



*One of our tiger salamanders anticipates a cricket. It will snatch one out of any willing visitor's fingers.*

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## ***Interaction is a Win-Win - for Exhibit Visitors AND for Our Herps!***

now over forty species of Michigan-native reptiles and amphibians that currently resides at our home-based nature center. Keeping, maintaining, hauling and exhibiting such a daunting number of tanks of animals to a growing number of indoor and outdoor venues across the state presents an unending carousel of trials and tribulations. A full exhibit takes up over forty feet of table space, not to mention a pool or two of free-swimming turtles on the floor. It's no wonder there is nothing else like it, but, as we can't help mentioning at specific school events, *we've got it down to a science.*

Virtually everywhere the exhibit is contracted the response from walk-by audiences is overwhelming... And why not? We strive to make each visitor's experience as interactive as possible, while at the same time remaining vigilant that the up-close opportunities are not taxing the well-being of our animals. The screen lids on all the tanks come off regularly as we drop insects to frogs or salamanders, or take out a snake to be better identified, touched, held, or with our large black rat snakes, "worn" around the shoulders for a unique photo op.

Daily diligence is required to keep over 100 living creatures at our facility alive, healthy and ultimately presentable at these exhibits. We often tell audiences that with this volume of living creatures in our care, every hour of every day there is a mouth to be fed, poop to be picked, or a tank to be torn down for a complete cleaning. We also take care to arrange the environment in the tanks in such a way as to mimic a slice of the natural habitat in which they exist.

In last month's issue I discussed our endeavor over the past two decades to accumulate an educational menagerie of





Comments from visitors affirm the effort applied. In fact, one of our favorite visitor iterations speaks not just for the condition of the tank environments, but for the healthy dispositions of the amphibians, turtles and snakes, themselves: “They’re so active and alert!” We attribute the surprise in their tones to a mental comparison they may conjure from a visit to a zoo’s reptile house. The boa, tortoise or alligator lays prostrate behind the glass as multitudes of visitors pass throughout a day. It has no impetus to rise from its stasis. The door to its enclosure will not be opened and it will not be fed or otherwise stimulated, despite all the activity on the other side of the glass.

By contrast, the continuously-interactive dynamic of our exhibit is stimulating to the animals as well as to the human visitors! They may have simpler brains in their heads, but all our frogs, salamanders, turtles and snakes quickly learn that good things happen for them when large mammals move in front of their given confines. A lid regularly comes off, they get to come out of the enclosure, or they get to be fed. Most of these animals do not view our presence as something to fear, as a wild one would, but as something that stimulates anticipation. Thus, the associated, sometimes excited movement.

Conversation is always in full swing. With multiple activities happening at a given event there is always much more for the visitors to move on to, but I often tell them that after they’ve checked out everything else, come on back. With a collection this extensive and all there is to learn we will *not* run out of material to share!



Our kids, now all in their twenties, have their own lives and jobs, but regularly assist us when needed at these events. As early as they can remember they’ve helped us with the daily zoo maintenance, traversed a range of habitats in search of specimens, and traveled with us to assist at presentations and exhibits. It’s no wonder that, like their parents, they can comfortably talk an informed “blue streak” about any species



with visitors in these venues. As parents, Carol and I love observing them from a distance - interacting, teaching and, yes, entertaining a child, a family, or a gathering of adults, comfortably, naturally and effectively.

Whether it is an exhibit at a school science fair, a special event at a nature center, or an outdoorsy event offered by the DNR, a local parks and rec department, or a non-profit environmental group the annual contracts to have us back are testament to the quality and entertainment value of the educational experience we provide. Ralya Elementary School in Haslett holds the record for consecutive years using our service for their annual science fair – twenty years and counting. They’ve not missed a year to contract us since we first began offering exhibits.

If you’ve not experienced Nature Discovery’s live Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit at an event there are two right here in South-central Michigan coming up this month. Michigan Audubon Society



operates Cranefest the weekend of October 13-14 and has contracted us to exhibit on Saturday at the event many years in a row. We love participating in it! Baker Sanctuary, located near Bellevue is one of two sites where thousands of Sandhill Cranes gather throughout the month before migrating south. The birds feed in fields for miles outside the sanctuary during the day then fly in to roost on Big Marsh Lake in late afternoon making for an impressive visual and auditory show. Birders are on hand with spotting scopes to give visitors close-ups of cranes and other birds on the marsh. Naturalist-led interpretive walks are available throughout the afternoon, a couple of which will be led by me on Saturday. The event also features a live birds of prey program, wildlife artists' displays, booths of various vendors and environmental organizations, and, of course, food concessions. The event is free with a few-dollar parking fee. For more details here is a link: <https://www.michiganaudubon.org/news-events/signature-events/cranefest/>.



MSU's Hidden Lake Gardens in Tipton will be contracting a partial Michigan reptiles & amphibians exhibit for the first time at their Fall Foliage Festival on Saturday, October 20. We're aiming to become an annual fixture at this event, too! Here's a link for more information: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/hiddenlakegardens/events/fall>.

-Jim McGrath

## ***Around the State in October***

- ❖ ***Sunday, October 6: 2 to 4pm. Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Presentation & Exhibit; MDNR Outdoor Adventure Center, Detroit..***
- ❖ ***Saturday, October 13: 1 to 6pm. Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Cranefest, Baker Sanctuary, Bellevue.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, October 20: 11am to 3pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Hidden Lake Gardens, Tipton.***
- ❖ ***Monday, October 29: 6:30pm. Michigan Snakes Presentation; Livonia Public Library.***



## ***Catch Nature Discovery on WLNZ Radio's Coffee Break on Friday, October 12***

Jim is scheduled to appear on Friday, October 12 at 9:15am. 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 our Facebook fan page.



