

# Nature's garbage-pickers thrive

By LEM MESSE

Outdoor writers see them on the seashore, where you'd expect them. You see them along the Great Lakes, which is no surprise.

You see them around ponds and puddles in these metropolitan suburbs. You see them even in the Rockies, soaring over grasslands where there's any water.

You see them in the wilds, and you see them thriving around people.

Gulls, nature's gleaming white garbage pickers, get along well alongside humans.

I had never thought much about it until picking up one of the kids' magazines from the National Wildlife Federation. Even where harbors are dirty, it said, gulls flourish.

Folks usually call them "seagulls," even 1,000 miles from the ocean. The more proper name is herring gull.

Few birds can swim as well as the gull. Few can walk as well or fly as well.

Gulls sometimes catch live fish. I've had one attack my stringer when I left it unattended for a moment to try a spot a few yards down the lakeshore. But they're not picky eaters, which is why they survive so well. When the tide is low, they'll feed on marine worms and crustaceans. They'll eat dead fish and garbage. Inland, they'll eat worms, mice, grasshoppers and other insects. They're the farmer's friend because they consume so many insects.

When they're thirsty, they prefer fresh water. But salt water is fine, too, because they have special glands in their heads to remove the salt from the blood.

While they seem to compete for food, actually gulls signal to one another when they spot a "haul."

When it comes to nesting, gulls will use flat places, islands, marshes, cliffs, even building ledges. If the weather gets too cold, gulls will migrate.

Snobs would call them indiscriminate. I think they're doing a marvelous job of adaptation.

THE MICHIGAN United Conservation Clubs held a convention recently, and Farmington Hills resident John Whitmore wound up as a regional vice-president.

President of the state's largest conservation organization will be Glenn Corbett, 61, of Harper Woods.

THE WILD strawberry season is just about past, but watch for black-

berries hitting their peaks any day.

Overall, says the friendly Department of Natural Resources, this year is producing bumper crops of wild berries.

One of my favorite hauls occurred last year on a hike through a remote upper peninsula woods. We couldn't see the wild raspberries from the path, but we caught a fragrant whiff in the hot summer breeze. A few yards

upwind off the path, there they were! They're much tiner than the kind you get in the grocery store, but the flavor and natural sweetness far exceed anything you can find commercially.

TWO DIFFERENT kinds of events at Stony Creek Metropark, near Rochester, are worthy adding.

"Good Things Come in Small Packages" is the theme of a nature walk

beginning at 9 a.m. Sunday, July 16. It will be led by park naturalist Bill Thomas and is intended for individuals and families.

Next Tuesday, July 25, is the seventh annual Stony Creek Distance Run, starting at 8:30 a.m. at the Oakgrove picnic area. There are six divisions: Ages 1-11, one mile; ages 12-16, 2 1/2 miles; ages 17-27, 2 1/2 miles; ages 28 and over, 2 1/2 miles; women, 2 1/2

miles; and open class, five miles.

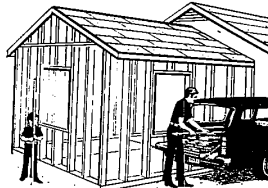
For either event, you pay only the admission to the park—\$1 per car per day or \$5 for a season pass good at all Huron-Clinton Metroparks.

KENSINGTON Metropark near Milford has a full week of events lined up, with the same kind of admission policy.



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