

Occasionally, we receive an email from the parent of one of our past students asking to be removed from the mailing list. “Our children are grown now,” often qualifies the request. Besides making us feel old (“Our children are in their twenties now.”), we also feel a sense of disappointment that what we do is viewed by some as only “kid stuff.” There is a misconception that we offer nothing of interest to adults. I inevitably respond that we enjoyed having their now-grown children participate in our programs, but we also offer programs of interest and real benefit to adults who desire to know “natural Michigan” better. I keep expecting a response of “Well, in that case, please keep us on,” but none yet...

I can understand the perception when I see some of the content in programs offered to children by nature centers in summer day camps or otherwise. They are often dominated by songs, games and crafts. A lesson on turtles may involve their learning and singing “Shelly the Turtle,” and coloring-up a paper bowl as for a make-your-own-turtle craft. At the end of the “lesson,” how much have the children learned about the identification, behavior, habitat and ecology of each of Michigan’s ten species? These should be the primary objectives for a Michigan naturalist teaching about turtles.

How rudimentary the learning experience would be for students in our public schools if the raw material of every lesson was watered down with songs, crafts and games about it. When adults see this sort of content in nature center activities, it is clear that this is not the type of “education” that belongs in our schools. It feels like “fluff” education, maybe fun for a first-grader, but optional, if not expendable, and of little use to anyone much older.



The Blanding’s is the only Michigan turtle with a solid yellow chin and throat. Any adult or first grader can learn this easy identification clincher to recognize this declining, state-protected species in the wild.

Songs, crafts and games do have their place in our education, but let’s leave the songs in music class, the crafts in art class, and save the games for organized play time. Michigan natural science and wildlife education needs to be legitimized and incorporated into every grade of the K-12 curriculum. There is that much to learn if we are to truly understand not only the diversity of life within our state, but also our impact on that life through the decisions we make on the landscape. What’s the product of such a curriculum in all public schools? Mainstream environmental awareness – and, with the knowledge, comes a sense of responsibility that is largely missing in society today. Simply put, you can’t care about something if you don’t know about it.

Adults have already been through their formal schooling without such opportunities, but it’s not too late. All of our monthly Second Sunday programs offer some aspect of detailed Michigan wildlife education, the information of which is sure to focus your outdoor attention, and ultimately, make your time there more interesting and fulfilling. Check out the presentation and field trips on the following pages.

-Jim McGrath

Second Sunday

“Field Guide” Presentation

Michigan Hawks & Eagles



Join us on Sunday, November 14, any time during our open hours from 1 to 5 pm. At 2 pm, we will present *A Powerpoint Field Guide to Michigan*

Hawks & Eagles. Throughout the seasons, up to eleven species of hawks can be found in Michigan, as well as the Bald and Golden Eagle. While viewing an abundance of color images, learn how to identify all of them in the field. Discussion will also include interesting behaviors of each species, the best seasons in which to find them, and where, specifically, you can go to see them, around Greater Lansing and throughout the state.

The Rough-legged Hawk is a winter resident. This one was photographed at Maple River SGA by Erik Enbody – an alumnus of Nature Discovery’s kids’ camps.



The small, migratory Bonaparte’s Gull can be seen on Lake Lansing in the spring and fall. The white outer primaries are diagnostic.

At the presentation’s conclusion, interested participants can carpool with Jim to Lake Lansing to view and identify migratory ducks, gulls and other birds. Jim has a spotting scope for up-close viewing, and each participant will receive a Michigan birds checklist to keep a tally of species encountered.

Visit our highly interactive Michigan reptiles & amphibians zoo or walk our trails, too. Before, during and after the presentation, our staff is available to assist visitors of all ages to help make the most of your visit.

A \$3/person donation is requested.

Join our
Muskegon Area
Birding Day
Saturday,
November 20



On Saturday, November 20, from 7am to about 4pm, join us on a guided trip to the Muskegon area for some great, late-fall birding. Jim will lead and drive a maximum of five participants on this full-day odyssey to tally as many species as possible through habitats that harbor thousands of birds.

