

“Two more mice in the millet,” our son, Reed, announced as he closed the door to the garage behind him. What started as an “accidental” mouse trap is now continuously “set” in the garage. In the past few weeks, we’ve caught three shrews and more than a dozen deer mice. Here’s how it works...

The seed kept in the garage for our bird feeders includes a 5-gallon bucket against the north wall currently filled a few inches deep with white millet. It so happens that a length of spare J-channel from a past vinyl siding project was left propped against the same wall next to the seed. At some point a few weeks ago, maybe due to the vibration of the overhead door being closed, the J-channel started to fall. It slid until it was stopped at a 30-degree angle by the rim of the millet bucket abutting the wall.

The first catch was a sleek, dark gray short-tailed shrew. I discovered it during my morning bird feeder-filling routine. A deer mouse can hop several feet into the air, but a shrew only a few inches at best. I looked over the surrounding array and concluded how it got in. The angled J-channel, starting from the floor, is the perfect ramp for a mouse-sized body. When the shrew reached the rim of the bucket, it smelled something good below it and took the leap, apparently oblivious, or incapable of any forethought as to how it would get out.

A deer mouse has the ability to jump directly into the bucket, but, from the floor its nose picks up no incentive to do it. Through a night of hyper exploration, its discovery of the ramp and a need to find out where it leads is inevitable. As with the shrew, once the rim of the bucket is reached the scent of the seed is irresistible. Down it jumps. Where, on any firm surface the deer mouse can leap the equivalent of a tall building in a single bound, its feet sink into the millet on every push-off, rendering it as inept of a jumper as the hapless shrew.



After spending almost 22 years in a very old country dwelling, we’ve come to accept that a completely mouseless house is unattainable. In fact, in fall and winter calling it a mouseful house might be more appropriate. We own no killing snap traps. We catch them alive with several aluminum box traps, which are in continuous use in the house, the classroom and the garage – and the mice keep on coming... What a testament to their reproductive prowess!

If you’re thinking *How humane to catch the mice alive and release them back into the wild*, you don’t know us very well. With fourteen mousers in our Michigan snakes menagerie, the mice we catch are saving us money! A live one from a pet store costs at least \$1.50.

Observe a snake consuming a frozen mouse that’s been thawed versus a snake pursuing a live one. You can tell that, like us, it prefers fresh to frozen. A snake may occasionally snub the thawed mouse, but a live one, especially as perky and evasive as a deer mouse, really puts a spring in its coils. In their fairly uneventful day-to-day existence behind the glass, the weekly awakening of the predatory instincts in these gentle, people-friendly reptiles feels right for them in more than just a physical sense.

-Jim McGrath



## Catch Nature Discovery on LCC Radio Tuesday Morning



Jim will be a guest on *The Coffee Break Morning Show* to discuss Capital Area Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count and Nature Discovery's associated Powerpoint presentation entitled *Birds of the 2009 Christmas Bird Count* (See below).

You can listen to *Coffee Break* each weekday morning 9am - 10am on 89.7 FM, and also catch it on Comcast 15 or 31. Jim's Tuesday, December 7 time slot is tentatively scheduled for 9:45am. Tune in!

### Winter Birding Maple River SGA Saturday, December 11, 7am to Noon

This guided trip for adults and teens offers chances to see a list of migrants from the north that, like snow buntings and shrikes, are impossible to see here during warmer months - plus other species, like the Bald Eagle, that you don't see every day. Most of the birding is done in the warmth of the van. Dress warmly for brief stints in the elements. Meet at Nature Discovery or make arrangements to be picked up and dropped off en route. \$20 includes all transportation. Each participant will also receive a Michigan birds checklist to keep track of the day's finds. Contact us to reserve a spot. Limit 5.



Nine Northern Flickers were counted last year.

### Second Sunday December 12, 1 to 5pm

Come join us! Visit our interactive zoo of live Michigan reptiles & amphibians, walk the trail or check out birds at the feeders. At 2pm, Jim will present *Birds of the 2009 Christmas Bird Count*. This Powerpoint presentation shows all 57 species identified and counted by participants in last year's count. A \$3/person donation is requested. Birders of any skill level - even if you have none - are encouraged to participate in this year's 65<sup>th</sup> annual count on Sat, Dec 18. Jim will explain the logistics of the count and how the data is used.

