

# Lake Erie Islands Chapter Black Swamp Conservancy



Winter 2004

## North Bass Island--Isle of St. George

by Debbie Woischke

North Bass Island is the northernmost island in U.S. waters of the 20-some islands in the Lake Erie western basin archipelago. At 677 acres, it is third in size behind Kelleys and South Bass. It is the only remaining large island that is relatively undeveloped and the only large island without ferry service. Although much of the island was cleared of its original vegetation and has been covered in vineyards and actively producing grapes for wine-making until very recently, there are many significant natural features on North Bass.

Interesting geologic features such as glacial grooves and striations can be seen in Manila Bay, and boulder-sized glacial erratics are strewn along the shoreline in various places around the island. Glacial erratics are rocks that were left behind by the glacier during the last ice age, about 12,000 to 14,000 years ago. How do we know the glacier left them behind? They are made of materials that are not found lo-

cally but are found further north in Canada. As the glacier advanced southward from Canada it picked up boulders and transported them along on its underside. When the glacier began to melt and recede northward, some of these boulders were left behind as remnants. The bedrock of the Bass Islands is composed of dolomite, a gray sedimentary rock. Many of the erratics are composed of granite and are flecked with pink, red, white and black.

There are several species of rare aquatic, wetland and beach plants known from North Bass. Richardson's pondweed is a rare aquatic plant that has been found along the south and southeast shore. It has become more common in the last ten years due to increasing water clarity in Lake Erie which is due to the incredible filtering capacity of the invasive zebra mussel. The zebra mussel filters out plankton (its food) from the water column which allows sunlight to penetrate down to greater depths. In shallower areas where sunlight reaches

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Lake Erie Islands Chapter  
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the bottom, aquatic plants have been able to regain a foothold. Richardson's pondweed has really benefited from this situation.

One of the rarest aquatic plants, filiform pondweed, was last recorded in Manila Bay in 1970. In fact it is now considered extirpated from Ohio because it hasn't been found anywhere in the state since then. While Richardson's pondweed has broader and fewer leaves, the filiform pondweed has many very narrow leaves that are linear or thread-like, so it is very aptly named. A third rare aquatic plant is American water-milfoil. It hasn't been recorded from North Bass since 1965 where it was seen in the area of Honey Point. It too has very thin, thread-like leaves. They are arranged in whorls around the stem. Under water, the fine leaves look very feathery. It also has an emerged spike of flowers.

Although increased water clarity may be helping some of the rare aquatic plants become reestablished, it is also helping the enemy - introduced invasive aquatic plants such as the Eurasian water milfoil, which looks very much like the native American Water-milfoil, and curly pondweed, which is related to Richardson's pondweed. These plants are very aggressive and can form dense colonies or monocultures which out compete the native species, reduces biological diversity and is undesirable to wildlife.

Moving onshore now, a rare wetland plant last recorded on North Bass in 1974 is wapato. It was seen in the wet mud of a pool behind the gravel beach on the south shore of the island. Although its leaves are very vari-

able in width, they resemble large arrowheads. The three-petaled flowers are white. There are other related species with which it is easily confused, and flowering or fruiting parts of the plant are needed for positive identification. It is also called arrowhead or duck potato in other parts of its range.

Rare beach plants last recorded from North Bass in the 1960s include the inland sea rocket, seaside spurge and purple sand grass. They were all found on a sandy beach in the vicinity of Honey Point. These are sun-



loving plants that grow in the dry, dune or upper beach area along the shore. The inland sea rocket is a succulent, meaning it has thick or fleshy leaves. As a member of the mustard family, its flowers have four petals and are white to pale purple. Purple sand grass is exactly what its name implies - a purple-colored grass that grows in the sand. It is very distinctive and unlikely to be confused with anything else on the beach. The seaside spurge grows prostrate or flat against the ground. Because of this it is also called seaside sandmat in other parts of its range. Contact with the sap of this plant may cause a dermatitis similar to that of poison ivy. Habitat loss is the biggest threat to all three of these species.

