

**THIS ISSUE**

*Visit Our Nature Center by Appointment*

*Owling by Appointment*

*Gift Ideas*

*Thank You Donors*

*The Biggest Story on the Planet*



*Hardly randomly, a bright Purple Finch alights only a few feet outside our window. We arranged for it to happen.*

## *Give a 'Peace' of the Wild*

Why should only doves corner the market as symbols of peace? Seek a communion with *all* wild birds - in fact, with 'wildness' in general - to find comfort and serenity inside and out. In this season of giving keep in mind that there are ways to bestow such a gift to others, as well.

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No purchase necessary... merely step outside. No matter how fragmented, the natural world is within easy reach just beyond your door. A simple walk delivers relief from the relentless torrent of anthropocentric static, influences and angsts that increasingly clutter and taint our lives and our minds.

This 2020 article in the American Psychological Association's *Monitor on Psychology* expounds on the benefits, and is worth a read before you continue: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature#:~:text=Nature%20might%20also%20make%20us,is%20the%20emotion%20of%20awe>.



*Barely-trafficked Epley Road is a perfect winter walk and on my usual rural route.*

Naturally, you may at first be disinclined to 'step out' into the cold of December; but barring especially nasty weather, if you're appropriately dressed it is really no big deal. Last Sunday morning I put on layers and got out for a brisk couple-mile walk at first light despite the single-digit wind chill. Barren of traffic at this hour, I had the snow-dusted country roads to myself. The only other movement came from wild residents: deer grazing while eyeing me from corn-stubbed fields, squirrels scaling tree trunks, juncos grit-picking at the road's edge, deer closely and skittishly crossing my path, crows flying overhead in uncharacteristic silence from a woodland roost, cardinals chipping softly in the undergrowth, and more deer, still.

Upon returning to the driveway, comfortably warmed and invigorated from thirty minutes of motion, I found myself in no hurry to re-enter the house. The bird feeding stations - one outside the dining room window, the other outside a large window in the nature center - were literally fluttering with activity. I topped off the seed in several hanging and pole-mounted feeders, scattered mix on the ground for the sparrows and doves, then returned indoors.

A short time later I seated myself at the dining room table which happens to be situated directly in front of our south-facing bay window. With “the nest” empty, the table surface primarily serves now as a his-and-hers office - Carol with her piles of papers and tablet on one end, I with my own business stuff on the other.

Despite the open laptop in front of me and a steaming cup of coffee on hand to my left, the torrent of winged things a short distance to my right was impossible to ignore. Dozens of birds of various sizes, colors and species flitted about in a fitful eddy of perpetual motion. I had positioned the feeders close to the window; so closely that if it weren't for the pane in the way I'd swear I could reach out and touch them. Ditto for the deer that often materialize during the crepuscular hours.

When stuck inside and bound (like *now*) by responsibility to our wildlife education mission, a random window-ward glance often lengthens to a gander. My gaze is drawn, like a moth to a flame, to the dynamic, life-sustaining imperatives of these spritely living beings playing out in real time before me.



*Migrants from Canada, Pine Siskins flutter and feed only inches from the pane.*

The act triggers a mental pause, a reprieve, a relief - however brief - from my own ostensibly essential imperatives. Indeed, my experience leads me to believe that exposure to that which is wild - no matter the duration, form or venue - is a natural stress buster, and it needn't require much effort to achieve.

Why don't more people do this?

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The local annual Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 14. A fifteen-mile diameter 'count circle' centered over the Greater Lansing area is divided into eleven sections. Binocular-wielding birders volunteer to traverse each numbered area; the goal, to identify and tally individuals of all species seen through the day. I've led birders in Area 7, which extends east-west roughly from Harrison to Waverly and north-south between Saginaw and Mount Hope, for over twenty years (You can read a column regarding my December 2020 experience in Area 7 here: <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20Jan21.pdf>).

