



Entry Number 30, the Northern Flicker, wasn't tallied until March of 1989, during our first year here. Now, a flicker at the suet is not an uncommon sight at any point through the winter months.

## **THIS ISSUE**

***Thank You, Donors!***

***Coffee Break, January 11***

***Sunday, January 14, MI Mammals***

***Lake Erie Winter Birding, January 13***

***LCC Saturday Youth Classes***

***Sobering Climate Change Review***

## **Our “Wild Vertebrates” Property List**

Admittedly, the title is hardly as lurid as *Cosmo*'s “Six Moves Under the Sheets Guaranteed to Drive Him Wild,” but there is no mistaking that the human brain has a natural propensity to want to arrange things in order or to peruse things that have been arranged and presented in list-form by others. Sometimes, we rank them – largest to smallest, best to worst, or in reverse, Letterman-style, like a countdown to blastoff.

I find the inception and evolution of our taxonomic system of life on Earth to be the world's ultimate and most beautiful list, and, I suspect most anyone else who studies biological systems would concur. The cascading sets and subsets from kingdom to subspecies, populations and individuals can then be so aptly converted into perfect tree-form - a girthy, voluminous trunk ultimately branching into the finest, green, outer twigs, buds and leaves. Just as on a healthy living tree, an occasional branch dies with the passage of time while others flourish.

Perhaps, more people would take our current, human-induced, great extinction event more seriously if presented with this specific visual aid: a depiction of the accelerating rate at which the twigs and leaves of the tree of “life on Earth” are shriveling and dropping. Most of us don't need a forestry degree to recognize when a tree is experiencing stress. Merely, and, at the same time, ironically, all it takes is some purposeful regard to know that its health is failing. Most are too distracted – rapt in our own anthropocentric drama and technology to even offer a glance in its direction, much less consider the toxic byproducts of living our lives with indifference toward the tree of life.

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The new year marks the beginning of our thirtieth, acting as stewards of this six-plus acres north of Williamston. Its acquisition in the winter of '88-89 was an exciting leap from the relatively, biologically-devoid surroundings of our inner-Chicago youth. A quarter of the acreage, side-by-side vernal wetlands, was ringed by grasses and Sensitive Fern. Early-successional shrubbery gave way to mostly sub-climax woods over the rest of the property except for the “country” lawn around the old house. However, recently-

graduated from MSU I was particularly enthused about the prospects it offered for becoming an integral piece of the private nature center which was to become Nature Discovery (See “We Bought Our House for the Frogs,” <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20Mar17.pdf>).

I became an avid birder in my early teens, and shortly thereafter, started my “life list.” The idea of beginning a specific “property-list” here became my first order of naturalist-business that first winter, and there was no better way to start than by setting up a feeding station outside our dining room window. Naturally, the feeder visitors were among the first tallied. Three decades later and several pages deep, the list continues to grow, but over the last several years, almost indiscernibly.

My personal parameters allow for any species to be added that has been spotted or heard from within the perimeter of our acreage. For instance, I’ve never seen a Bald Eagle land on our property, but have seen many individuals in flight – usually migrating – overhead. There are a handful on the list that I’ve positively identified by call or song, even if I didn’t get a definitive look, like the latest addition...

The list gained just one entry in 2017, Number 144 - an Alder Flycatcher vocalizing throughout the duration of an entire May day, yet, I never did get my binoculars trained on it. After hearing its quick, raspy and rising *fee-BEER* coming from the trees surrounding our front vernal pond dozens of times that day, its voice was notably missing from the noisy, spring orchestra the very next day and beyond. The visit happened to fall in the midst of the species’ peak migration window through this latitude. It had undoubtedly continued its northward journey that night toward a breeding territory within some coniferous muskeg perhaps hundreds of miles to the north.

A list of the vertebrate life encountered on our property beyond the bird life is so greatly limited by comparison that a written one is barely necessary to keep track. Here are the rest...

#### MAMMALS (24 species, incl. one marsupial)

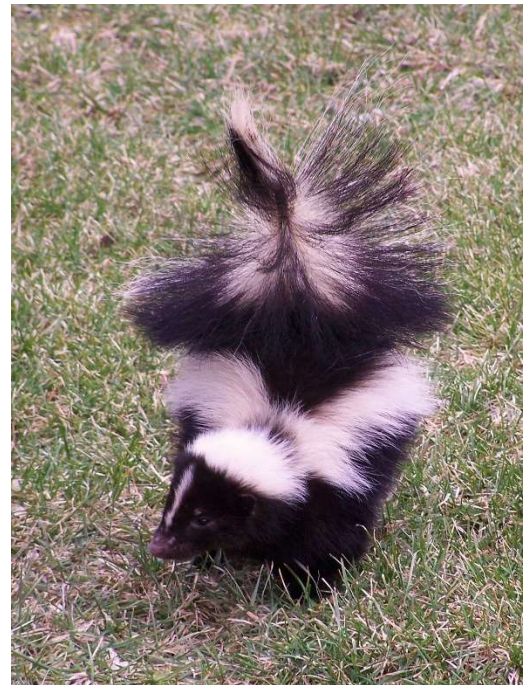
White-tailed Deer, Virginia Opossum, Raccoon, Coyote, Red Fox, Striped Skunk, Mink, Eastern Cottontail, Woodchuck, Eastern Fox Squirrel, Eastern Gray Squirrel, Red Squirrel, Eastern Chipmunk, Southern Flying Squirrel, Muskrat, Norway Rat, Deer Mouse, White-footed Mouse, Meadow Jumping Mouse, Eastern Meadow Vole, Eastern Mole, Star-nosed Mole, Northern Short-tailed Shrew, Masked Shrew, Big Brown Bat.

