

No freeze on nature lovers

By LEM MESEE
Outdoors writer

Late fall. Frost and overcast skies. You'd think everyone but deer hunters would be slowing down, but news items from the Huron-Clinton Metroparks nature centers keep rolling in.

"Our big push is spring and fall," said Patricia Carlson, supervising naturalist at Kensington Park. "The end of July and August are our slowest weeks."

"Winter weekdays are slow. But winter weekends for the past 10 years have been fairly strong — a nice, steady flow of visitors," she said.

Mrs. Carlson's explanation: "More people are refusing to be cooped up in winter. There are more winter hikers, and cross country skiing has grown up in the last 15 years."

THE NATURE centers of Kensington, Stony Creek and Oakwoods metroparks provide speakers and tours for groups and classes. They also provide exhibits and short nature trails for solitary nature lovers who just drop in.

What Pat Carlson has pioneered, however, are programs for individuals, couples and families. Examples:

• "Animal homes," a nature walk at 9 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 17. Those who sign up will be guided on a look at animal shelters, where they're found, how they're built.

• "Predation — A Matter of Food," at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 18.

• "When Pine and Paul Bunyan Were Kings," a program of slides and demonstrations at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 28.

In season, naturalists cover shore life, waterfowl, deer, fall colors, geology and plants.

Some programs are done from the deck of the "Island Queen" excursion boat. Others are done by cross country skis and bicycling.

The new Oakwoods park near Flat Rock boasts a canoe trail.

"Evening programs are tremendous

hits," said Mrs. Carlson, citing stargazing.

ONE-THIRD of the participants are there for the first time, a survey shows, and two-thirds are repeaters.

Participants are asked to call the nature center in advance to reserve space, even though programs are free. "We have to limit registration. I'd rather have 25 to 35 persons really enjoy the walk than have 50 show up with some unable to see or hear," said Mrs. Carlson.



Dave Moilanen, who dresses as Paul Bunyan for a program on logging.

While the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority boasts nature centers at Stony Creek and Oakwoods too, Mrs. Carlson considers Kensington's best because of its wide variety of habitat.

Kensington's is also the most popular because it is on the main drive through the park rather than in a corner.

THE TEAM of naturalists at Ken-

ington is balanced in its interests.

Bob Hotelling's specialties are geology and birds. He has a master of science degree in resource planning and conservation from the University of Michigan, where he was president of an earth science honorary society. He edits the Washtenaw Audubon Society's newsletter. As a student, Hotelling worked for an oil company and in oceanographic research.

Steve Horn knows fish and wildlife and is rated as the best staff artist and photographer. His bachelor of science degree in park and recreation resources was earned at Michigan State University. He worked at the state's Waterloo and Yankee Springs recreation areas before joining HCMA.



Pat Carlson and stuffed badger (they don't use live animals at nature centers).

Pat Carlson

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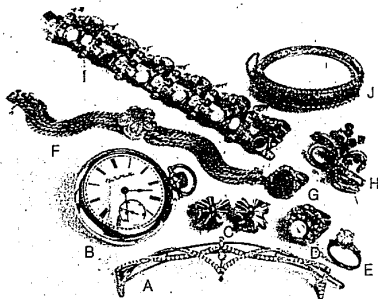
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