A sizeable portion of the count requires driving through residential neighborhoods in search of bird life. Where do the most birds accumulate? In the vicinity of yards with bird feeders, of course. While nearly no one else any other time of the year would pay heed to other people's feeders, much less, actively search for them, this is exactly what I and others do over cumulative hours on the count day.

Such targeted attention generates additional observations beyond the birds themselves that would otherwise go unnoticed. Foremost may be this: Bird feeders are present in *very* few yards. In those that have them, most swing hollowly in the wind, devoid of seed. It's like buying a membership to Planet Fitness, then never gaining the gumption to go.

I think it's a safe bet that the vast majority of citizens are unaware of the benefits in store for *them* by generating a physical closeness with wild birds. To achieve the goal, put the acquisition of bird feeders

near the top of the list. Erect them close to a large window that offers convenient viewing from inside the house, then mindfully *maintain* them by making the filling process a morning routine, perhaps while the coffee is brewing. Or...

Get out to visit them in theirs. Invest in a good pair of binoculars to reveal dazzlingly close looks at feathers, colors, patterns and behaviors that will surely serve to further deepen your appreciation. Walk a rural road, or if you live in an urban area, beat it to the closest municipal trail. There are over thirty miles of paved trails in Ingham County alone. Walk trails at a nature center or a designated natural area. In so doing, encounters are in store with even more birds and species, many of which have no business showing up at a backyard feeder.

An array of wild bird apps and digital field guides are available to load onto your phone or tablet, many of which are reasonably priced or even free. Everybody who spends time outdoors - no matter your identification skill level - should download and use the free app, *Merlin* (<https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>).

From here it's only a short flight to full immersion. *Ebird* (<https://ebird.org/>) is citizen science in action. Submit your own checklists of birds encountered into a running database. Keep daily track of new and unusual bird sightings reported around your neighborhood or around the state.

Join other birders on group outings to specific destinations, locally or beyond. Michigan Audubon Society (<https://www.michiganaudubon.org/>) has local chapters across the state, nearly all of which offer guided or group field trips.

Nature Discovery leads our own outings too. We purposely keep the number of participants to an intimately-sized group of no more than five. Thus, we can travel together in the same vehicle – a much higher-quality experience than cumbersome caravanning within a larger group.

If you are just beginning and would like to borrow a pair of binoculars, just ask. We've got you covered. Bird checklists are distributed so participants can tally species as they are encountered. We make a game out of how many we can check by the end of the trip.



*Our group got to see a Harlequin Duck, a migrant from the Arctic, along a breakwater in Muskegon.*

Destinations vary from half-day local trips to places like Maple River State Game Area north of St. Johns or to MSU's Corey Marsh Research Center near Bath, to full day excursions to more distant venues, like the Muskegon Wastewater Facility or Lake Erie Metropark. An overnight trip might take us across the bridge to do some winter birding around Whitefish Point or Sault Ste. Marie.

We don't advertise most of these excursions in our newsletters. Why? We happen to have a core of avid repeat participants that are only a text message away from joining the next available outing; a testament to the quality of the experience. The five seats fill quickly.

Would you like to join one of our guided birding experiences? Ask to be added to our text string to receive word of an upcoming date or two over the holidays and in January.

You can get busy more quickly by planning a few hours with us during this Saturday's CBC. Contact us to arrange where and when to meet in Area 7.

Finally, if there remains a recipient on your list – family or friend – for whom you haven't yet gotten a gift, consider a bird feeder with seed to get them started. Who knows where it could lead?

*- Jim McGrath*



# Nature Discovery

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*Visit Our  
Nature Center  
by Appointment  
Over the Holidays*

*Suggested Minimum  
Donation: \$5/person/hr*

The sky's the limit for natural science learning here – with a Michigan twist! Adults, couples and individual families are welcome to schedule an intimate indoor or outdoor visit to what we call “The Biggest Little Nature Center in Michigan,” and “Home to the Largest Zoo of Michigan-native Reptiles and Amphibians.” The unique, in-person, hands-on experiences here are unrivaled at any other nature center or zoo! We will bring snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders out of tanks to interact with adults or students of any age or grade-level.

