

More birds can be seen in Michigan in the month of May than in any other month of the year. Permanent residents, like cardinals, chickadees and nuthatches can be seen in all months, but through this month, the last and largest wave of migrants return from the south. If they have all returned by the end of May, wouldn't June or July also share the honor of most birds? Not quite. A number of our migrants are just passing through, overwintering south of us, but breeding mostly to our north in Canada.

Ornithologists estimate that North America has lost about fifty percent of its tropical migrant songbirds in the past forty years. Not *species*, necessarily, but *numbers* of birds of all species across the board. These include mostly birds that have no business showing up at your bird feeder (insectivores), but are evident in the bushes and tree tops to the discerning eye and ear - warblers, vireos, buntings and flycatchers. It is scary to think that all these birds may very well all be endangered in another forty years, and it is equally frustrating to know that the reasons for their decline are obvious and rectifiable. Yet, there seems to be no mainstream societal concern, much less, awareness, of these birds or their plight.

Very simply, you can't care about something if you don't know about it. We believe the majority of Americans would be very concerned if they only knew, and many of them would want to know how to curtail songbird decline, then, perhaps, do their part to implement steps.

Governmental agencies, from the federal level on down, devote little toward declining non-game species until they become listed. In all fairness, the agencies' hands are tied due to dwindling budgets and limited manpower. These agencies need to be supplied the resources to do their jobs, but the citizenry needs to become aware of the gravity of the situation and voice its support.

Our so-called "Age of Information" has inundated us with such a flood of it - some important, most mundane - it is becoming increasingly difficult to spot the critical information among the sea of static. A current case in point... The continuing, uncontrolled spread of oil over the Gulf of Mexico has yet to crack front page coverage in the *Lansing State Journal*. The majority of stories pale in comparison to what is being called the worst (and continuing to worsen) domestic environmental disaster in decades.

This weekend we are offering two opportunities surrounding our declining migrant songbirds. The first is Friday night's showing of a 60-minute video, entitled *On a Wing and a Prayer*. This program delves into the causes of the decline in graphic detail while also illustrating avian adaptations to the hardships of migration. On Saturday morning, a local birding tour is followed by a home-made brunch here. Check the details below.



The colorful Cape May Warbler is one of many neo-tropical migrants in decline. © Steve Sage

FRIDAY NIGHT AT NATURE DISCOVERY

Friday, May 7. 7:00 to 10:00pm. Adults & Families.



Gray tree frogs in Nature Discovery's rich vernal pond.

Join us for a spring evening of indoor and outdoor experiences as the sun sets. We'll lead a walk around our vernal pond, loud with the trills of gray tree frogs and toads, while also identifying birds, bugs and other spring activity.

At 7:30 we will show a 60-minute video, *On a Wing & a Prayer*, that explains in graphic detail why populations of our tropical migrant songbirds, like warblers, vireos, buntings and flycatchers are undergoing rapid and alarming declines within our lifetime. Whether you have a strong personal interest in birds or not, everyone should see this program to understand this largely unknown trend. (See our related ecotour on the next page.)

After dark, we'll walk the trails again to marvel at the huge number of glowworms, firefly larvae, that emit pinpoints of dim light on the ground that look like distant stars in the blackness around us.

As always, our huge collection of Michigan snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders is available. Hold a snake. Drop a cricket to a frog. Witness the "Grand Slam of Michigan Turtles." You can see all ten species at no other facility in the state!

A \$3/person donation is requested.

BIRD 'N' BRUNCH

Saturday, May 8. 6:30am to Noon. Adults.

Don't let the early start time scare you off. Schedule a nap in the afternoon. We need to get out while the birds are at their most active! After meeting here, Jim will lead the group to a number of locations and habitats in the area. Our goal is to tally as many species as possible in our five-hour excursion. Jim will supply checklists for all participants plus keep the spotting scope and "birdpod" available for enhanced viewing. Afterward, we'll return to our nature center where we'll converse over a hearty brunch prepared and served by Carol. Bring binoculars.

\$30/person. Spaces are limited, so contact us to reserve a spot.

The Ovenbird will be one of many tallies on Saturday's trip. © Steve Sage



SPRING & SUMMER ARE BUSY IN THIS LINE OF WORK!

If the number of offerings seems light in this issue, get ready for more abbreviated monthly issues right through the summer. Nature Discovery's services are booked heavily in these months, especially on weekends. You may have an opportunity to catch one of our presentations at a nature center, state park or library almost anywhere in the state. We'll list some of our destinations and dates in each issue.

***DON'T FORGET... Enroll in Our
Summer Day Camps & Field Trips Now!***
Check Nature Discovery's website (www.naturediscovery.net) for details.



Kirtland's Warbler. –www.birdwatchersdigest.com

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

Saturday, May 15.

Kirtland Community College in Roscommon, MI, hosts this event every May. See endangered Kirtland's Warblers on guided tours through their habitat. Attend other Michigan wildlife presentations and tours throughout the day. Jim will be leading a birding tour in the morning, then presenting on Michigan's Giant Silk Moths in the afternoon. Visit www.warbler.kirtland.edu for event details.

BIRD, KAYAK & HIKE SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

Saturday, June 12 (am) to Friday, June 18 (pm).

If you've never been through southern Illinois, it is nothing like the flat cornfields to the north. Rolling hills of forests and cypress swamps dominate much of it. One cypress swamp which we will bird and explore by kayak and by foot, is over 10,000 acres in size. It is also the research site of Dr. Jeff Hoover, an ornithologist whose research on the effects of cowbird parasitism on Prothonotary Warblers and other species is featured in the video we are showing here on Friday, May 7. Dr. Hoover has offered to spend a portion of a day giving us a tour of his research site along with explanations of the details and findings of his research.

\$600 includes all transportation, lodging (double occupancy), and nearly all meals. If you have your own personal kayak, we will arrange to transport it. Otherwise, we can arrange for you to rent one for an extra fee. We are still shopping for the best rates for a week-long rental. Contact us for costs or for more information. A 50% non-refundable deposit is required to reserve a space. Spaces are limited, so contact us immediately to make a reservation.

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