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Snakes in “Straits”

This March, for the fifth consecutive year Straits Area Audubon Society has hosted Nature

Discovery for multiple presentations at a variety of locations in the tip of The Mitten. They typically schedule us to present on a Michigan wildlife topic at the monthly SAAS meeting held at Cheboygan Public Library, then arrange for us to tote a bunch of our Michigan snakes for presentations in area schools (I wrote about the experience in last March’s newsletter: <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20Mar15.pdf>).

Kathy and Jim Bricker are the straws that stir this annual elixir to the benefit of area citizens. Prior to this March, they managed to contact enough educational venues and raise enough funds for three very busy days of programming, totaling thirteen presentations and approximately 600 participants. As usual, the Brickers hosted the snakes, frogs and me in their home near Cheboygan, then, with a few other SAAS members, assisted through the duration of each program.

I presented *Green Frogs, Vernal Ponds & Extreme Weather* at this year’s SAAS meeting (See this link for the content: <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20Jan16.pdf>). The other programs featured the always much-needed *Michigan Snakes Alive* topic. In addition to teaching fifth graders at Cheboygan, Onaway and Wolverine elementary schools, we presented to middle school students at Mackinaw City, preschool students and many of their parents at Petoskey Children’s Nursery Preschool and to elementary students at Montessori Children’s House of Petoskey. Another evening *Snakes* presentation was delivered to a mixed audience of over 100 participants at Indian River Public Library.

Of course, our ultimate emphasis in these programs is for conservation of snake populations. It starts with knowledge and acceptance. This, in the face of a broad view that these creatures possess some sinister intent toward humanity that, therefore, demands counteraction through various stances of intolerance. *Snakes* programs act as a potent springboard to encouraging the pursuit of knowledge about other aspects of our natural environment, constantly under siege from a burgeoning human presence that is unaware and, by extension, indifferent toward its ecological health.

Do these programs truly make a difference? Gauge any audience’s attitude toward snakes at the start, then, at the conclusion of any presentation. The answer is a resounding *Ooooooh yeah!* Some make it a point to personally articulate their conversion.



SAAS Treasurer, Rose Rynerson, introduces Cheboygan 5th-graders to a Northern Water Snake, commonly misnamed a Water Moccasin.

Fifth graders at Cheboygan Elementary were my first audiences. After one presentation, a bright, polite, and soft-spoken boy named Thomas stuck around to tell me how afraid of the snakes he was at first, and how much he likes them now. The Brickers made it a point to encourage the students to come with their families to that evening's presentation on frogs at the library. Thomas assured me that he would be there - and he was.

The following evening I was pleasantly surprised to see Thomas and his dad walk through the doors at Indian River Library, too. They were among the first to arrive, well before the start of the presentation. As they entered, our eyes met, and Thomas was beaming. He asked if he could help with walking the snakes around the audience, like the adult SAAS members were doing, and was visibly thrilled when I consented.

Several minutes before the presentation was to begin and as more and more participants filled the seats, I chatted with the librarian in the back of the room. As we scanned the audience filling the seats, I saw Thomas peering at us across the sea of heads from his chosen seat, front and center. He stood and ambled back toward us. The librarian was in the process of commenting that she was constantly amazed at how little people knew about wild things around them. Thomas, now within earshot, heard my response. I replied that I find many adults often think they know about wildlife when they actually know very little. Before I could give an example Thomas piped up, "Yeah, like a frog is green, a frog says 'ribbit', a frog lives in a pond, a frog eats bugs, a baby frog is a tadpole." I turned and pointed to him. "Exactly!" He had taken the words right out of my mouth - reciting, verbatim, information he had picked up and stored from the previous evening's presentation.



Upon our arrival at Onaway Elementary (on "hat day, btw) this teacher declared that he and snakes "don't get along." By the second presentation he had apparently made his peace with them.



SAAS member, Nancy Waldron (left), a major annual contributor toward funding for Nature Discovery programs in Northern Michigan schools, visits with our Northern Water Snake at Indian River Library. Thank you, Nancy!

Sometimes, compliments can be received without the giver being aware that one had been paid. I recognize them often - especially from kids - and am, thus, gratified and encouraged to keep doing what I do. After interacting with me three times in three different venues in a little over a day, Thomas delivered one as we parted after that third presentation. He and his dad were among the last to leave the once-packed room. He approached with a wistful smile and extended his hand to shake mine. "Can I ask you something?" he said. "I know I'm too young now, but do you think I could work for you when I get older?" I smiled and shook his hand. "Let's stay in touch!"

-Jim McGrath

Spring Break Day Camp Alert!

Day Camps for children, K & older, are scheduled at Nature Discovery this Monday & Tuesday, April 4 & 5. There is also a Birding Field Trip scheduled for students 4th grade & older on Tuesday. Contact us to enroll or to inquire about details...

Frogging “by Ear”

Sunday, April 10

Doors open from 1 to 5pm

Admission: \$5/person



What frogs breed in your neighborhood? Through spring and early summer, you need not get your feet wet to find out. Michigan is home to 13 species of frogs and toads, eight of which can be found around the Greater Lansing area. Each can be identified by its specific breeding call, given only by the male.

