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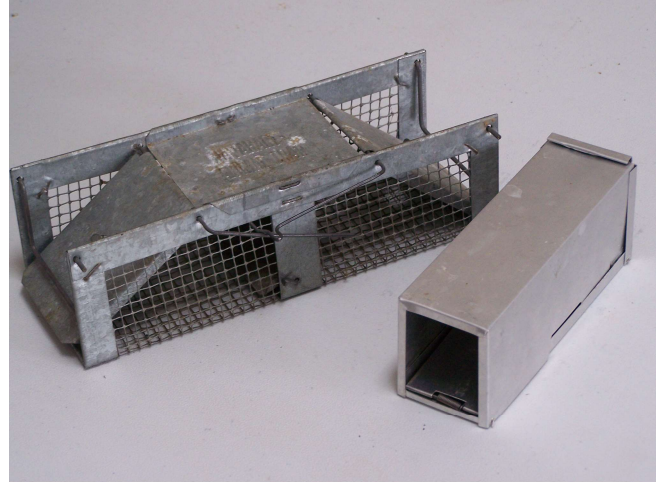
**Fossil Free State of the Union**

## **My Live Mouse Trap Espousal**

A four-block walk separated our house from St. Viator Elementary School on the northwest side of Chicago. Through the mid-to-late 60s we came home for lunch every day, so my sibs and I would walk the overly-familiar route (far more often separately than together) round trip, twice every school day.

Halfway through the walk the intersection of Addison and Pulaski was the busiest point, complete with necessary traffic lights and a school day necessity – Mrs. Cwick, the designated, uniformed, crossing guard. The Hi Ho diner's flashing neon sign drew attention to the southwest corner. A sprawling expanse of plate glass - all that separated sidewalk pedestrians from diners in booths - encouraged unfettered gawking in both directions. On the southeast corner the Standard station posted twenty-six cent gas. A clear pair of *dings* would sporadically reverberate over the street corner whenever an entering or exiting car rolled over the hose. Near the northeast corner a taxidermy shop displayed two never-changing, faded mounts. An antlered head with glassy, black eyes stared toward a spread-winged pheasant in frozen flight. On the curb of the northwest corner squatted a small, rickety kiosk of gray-painted wood. Hustling in and out of it an aptly-small, old, chain-smoking man wearing a really groovy, belt-mounted, chrome, coin-changer hawked Chicago Tribunes and Sun Times to passers-by on foot or on wheels. Across this corner's sidewalk the walls of an old, brick building abutted it and stretched in both directions, westward down Addison and northward on Pulaski. Small, peeling, casement windows of second-story apartments regarded the bustling intersection below. However, at street-level below them a couple of large plate-glass windows allowed a gander into the rental space of small businesses.

One filmy window belied its purpose - the dusty, display ledge bare, the space behind it dissolving into vacant gloom. To most other passing school kids the pest control company inside the next window was barely more interesting. I never saw anyone else stop to look through the pane, but I did, often – especially on my way home when the walk could be more leisurely and circuitous, if necessary. No person ever stirred inside, but my attention was rapt around the contents of the display ledge – cage traps of all sizes. The largest looked like it could hold a medium-sized dog or small bear. From there the sizes cascaded down to Hav-a-harts for cat and raccoon-sized targets, then squirrel-sized nuisances, and finally, for mousey vermin, that, ostensibly, some soft-hearted souls would prefer to set in lieu of a snap trap's final



*Who knew that a city kid's fascination with a mouse live trap would evolve into its usage as a regular tool in our country home and in our wildlife education business?*

solution. Then, what would they do with it? Drive it out to the country? I knew what I would do. I'd want to keep it alive in a special cage or terrarium, feed and observe it.

As in most city houses mice would find their way into ours. My dad set snap traps in the basement. I would inspect the crushed, lifeless victim pinned askew under the killing bar and find myself imagining that this mysterious, little interloper that had once enjoyed the run of the house while we slept would have been infinitely more interesting – and therefore, valuable – if captured *alive*. One evening at the supper table I summoned the nerve to build the case toward my plan. First, I mentioned my awareness of that pest control company on Pulaski, then of this neat, little mouse-sized live trap I noticed in the window, then of the sticker that said “ten dollars,” before finally broaching the possibility of trapping mice in the basement alive instead of killing them.

“*Ten dollars?!?*” my dad exclaimed. “You can buy fifty snap traps for that. What would we do with the mouse then?”

I suggested I could keep it in my bedroom. My dad quietly stifled his amusement, while a couple of my older sibs openly scoffed. My mother, clearly squeamish over the thought, affirmed that we would not be spending ten dollars to catch one of those filthy little creatures so I could have a pet. She followed that with the same patented, volition-killing, discussion-ending statement I had come to anticipate throughout my formative years, the only variable within which was the name of the living creature I had considered keeping: “When you have a house of your own you can keep as many mice as you want.”

