

Nature Discovery **WILD TIMES**

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For any business, and especially for the small business entrepreneur, the state of the economy in these times requires more adjustment and ingenuity than ever. However, regarding Nature Discovery's specialty, quality Michigan wildlife education, we feel a need to also make adjustments with concern toward another trend – a growing divide between people and the natural world.

As our society, and especially our youth, chooses to spend increasing amounts of free time remaining indoors, the corresponding alienation from the outdoors, and specifically the natural world, is quite unsettling. We are becoming increasingly disconnected from the very environment on which we, as biological beings, must depend. At the same time, our demands on the environment (energy consumption, greenhouse gases, “development” of once-natural areas, etc.) continue to rise. How will this attitude translate into our ability to make sound assessments about the state of our environment, and ultimately, our ability to make the right decisions and adjustments in the way we live, now and in the future?



A mixed crowd marvels at a suspended female Black Ratsnake, the largest snake species in Michigan, at a recent Nature Discovery exhibit.

We've met kids as well as adults who convey displeasure at the prospect of a walk in the woods. For many of them, the experience lacks stimulation. At the mere suggestion some children, with a roll of their eyes, exclaim, “Boring!”

If you are incapable of telling one tree from another, one bird from another, one butterfly, one plant, one snake from another, the aversion seems justified. On the other hand, the pursuance of knowledge and the resultant acknowledgement of the tremendous natural diversity around us transforms a walk in the woods to anything but boring.

Nature Discovery is taking a number of steps to make our programs and wildlife education in general, more accessible to the public. Our goal is to develop a broader following in the community as well as around the state, while at the same time providing regular opportunities for any person of any age to attain a well-rounded Michigan natural science education. Such opportunities are virtually unavailable throughout Mid-Michigan, even at established nature centers. Here are a few implementations:

- Regular open hours. Our facility, attached to our house, north of Williamston, will have open hours every second Sunday of the month from 1 to 5pm. With lots of assistance from knowledgeable staff, visitors can interact with the largest collection of Michigan reptiles & amphibians in the state. Walk the trail out back with or without a staff guide. We will also offer a presentation for general audiences on a specific Michigan wildlife topic. Check out this

Sunday's lineup on the next page. We request a \$3/person donation each Sunday. Past visitors agree that the experience is well worth the money. In fact, many have commented that the donation amount is too low. (Okay, we won't turn down larger donations!)

- Monthly newsletter. This is the first! Each month's will be available on our website. You can also join our email list to have it pop up directly to your inbox. Just drop a line. Each newsletter will feature an informational column such as this one, a description of the "Second Sunday" program for that month, plus upcoming program announcements for school children to adults.
- Newspaper columns. Jim writes monthly on nature themes in the *Williamston Enterprise*. The column can also be found at lsj.com. The latest column was about the resurgence of the huge Pileated Woodpecker in the Greater Lansing area. Contact us if you'd like it (or any past column) emailed to you.
- All of our past services are still in place, such as nature-themed birthday parties with live animals (at our place or yours), full day nature camps on holidays, over spring break, and in the summer (Check out our between-the-holidays camps below!), wildlife presentations, and exhibits featuring our live Michigan reptiles and amphibians, for schools, organizations and special events.

-Jim & Carol McGrath

SECOND SUNDAY December 13 at Nature Discovery

The center is open from 1 to 5pm. A \$3 donation is requested. Our knowledgeable staff can answer questions about any of the many frogs, salamanders, turtles, snakes and lizards on hand, take one out to hold, or feed them, too. Walk the trail in the natural area out back. On request, we'd be happy to supply an engaging personal guide.



A male Red-bellied Woodpecker.

At 2pm, *Michigan Woodpeckers* will be presented. This Powerpoint presentation features all nine species found throughout the state. Learn how to identify them by sight and by call in addition to interesting aspects of their anatomy, behavior and ecology. Find out which species to expect at your suet feeder and in your neighborhood, as well as where to go in the state to encounter the others. Following the presentation, interested participants will carpool to a neighbor's woodlot to see if we can get a glimpse of one of their huge resident Pileated Woodpeckers. Don't forget binoculars!