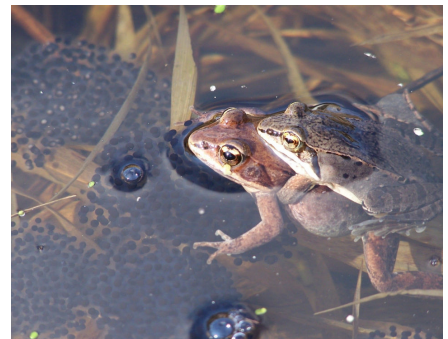


Each species also has its own breeding “window,” the period of time when it is egg-laying on a particular wetland from early spring to mid-summer. At 2pm, sit-in on our presentation, *Frogging “by Ear.”* With the use of beautiful Powerpoint images, live specimens, and audio recordings from Nature Discovery’s original CD, *Frogs of the Great Lakes Region*, immerse yourself “knee-deep” into the world of Michigan frogs.

*** Our *Frogs of the Great Lakes Region* CDs are normally priced at \$14. Participants in this program are invited to purchase one for only \$12.

At the presentation’s conclusion, visitors can participate in a guided hike around our vernal pond, now burgeoning with frogs and invertebrate life. See masses of wood frog eggs and listen to the unique calls of the wood frogs, spring peepers and leopard frogs. A staff person will wade into the pond to net some of the abundant and diverse invertebrate life that shares the biologically-rich vernal waters with the breeding frogs.

There is more! Visit our highly interactive Michigan reptiles & amphibians zoo. Hold a snake, feed some turtles, drop a cricket to a frog. Enjoy the action at our bird feeders or ask for your own personalized guided walk on the trail. Knowledgeable staff is on hand to help visitors of all ages make the most of their visit.



2016 Summer Day Camp Schedule

is on our website now! Click this link:

<http://www.naturediscovery.net/pdf/summercamps.pdf>



Catch Us on Coffee Break Monday, April 11

Jim is scheduled to appear on Monday, April 11 at 9:30am, discussing “frogging by ear”. The show airs weekdays from 9 to 10am on 89.7 FM. Listen live online at lcc.edu/radio/onair/ or watch it live (or later in the day at 6pm) online at lcc.edu/tv/watch. We’ll post a reminder on our Facebook fan page.

Around the State in April

- ❖ Wednesday, April 13: 1pm. MI Garden Amphibians; Big Rapids Garden Club, Big Rapids.
- ❖ Saturday, April 16: 10am-3pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Earth Day Festival, UM-Flint, Flint.
- ❖ Saturday/Sunday, April 16-17: 10am-4pm/12-4pm. Michigan Frogs Exhibit; MSU Science Festival, East Lansing.
- ❖ Monday, April 18: 6pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Presentation; Perry Elementary School, Perry.
- ❖ Wednesday, April 20 5:30-7:30pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Okemos Public Montessori, Central School, Okemos.
- ❖ Tuesday, April 21: 9am-2pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; MDEQ Earth Day Celebration, Constitution Hall, Lansing.
- ❖ Friday, April 22: 2pm. MI Wildlife Presentation; Burcham Hills Retirement Comm., E. Lansing.
- ❖ Saturday, April 23: 10am-3pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Embrace Our Earth Festival, Bad Axe Middle School, Bad Axe.
- ❖ Thursday, April 28 6-8pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; MacDonald Middle School, Central School, Okemos.
- ❖ Saturday, April 30: 2pm. MI Turtles Presentation; DeGraaf Nature Center, Holland.
- ❖ Sunday, May 1: 2pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Presentation; Gerald Eddy Center, Waterloo.



Ice Shelves, Carbon Emissions & Daily Decisions

Here’s a fresh *New York Times* editorial regarding our fossil-fuel based lifestyles, the rate at which Antarctic ice shelves are melting, and the price the earth and our newest-born generation will ultimately have to pay for our continued complacency.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/01/opinion/the-danger-of-a-runaway-antarctica.html?ribbon-ad-idx=16&rref=science&module=Ribbon&version=context®ion=Header&action=click&contentCollection=Science&pgtype=article>

Scientists in the report state that this outcome is not quite inevitable yet, as long as we act immediately and much more aggressively to curb fossil-fuel emissions than we have so far. Looking around, from climate change-denying candidates intent on keeping the fossil-fuels burning to common citizens going about “business as usual,” it is difficult to see significant change occurring any time soon. We urge everyone, foremost, to take responsibility for your own carbon footprint. It’s the easiest, most logical place to start.

–JM

U.P. Raptor Migration Overnighter, April 26-27

Join this personable, economical, 2-day guided birding tour in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. A group of no more than 5 adults will be led by Jim to raptor watches in Mackinaw City and Whitefish Point. We'll depart Tuesday morning in time to arrive in Mackinaw City by noon. Then, we will spend the entire afternoon watching for migratory eagles and hawks of up to ten different species. We will also encounter a slew of waterfowl and songbirds along the way. Then we will drive north to Whitefish Point on Lake Superior's eastern shore in time to catch the start of owl migration activity at dusk. On Wednesday, we will enjoy diurnal raptor, waterfowl and songbird movement at the point before heading homeward around 2pm. We will return around 6 to 7pm. A Michigan Birds checklist will be provided to each



An immature Golden Eagle displays a light patch on the underside of each wing. Photo © Greg Smith.

participant to keep track of species and numbers encountered. Our spotting scope will be on hand for up-close viewing. Participants will be responsible for their own meals and snacks, packed or purchased en route. We will also plan for opportunity to dine out at restaurants to your personal desire.

COST: \$225 (\$100 non-refundable deposit), includes all transportation, and lodging at a motel in Paradise. Contact us to enroll or for any additional information.

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Concerned Scientists**
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