##### NOTES:

1. American Beaver missed the list by a mere couple hundred feet. In early spring of 2010 a yearling – surely in the act of dispersing from some distant waterway – was road-killed near the driveway of our neighbor to the south.

2. Up to three other weasel species are possible and sporadically probable on the property. We’ve seen tiny tracks in the snow that are most certainly from a Least Weasel on a number of occasions, but no sighting.

3. A few species of bats should be present in the vicinity and have surely flown over our air space. A colony of Big Brown Bats has occupied our attic since we moved here, but other species are difficult to identify in flight at dusk without a bat-detector to differentiate them by their unique vocalizations. When our daughter, Lily, was in early elementary school she and a friend, for fun, climbed fairly high into one of our



*With a raised tail this skunk makes its displeasure known at being cut-off on its waddling trip out of the woods and across the lawn toward our compost pile.*

large Norway Spruces. (Branches grow horizontally to the trunk making it almost as easy to climb as a ladder, plus a few pokes.) Only days later did she tell me that they saw a bat hanging from a limb near them. The Hoary Bat and Red Bat are known to roost in solitude from the limbs of a variety of trees, including evergreens.

#### REPTILES (8 species)

Common Snapping Turtle, Painted Turtle, Blanding's Turtle, Eastern Garter Snake, Northern Ribbon Snake, Butler's Garter Snake, Northern Water Snake, Eastern Milk Snake.

##### NOTES:

1. We encountered Butler's Garters on the property through most of the 1990s. Since we have not seen one in over twenty years we are assuming the species has become locally extinct. Herp survey data indicates this species to be in steep decline throughout its range over the last twenty years. It is probably not a coincidence that as Wild Turkey numbers have risen, this small species has declined. Turkeys eat small snakes.
2. It is of interest to note that, for reasons we cannot fathom we have never seen a Northern Brown or Red-bellied Snake on our property. This, despite the fact that we have seen individuals, road-killed and alive not far from our property in any direction. Turkeys may be a factor here, as well.
3. The Northern Water Snake appears to need proximity to permanent bodies of water, and access to small fish. Our vernal ponds cannot support fish since they dry up at some point in most years. Yet, several years ago, Carol found the one and only recorded individual of this species on the edge of our lawn. Not surprisingly, it was a new-born. A small, but fish-laden permanent pond exists on a neighbor's property only a tenth of a mile to our north. Northern Water Snakes reside here. It is not unusual for young snakes to disperse quite far from their point of origin.

#### AMPHIBIANS (9 species)

Northern Spring Peeper, Western Chorus Frog, Eastern Gray Tree Frog, American Toad, Wood Frog, Northern Leopard Frog, Green Frog, Eastern Tiger Salamander, Blue-spotted Salamander.

##### NOTES:

While all those listed have been found throughout our years here, amphibian abundance, in general, has declined overall. Based on intensity of vocalizations the Western Chorus Frog and the Northern Leopard Frog have declined by well over ninety percent.



*In recent springs the few vocalizing chorus frogs are a far cry from the cacophony recorded here in the 90s for our Frogs of the Great Lakes CD.*

We've never attempted the gargantuan task of compiling a complete invertebrates list for the property, but we are intimately aware of what's here through the seasons. In the warmer months we collect insects to feed to our in-house frogs and salamanders on a daily basis. We wade through our vernal ponds dozens of times each spring and summer dragging nets through the water column for aquatic invertebrates. With this level of familiarity we know a "new" insect when we see it. In 2015 we found a female, then a male Roepel's Katydid, a species introduced in The East decades ago that is expanding its range westward (<http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20Aug15.pdf>). We contacted MSU's entomology department and donated the specimens – the first in their collection and almost certainly the first confirmation in Ingham County.

Ditto, in regard to a list of the property's plant life, although, again, we are intimately aware of what is here for all our time spent off-trail. The prevalence of some species has shifted, partly due to normal successional processes, but more troublingly, due to the proliferation of invasive species. We often mention that the vegetative make-up of our acreage has changed dramatically since 1990. We've got Garlic Mustard somewhat under control and have worked to keep Dame's Rocket and European





*Our front vernal pond greens up in early April. The ponds are directly or indirectly responsible for most of the wild diversity here.*

observation over decades within the boundaries of such a specific location engenders many, equally-prolonged considerations which, by extension, promote a level of concern that is apt to elude the casual visitor.

