

Whew! Another crazy-busy August is behind us. It's our busiest month of the year. You'd think we were a full-blown nature center with a multitude of staff at our disposal to see the schedule Carol and I have kept with the help of our son, Reed.

The final week was the craziest. Carol and Reed hauled, set up, and exhibited our Michigan reptiles and amphibians - thirteen aquariums and two pools worth - for four long days at the Otsego County Fair in Gaylord. Meanwhile, I remained here running the most labor-intensive summer camp that we offer – Advanced Entomology for middle school-aged students.

This involves students not only collecting, identifying, correctly pinning, and separating insects into their respective taxonomic orders. They take it a level further and identify their catches down to the families within each order. For instance, of the many insects caught by the group in the order, Lepidoptera (butterflies & moths), the largest of the butterflies belonged to the families Danaidae (milkweed butterflies, i.e. monarch) and Papilionidae (swallowtails).

Everyone also got to take home an impressive specimen from the order, Saturniidae (giant silk moths) – a beautiful, pale green, swallow-tailed Luna Moth. None of these were caught wild outside. (Check out Page 2 to find out how they were acquired – and how you can get a live one!)

Outside of class time, I worked on purchasing the wood, then cutting, assembling and shellacking six high-quality insect display boxes with sliding plexiglass covers in which the students could display their collections. I also spent hours printing and cutting hundreds of tiny labels with insect order and family names. A student would take the pin on which each identified insect is mounted and push it through the appropriate taxonomic tag, positioning it squarely below the insect, just like you'd see in a museum.



*Nature Discovery's Advanced Entomology participants didn't want the camp to end.*

Most of the students collected representative insects from about ten insect orders. We made a friendly competition out of who could collect and pin representatives from the most insect families. The winner collected and mounted about 100 members of 57 families in less than four camp days! The rest of the students reached the high 40s or low 50s, too.

From my perspective, seeing these enthusiastic students forging through the project in such a gung-ho manner made it well worth the long hours I spent outside the actual camp time. As an instructor in my field, I just can't turn my back on an enthusiastic learner. These students fuel my effort. I think many other educators would concur.

*-Jim McGrath*

# Raise a LUNA MOTH this September



Certainly in the Greater Lansing area and in many other areas of the state, the mere sight of a rare and beautiful Luna Moth is momentous. As of the beginning of September, we are maintaining about 200 young larvae. Here's an opportunity for anyone of any age who would like the unique experience of rearing some until they metamorphose into adult moths. For many, it's a once-in-a-lifetime chance. There are any of a number of ways to acquire some, but you must take advantage soon. They grow rapidly! Here are a number of options:

## TEACHERS...

of any grade level through high school can take advantage of this opportunity. Nail down several required science benchmarks by scheduling us for a highly entertaining presentation on Lunas and other moths and butterflies. Live caterpillars of a number of other Michigan species can be shown if the presentation is scheduled in September while they are still available outside. For lower grade levels, we also cover "what's wrong with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*." This book is rife with errors about insect anatomy and metamorphosis that are accepted by many teachers and parents as fact (See the August *Wild Times*).

## HOME SCHOOL FAMILIES & GROUPS...

can acquire larvae to rear right at home. For groups, consider scheduling a special visit here soon for a presentation (see above) when you pick up the caterpillars.



*This three-day-old Luna caterpillar is barely a quarter inch in length.*

## ANY PARENT...

can arrange to pick some up to rear together with your children at home. What a great home lesson!

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, COLLEGE STUDENTS OR ADULTS...

are welcome and encouraged to engage in this opportunity, too. Just contact us to make arrangements.

\*\*\* All caterpillar caretakers will receive an information sheet with helpful tips on how to successfully rear your Luna larvae to adulthood.

Turn the page for one more option...

## Second Sundays are Back!

*Sunday, September 12*

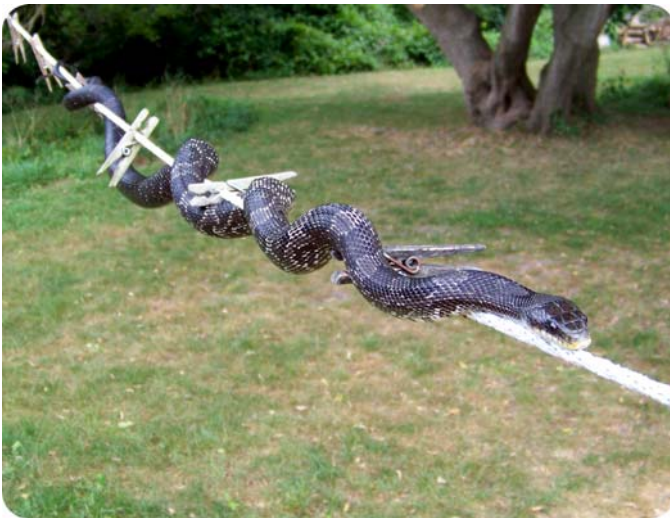
Our home-based nature center is open from 1 to 5pm. A \$3/person donation is requested.

At 2pm, we will present **Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths**. The largest, most impressive moths on the continent can be found right here in Michigan. Beautiful photographs enhance this Powerpoint presentation that features the life cycles of Cecropia, Polyphemus, Promethea and Luna Moths. All participants are welcome to take semi-grown Luna Moth caterpillars home to rear until they spin cocoons a couple of weeks later. Information sheets offer tips on how to rear them successfully.



*This large Luna caterpillar perfectly matches the color and pattern of the hickory leaves on which it feeds.*

Come early or stay late to walk our trail or to interact with the largest collection of live Michigan reptiles and amphibians in the state. Hold a state-threatened Eastern Foxsnake, watch Michigan's largest snake, the Black Ratsnake, climb straight up a tree trunk, identify all ten species of Michigan turtles, drop crickets to hungry frogs. Our staff is always on hand to help you make the most of your visit.



*Our two-year-old Black Ratsnake "hangs out" on the clothesline.*

## *Look for Us at These Locations Locally and Around Michigan in September...*

### **Saturday, September 11**

**Sportsmen for Youth – Youth Day (Muskegon Co Fairground), 9am-3pm – Michigan Snakes & Turtles Exhibit**

### **Saturday, September 18**

**Kettunen Center Family Fall Fest (Tustin), 11am - Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians.**

### **Sat-Sun, September 25-26**

**Van Atta's Greenhouse Fall Festival (Haslett), 12-5pm - MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit.**

Contact us, contact the host of the event, or search the internet for more details.

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