Perhaps the most interesting and un-

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usual rare plant record from North Bass is that of the prairie fringed orchid. A single plant of this state and federal threatened species was first recorded in 1980 from a grassy area near a barn on the southwest side of the island, but it was never seen again. It prefers moist grassy areas that make good agricultural sites. However, it will disappear if the area becomes too overgrown, which may have been the case on North Bass. Population numbers are erratic from year to year for this tall, conspicuous plant with creamy white flowers. Habitat loss, over collection and casual picking are its main threats.

Other rare plants recorded from North Bass include clasping-leaved dogbane, wheat sedge, Canada milk-vetch and butternut. However, the interesting rarities on North Bass are not limited to just plants! The ubiquitous



Lake Erie water snake can be found along the shoreline, of course. Other interesting and uncommon reptiles include the eastern fox snake, the melanistic form of the garter snake and Blanding's turtle. All of these species were recorded in or near Fox's Marsh.

Moving back offshore into the waters around Honey Point, there are records for a small fish, the channel darter, and five mollusks including the threehorn wartyback, rayed bean, eastern pondmussel, fawnsfoot

and purple wartyback.

In 2004, the Ohio Department of



Natural Resources purchased 589 acres of North Bass vineyards from Paramount Distillers, owners of the Meier's Wine Cellars. This amounts to about 87% of the island. The Divisions of Parks and Recreation and Wildlife will each manage a portion of the

acreage. Although most of the vineyards are being torn out, a small number of acres will remain active, at least for the immediate future. Firelands Wine Company is leasing these vineyards from the State.

The grapes being removed are no longer highly sought after for wine-making. If they are left in place and unattended, they could become diseased and the disease could spread to the grapes still being tended. The ODNR property on the island will eventually be open for low impact uses such as bicycling, bird watching, hiking, fishing and swimming.

In 1994, the ODNR Division of Wildlife acquired 4.7 acres on the southeast tip of the island, now known as Honey Point Wildlife Area.

## ***GREAT STOCKING STUFFERS!***

The LIEC/BSC has been offered a fund raising opportunity. The Cleveland Lodge of the International Ship Masters' Association is raffling off a Trip for 4 adults aboard an Interlake Steamship Company Steamship to be taken during the 2005 season (includes \$250 toward transportation expenses.) Winner must be flexible concerning scheduling and port of departure/return and able to climb ladders and stairs. Tickets are \$10 each and the drawing is April 7, 2005. We have been offered \$3 for each ticket that we can sell. Tickets can be purchased at Tony's on South Bass Island or by calling 419-285-5811. The second prize is \$100 and the third and fourth prizes are \$50 each.



## ***Welcome New Members!***

### *Friends*

Cheri Everson  
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John Baker

## **Lake Erie Water Snake Conservation Agreements**

We still have grant funds available from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife to pay for costs associated with setting up donated conservation agreements on private property to protect habitat for the Lake Erie water snake. These funds would cover typical costs of an agreement, such as a survey, appraisal, legal fees, etc. The donation of an agreement is tax deductible. A conservation agreement is a restriction that a landowner can voluntarily place on their property. A landowner keeps the title and there is no public access. Our first conservation agreement on the Lake Erie Islands should be completed by the end of the year! If you own lake front property and think you might be interested, please call us at 419-285-5811 or e-mail at leic\_bsc@ cros.net for more details.



## **WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER VALERIE METTLER!!**

Put-in-Bay resident Valerie Mettler joined our Board at the Annual Meeting held at the Middle Bass Town Hall October 3. We are pleased to have Valerie join us as she brings lots of experience and knowledge of environmental issues. Valerie organized Earth Day celebrations while teaching at Put-in-Bay Local, attended the Ohio Environmental Council's Lobby Day for many years, and more recently volunteered for LEIC-BSC's Nature Camp at the Bay and Middle Bass Nature Camp. Valerie worked for the Village Board of Public Affairs for 17 years. We look forward to working with Valerie!



## **Welcome Back Carin Starr!**

Carin Starr has been appointed the new Black Swamp Conservancy director. Some of you may have met Carin when as President of the Black Swamp Conservancy, she visited the island with director Dan Riedell in 1998. They gave presentations on Middle Bass and South Bass about the advantages of having a land trust or conservancy in our community. We look forward to working with Carin again!