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Fast forwarding a few decades reveals *my* house to be home to far more non-human life than my mother would ever feel comfortable near. Out of necessity the queen of *this* castle has to be tolerant of the whole menagerie, and she is. Most are sheltered in the private nature center attached to our home and used educationally throughout the year, both, on site and in a huge array of venues throughout the state. In fact, the lion's share of our income is directly related to the maintenance of this one-of-a-kind, extensive Michigan-specific reptiles and amphibians zoo.

Some of the non-human life here is free-roaming, but not necessarily in the form of escapees. Small mammals – almost exclusively deer mice, but sometimes a short-tailed shrew - from the surrounding rural landscape find their way into our old farmhouse, especially in the colder months. I did purchase that smallest size Hav-a-hart early in my adulthood and still have it today, but it soon became evident that one wasn't nearly enough. Circumstances within our house and in regard to our varied Nature Discovery lessons about Michigan wildlife eventually dictated that I purchase a half dozen extra aluminum box traps.

Two are permanently set in kitchen cabinets. Over a year we catch dozens of deer mice in these locations. Setting a few traps in the garage overnight nearly guarantees one, or three by morning. Last winter I purposely set traps in the garage nearly nightly for a month straight, checking them each morning. At least thirty were captured in that span. What, did all the deer mice outside move in with us over the winter? Apparently, not all... This winter, amid a several-inch-deep blanket of snow I set four traps overnight in various locations on the back third of our property. By morning three contained a deer mouse.



*In rural settings the native deer mouse is a household's most likely intruder.*

No wonder the impression that no matter how many days in a row the traps are set – in the house, in the garage or anywhere on our acreage, the mice will keep coming – an eye-opening testament to the volume that exists in a country setting. Yet, they keep virtually out-of-sight, and so, out-of-mind from our plane of perspective. We are impelled to take action when we notice their piddly calling cards in our homes.

Those who have had multiple experiences with Nature Discovery over time become aware that these mice are not part of a catch-and-release program. They are eventually fed to one of our many Michigan-native, mouse-eating constrictors – black rat snakes of many sizes and ages in addition to an adult fox snake and milk snake. While all the snakes will take frozen, thawed mice purchased from a breeding facility for this purpose, we regularly allow participants, from preschool classes through adult audiences, to watch the unique process of live prey constriction and consumption up close.



Although some parents may express reticence over their child witnessing this, with a proper introductory explanation about predator-prey relationships, food chains, and the amazing, reproductive prowess that enables sustainable depredation of mouse populations by a wide range of predators, kids understand and accept it, then find it fascinating to watch. We present it with objectivity at face value: an intimate, educational peek at a unique form of ecological relationship within the vast dynamic that is the interaction of life on Planet Earth. Far from gory (see “cat catches mouse”), this predatory function is remarkably quick, clean and efficient.



*Short-tailed Shrew.*

I sometimes ask if they would like to have a live trap like this of their own. Enthusiastic approval erupts, and my inner child nods in agreement.

We also use the traps to collect and temporarily keep live specimens of deer mice, meadow voles and short-tailed shrews to show in a special natural science unit that helps students get to better know the largely unseen world of our tiniest wild mammals. The lessons traverse identification, comparative physiology, behavior, habitat and ecology, including acknowledgement of the tertiary consumers who rely heavily on their abundance for sustenance – hawks, owls, shrikes, weasels, and, yes, snakes.

I will often bring a live trap along in which the small mammals on hand were caught. Without exception kids of all ages are eager to inspect the mechanism then set and

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Recently-trapped deer mice are almost always on hand here. Visit during our February 11 open Sunday and just ask us if you would like to see the process of constriction. Can't make it Sunday? Contact us to arrange a special appointment!

*-Jim McGrath*

## ***Catch Us on Coffee Break*** ***Tuesday, February 6***

Carol is scheduled to appear on Tuesday, February 6 at 9:15am, discussing our open Sunday and LCC youth classes. The show airs weekdays from 9 to 10am on 89.7 FM. Listen live online at [lcc.edu/radio/onair/](http://lcc.edu/radio/onair/) or watch it live (or later in the day at 6pm) online at [lcc.edu/tv/watch](http://lcc.edu/tv/watch). We'll post a reminder on Facebook.





## Open Hours

*Sunday, February 11*

*1 to 5pm; \$5 admission*

## 2pm Presentation

*Birding by Ear*

*Late Winter Edition*



*Tufted Titmouse. Photo © Steve Sage*

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At 2pm, *Birding by Ear – Late Winter Edition*, will be presented. Cued by our lengthening days, chickadees, titmice, cardinals and many other winter resident songbirds have ratcheted up the volume, intensity, and frequency of their breeding songs. Learning to identify birds by sight is a useful skill, however, when you are able to step outside and “bird by ear,” you graduate to a level of avian awareness that blows away identification by sight alone! February may be the best month to start. A manageable number of common species are singing their breeding songs now. As migrants return, the number of songs out your window increases steadily. By May, a boggling 40 or more may be heard on a country lot! Powerpoint slides and audio recordings are used to familiarize participants with who is calling now. At the presentation’s conclusion we’ll step outside to identify singers and elicit some responses with recordings. Bring your binoculars!

