

I just returned from my first wade of the year into our vernal pond. Numbingly cold, but worth it! I quickly collected a couple of masses of newly-laid wood frog eggs for Carol to show at Fairview Elementary and for me to show at Stepping Stones Montessori and Montessori Children's House during our lessons this week.

Wood frogs began to emerge from their shallow winter burrows over a week ago to head to the pond to breed. Now, hundreds of males hurriedly quack to draw females closer. It only took a minute to locate the convoluted, dark ribbon of egg masses in the photo on the right. While the pond is over one hundred feet in diameter, all the action takes place in only a couple of very busy corners of the expanse. I merely squished along the overgrown shoreline toward the closest concentration of quacking. The surface of the water rippled with activity.



The dark ribbons through the grassy pond above are strung-together masses of wood frog eggs. Thousands are visible here.

Wood frog breeding time (occurring in late-March or early April dependent on weather) sounds like a duck convention where all the ducks have something to say – and they're being served a LOT of coffee.

The sight and sound of breeding wood frogs is a fleeting annual event – more so than the breeding activity of any Michigan frog. Every frog has its species-specific “breeding window,” the duration in weeks or months from the onset of egg-laying to the end of it for the year. How do we know? Just listen! Males heard calling on the water indicate breeding activity. The abundant and widespread green frog, often mistaken for a bull frog, has the longest breeding window of Michigan frogs – up to three months or more. The wood frog has the shortest window – two weeks at best in most springs. With our current stretch of days in the 70s, the wood frog activity has reached its frenzied apex. By next week, all eggs will have been deposited and the adults will return back to the surrounding woods and brushy uplands to spend the rest of the spring and summer. Two months from now they'll be joined by armies of penny-sized wood froglets, metamorphosed from their rapidly-grown tadpole stage. Garter snakes are well-fed in June!

This warm-up will also induce maximum breeding and the associated noise from Michigan's other two earliest breeders, the spring peeper and chorus frog. Simultaneously, it will induce the opening of, yet, another breeding window - that of the leopard frog. By mid-April, it's the toad's turn in line. April 15 means taxes *and* toads! By then, the wood frog's window will be long-shut and that of the chorus and peeper will not be far away.

The frogs are just one aspect of the multi-faceted explosion of life that takes place in a beautifully-ordered progression through the spring and into summer. Let us help you to experience it and to know it better! Read on for opportunities this month for kids and adults.

-Jim McGrath

NEW! Monthly Guided Field Trips for Adults

Nature Discovery will offer wildlife-related field trips to a variety of sites throughout mid-Michigan and beyond. Anyone 18 or older is welcome to join us. Fees will vary depending on the time and driving distance to the site. Participants can drive themselves or catch a ride in our minivan. Here is the first one:

MAPLE RIVER BIRDING, Saturday, April 3

A huge variety of waterfowl stop by the floodings at Maple River State Game Area to refuel on their northward migration. We'll spend time on the dikes and elsewhere in the area, getting great looks at, not just waterfowl, but bluebirds, meadowlarks, rusty blackbirds, snipe, a red-tailed hawk nest, a bald eagle nest and so much more. Our spotting scope will be available for ultra-close viewing. We will supply participants with personal checklists to keep track of their sightings. By day's end, over 50 species may be checked. We will aim to leave at 7am and return around noon. Fee: \$15. Enrollment is limited to 6. Contact us to reserve a spot.



A spotting scope enhances Maple River birding.

Spring Break and Summer Day Camps & Field Trips

Check Nature Discovery's website (www.naturediscovery.net) for details about the offerings listed below. Reservations are being accepted now!



SPRING BREAK

NATURE DISCOVERY DAY CAMPS (K-4th gr)
Mon-Tue, April 5-6, 9am-3pm. \$50/student/day

FIELD TRIPS (3rd gr & up)
Mon, April 5, 8:30am-3:30pm. Maple River SGA
Tue, April 6, 8:30am-3:30pm. Kensington MP
\$60/student/day

Wed, April 7, 8am-5:30pm. Hoffmaster SP
\$75/student

SUMMER DAY CAMPS AND FIELD DAYS

June 21-24 Field Birding (10 yrs & up); June 28-July 1 Nature Discovery (7-8 yrs);
July 6-9 Biodiversity Day Trips (MS/HS); July 19-22 "Bugging" Naturalists (5-6 yrs);
July 26-29 Budding Naturalists (5-6 yrs); Aug 2-5 Michigan Reptiles / Amphibians (8-10 yrs);
Aug 9-12 Nature Discovery (7-8 yrs); Aug 23-26 Advanced Entomology (11 & up).

AFTER DARK VERNAL POND-WADING

7:30-10pm.

