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A Birding Stay-cation for Adults

It's like a vacation without actually going on vacation. You can still be home to water the vegetable garden or walk the dog... or, if your budget's tight, keep the money you'd spend on travel and lodging in your pocket. On the flip-side, get ready to meet a huge diversity of wild birds, many of which you may never have seen before.

Day camps don't have to just be for kids, you know. For the first time, we're offering a four-day field course early this summer geared to a very small group of adults. It's titled, Lower Michigan Field Birding. The goal is to experience as many species of wild birds as we can over those days. As long as rain is not a factor, we should have no trouble meeting or exceeding 80 species. The small group allows for less complication, more spontaneity, and also, more personal contact and attention.

The kids' camps start no earlier than 8 or 9am, mostly because it coincides with parents' work schedules. Birds begin their day well before that, so our days will start at 6:30am and be over by about 1pm. Then, hopefully, you can catch an afternoon siesta.

Each day's birding location will be within about an hour of the Lansing area. A specific natural area is chosen due to the known presence of a specialty bird that is difficult or impossible to find elsewhere in Lower Michigan. One example is the Prothonotary Warbler, found nesting in the vicinity of Maple River State Game Area, north of St. Johns. This is a southern species, found only in a few locations in Lower Michigan. Another is the Cerulean Warbler. This rare migrant has declined by over sixty percent in the past thirty years. It can still be found in some woodlands west of Hastings, in the vicinity of Yankee Springs Recreation Area. When we visit these and any other locations, we will be checking-off a slew of other species, as well, on personal checklists I'll provide.

Birding strictly by spotting them with your eyes can't hold a candle to the hyper-awareness developed when you learn to "bird by ear." This is more evident in the spring and early summer than any other time of the year as songbirds sing abundantly to make known their defense of a specific breeding territory. For the majority of citizens, bird song is perceived as merely an indistinct mix of background



The Black-throated Green Warbler will be heard, then seen as we bird through mature deciduous forests. Its burry "Zee-zee-zee-zoo-zee!" is easy to identify.
© Steve Sage



The Scarlet Tanager of Eastern deciduous forests sounds like a robin with a sore throat. We'll draw one in with the "birdpod" for a close look.

© Steve Sage

twitter. Yet, like instruments in an orchestra, each has its unique identifying voice and, yes, "words," that can easily be learned with repetitive listening in the field.

To aid us in not only learning the bird songs, but, in some cases, helping to lure one in for a closer look, my "birdpod" (an ipod loaded with all the bird songs of North America), can be cued and played over portable fold-out speakers on a moment's notice. What a valuable field-birding course tool!

Need a good set of binoculars? Let me help point you in the right direction.

This is sure to be a high-quality "stay-cation" for all participants! Here are the figures in a nutshell.

-Jim McGrath

Lower Michigan Field Birding

Mon-Thur, June 13-16, 2011

6:30am to 1:00pm

Fee: \$230 (\$100 NR deposit) includes all transportation to birding locales. Max enrollment: 5 adults. Call or email to enroll!

Second Sunday, April 10

Doors open from 1 to 5pm. \$3/person
2pm Presentation: Frogging by Ear

What frogs breed on your pond? Through spring and early summer, you need not get your feet wet to find out. Michigan is home to 13 species of frogs and toads, eight of which can be found around the Greater Lansing area. Each can be identified by its own specific breeding call, given only by the male. Each species also has its own breeding "window," the period of time when it is egg-laying on a particular wetland from early spring to mid-summer. In this presentation using beautiful Powerpoint images, audio recordings from Nature Discovery's CD, *Frogs of the Great Lakes Region*, and live frogs from our Michigan collection at the center, immerse yourself "knee-deep" into the vocalizations of Michigan frogs.



At the presentation's conclusion, visitors can participate in a guided hike around our vernal pond, now burgeoning with frogs and invertebrate life. See masses of wood frog eggs and listen to the unique calls of the wood frogs, spring peepers and leopard frogs. Join us for a wade!

Spring Break Day Camps & Field Trips

There are still a few openings in Tuesday's day camp and in the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday field trips. Check the link on our website for details.

Enroll for Summer Day Camps Now!

Check the link on our website for weeks, topics and details .

Williamston "Birdabout" Mondays

Monday, April 11 and Monday, April 25. 8 to 11am. Jim will be leading a maximum of four participants on a three-hour local birding excursion around our neighborhood north of Williamston. The goal, to encounter as many species as possible in our yard, then along roadside fields, forests, lakes and marshes, as well as on other private acreage. We'll ride together in our minivan from one location to another. Participants will be given Michigan Birds checklists to keep a record of the day's encounter. Sign up in advance for one or both Mondays.

Fee: \$15/day.

Williamston "Walkabout" Monday

Monday, April 18. 9 to 11am. Get some exercise on this 3.4 mile loop around the country block, starting and ending at Nature Discovery, while getting an intimate, roadside nature lesson, to boot! At the walk's conclusion, join us for bagels and beverages as we recount details of the experience. Maximum, 4 participants. Sign up in advance to reserve your spot. Fee: \$8.

Guided Birding at Nettie Bay Lodge

Nettie Bay Lodge in beautiful Presque Isle County offers guided birding stays in the month of May. This year, the two sessions with their usual guide have been booked, with more on a waiting list. Jim has been asked to lead an additional three-day session, May 15-17. Lodging, meals and transportation to a variety of natural areas in the vicinity are included in the cost. For more information contact us. Maximum – only 5 participants.

Southern Illinois Nest-Finding Ecotour, June 4-11

Check the link on our website for details of this unique opportunity to intimately explore the forests and cypress swamps of Southern Illinois while aiding songbird conservation research.



A bluebird secures a cutworm atop a common mullein stalk. © Steve Sage



A Few Bluebird Nesting Boxes Are Still Available.

We've had great success with our bluebird boxes thanks to the house sparrow box traps. A pair of bluebirds has begun nest-building in a box on our clothesline pole. We've captured four of the non-native, aggressive cavity-nesting house sparrows with the traps, so far. Contact us to purchase a remaining box for \$15. House sparrow traps available for \$10 each. Ask us about installing one on a pole in your yard for you!

Around the State in April

- ❖ *Wednesday, April 8: 7pm. Live Michigan Snakes presentation for the Straits Area Audubon Club. Public is welcome*
- ❖ *Thursday, April 14: 6 to 7:30pm. Live Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit at Fairview Elementary School's Science Night, Lansing. Public is welcome!*
- ❖ *Saturday, April 16: 9am to 3pm. Live Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit at UM -Flint's Earth Day Celebration.*
- ❖ *Saturday, April 16: 1pm and 3pm. Live Michigan Snakes presentations at DeGraaf Nature Center in Holland, MI.*
- ❖ *Thursday, April 21: 9am to 3pm. Live Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit at the Michigan DNR/DEQ Earth Day Celebration, Constitution Hall in Lansing.*
- ❖ *Saturday, April 30: 9:30am to 3:30pm. Live Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit at Embracing Our Earth Celebration, Bad Axe Junior High School.*

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