

May 30, 1989  
Kalamazoo Gazette  
By Sue Christian

# Resurging water level brings marsh birds back to nature preserve

SUE CHRISTIAN  
GAZETTE SPECIAL WRITER

Water levels in the marsh at Kalamazoo's Kleinstuck Preserve are at their highest since a water-supply problem was first noticed there about five years ago.

And, as a result, many birds are returning to the preserve this spring.

Falling water levels had threatened some plant and animal species at the preserve as water in the marsh at the center of the preserve began mysteriously disappearing since about 1984, creating a mud bowl.

Although no formal record of the marsh's water levels has been maintained, the informal word from both researchers and preserve-goers is that the water level has risen.

The city's public utilities department and a graduate student from Western Michigan University have begun investigating the water-level fluctuations.

"There are many things going on that affect the water level — rainfall, pumping from utilities — it's difficult to specify one influence," said Bruce Minsley, utilities deputy director.

The higher water means the re-appearance of many waterfowl and migratory birds to the preserve, said Kalamazoo Nature Center Research Director Ray Adams, who has been studying Kleinstuck for 17 years.

"The return of the water has had a dramatic impact on the birds returning to the site," and even some new species have appeared there, Adams said. "There's no question that the water level is up noticeably from the



A sign welcomes visitors to the Kleinstuck Preserve.

previous two years . . .

"The effect has been that the marsh birds, the group declining most in southwest Michigan, is returning to Kleinstuck."

Wood ducks, mallards, sora ralls, Virginia ralls and pied-billed grebes are among the birds nesting in the preserve.

Marie Burbidge, who has lived at the edge of the preserve since 1960, said for three years she has investigated the loss of water from the marsh.

"I started looking into it because I noticed the disappearance of birds, wildflowers, waterfowl and water," said Burbidge, who walks the preserve's dirt paths daily.

Burbidge contacted the state Department of Natural Resources, the city's public utilities department, state Rep. Mary Brown, Western Michigan University and

the public deeds office about the change.

"The deed specifically says it (the preserve) is to be used for educational purposes," Burbidge said, displaying a copy of the deed, which shows that Caroline Kleinstuck sold the land for \$1 in 1922 to the State Board of Education.

The deed states that the preserve will revert back to the Kleinstuck heirs if it is not used for educational and scientific purposes.

Students are now making efforts to upgrade the preserve, located on Kalamazoo's southwest side.

Hikers will see a small sign, reading "Please Excuse Our Mess," which refers to one of several projects by Students for a Sustainable Earth, an environmental studies group from WMU.

The group's goal is to improve maintenance, education and research at Kleinstuck, said Korie Bachleda, one of the first students involved in SSE.

Students have blocked off trails that were causing erosion and have cleared away other small paths. And they're building a wooden footbridge so that walkers on a milelong trail circling the marsh don't have to try their luck at jumping over a muddy stream.

Further, the group plans to build an outpost overlooking the preserve and a dock into the marsh, Bachleda said.

"We also plan on making a brochure to educate people about the history of Kleinstuck," she said, "to let people know Kleinstuck is the only inner-city preserve in Michigan."

© 1970-2004 KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

All rights reserved.

Used with permission of KALAMAZOO GAZETTE