# Petersen Woods Dedicated at Fourth Annual Meeting

by Debbie Woischke

In a roadside ceremony on a beautiful October 3<sup>rd</sup> afternoon, the Lake Erie Islands Chapter-Black Swamp Conservancy (LEIC-BSC) dedicated its first parcel, Petersen Woods, on Middle Bass Island. The one and a half acre site on Deist Road was acquired last winter from Pete and Carla Petersen with funds from the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, the ODNR Division of Wildlife and The Nature Conservancy. Lisa Brohl, LEIC-BSC chairperson, began the event by welcoming everyone, acknowledging various supporters of the project and introducing special guests in attendance. And as if on cue, a beautiful adult bald eagle graced us with a fly-by, which seemed to be a perfect seal of approval on the days activities.

Pete Petersen IV, with wife Carla at his side, spoke with emotion about what the property meant to him and his family through the many years they enjoyed it. The parcel had been in the Petersen family since the 1920's when Pete's grandfather bought it. When high water washed out the family cottage in the



1970s and they could not rebuild, they decided in the end that the best thing to do with the property was to sell it to LEIC-BSC so it would be protected in a natural state. In this

way, they will always be able to visit Middle Bass and enjoy their woods, as will so many other people.

John Ritzenthaler, Director of the Ohio Important Bird Area (IBA) Program and Director of Habitat Conservation for Audubon Ohio, spoke next about the importance of the Lake Erie Western Basin as an IBA. IBAs are areas that are important to birds for various reasons. Petersen Woods, for example, is an important piece of the Bass Island IBA puzzle in that it provides important migratory stopover habitat where birds can find food and a place to rest as they move through the region in both spring and fall. The woods also provide roosting habitat for the bald eagles that nest across the street, and nesting habitat for resident songbirds. Mr. Ritzenthaler presented LEIC-BSC with an IBA sign which has since been erected at the site.

The next speaker was Marleen Kromer, Director of Conservation Programs - Lake Erie Region, from The Nature Conservancy. She spoke about the work of her organization and the importance of providing support through partnerships with other groups, such as with LEIC-BSC on the Petersen Woods project. She also said she looks forward to working with the LEIC-BSC on future endeavors.

After some closing remarks and announcements by Lisa, everyone gathered in front of the covered sign. Mr. and Mrs. Petersen had the honor of unveiling it, after which many poses were struck and pictures taken. The group then walked down the road to observe Kuehnle Wildlife Area and the bald eagle nest, still somewhat obscured by the leaves on the trees.

Guests were invited to the town hall to enjoy a delicious variety of refreshments, followed by a short board meeting. A financial report was given and current and recent projects were

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briefly mentioned. Two-year terms were extended for board members John Ladd, Bob Russell and Lianne Genzman, and Valerie Mettler was nominated and added as the seventh board member. Our display was set up and copies of our most recent newsletter and brochures were available.

Special thanks go out to LEIC-BSC board member Carol Richardson for arranging the wonderful refreshments, sending out invitations, reserving and decorating the town hall, arranging the sign, and transporting guests; LEIC-BSC chairperson and life members Lisa and Russ Brohl for transportation; and Kenny Geiger for installing the sign. We would also like to thank Gino Barna for representing the ODNR Division of Wildlife, Marleen Kromer and Kay Carlson for representing The Nature Conservancy, and John Ritzenthaler for representing Audubon Ohio.

And last but not least, a huge thank you to Pete and Carla Peterson, without whom this day would not have been possible, for having the foresight and selflessness to share their precious "piece of the rock" with us and with future generations of people and wildlife. Their



*Pete and Carla Peterson*

legacy will forever be known and appreciated as Petersen Woods.

Those in attendance: Pete and Carla Petersen; Lisa and Russ Brohl; Bob and Nancy Russell; Kristin Stanford; Valerie Mettler; Carol and Mac Richardson and granddaughter Leah

Bilski; John Ritzenthaler; Kay Carlson; Marleen Kromer; Gino Barna; Jeff Koehler; Amy Newell; Matt Thomas; Betty Evans, Lisa and Jeff Fine, and Debbie Woischke.

