

A foggy sunrise showcases mallards and other birds and rewards the authors for rising early to trek the L.H. Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve.

The beauty of Barkhausen

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF WATERFOWL REFUGE AND RECREATION IN BROWN COUNTY.

Story by Jane and Reginald Muhl, photos by Reginald Muhl

Have you ever witnessed geese, ducks or cranes in flight as the brilliant red and orange colors of the warming sun arise, or spotted a white-tailed deer in the early morning fog? How about smelling the sweet fragrance of wildflowers in bloom or pondering the engineering astuteness of an eagle building its huge nest?

These images describe some of the beauty we experience each time we hike the trails, photograph the beauty and experience the wonders of the natural resources at the L.H. Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve on the west shore of Green Bay.

One of the first waterfowl refuges in Wisconsin, the L.H. Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve is a sanctuary consisting of 920 acres of meadows, wetlands, prairie and forest that serve as a home and safe haven for many species of fowl, flora and fauna.

The preserve is part of Brown County's public park system and is named in honor of its donor, a former Green Bay businessman named Louis Henry Barkhausen, who 60 years ago, in 1955, donated 474 acres of land to the citizens of Brown County.

His only stipulation was that the property remain a refuge for waterfowl and wildlife. Barkhausen had purchased

this property in 1926 with the vision of providing a resting and feeding area for migrating waterfowl. It was primarily brush and marshland, located about a half mile back from the bay of Green Bay shoreline, and was originally known as the Suamico Game Sanctuary.

An avid waterfowl hunter and conservationist, and one of the creators of Ducks Unlimited, Barkhausen developed the area by constructing two diked water areas (impoundments), drilled wells and installed pumps so the water levels over the marsh could be managed. He then erected fences around the property to limit access, control poaching and provide for raising white-tailed deer. In addition, he built a caretaker residence and hired staff to oversee the property.

Barkhausen's dedication and devotion to the preservation of waterfowl resources is perhaps best associated with his work of re-introducing the giant Canada goose to the Green Bay area.

Once thought to be extinct in Wisconsin, in 1932, Barkhausen bought three pairs of "giants" and began raising them on his preserve. They quickly multiplied and in 1948, the flock was divided, with half the geese given to the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary on Green Bay's east side. Today, descendants of the original geese number several thousand and the preserve continues to be home to a large resident flock. As a tribute to Barkhausen, the preserve aerates a pond and provides corn for geese that winter here.

The preserve expanded in 1976 when the Fort Howard Paper Foundation donated an additional 446 acres for use as a wildlife and educational study area. Access to the waters of Green Bay was made possible by this donation and it became the catalyst to provide educational programming for students and area residents.

Today, the mission of the 920-acre preserve continues to focus on resource management so that it remains a refuge for wildlife and waterfowl, while broadening its goals to also include environmental education and passive recreation for area residents.

A closer look at the work that is being done to achieve each of these goals brings a greater appreciation of the property and those committed to preserving them.

Resource management

Through the efforts of the Brown County Park Department staff and volunteers,

managing the property to improve the overall plant, wildlife and waterfowl habitats continues to be a focus. Many activities are ongoing, such as providing supplemental food sources, constructing and maintaining nesting structures, improving spawning habitat for northern pike, and enhancing/maintaining marsh habitat by controlling the spread of invasive species of plants.

Areas of brush are also mowed in wetland areas to open up marshes and pond areas allowing native grasses, sedges and cattails to grow, and, in turn, provide better habitat for myriad wildlife including migrating birds, nesting waterfowl and other wetland species.



Visitors surprise a deer as it ambles down a path.

Critters commonly observed at the preserve include white-tailed deer, coyote, red fox, otters, muskrats, opossum, skunk, raccoon, mink, weasel, groundhog (woodchuck), chipmunks, pine squirrels and 13-lined ground squirrels.

In the waters and wetlands, various types of turtles, several varieties of snakes, and many species of frogs are found. Bullfrogs are commonly heard calling on July evenings and Blanding's turtles have also been spotted using the preserve.

The vegetation and flowers are typical of the low, sandy soils of the area and include skunk cabbage, marsh marigolds, May apples, Joe-Pye weed, swamp milkweed and prairie wildflowers.

Over 200 bird and waterfowl species have been observed at the preserve including nesting waterfowl, migrating birds, and other species that consider the

preserve their residence such as mourning doves, woodpeckers and owls.

Environmental education for students and adults

A second goal of the preserve is to provide quality outdoor educational programs for schools and the public. To accomplish this, in 1980, a portion of the residence building was converted to a classroom and display area and became known as the West Shores Interpretive Center. An 800-square-foot Discovery Room was added for natural history displays and live animals.

In 1982, the first naturalist was employed. Today, the staff includes a park ranger, park educator and an assistant naturalist. As part of the organized educational programming for schools, the staff presents outdoor educational programs focusing on three habitats — marsh, woodland and pond — while immersing students in an outdoor classroom as they gain life skills they will never forget.

Staff-led programs for the public include programs across the seasons. Winter offerings include snowshoe lessons, basic winter survival skills, moonlight snowshoe hikes and tiki torch evening treks. Spring offerings have included courses in building bluebird and bat houses, maple syruping, kayaking, archery and more.

Four-day summer camps for children ages 6 through 13 started in 2013.

Barkhausen has a cure for anyone suffering from nature-deficit disorder!

Passive recreation

The third goal of the preserve is to allow the public to experience the beauty of Barkhausen through access to the many areas of the preserve. The 920 acres of the L.H. Barkhausen Preserve are interwoven with over 9 miles of carefully marked trails through the fields, forests and wetlands. Most of the trails have a crushed limestone surface, although some just have grass. Along the trails, bird watchers, naturalists, nature photographers, hikers and families find an abundance of plants, including a few threatened species, as well as waterfowl and wildlife.

The trails are accessible to users of all

abilities, including those in wheelchairs. The preserve has an all-terrain wheelchair, or Action Trackchair, purchased through a fundraising effort by the county in 2013. Several local individuals and foundations donated the funds so those with mobility limitations would have access to the natural world. The preserve "rents" the all-terrain chair by reservation for free.

The hiking trails are groomed for classical cross-country skiing and there are two signed snowshoeing trails that take visitors through areas of the preserve that are not accessible other times of the year. The pond in front of the Interpretive Center is cleared for skating.

In addition to the trails, three observation blinds, a raised mound overlook, a 12-foot-high viewing platform and a 315-foot raised boardwalk enhance the opportunity for visitors to experience the wonders of wildlife in its natural habitat. In 1955, the preserve was designated as a State Wildlife Viewing Site. The annual usage is estimated to be over 66,000.

Experience the wonders of nature and help celebrate the 60th anniversary of the preserve.



Jane and Reginald Muhl write from Green Bay.

L.H. BARKHAUSEN PRESERVE

ADDRESS:

2024 Lakeview Drive
Suamico, WI 54173

DRIVING DIRECTIONS:

Take Hwy. 41-141 north of Green Bay 4 1/2 miles to Lineville Road exit, turn right (east) on Lineville Road to intersection with Lakeview Drive, turn north onto Lakeview Drive. Park entrance is about a half mile ahead on the right. About 5 miles north of Green Bay.

PHONE:

920-448-4466

WEBSITE:

co.brown.wi.us

HOURS:

The Interpretive Center is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. Trails are open sunrise to sunset.