CAPITAL AREA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT December 19

Capital Area Audubon's Christmas Bird Count is Saturday, December 19. Jim is responsible for tallying bird species and numbers within an area roughly bordered north and south by Saginaw and Mount Hope, east and west by Harrison and Waverly. Much of the birding takes place along the river trail, through Potter Park, and Frances Park along the Grand River. Jim will start at 5am and hit various woodlots playing owl calls to elicit a response, then bird the area through the daylight hours until dusk. Contact us if you would like to join him for as much of the day as you'd like. Birders of any skill level are welcome and encouraged to join him in this fun and purposeful way to enjoy the outdoors in winter.

BETWEEN-THE-HOLIDAYS DAY CAMP December 28, 29 & 30

For children, K thru middle school. Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, 9am to 3pm.

Join us for one, two or all three days. Indoor activities include lots of interaction with our snakes, turtles, frogs, salamanders and lizards. We'll spend time outdoors on the trails and engage in *The Winter Games*. A hot lunch is provided on Monday and Tuesday.

On Wednesday, we will lead a field trip to Kensington Metropark, east of Brighton. Participants will walk trails and keep a checklist of birds encountered through the day. We'll scan the open water through a powerful spotting scope to see what migrant waterfowl from the Arctic have stopped here, and best of all, we'll spend time coaxing birds to land and eat from our hands! Students should pack a bag lunch and dress extra warmly.

Parents, other interested adults or older students are welcome to join us on any day, too. Enroll in advance by contacting us via email or phone. COST: \$50/student/day.



Chickadees, titmice and nuthatches at Kensington are not shy about taking "handouts."



OWLING NIGHT January 2

On Saturday, January 2, from 7 to 9pm, join us for a Powerpoint presentation over hot beverages and cookies. **Michigan Owls** features all ten species found in the state, and one more that's now considered extinct here. We'll discuss some of the physical adaptations that make an owl such an efficient nocturnal predator, as well as share some insights into the identification, vocalizations, behavior and ecology of each species. At the presentation's conclusion, we will go into the night and attempt to "call one in" with audio recordings for a close encounter. Dress warmly and don't forget your binoculars and camera!

Not recommended for preschool children. Limited to 10 participants. Enroll in advance by email or phone.

COST: \$10/person.

A Screech-owl is spot-lighted after responding to our recording.

PLANNING FOR JANUARY...

U.P. WINTER BIRDING WEEKEND Fri-Mon, January 15 - 18

Join us for some great birding among the beautiful winter vistas of the U.P., from Sault Ste. Marie to Marquette. This trip is a boon to any birders who have yet to experience the unique bird species of the far north, and also to outdoor and wildlife photographers. Around the Soo are great opportunities for

Gyrfalcons, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Snowy Owls, along with considerable opportunities for crossbills, redpolls, Pine Siskins, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Bohemian Waxwings, and more.



Pishekee Grade is a logging road west of Marquette. Remote, peaceful, and wild, yet highly accessible and well-plowed.

Throughout the trip, we'll stay mostly on or near roads, so no strenuous hiking will be necessary. Depart 8am Friday. Return estimate 7pm Monday.

FEE: \$280 (includes all transportation, lodging, and some meals). Space is limited to 5, so enroll soon!



We'll cruise to Marquette and stay for two nights at the Quartz Mountain Lodge, where their home-cooked, hearty breakfast buffet is as good as it gets.

We'll spend a day at Pishekee Grade to the west, where Boreal Chickadees are an automatic check on the trip list. We'll entice Gray Jays, chickadees and nuthatches up-close (and possibly to our hands) with peanuts and sunflower. Black-backed Woodpeckers are also a strong possibility.

On Monday, we'll return east and bird the Marquette area for a variety of hawks, gulls, waterfowl, then Hulburt Bog for more boreal species before heading homeward. We'll check UP internet postings for a chance at some vagrant specialties that often pop up through the winter.



Above: A flock of Pine Grosbeaks and a lone Common Redpoll visit a feeder at Hulburt Bog.

Left: With some patience, a Gray Jay like this, as well as chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches, can be enticed to the hand with seed or peanuts.

Consider a *GIFT CERTIFICATE* toward any of the above offerings as a *Holiday Gift*.

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