

According to the calendar, March 20 may officially be the first day of spring, but I am much more inclined to be thinking “spring” as early as now, at the beginning of the month. After all, nothing in nature makes a big deal out of the vernal equinox. The amount of daylight on March 19 is a handful of seconds shorter; on March 21, seconds longer. It’s just another lengthening day in our tilted earth’s circannual loop around the sun.

By the first week of March, irreversible changes outside, cued by the photoperiod, and sometimes quite independent of the weather, let us know that what we perceive as spring is rapidly approaching. In the coming weeks, any burp of winter-like conditions tends to not last long. You can hear some of the “irreversibles.” In early February many of our non-migrant songbirds began sporadically singing their breeding songs and staking claim to nesting territories, even though they would not be getting down to the actual business of nesting for a couple of months yet. Now, four weeks later, cued by the longer days, country mornings are downright noisy with bird song.

Another “irreversible,” and also avian, is the first wave of returning migrants which occurs around the first week of March, too. The list includes many of the blackbirds – Red-winged, Common Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbird. The first Eastern Meadowlark, a blackbird that’s not a black bird, may be heard singing over a farm field. The Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Turkey Vulture, Song Sparrow, and others, also begin returning now.



Eastern Bluebirds are singing their soft, raspy, territorial phrases throughout rural landscapes in early March. To attract a pair, put a nest box in your yard this weekend.

For more details on this topic, with the aid of Powerpoint slides, audio recordings and time outside with the birds, attend our Second Sunday, March 14 presentation, *March Migrants: The First Wave*. Details are on Page 3.

Before that, this coming weekend is the culmination of an idea we conceived only fourmonths ago, *Get Out – Go Wild Weekend*. This event is geared to help visitors become more aware and informed about the *wild* around us, and hopefully, to become motivated to “get out” and experience it. More below...

Our spring break and summer day camp schedules are taking shape. Check our website in the coming week for all the details. If you visit GOGW this weekend, there is opportunity to enroll right on the spot for these and other offerings discussed in this and upcoming newsletters.

Hey, this isn’t just kid stuff. We are creating opportunities for adults to become more in tune with the diverse and dynamic natural world around us, too. Won’t you join us on April 3? See Page 4.

–Jim McGrath

Get Out – Go WILD Weekend

**Saturday, March 6, 10am to 5pm; Sunday, March 7, 12 to 5pm.
Bengel Wildlife Center, 6380 Drumheller Road, Bath.**

Admission: \$5/person.



As our society, and especially our youth, choose to spend increasing amounts of free time indoors, the corresponding alienation from the outdoors, and specifically the natural world, is quite unsettling. We are becoming increasingly disconnected from the very environment on which we, as biological beings, depend. In addition, thanks to the inception of Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” program, the disturbing news that childhood obesity has tripled in the past 30 years has gone mainstream. On the other hand, research has shown that families which spend regular time outdoors produce healthier children who mature into more environmentally-aware adults.

Introducing a weekend wildlife event with a unique and timely twist. Nature Discovery is teaming with Michigan Wildlife Conservancy to bring Mid-Michigan a weekend full of eye-opening experiences. Our goal is to spark, in young and old alike, a hunger to get outdoors, and a personal desire to better understand the natural world. Visitors are intended to not only become motivated to “get out,” but to do so with focus,

enthusiasm, and a renewed sense of stewardship toward all things wild. Both days feature a smorgasbord of LIVE Michigan wildlife encounters, wildlife presentations, wildlife exhibits, and informative guided trail walks. Presentations are different on each day. Attend one or both days! Here is the schedule:

SATURDAY, March 6

- 10:30 Birding by Ear Guided Walk***
- 11:30 Animal Tracking Guided Walk***
- 12:30 Live Beaver Presentation***
- 1:30 Bluebirds Presentation***
- 2:30 Pileated Woodpecker Presentation***
- 3:30 Cougars in Michigan Presentation***

SUNDAY, March 7

- 12:00 Birding by Ear Guided Walk***
- 12:45 Invasive Species Guided Walk***
- 1:30 Live Michigan Turtles Presentation***
- 2:30 Polar Bears Presentation***
- 3:30 Live Birds of Prey Presentation***



See the Powerpoint photo montage, Natural Michigan, by award-winning photographer, Steve Sage.

