
THIS ISSUE

*Sunday, September 8 /
Celebrate Michigan Snakes Day
Coffee Break, September 20
LCC Fall Saturday Kids' Class
Around the State in September
Climate Change Realist*

***Baby Snake Boom
is a Timely Boon***



A hatchling Blue Racer looks world's apart from the adult.

After 26 years, the “firsts” keep coming for Nature Discovery. That means unprecedented opportunities for participants in our programs, too. The latest can be seen this Sunday, and it’s apropos to the event.

Among countless “natural-Michigan” circannual rhythms, think of August and early September as baby snake time. Then, watch for them. Over the past six weeks, one fortuitous circumstance after another (including a little help from our friends) has resulted in our accumulating “snake-lings” of seven Michigan species! Number eight is due any day.

Acquisition of each species carries its own story. If you read last month’s *Wild Times*, you are already aware of our hatchling black rat snakes, including a couple of albinos. Incidentally, a second brood of eggs laid by our five-year-old female are hatching as I write.

Young of two live-bearers were secured indirectly by students enrolled in our Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians day camp in early August. In addition to getting lots of exposure to our interactive herp-zoo on site, the group traveled each day to a different local natural area with this goal in mind: encounter as many species of snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders within their natural habitats as possible. They made it up to an impressive sixteen species, and, in the process indirectly secured the young of two live-bearing snakes. We captured a large, pregnant female of an Eastern Garter and Northern Ribbon Snake. They were brought back to our classroom with the hope that the students might get an opportunity to see either of them give birth before the week was over. They missed it by two days. Both individuals gave birth on the same day. Kids in the following week’s camp were given the opportunity to release the baby snakes, mostly around the prime vernal wetland habitat on our property.

In late June we found a large female Eastern Milksnake in the yard. Her wide girth evinced her gravid state. A week later, she laid sixteen eggs that we kept in a bucket of potting soil. They just hatched last week. We released all but two to show.

We’ve had only a single Northern Watersnake in our educational collection for some time now – a three-year-old female that we’ve had since birth. We’ve wanted to secure a second individual – preferably a large, impressive female to show in our various programs. Unfortunately, we have limited local places to find them. Jesse Anderson, a teen who lives a few miles north of us, came through in the middle of August. He dropped off a very large and wide-bodied female who was definitely pregnant.

(Thank you, Jesse!) Last week she gave birth to no less than thirty healthy snake-lings. We're keeping a few to show this Sunday and releasing the rest on a flooding at Rose Lake this afternoon.



The upturned snout is a give-away to ID a hognose. This and the Massasauga are Michigan's most stout-bodied species.

in appearance to the smooth, beautiful, glossy blue of an adult. Instead, its head is dark-brown while its body is heavily-spotted over a dirty tan background. Not far down the same sandy side road I swerved to miss another tiny snake in my path - a hatchling Eastern Hognose Snake.

Finally, about that eighth species due to hatch... This story requires a rewind back to May, then, an early-summer midnight snake pick-up at a police officer's home.

We were exhibiting our complete collection of Michigan reptiles and amphibians at a park in Mount Pleasant as part of an Environmental Awareness Day hosted by Isabella Conservation District for area third graders. As busloads of kids, teachers and chaperones made their way through the interactive exhibit, we were continuously embroiled in conversation. Paul Lauria, a Mount Pleasant police officer, was one of the chaperones. After emphatically - from a distance - letting us know he was not cool with snakes, he commenced to tell us about the huge foxsnakes they see in the garage at his parents' place located in the Rapid River area of the U.P. We immediately told him we'd love to come up sometime this summer and take one or two off their hands. (We had lost our only foxsnake in tandem with the racer over the winter.)

On July 6, we had just finished exhibiting again at Ludington State Park when Carol received a call on her cell. Paul's brother, who had been visiting his parents over the weekend, was on his way home with a very large foxsnake for us. He was going to drop it at Paul's house. Paul had called to make arrangements for us to get it - the sooner, the better. We told him that, as it turned out, we were coming home from Ludington that very night but would not be going through Mount Pleasant until quite late. He said they'd wait up. Not only did we pick up the snake, but when we saw its girth, once again, we knew it had to be gravid. She laid over twenty eggs a few weeks later.

Incidentally, on a trip to the U.P. two weeks ago, we paid Paul's mother, Judy Lauria, a visit. (Thank you, Judy!) She allowed us to walk all around the property and through various garages and sheds to look for another foxsnake, but, not surprisingly, the Murphy's Law of Snake-searching (the searched-for snake shall not be found) rendered our effort unsuccessful.

We're keeping our fingers crossed that the foxsnake eggs will hatch before Sunday, though. Better yet, maybe they'll be hatching while visitors are here to see it!