Thur, April 8: Adults

Wed, April 14: Homeschool families

Fri, April 16: Adults & families

Find out first hand why this dwindling habitat is one of the most biologically-rich on Earth. Before dark, we'll walk the trails and visit with our snakes, frogs and turtles. Then, as darkness sets in, we'll wade into the pond while being loudly serenaded by breeding frogs of several species. We'll spotlight them and search for eggs and newly-hatched tadpoles. With hand nets and small buckets, we'll also scoop up a huge array of aquatic invertebrates then take them back to the classroom for closer inspection and identification under bright lights and magnifiers. After dark, we can also walk the trails in search of glowworms, the predatory, dimly-glowing larvae soon to become the fireflies of summer. Bring a strong flashlight. Headlamps work best. Wear old shoes, socks and long pants. Bring extra clothes, a towel, and a plastic bag in which to put your wet wading clothes. Boots are not recommended. If the above dates don't work for you, contact us to make a special appointment on another night for your small group. It's a fun and unique outing for scouts and special occasions! We'll offer more wades in the May newsletter.

10/person. Limited enrollment. Contact us to reserve a spot.



Homeschool Lesson: Michigan Frogs

Monday, April 12. 1-3pm.



Here's a combination of indoor study and wild outdoor exploration. Meet every species of frog and toad in Michigan, LIVE. Nature Discovery is the only place in the state where you can visit with live captive specimens of every one. Learn their identification, classification, ranges and specific habitat needs. You've never dreamed there is so much to learn about frogs! Hear their varied calls on a CD made by Nature Discovery and featuring some recordings taken right from the vernal pond out back. If you dress in old shoes, socks and pants, join us for a wade into our vernal pond, loaded not only with frogs of several species, but growing tadpoles, salamander larvae and a

dizzying array of invertebrate life. The wading experience allows students to see, first-hand, why this dwindling habitat is one of the most biologically-rich on Earth, and why it is worth protecting what remains.

*The class is geared toward middle-elementary-aged students and older although any elementary children are welcome to participate. Parents of paid students are welcome and encouraged to participate at no extra charge. Preschool children may attend at no charge under close supervision by a parent.

\$10/student, payable in advance. Limited enrollment. Contact us to reserve a spot.

PICKIN' 'N' PICNIC

Sunday, April 18, Noon-6pm.

Nature Discovery's property (as well as so many other roadsides, parks and other public & private lands) is overrun with garlic Mustard, an aggressive, alien biennial. Instead of spraying herbicides and killing everything, we'd rather pull it, but we need manpower... and we'll pay in food. We'll provide hot dogs, chips, pickle spears and pop throughout the afternoon for all able-bodied mustard-pullers. Elementary students or younger must be accompanied by an adult. Stay for two hours or all six! Contact us to sign-up in advance.

Right: Garlic Mustard is a highly-invasive biennial plant that thrives in shady environments, like forest floors. It is rapidly displacing many of our native woodland wildflowers. Leaves are heart-shaped and toothed. Its clusters of tiny white flowers have four petals each.



Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians EXHIBITS

April is hopping with special events in which Nature Discovery is contracted to set up our collection of over 40 total species of Michigan frogs, salamanders, turtles, snakes, lizards. These highly interactive set-ups are a huge hit with walk-by audiences. Here are a few, locally and beyond, this month. Most of the events listed below are open to the general public, feature other interesting booths and attractions, and are free of charge. Contact us for more information.

Thur, April 15, 6 to 7:30pm. Fairview Elementary School, Lansing. Science Expo.

Thur, April 22, 9am to 3pm. DNRE Earth Day Celebration, Constitution Hall, Lansing.

Sat, April 24, 9am to 3pm. Earth Day Celebration, UM, Flint Campus.

Thur, April 29, 6:30 to 8:30pm. Central Elementary School, Okemos. Science Night.

Michigan Amphibians Presentations at DeGraaf Nature Center in Holland

On Saturday, April 17, Nature Discovery will be offering two separate presentations available to the public, 1pm and 3pm, featuring live specimens of nearly all species of frogs and salamanders found in our state. A small entry fee is required. Contact DeGraaf at 616.355.1057.



Get Out – Go Wild Weekend Yields an Encouraging Turnout

Thank you to all who attended our Michigan wildlife educational event held at the Bengel Wildlife Center in Bath on March 6-7. About 150 people attended on Saturday and another 120 on Sunday. With such an encouraging turnout, it may very well become an annual event! Stay tuned as next March approaches.

Left: Louise Sagaert, founder of WILDSIDE Wildlife rehabilitation & Education Center, shows the audience a Short-eared Owl at Get Out – Go Wild Weekend held on March 6 and 7.

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