Ecological Jewels

The Great Lakes shores in this region are extremely vulnerable because of thin soils and seasonal extremes such as spring flooding and summer drought. Alvar is among the rarest habitats in the world, known only from the Great Lakes, the Baltic region of Europe and eastern North America, where it grows on flat limestone bedrock. Most trees are unable to survive on these sites. The white flowers of Pitcher’s thistle grow on these sites.

In the Great Lakes region, lake cisco is among the most natively abundant and ecologically significant species in the upper Midwest, providing habitat for more than 25 percent of northern Michigan's wildlife species and critical winter forage for ducks.

The black tern is Michigan's smallest tern, spanning 25 cm in length and 41 cm in wingspan. It nests in colonies in freshwater marshes of inland lakes and Great Lakes shorelines. Colonies occur along Mackinac Bay, Cheboygan Channel and Pensinsula Bays.

The Caspian tern, which breeds in northern Europe, Asia, and the Americas, is Michigan's largest tern, with an average wingspan of 137 cm. The Caspian tern has a stout red bill and lacks a deeply forked bill; the common tern is smaller and has a red bill with a black tip and a deeply forked bill. These terns nest on sand and gravel beaches on islands or along the shoreline of the Great Lakes.

Northern ferns are herbaceous wetland plants that occur where limestone bedrock or calcareous soil is near the surface. They are found primarily in Great Lakes coastal wetlands and northern lake shores. The leaves secrete enzymes that aid in the digestion of insects that land on their sticky surfaces.

Butterwort, a carnivorous plant with purple flowers arising from small rosettes of distinctively yellow-green leaves, occurs predominantly in interdunal wetlands and northern lake shores along the northern Great Lakes shorelines. The leaves secrete enzymes that aid in the digestion of insects that land on their sticky surfaces.

The Hine’s emerald dragonfly is an extremely rare dragonfly occurring only in Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and Missouri. These dragonflies live in bogs and other wetlands that contain cool water springs, open areas near forest edges and sandy soils over bedrock, with firm mud. Adults are about 6 cm long and have brilliant green eyes, a dark metallic green upper body with yellow stripes, and distinctive appendages at the rear end of the body.

The black tern is Michigan's smallest tern, spanning 25 cm in length and 41 cm in wingspan. Small size and black and gray body coloration help distinguish this species from other terns in the state. Black terns nest in colonies in freshwater marshes of inland lakes and Great Lakes shorelines. Colonies occur along Mackinac Bay, Cheboygan Channel and Pensinsula Bays.

Common terns also have nested in the Les Cheneaux region. The Caspian tern, shown here, is Michigan's largest tern, with an average wingspan of 137 cm. The Caspian tern has a stout red bill and lacks a deeply forked bill; the common tern is smaller and has a red bill with a black tip and a deeply forked bill. These terns nest on sand and gravel beaches on islands or along the shoreline of the Great Lakes.