Wastewater treatment facilities are typically hot birding locales. Holding ponds of various depths are magnets to waterfowl and shorebirds. Density of water birds in turn, attracts predatory hawks and eagles. Unfortunately, most of these facilities are off-limits to the public. However, the expansive Muskegon Wastewater Facility, several miles from Lake Michigan, allows birders to acquire a special permit to access their facility. Jim has one!

Miles of dikes surround vast holding ponds crammed with thousands of ducks of over a dozen species, plus geese, swans, grebes and other surprises. Miles of open area north and south of the ponds offer a slew of other species, including bald, and sometimes, golden eagles, rough-legged hawks, kestrels, shrikes, snow buntings and lots more. Snow Geese and Cackling Geese make regular appearances, too.



Let us serve you a Purple Sandpiper "on the rocks." Migrants appear on Lake Michigan breakwaters later in November.

We'll stop for lunch then head to Lake Michigan to pick up more birds from the shore and on the breakwater. Diving ducks, loons, grebes and more, forage everywhere in the water. The uncommon Purple Sandpiper, migrates through Michigan and forages on rocky shorelines. We'll search the huge rocks that line both sides of the breakwater for their presence.

Weather-permitting, we should tally over 50 species. Most of the birding will be in or near the vehicle. The only extended walking will be on the breakwater. Dress warmly, bring binoculars and plan to stop at Subway or another fast food place for lunch. Jim's spotting scope will be available for especially up-close viewing.

COST: Only \$30/person, includes all transportation. (You'd spend more on gas if you went by yourself!) Meet at Nature Discovery. With notice, we can also arrange to pick you up at a more convenient location for you. Contact us to make a reservation. Limited spaces available.

Black (Rat Snake) Saturday!?

On **Saturday, November 27, any time between 9am and 4pm**, drop your child, 4 yrs or older, here for some wild fun while you get some holiday shopping done. Nature Discovery's doors will be open to any parents who would like to free up some time during this busy time of year while your kids are having a ball with our snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders. This unstructured setting with an abundance of available staff, introduces your children to a *hundred* live creatures on hand to keep them engaged. Time can also be spent in the yard and on the nature trail. We will take a digital picture of each participant with his/her favorite animal and email it to you, too. Popcorn and lemonade are available through the day. Pizza will be served to children here between 12 & 1. Drop off/pick up any time, according to your schedule!
Fee: \$6 per hour per child. We'd appreciate contact in advance, but drop-ins are welcome, too.



Children thrill at watching our Bull Frog gobble up worms.



The uncommon boreal chickadee can be found only in extensive northern coniferous forests. It is "automatic" along Pischee Grade.

UP Winter Birding Weekend

MLK Weekend – January 14-17. Winter birding in the Upper Peninsula is fantastic! See birds here that are rare or impossible to see near home. These include: evening and pine grosbeak; pine siskin, common redpoll, northern shrike, gray jay, boreal chickadee, bohemian waxwing, black-backed woodpecker; raptors, such as bald eagle, rough-legged hawk, snowy owl, and even potential for gyrfalcon, great gray owl and northern hawk-owl; and there are always surprises. One year we spotted a marten. Another, a gray wolf! We'll spend the night at a motel in Sault Ste. Marie, then bird areas in that vicinity on Saturday, before heading west to the Marquette area later in the day. We will spend the night at a motel in

Negaunee, that serves an awesome all-you-can-eat, home-cooked breakfast, then we'll bird along Pischee Grade, a well-maintained wilderness logging road, throughout the day. We'll overnight and have breakfast again in Negaunee, then bird the waterways around Marquette through Monday morning before starting the drive back. Concerned about the cold? Don't be. The majority of the birding is from within or near the warmth of the van almost the entire trip. This is cushy winter car-birding at its best! We'll depart around 3pm Friday afternoon and return by early Monday evening.

COST: \$350 (\$100 NR deposit), covers all transportation, lodging, "road bag-lunches," and two hearty breakfasts. This trip is limited to only three participants, so contact us soon to reserve your spot.

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