***The following is a speech from Pete Petersen IV at the dedication of Petersen Woods on Middle Bass Island on October 3, 2004.***

*When my grandfather, Peter Petersen, Jr., bought property and built the family cottage and camp on the North Shore of Middle Bass Island, I imagine he envisioned a summer place where generations of family could enjoy the quiet and solitude that the island had to offer.*

*When I was six months old, I made my first trip to the island, flying in on Island Airlines' Ford Tri-Motor. As a youth, and into my teen years, I made that trip many times and spent many glorious summers at that cottage with my parents and my grand parents. We boated and fished and I learned to swim in the lake right off the cottage beach. I spent many a lazy summer day wandering the island in a land of make believe, fighting wars and having adventures any American boy would treasure.*

*Sadly, the island began to change. Shortly before my grandfather's death, the lake rose to its highest point in years and our cottage and the boathouse were taken by storms. My father and I talked many times of building a new cottage but couldn't en-*

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vision a structure that could replace the old one on what nature had left of the property. However, I visited again and again, showing first my wife the places of my childhood and then my son's, Dennis and Nick. Nick and I even camped on the



beach a few years back and sat in the lake – up to our necks – and watched a family of ducks swim by us.

Earlier this Summer I took a fare-well flight from Port Clinton in a Ford Tri-Motor and looked out over the lake at the islands. I still have many memories of Middle Bass that I treasure and will share some day with my grandchildren. But the place of their creation - the summer place that my grandfather built is gone. The island has changed even more and so I am please that the Lake Erie Islands Chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy has made it possible to maintain this small portion of the island as a habitat for the plants and animals that make it their home. And my family and I are equally grateful and pleased that you honor our family by naming this area Petersen Woods. I know that my grandparents and my father would be pleased that this small piece of quiet and solitude will remain. Thank you.

**Thank you** to Novella King, at Office Max, for putting our island mailing lists in a data base, to Linda Parker for the great newsletters , Debbie Woischke for her great articles, to Christie Ontko Engel for the donation jar she kept at her *Fresh-water Sensations* shop this summer, to Amy Newell for her help in advertising our programs, to Brad Titcherner, Amy Newell, and Kristin Stanford for their excellent programs for the LEIHS Elderhostel programs this past fall, and to Eddie Sheller at the Middle Bass General Store & Elizabeth Heineman at Tony's for selling freighter raffle tickets.



## *Christmas is for the Birds!*

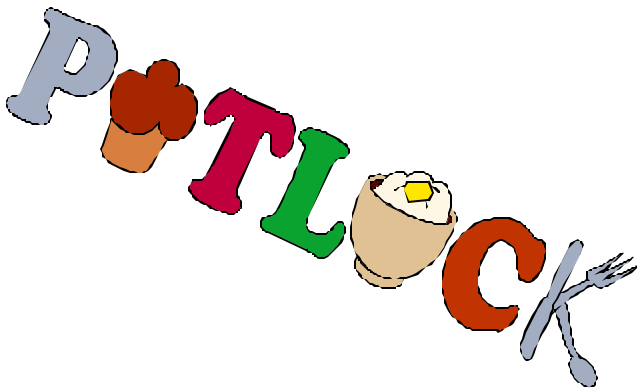
The **Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count** will be held here on South Bass Island on **Sunday, December 19, 2004**. We need volunteers to listen for owls in the early morning, travel the island bird watching during the day, and to watch their feeders. If you are interested in being a feeder watcher, call Joey Wulkowicz at (419)285-2141. If you are interested in bird watching on the island for the day or a portion of it, call Lisa Brohl at (419)285-5811. If you would like to be listed as a participant in the Annual Report of the Christmas Bird Count, there is a \$5 fee. As Joey Wulkowicz has graciously agreed to feed participants lunch, we would like you to RSVP. Recently a snowy owl has been seen at different locations on the island. We hope it sticks around for the count ! Join us to see what shows up this year!



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Mailing Label



The LEIC-BSC Annual Christmas Potluck will be held at the South Bass Island Light House, winter home of Kristin Stanford & Matt Thomas on December 16, 2004, Thursday at 7:00PM. The main dish will be provided but please bring a covered dish and beverage. Please RSVP by calling Kristin at 419-285-2341, or Lisa at 419-285-5811. Join us as we review our past year, and look forward to the next!

