

# Biological clock helps nature cope

AS WE LOOK at our clocks to see what time darkness sets in, we notice that it is much earlier than just a few weeks ago.

In a few days the length of day and night will be equal. During the winter months, days reach their shortest point. We gradually return to days and nights of equal duration again in spring.

This seasonal change, coupled with the daily alternation of day and night resulting from the Earth rotating on its axis, has been occurring for eons. Because these phenomena are so dependable, many animals have come to rely on them to serve as clues for what is most likely to happen next.

**BIRDS.** For instance, are flocking in preparation for their migration south for the winter months. Large groups of starlings, blackbirds, and robins can be seen flying around neighborhoods. What makes them form flocks now and not from flocks several weeks ago?

One factor very influential in stimulating this change of behavior is the length of daylight or photoperiod. When the photoperiod begins to change during the summer months, it serves as a stimulus for animals like woodchucks to begin hibernating voraciously in order to put on enough fat to sustain them through winter.

Flying squirrels normally collect hickory nuts when they can at the



nature

**Timothy Nowicki**

rate of about 20 per night during the summer. When the photoperiod stimulates food storing behavior, flying squirrels can collect as many as 300 nuts per night. If a squirrel did not take advantage of this urge to cache food it might not survive. So through the years, those squirrels that did cache food survived.

Once the flocks of birds decide to move south on migration, they use the sun to help guide them in a southerly direction. At night, when many birds migrate, they use the north star and surrounding constellations as a guide. On cloudy days they can use the Earth's magnetic field.

The actual source of this biological clock is not known, but given a minimal stimulus it keeps on ticking, enabling animals to know when and how to prepare for life's events.

Tim Nowicki is a naturalist at Independence-Oaks Park in Oakland County. He lives in Livonia.

# Landfill group questions process

By C. L. Rugenstein  
staff writer

"It's a whole different ballgame," now that the process is no longer blind, and two Oxford sites were named as potential top candidates for a new Oakland County landfill, said Wilburn Bennett, a member of the Landfill Siting Advisory Committee.

Bennett and committee members challenged several factors in the process including the data base, the 40-year term for the landfill and the stigma attached to residential property near fills in a meeting Tuesday night.

The meeting of the full LSAC committee was called "on short notice," said chairwoman Ardath Regan. The purpose was to update the committee about the Aug. 31 meeting of the LSAC board with county officials and consultants for the project, in which recalculations of errors in data led to a shift in ranking of the sites.

Tuesday's meeting was opened to questions from residents at the end. Two lists of information were also distributed, which showed the current ranking of the top 10 candidate sites and their total scores on the 28 criteria.

"TWO THINGS changed on site five (as a result of the recalculations)," n. I maintain there are others," said JoAnn Van Tassel, committee member and supervisor of Orion Township who challenged the data base used for the project.

One of the criticisms was that the consultants relied more on maps and

**Some committee members expressed doubt over the process and wanted to start again with a new one, including doing test borings and soil samplings on all 27 sites.**

documents for their data than on actual on-site inspection.

"We did not trespass on private roads," said John Rogers, the consultant project director for Rogers, Golden and Halpern. "The landfill people were so instructed (to not trespass) so some houses on private roads were not counted."

The LSAC committee approved a motion to expand the data base to include other information offered by local communities, including prior test boring results in Oxford, soil surveys and a 1981 study which included the second-ranked candidate site, Oxford-Addison.

Regan said copies of all information used by the consultants would be sent to the county by Friday, and would be reviewed by committee-citizen teams.

Copies of all consultant studies being compiled about the sites would be made available as soon as possible for citizens, Regan said. She stressed the fact that the committee's work and findings have been open to the public throughout the process.

"This committee's credibility is under attack in some communities," Regan said. "The answers we get are only as good as the data going into"

the process, so the group's commitment to using the data base was critical.

"It would be cavalier to suggest citizens wouldn't be concerned," Regan said about the reaction.

When asked if added information would affect the criteria and the rankings again, the consultants said it might — or it might not.

SOME COMMITTEE members expressed doubt over the process and wanted to start again with a new one, including doing test borings and soil samplings on all 27 sites.

But Jo Spear, project manager for RGH told them they had the best process available "with the best data," and they needed to get on with the actual testing instead.

"I'd like to get my people out there as soon as possible — a terrestrial biologist, wetlands expert and geologist," to walk the grounds of each site," Spear said.

He stressed that actual testing, drilling 22 holes per site was best way to confirm or eliminate potential sites.

But drilling will have to wait. The committee passed an immediate recommendation to the county board of commissioners to include citizens and committee members in the on-site "walk-over" with Spear's experts, and to find money to fund it.

The LSAC committee, county officials and consultants had one meeting with citizens Wednesday in Oxford. They'll meet with residents of Highland next Monday. Residents have the opportunity to voice their concerns at the meetings.

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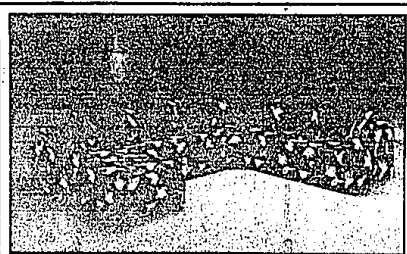


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