

Michigan Nature Association Columbia Nature Sanctuary



Sanctuary at a Glance:

Location: Jackson County

Size: 40 acres

History: The land was donated to MNA by Mason C. Schafer in 1985.

About MNA:

The Michigan Nature Association is a nonprofit conservation organization working to protect Michigan's rare, threatened and endangered species by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Established in 1952, MNA's members, donors, and volunteers have built a remarkable network of more than 170 nature sanctuaries across the state - the largest network of natural areas established and maintained by a nonprofit conservation organization in Michigan.




Michigan Nature Association

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Photo: Jeff Ganley

Columbia Nature Sanctuary was donated to MNA by Mason C. Schafer in 1985. The sanctuary consists of several marshy areas, an old lake bed and forest. The land wasn't always that way - according to the Michigan Natural Features Inventory historical records, the wet areas were originally surrounded by black oak barrens, but a lack of fire has allowed these areas to transition to closed canopy forest.

Today, Columbia's habitat consists of southern hardwood swamp, emergent marsh and mesic southern forest. Flooding plays a role in the southern hardwood swamp and emergent marsh - standing water typically occurs in swamps during winter and spring, and emergent marshes are subject to frequent or seasonal flooding. The mesic southern forest experiences frequent, small windthrow gaps that allow for the regeneration of the shade-tolerant, canopy species.

In wetland complexes like Columbia southern hardwood swamp is typically associated with a variety of other herb, shrub and forested wetland communities. Upland communities bordering southern hardwood swamps are usually forested, with mesic southern forest as the most common.

More Than 150 Native Plant Species

According to a survey conducted by botanist Harvey Ballard Jr., Columbia has 150 native plant species. Among other plants, Columbia is home to Michigan holly, seven types of bedstraws and various rushes and sedges, including the rare false hop sedge.

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Sedges resemble grasses, but their stems are unjointed and often three-sided. False hop sedge is a coarse, densely tufted perennial that grows from a thick, dark, scaly rootstalk and ranges from 0.5 to just over 1 meters in height. The plant has four to seven leaves, which are smooth and V-shaped when young, and have persistent brownish to reddish basal sheaths.

False hop sedge is considered rare throughout the majority of its wide distribution in North America, ranging from Ontario to Quebec in the north and south to Florida, and growing west to Oklahoma and Texas.

In Michigan, false hop sedge is restricted to the southern Lower Peninsula, from Bay County to Macomb County and extending into Cass County in the southwestern part of the state.

Birding Opportunities

Columbia also offers excellent birding opportunities. The southwest quarter of the sanctuary consists of a wooded swamp and old lake bed which are often used by great blue heron and green heron, swallows, woodpeckers, geese and ducks.



Photo: Jeff Ganley



Photo: Keith Saylor

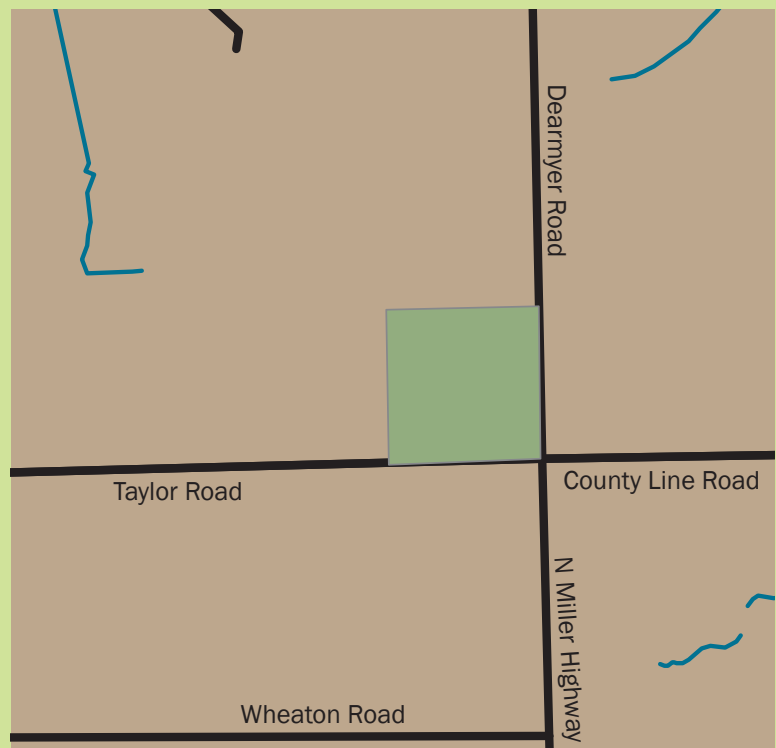
Planning Your Visit:

Columbia is home to roughly 38 nesting species, and the wooded swamp and old lake bed in the southwest quarter are used by great blue and green herons, swallows, woodpeckers, geese, and ducks. Visitors interested in bird watching should visit Columbia in the spring, when many bird species are migrating north and beginning their mating seasons.

Driving Directions

The sanctuary is in Jackson County, east of Cement City, on the corner of Dearmyer and Taylor Road.

For additional information, contact the MNA office at (866) 223-2231.



Sanctuary Map