So arises the basis of our mission - to help anyone of any age identify that which lives wild around them, then to consider its ecological connectivity to other organisms, to the land and to the water. Concern follows, naturally.

*-Jim McGrath*

Buckthorn from ever getting a foothold, but, despite countless hundreds of hours of pulling and cutting, the advance of unpalatable Amur Honeysuckle and Oriental Bittersweet continues, crowding out native plant life, and thus, negatively-affecting all else in this mixed natural community.

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Our property list is not necessarily or especially unique, but valuable nonetheless. These ever-changing snapshots of the biota it supports are indicative not just of the species you can expect to find throughout this corner of the county and speck on the globe, but of broader influences affecting the survival and function of each. For better or worse, steady

***Thank you...***  
*to Judy & Allen Marr,*  
*Jon Kaszuk, and*  
*Lisa Symons for recent,*  
*generous donations to*  
*Nature Discovery!*



### ***Catch Nature Discovery on WLNZ's Coffee Break January 11***

Jim is scheduled to appear this month on Thursday, January 11 at 9:15am discussing Snowy Owls and mammals. 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 Facebook reminder prior to the 6pm airing.

# *Michigan Mammals: Mouse to Moose*

*Sunday, January 14*

***Doors open from 1 to 5pm  
Admission: \$5/person***



*The Deer Mouse is prolific and abundant in rural settings.*

Did you know over 60 species of wild mammals can be found within our state's borders? Participate in the following activities to help you get to better know our state's furry fauna. This is hardly just for kids. Participating adults will be challenged and surprised by how much is to be learned in a few hours here!



Take the MICHIGAN MAMMAL SKULLS QUIZ.

Over decades, Nature Discovery has amassed a collection of skulls of over two dozen wild Michigan mammals. The skulls will be spread across a table and arranged according to the taxonomic orders in which they are found, i.e., carnivores, ungulates, rodents, etc., each species with a number-coded card. A worksheet is supplied. Check if you are correct by turning over the card to reveal the name.

Take the MID-MICHIGAN MAMMALS POWERPOINT QUIZ.

An automated slide show guides you through numbered images of thirty mammal species that can be found in the wild around the Greater Lansing Area. A worksheet is supplied, and answers are provided when you are ready to check how you did.

LIVE WILD MICE, VOLES & SHREWS trapped on the property will be on display. We'll help you differentiate between them and discuss differences in their behavior and ecology. Watch a Michigan constrictor in action! We will feed a live mouse to a milk snake or rat snake a few times through the afternoon.

SKULL IDENTIFICATION. Do you have a mammal skull that you found outside but aren't sure what species it is? Bring it along. We'll help you identify it!

There's more... Visit our huge, interactive MICHIGAN REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS ZOO throughout the afternoon, as well. Knowledgeable staff is always on hand to help visitors of all ages make the most of their visit!







Male Canvasback.

Photo © Steve Sage.

# *Lake Erie Birding Day Saturday, January 13 7:30am to 4:30pm*

The winter landscapes of our Great Lakes shorelines are strong magnets to a surprising array of Canadian species that call Lower Michigan “South.” Lake Erie is no exception. In addition to viewing diving ducks and other fowl on the open water through our spotting scope, we’ll explore adjacent habitats for roosting northern migrant owls, such as Long-eared and Saw-whet. Many other birds are always in store, too. Birding stops include Lake Erie Metropark, Point Mouillee State Game Area and other locations along the way dependent on latest internet reports. A Michigan Birds checklist is provided to allow participants to keep track of species encountered throughout the day.

Enrollment: Adults only, Maximum 5 participants. Advance registration required.

FEE: \$70, includes all transportation to and from Nature Discovery.

## *LCC Saturday GATE Youth Classes...*

will be taught by Carol starting next month at East Campus. The classes run for five weeks, Saturday, February 17 through Saturday, March 17. These classes require a teacher recommendation form.

**Toy Science** (for grades 2 & 3; 9am to 12pm)

This is an exciting, hands-on class in which students will investigate the science behind the function of various toys. Students will explore electricity, magnetism, friction, gravity, and simple machines commonly used in toy design. They will even build their own working toy to take home!

**Advanced Science with Experiments** (for grades 4-6; 1 to 4pm)

Student will enjoy mixing chemicals, bubbling liquids, and even lighting metal on fire in this highly-engaging class led by a professional chemist! Other projects include coating a nail with copper, making then testing a mini-air bag, designing an electric maze, and more. Each Saturday a natural science “live time” will also be presented featuring Michigan animals.

To register visit [www.lcc.edu/seriousfun](http://www.lcc.edu/seriousfun) and select Spring GATE.

## *A Sobering Year-end Review on Climate Change*

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/26122017/climate-change-science-2017-year-review-evidence-impact-faster-more-extreme>

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

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