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Uncommon flora and fauna welcome visitors to Beaver Island

by **David V. Graham** | **The Flint Journal**

Wednesday June 18, 2008, 11:54 PM

BEAVER ISLAND -- Beaver Island is known for its summer delights, including scenic sunrises and sunset beaches, its 19th century Mormon "kingdom" history and its varied hunting opportunities for deer, turkey, grouse and snowshoe hare.

But it is not as well-known as the island home of several endangered or threatened wildflowers and other plants, particularly those that grow on sandy beaches, common on the island.

Eric Myers, a biology professor at a suburban Chicago college during the school year and a summertime island resident, recently took a group of outdoor writers on an island tour, pointing out a variety of plants and animals not commonly seen in other locales.

Those included about 20 white pelicans circling not far over our heads, a bald eagle, an osprey and nesting loons cruising a small lake. Several of the writers commented on the pelicans, pointing out that they are far more common in Florida than in Michigan.

Myers agreed. "I've heard that they (the pelicans) had been here, but this is the first time I've seen them," he said.

Myers and a few of his clients also saw a coyote, which he called a rare event.

"That is the first time we have seen a coyote during the tour," he said.

There were also several endangered plants, including the rare Pitcher's thistle, which flowers once in its five-year life span and then dies.

Other threatened or endangered species found on the island include dwarf lake iris, Michigan monkey-flower and Lake Huron tansy, which is found only on beaches of lakes Huron and Michigan, Myers said.

He said the island has 18 species of orchids, several of them threatened. Such plants are generally endangered or threatened because their ideal habitat is threatened by development, Myers explained.

He lives on the island during the summer with his wife, Carrie, who helps with the family business, Beaver Island Eco Tours. He said they generally have between 40 and 70 clients each summer, but saw the most visitors last season after a newspaper travel story resulted in a surge of business.

Myers said he and his wife can adapt the tours to the clients' interests. Some people want more of a photo tour, he said, while others with young children, for instance, want to see snakes, turtles and other reptiles.

They started the business to help deal with the costs of island living, which, he said, tends to be expensive because everything has to be shipped to the island by air or ferry. He said the cost of living there is comparable with that in Chicago.

Myers drove his vehicle on our trip, which included about 15 outdoor writers following behind in three vehicles. We stopped at about a dozen sites to look at the variety of lakes, marshes, woods and beaches.

His knowledge and enthusiasm were obvious.



David V. Graham | The Flint Journal

Eric Myers (center) talks about endangered plants and animals on a tour of Beaver Island.

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