Don’t forget! Our **Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Interactive Zoo** is open to all ages for visitation before, during and after the presentation. Great photo ops!



*Horned Lark. Photo © Steve Sage*

*Lansing Area*

*Late Winter Birding Day*

*Tuesday, February 13*

*7am to 2pm*

Join an intimate guided trip to a few prime birding locations in the Greater Lansing Area, including waterfowl and more at Potter Park and along the river trail, Moore’s Park for Peregrine Falcons, MSU farmlands, and other locations depending on the latest internet bird reports. Participants will be given bird checklists to keep track of the day’s finds. Enrollment is limited to five adults. Advance registration required. FEE: \$55, includes all transportation to and from Nature Discovery. Arrangements may also be made to pick up /drop off at your door or another convenient location.

# *After School Skull Preservation Class*



***Thursdays, February 15 - March 1***

Recommended for students 4<sup>th</sup> grade & up.

NOT for the squeamish! An introductory lesson about characteristics of mammal skulls kicks-off the activity, then the young biologists are given a freshly-boiled head of raccoon, opossum or similar-sized mammal and the utensils required to carefully tear away all the flesh. After a bleaching bath and polyurethane treatment the finished specimen, worthy of a museum case, is ready to take home for display on bureau or hearth!

\$60/student. Call or email to reserve a spot. Enrollment is limited to 5.

NOTE: For parental convenience, arrangements can be made for Jim to pick your student up after school at Stepping Stones Montessori in East Lansing and drive him/her directly to Nature Discovery.

## ***LCC Saturday GATE Youth Class, Toy Science, Begins February 17***

Taught by Carol, this five week class for students, grade 2-3, runs for five Saturdays through March 17, 9am to noon. Kids will explore the science of toy design, then use the knowledge to build your own unique toy to take home! To enroll or for more information go to [www.lcc.edu/seriousfun](http://www.lcc.edu/seriousfun) and select Spring term.



## ***Monday, February 19 Kensington Field Trip 9am to 3pm***

For elementary students and older. Hand-feeding birds at this metropark, just east of Brighton, is the highlight of this field trip that begins and ends in Nature Discovery's classroom. We'll take pictures of all participants with bird-in-hand. Bring binoculars if you have them, dress warmly and pack a bag lunch for the road! Advance enrollment required. FEE: \$70/student.

# *The Climate “State of the Union”...*

on January 31 contained far more substance than the address given the night before, which mentioned the words “climate change” not a single time. “Fossil Free Fast, The Climate Resistance,” held in Washington D.C., was streamed to live watch parties in over 300 locations around the globe. Your time would be better spent viewing this state of the union than the grandstanding pep rally put on the night before.

Senator Bernie Sanders opens by stating what is obvious to every country in the world but ours: “If you go to the scientific community and you say to them, *What is the major global crisis that we face?* the vast majority of them will say that it is absolutely imperative and a life and death issue that we have got to transform our energy systems away from fossil fuels to sustainable energy.”

*The Union Has a Climate Crisis, and Activists Are Ready to Work Around Trump*

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/climate-state-of-the-union\\_us\\_5a72679ce4b05253b27578b3](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/climate-state-of-the-union_us_5a72679ce4b05253b27578b3)

(Advance the Youtube video within the article to the 59 minute mark to the beginning presentations.)

By polar contrast, in point-of-view and in clarity, here’s a snippet from Trump’s exclusive interview with Piers Morgan of *Celebrity Apprentice* renown, in which he shares what swirls in his stable genius mind and forms the basis for his push to cram more fossil fuel production down *his* country’s throat: “There is a cooling and there’s a heating—I mean, look, it used to not be climate change. It used to be global warming. That wasn’t working too well because it was getting too cold all over the place. The ice caps were going to melt. They were going to be gone by now, but now they’re setting records, okay? They’re at a record level.”

*Trump’s Latest Climate Change Interview Was Absurd*

<http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a15911787/trump-climate-change-piers-morgan/Trump>

Read this before throwing that next plastic item in the trash. Did you know MSU Recycling Center accepts virtually EVERYTHING plastic?

[https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/01/plastic-junk-coral-disease/551495/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=atlantic-daily-newsletter&utm\\_content=20180125&silverid=MzI4Njc1NDk5NTIxS0](https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/01/plastic-junk-coral-disease/551495/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=atlantic-daily-newsletter&utm_content=20180125&silverid=MzI4Njc1NDk5NTIxS0)

-JM

**[ Union of  
Concerned Scientists**  
Science for a healthy planet and safer world

**350.org**

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