To view a 5-pg pdf with all the details, visit our website (www.naturediscovery.net), or Michigan Wildlife Conservancy’s site (www.miwildlife.org). Bengel Wildlife Center is only a two-minute drive north of the Webster Road exit (#92) of I-69. Follow the signs at the exit ramp!

SECOND SUNDAY

March 14 at Nature Discovery

Our home-based nature center is open from 1 to 4pm. A \$3 donation is requested. Visit the largest collection of live Michigan reptiles and amphibians found in the state here. Our knowledgeable staff is on hand to maximize your experience. Walk the trail in the natural area out back. On request, we'd be happy to supply an engaging personal guide.

At 2pm, we will be presenting *March Migrants: The First Wave*. Migration is in full swing by the middle of the month. In this Powerpoint presentation, find out who is returning now and how and where to watch (and listen) for them. At the presentation's conclusion, we'll spend some time birding outside. Don't forget binoculars, if you have them. Refreshments are available, too!

****Note: This will be the final Second Sunday of the season. Second Sundays will resume in October.*



By March, Horned Larks are plentiful in cultivated fields and more easily heard than seen. ©Steve Sage.

BEYOND MARCH...



SPRING BREAK DAY CAMPS & DAY TRIPS

Nature Discovery Spring Day Camp

Mon & Tues, April 5 & 6, 9am-3pm.

For K thru 4th grade.

Students can sign-up for one or two days of nature and outdoor-oriented activities. Each day will encompass feeding, caring for, and handling our huge captive collection of Michigan snakes, turtles, frogs, salamanders and lizards. Each day will also offer a variety engaging outside explorations and activities dependent on the weather.

COST: \$50/day. \$45/day for more than one day or more than one child. Hot lunch and snack are provided. Call or email to enroll in advance.

Spring Day Field Trips

Mon & Tues, April 5 & 6, 8:30am-3:30pm.

For 3rd grade & older. Sign-up for one or two trips.

Monday, April 5: MAPLE RIVER ST GAME AREA

Tuesday, April 6: YANKEE SPRINGS REC AREA

COST: \$55/day. \$50/day for more than one day or more than one student. Call or email to enroll in advance.

Wednesday, April 7: HOFFMASTER STATE PARK

8am-5pm. \$75. Call or email to enroll in advance.



Look for details about the above camps and field trips on our website, www.naturediscovery.net.

**LOOK FOR OUR SUMMER DAY CAMP SCHEDULE ON OUR WEBSITE BY
MID-MARCH. VISIT WWW.NATUREDISCOVERY.NET.**

NEW! Monthly Guided Field Trips for Adults

Beginning Saturday, April 3, Nature Discovery will offer wildlife-related field trips to a variety of sites throughout mid-Michigan and beyond. Anyone 18 or older is welcome to join us. Fees will vary depending on the time and driving distance to the site.

Participants can drive themselves or catch a ride in our minivan. Here is the first one:

MAPLE RIVER BIRDING, April 3

A huge variety of waterfowl stop by the floodings at Maple River State Game Area to refuel on their northward migration. We'll spend time on the dikes and elsewhere in the area, getting great looks at, not just waterfowl, but bluebirds, meadowlarks, rusty blackbirds, snipe, red-tailed hawk nests, a bald eagle nest and so much more. Our spotting scope will be available for ultra-close viewing. We will supply participants with personal checklists to keep track of their sightings. By day's end, over 50 species may be checked. We will aim to leave at 7am and return around noon. Fee: \$15. Enrollment is limited to 5. Contact us to reserve a spot.



Though plentiful at Maple River, the Wood Duck's shy nature can make prolonged views difficult.

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