American Widgeon.

Photo © Steve Sage.

# *A Powerpoint Field Guide to Michigan Waterfowl*

***Sunday, October 14      Admission: \$5***  
***Doors open from 1 to 5pm.***

Many Michiganders are surprised to learn that there are over 40 species of waterfowl to be encountered within our state's borders throughout the year. At 2pm, sit-in on our original presentation, *A Powerpoint Field Guide to Michigan Waterfowl*. Beautiful images of loons, grebes and cormorants join a slew of species of ducks, geese and swans. Learn the identification, behavior, migratory habits and seasonality of each species, in addition to where and when to find them.

**Don't forget our interactive Michigan-native reptiles & amphibians zoo!** Before, during or after the presentation visitors of all ages are encouraged to spend time here. Home to over 40 combined species of snakes, turtles, frogs, salamanders and lizards, it's the largest such collection in the state!



## ***Thank You, Cedar Creek Vets!***

Cedar Creek Veterinary Clinic in Williamston donates professional medical care for Nature Discovery's huge educational menagerie of Michigan-native reptiles & amphibians. With over 100 animals in all we need to call on them regularly. That's why we appreciatively call CCV **THE OFFICIAL VET OF NATURE DISCOVERY!** Make them your pet's health care team. Visit [www.cedarcreekvet.com](http://www.cedarcreekvet.com).

*Dr. Wayne Beasley tends to our precious, state-listed Wood Turtle.*

## ***Saturday GATE Classes Begin October 20 at LCC***

Carol is teaching 5-week Saturday LCC Fall GATE classes (East Campus) beginning October 20.

Science Wizards (9am-noon, Grades 2-3) Learn about Michigan wildlife, plenty of live animals in class each day! Includes a field trip to Nature Discovery.

Advanced Fun with Physics (1-4pm, Grades 5-6) Learn how to build a simple motor, generate electricity from renewable sources, build a solar cooker and more in this hands on, project based class.

To register or for more information visit [lcc.edu/seriousfun](http://lcc.edu/seriousfun) and click on Fall/Spring GATE.

## ***Whitefish Point Fall Birding***

***Tuesday-Wednesday,  
October 23-24***

*Tundra Swans. Photo © Greg Smith.*



Depart Tuesday, 7am. Return Wednesday, @ 5pm. Join an intimate group of only five adult participants on a guided trip to Whitefish Point, including a number of stops in transit. The fact that the peninsula juts into the southeast shore of Lake Superior makes it a perfect gathering point for migrants, large and small. We'll join professional hawk-counters and waterfowl counters at designated stations and visit other locations on the point. Weather-permitting after dark we will visit the owl station where owls are captured in mist nets, data collected, then released.

On our way to/from the point we will stop at Point LaBarbe, located on the northeast tip of Lake Michigan and in the shadow of Mackinac Bridge. Here we will join Mackinaw Straits Raptor Watch counters identifying a variety of hawks and eagles passing overhead. Late October is the peak fall Golden Eagle migration window!

Weather-permitting, we should tally up to 50 species. Much of the birding through the trip is in or near the vehicle with a few relatively short hikes.

Overnight accommodations will be made at Curley's Motel in Paradise.

**COST:** Only \$220/person, includes all transportation and lodging. Meet at Nature Discovery.

Contact us to register. (In case of an inclement weather forecast the trip may be postponed and rescheduled for Tu-Wed, Oct 30-31.)

# *More Personal Responsibility*

In response to our column, *Exercise the “First R”: Refuse* in last month’s issue, our Seattle sister-in-law, Cynthia McGrath wrote this:

*I think having a zero waste feature in your newsletter is great, and I love that you are giving your readers ideas to take action/make a difference in any way they can. It’s a leap for many, but must get people thinking about how they live and what they can personally do to make a difference. We all have to own responsibility to our environment and this planet! One of my things is paper towels and napkins. I have not purchased either in over three plus decades. We always use cloth napkins and if I’m going to the movies where I’ll be having popcorn or to the rare restaurant that won’t be serving me with cloth, I bring my own. So easy to stash in my purse. When our dish towels get dingy, they go to the rag basket for mopping up spills and cleaning. We use dish towels to dry our hands and if I need to drain something really greasy like bacon, I simply use something from the recycling bin like a piece of butcher paper or cardboard. These “dirty” paper items can then be placed in our clean green/compost bin for weekly pickup.*

Thank you for that, Cynthia! We’re following suit to eliminate paper towels and napkins from our own daily activity now. If any other readers can share examples of how they are “refusing” or “reducing” we’d love to hear about it and share it for others to consider implementing in their own lives.

Meanwhile, bleak environmental news abounds that should be reason enough to impel everyone to take individual responsibility, especially in view of the fact that our current administration is adamant on stonewalling any action to curtail the looming crises. Vote ‘em out before it’s too late!

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/energy-environment/2018/10/03/climate-scientists-are-struggling-find-right-words-very-bad-news/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.20c21d21c90d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/energy-environment/2018/10/03/climate-scientists-are-struggling-find-right-words-very-bad-news/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.20c21d21c90d)

-JM

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