## Christmas Bird Count

The 65<sup>th</sup> annual East Lansing Christmas bird count, coordinated by Capital Area Audubon Society, is Saturday, December 18. Anyone is welcome to participate, regardless of your skill level. In fact, joining other birders for a day or part of a day is a great way to get to know your winter birds better – and it's fun!

Jim is the editor of Capital Area Audubon's monthly newsletter, *The Call Note*. For more information on how you can become involved, go to [www.capitalareaaudubon.org](http://www.capitalareaaudubon.org) and click on the December 2010 newsletter. A map of the 15-mile diameter count circle can be viewed on the site as well.

Jim has also written a column about the count that appeared in this Sunday's *Williamston Enterprise*. To find it on [www.lsj.com](http://www.lsj.com), click on *Communities*, then on *Williamston*.



Children thrill at watching our Bull Frog gobble up worms.

## Pre-Holiday Day Camp

**Mon thru Wed, December 20-22 9am-3pm**

For K & older. Join us for one, two or three days of hands-on Michigan natural science. Visit 100 animals at our highly interactive Michigan reptiles & amphibians zoo! Identify, handle and feed many of our 13 snake species, 10 turtles, 12 frogs and 7 salamanders. Students love holding our bearded dragon. We'll also spend time in the yard and on the trails identifying birds and other wildlife – and track the Abominable Snow Bunny. "Yeti or not, here we come!" A photo of your student will be emailed home. A hot lunch & snacks are provided. \$45/day; \$125/three days. Contact us to reserve a spot.

## Pre-Holiday Field Trips

**Mon thru Wed, December 20-22 9am-3pm**

For 4<sup>th</sup> gr & older. Bald eagles, peregrine falcons, birds-in-the-hand, and more. Join Jim for one, two or three days of wild exploration at three separate locations: Kensington Metropark (east of Brighton), Maple River State Game Area (north of St. Johns), and "Area 7" (Jim's Christmas Bird Count area in Lansing). Each offers its own unique experiences with birds and other wildlife. Students will keep checklists of bird species seen throughout each day. We'll also be sure to return early enough to spend time with the animals in Nature Discovery's classroom. The specific day of each destination will be determined as the week approaches. Pack a bag lunch, dress warmly and bring binoculars, if you have some. (Compact binos are not recommended. Ask us about the best kind to get.)



Chickadees, titmice and nuthatches at Kensington are not shy about taking "handouts."

\$50/day; \$135/three days. Max enrollment, 5. Contact us to reserve a spot.

Parents, other interested adults or older students are welcome to join us on any day. Do you have a student younger than 4<sup>th</sup> grade with an exceptional interest in birds? Contact us to discuss his/her inclusion.



*A Screech-owl is spot-lighted after responding to our recording.*

## ***Between-the-Holidays Owling***

***Tue or Thur, December 28 or 30 7 to 9pm***

Join us Tuesday or Thursday, December 28 or 30 from 7 to 9pm for a Powerpoint presentation over hot beverages and cookies. ***Michigan Owls*** features all ten species found in the state, and one more that's now considered extinct here. We'll discuss some of the physical adaptations that make an owl such an efficient nocturnal predator, and offer insight on the identification, vocalizations, behavior and ecology of each species. At the presentation's conclusion, we will go into the night and attempt to "call one in" with audio recordings for a close encounter. Dress warmly and don't forget your binoculars and camera!

\$10/person. Limit, 10 participants. Contact us for advance enrollment. Not recommended for preschool children.

## ***UP Winter Birding Trip***

***MLK Weekend, January 14-17***

There are still spaces available for this unique opportunity to experience northern birds that you'll never see downstate while enjoying the beautiful winter landscapes of the UP. All your transportation and lodging are covered! Check the November newsletter for all the details.



## ***Gifts & Certificates***

Nature Discovery's instructional & environmental audio CD, ***Frogs of the Great Lakes Region***, is available for \$14.00.

***PERSONALIZED GIFT CERTIFICATES*** of any dollar value are available. The recipient can redeem them at any Nature Discovery functions.

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