-Jim McGrath

Come Celebrate our 4th Annual Michigan SNAKES Day

Sunday, September 8
1 to 5pm; \$5/person



Meet the Black Ratsnake. The largest and one of the rarest snakes in the state is also ridiculously gentle and highly handle-able. It's got the whole package!

Join us for **Celebrate Michigan Snakes Day**. If you love snakes, this day is for you. If you loathe snakes, this day is *definitely* for you! Meet live specimens of 12 of our state's 17 species!

Do you know someone who is afraid of, dislikes, hates, or otherwise has uncomfortable feelings toward snakes? Try to coax them into coming. We **GUARANTEE** that anyone who attends this informative and completely benign event will walk away feeling better about snakes!



At 2pm, we will present ***Facts Over Fear: Things Everyone Should Know About Snakes***. We'll discuss a host of erroneous beliefs spread through society that produce bad feelings toward these surprisingly gentle reptiles. Will a snake bite? Will a snake chase you? Are snakes slimy? Do snakes have fangs? Will a venomous snake ever appear in your yard? One question after another produces a factual explanation that sheds light on the unthreatening reality of these needlessly-persecuted creatures. Learn how to identify one from another through close inspection.

Watch a **snake climb a tree**. See **snakes eating** worms, fish, frogs and mice. Check out our one-of-a-kind, recently-amassed huge array of baby Michigan snakes, fertile snake eggs, and more. Lots of **handling** opportunities, too. We'll take a **photo** of you holding a snake, then email it to you. Don't forget the rest of our zoo of Michigan turtles, frogs, salamanders and lizards, too!

Refreshments available all day!

***Catch Nature Discovery on
WLNZ Radio's Coffee Break
on Friday, September 20***

Jim & Carol are scheduled to appear on Friday, September 20 at 9:15am, discussing Michigan's praying mantises and more. 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.



Enroll your 2nd-3rd Grader in



***Creepy Crawlies –
Fall Edition***

***Saturdays, Oct 26-Nov 23
at LCC East***

Carol is teaching this LIVELY 5-week class featuring hands-on and up close experiences, inside and outside, with a variety of insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals, and more. It runs from 1 to 4pm for 5 Saturdays at Lansing Community College (East Campus). Call LCC at 483-1860 to enroll.

Around the State in September

- ❖ ***Saturday, September 7: 9am to 3pm. Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Sportsmen for Youth Day, Muskegon Co. Fairgrounds.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, September 21: 9am to 1pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Park-It Event, Lakelands Trail State Park, Hamburg.***
- ❖ ***Tuesday, September 24: Michigan Turtles Presentation; Saginaw Audubon Meeting. Green Point Nature Center, Saginaw.***



Climate Change Realist

It was refreshing to see a cartoon in the *Lansing State Journal* lampoon the GOP's unwillingness to take scientific evidence seriously on the causes of climate change. We particularly liked cartoonist Pat Bagley's use of frogs to make his point (www.politicalcartoons.com/cartoon/AA4DA404-0C93-4448-AF25-91FE82EC0B07.html). If you are unfamiliar with Rep.-Utah Chris Stewart, he's the GOP-chosen chairman of the House environmental subcommittee charged with overseeing climate change issues. His resume' earned their confidence (www.sltrib.com/sltrib/politics/56029666-90/stewart-climate-utah-committee.html.csp).



Frogs are widely known to be environmental indicators, but who would notice, then, have the will to act if they are indicating something's wrong. The Wood Frog is a common Michigan species, yet, our wood frog population has experienced close to 100% reproductive failure in two of the last four summers.

While we've done everything we can to protect the integrity of the vernal pond and surrounding habitat on our north Williamston property, populations of all seven species of frogs that breed here experienced nearly 100% reproductive failure in the summer of 2012. While we are relieved to see such a nice rebound in their reproductive success this summer (Life is resilient when given an opportunity!), it doesn't take much of a leap to come to the realization that more frequent summers like 2012 will result in the decline and ultimate extinction of these populations. As we've stated before, we are doing all we can to protect their habitat, but the state of the atmosphere is out of our control. This past May, a U.S. Geological Survey report corroborated everything we observed, then feared may happen on our vernal pond, as well as throughout northeastern Ingham County:

www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=3597&from=rss

OUR HATCHLING RAT SNAKES NEED HOMES!

We'll give one, along with all the care support you need, to any educational institution that uses our services.

An excellent classroom mascot!

Contact us for details...

Become a fan of *Nature Discovery* on Facebook!

Check out our latest "Spotty Baby Snake ID"
post on our Youtube channel,

Wild Williamston.

NATURE DISCOVERY 5900 N. Williamston Road Williamston, MI 48895

(517) 655-5349 naturedisc87@gmail.com www.naturediscovery.net