. It is a beautiful property with a nice mix of land types and trails and it’s a great place to visit. People can enjoy it even just driving by.”

When asked about the SMLC’s future, Richard said, “I think the future is good. I mean, we just went through a bunch of planning exercises, and we have more concrete goals than we had before. We’d like to build on our success, and we have a model there that we can build on. The organization is not going away, that’s for sure. There’s lots of work to do.”



Richard Kent, at left, relaxes with fellow SMLC board member Bill Secret during the Annual Picnic at the Farm in 2008.

Photo by Jim Weiner

# Canned Beets Anyone?

By Wendy Pellerito,  
Office Manager and staff Garden Coordinator

This is not your typical grocery store canned beets. The idea here is to take any tin can, remove the top and the bottom, and sink it into the soil leaving at least two inches above the soil. This makes a cheap effective collar around the beet plant preventing the notorious cut worm from lopping off your seedling at the soil level. Who hasn't experienced that tragedy a few times in the gardening endeavors? Argh! One of the gardeners here at the Organic Community Garden tried this technique in her plot this year with great success and she also discovered that little furry critters with 4 legs did not mess with her beets either. Oh the joy of discovering these little gems of ideas to help save the crops. It beets, I mean, *beats* losing a great tasty vegetable to an unwelcomed guest.



Photo by Pat Robertson

## Overheard in the Garden:

“Hello Mr. Robin, please don't eat my worms.”

“I spent the whole winter thinking about how I can do better this year in my garden.”

“I hate that my weeds grow faster than my vegetable plants.”



# Scenes from the annual Picnic



Volunteer of the Year Chris Fielding holds his award with SMLC president Jim Weiner (l) and Volunteer Coordinator Scott Tyrrell (r).

Photo by Jim Robertson

The Annual Picnic at the Farm this past September was very enjoyable. More than 70 people came out to share homemade food, fun activities and the farm's rural atmosphere. Everyone caught up with friends and SMLC's latest news, and some contributed ideas for SMLC's slogan. 22 volunteers and SMLC's staff helped make this event special for everyone.



Wendy shows off raffle baskets.

Photo by Jim Robertson

Highlights: SMLC celebrated three honorary awards (see page 7 for more information); a large group of kids were regaled by volunteers, **Shawn Severance**, **Rick Simek** and **Jennie Williams**, as they hunted for insects and specific plants in the fields; and David Clipner, Wildlife Curator - Leslie Science and Nature Center, entertained the crowd by showcasing spiders, a giant cockroach, and native southeast Michigan animals.

Shawn Severance (r) talks with a young picnicker and budding naturalist about the monarch butterfly caterpillar they found on the leaf of its favorite plant: milkweed.



Photo by Jim Robertson

# Wildlife Sightings

## The Black and Yellow Garden Orb-weaver

By David Clipner, Leslie Science and Nature Center's Chief Naturalist

It has been my experience that the wildlife that gets the most attention are those species labeled “endangered”. However, rather than focus on endangered species, I tend to teach about endangered habitats. So join me in celebrating a “common” species, *Argiope aurantia* (the black-and-yellow Garden Orb-weaver). Although this species is not threatened, I have been seeing an increase in the presence of these spiders around homes and other urban settings over the last few years - a possible indicator that their natural habitats are being reduced causing them to find homes elsewhere.

Orb-weavers pose no threat to humans, however, if you do spot one it is not likely you will forget it. Their abdomens have a contrasting black and yellow pattern on the dorsal (back) side. Females can grow over an inch in body length and their size doubles if you include their long striped legs. Their common name is taken from the round shape of a typical web. In addition, it has a very distinctive web characteristic called a stabilimenta. This vertical zigzagging silk construction causes some debate amongst arachnologists as to its purpose but all agree it is very striking.

A female produces up to three egg sacs a year – each of which can hold nearly 1,400 eggs! About 97% (according to one study) of the egg sacs produced, however, are damaged by birds, parasitic insects and other predation. I often like to point out that the reason certain animals produce so many offspring is to help off-set these natural challenges and *A. aurantia* is a prime example.

This species is famous for its ability to capture a wide variety of prey including mosquitoes, wasps, grasshoppers, cicadas and even dragonflies. This makes the *A. aurantia* perfect for agricultural pest control and keeping a chemical-free home garden.

A fact closer to home is that this species can be found in nearly all of the habitats protected by



The Garden Orb-weaver, with its distinctive web can be found in open sunny areas of many SMLC nature preserves. Their declining numbers may be due to habitat loss. Photo by Deisy Mendoza

SMLC and I never get tired of finding them. They love sunny spots with tall grasses and if you find one, keep looking, as they often are found in clusters. Like most spiders, these are considered harmless to humans and I handle them regularly. They even assist me in keeping vegetables in my garden pest free.

I am continually looking for ways to instill an appreciation for spiders by offering public programming that dispels myths and by fostering admiration for them. By far, I find the most effective way has been to highlight their insect population control abilities. For some reason, people are not fans of mosquitoes and these guys do a lot to control them. So I invite you to help me as I attempt to transform fear into respect and excitement for these unsung heroes of the natural world. Let's keep this common species common!

### Get Email Updates from SMLC

Don't miss out on the latest Conservancy news, events, and announcements. If your address has changed, be sure to let us know that, too. Send an email to Wendy: [wpellerito@smlcland.org](mailto:wpellerito@smlcland.org)

**YES! I want to help preserve critical natural habitat in southeast Michigan by supporting Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy.**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Gift

Check here to let SMLC use my gift where it is needed most.

**Or, direct my donation:**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ General Fund

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Monroe County Fund

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Land Protection Fund

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Superior Township Fund

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Superior Greenway Expansion Project**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Stewardship Endowment Fund

Please make checks payable to Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy and mail to:

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8383 Vreeland Rd.  
Superior Township, MI 48198**

Or, make a secure online credit card donation at [www.smlcland.org](http://www.smlcland.org)

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All donations are tax deductible to the extent provided by law. The donor received no goods or services in exchange for this donation. E-mail used only for SMLC news/announcements. We will never give or sell your personal information to any other group.

## Wish List

Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy could use the following items:

- modern commercial **lawn mower** in good working order for mowing preserve trails (retail cost \$10,000)
- Sturdy good quality **office desk** (solid wood or metal) please call office first. (retail cost \$400)
- heavy duty **gas powered weed trimmer** with straight shaft for brush blade (retail cost \$140)
- **Keurig "K-Cup" coffee maker** for SMLC events, newer (retail cost \$150)
- long handled **spades and rakes** for the Garden program (retail cost \$25 each)
- quality **leather gloves** (retail cost \$6 each)
- **bottled water** for thirsty volunteers.

Please contact Scott or Wendy at the SMLC office if you would like to make our wishes come true!

**(734) 484-6565**  
[styrrell@smlcland.org](mailto:styrrell@smlcland.org)  
[wpellerito@smlcland.org](mailto:wpellerito@smlcland.org)

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**Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy**  
8383 Vreeland Rd  
Superior Township, MI 48198