Identify and feed “the grand slam of Michigan turtles” - all ten species native to our state! Meet, pet and feed “Milberta”, our always hungry Red-footed tortoise.

Handle any or all of Michigan’s three species of garter snakes while learning how to tell them apart, then watch them gobble up worms and tadpoles. Hold or “wear” a gentle 6-foot Black Ratsnake – the largest in the state!

Many more snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders to identify and feed. Identify birds at the feeders. Take a guided walk on our trails to identify birds, trees, vines, and invasive plants.

Ask about arranging a special evening visit. Weather-permitting we can step outside and attempt to attract a wild screech-owl with recordings.

Contact us for additional information or to make an appointment most any day.





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***By Appointment  
Over the Holidays...***

***Go “Owling”  
at Nature Discovery***



Schedule a 90 minute appointment for your small group (recommended max. 8) to visit **almost any evening after dusk**, and we'll attempt to draw a *wild owl* in for a close-encounter!

The evening begins with Powerpoint images and recordings to help you become familiar with Screech, Great-horned and Barred Owls - the three permanent residents found in Lower Michigan. Learn about six other species - migrants from Canada - that drift southward into our area to hunt for prey over the winter, including where to go to see them.



Then, we will go out the back door into the darkness to try to get one to respond to recordings. If an owl comes close we will attempt to spotlight it for viewing. Bring binoculars and a camera if you have them.

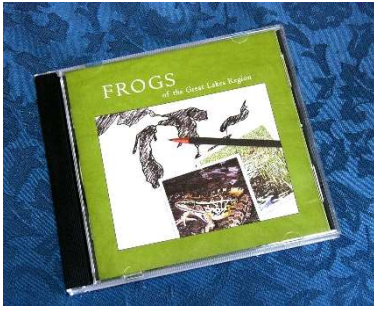
Before or after the owling experience visitors may also wish to view and interact with specimens from our huge zoo of Michigan-native reptiles & amphibians.

Base suggested donation: \$100.

Do you live in a rural area? Arrangements can also be made to have this program come to you whereby you may get a chance to meet your own neighborhood owl face to face. Contact us for details or to make an appointment, here or there.

**Note:** The likelihood of attracting an owl is diminished in windy or precipitating conditions. If possible, arrange to schedule a visit after confirming a favorable weather forecast. If you schedule a date further in advance, feel free to cancel and reschedule on short notice if the forecast calls for poor conditions.





# Give a *natural* gift this season

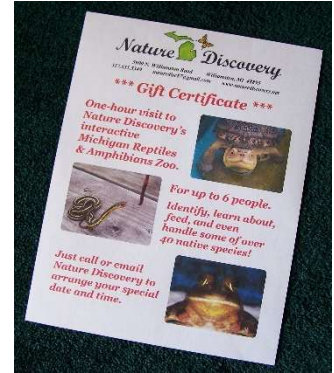
## ***“FROGS OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION”***

*Instructional and environmental listening featuring our own original recordings of the breeding calls of 13 native species compiled from wetland habitats across the state. Load the app onto a phone or tablet! \$15. Check our website for details.*

## ***NATURE DISCOVERY GIFT CERTIFICATES***

*A guided experience for adults, couples, or families at our nature center located north of Williamston. Base rate is \$30/hr. Upon payment we will email you a certificate to print and present to the recipient.*

*Gift certificates are also available for outdoor guided functions for adults and families, i.e., interpretive walks or birding outings at local natural areas, an “owling” night, etc. Contact us for details or to discuss more ideas.*



***During this holiday season we wish our supporters, including these***

***to extend a heartfelt ‘Thank you’ to all most recent generous donors...***



- Anonymous*
- Kelly Boyle*
- Cedar Creek Vet Clinic*
- Grand River*
- Bait & Tackle*
- Nancy & Jack Nelson*
- Sue & Tom Rusnik*
- Jenny & Bob Stanfield*
- Mary Lou Turnbull*
- Gene & Ann*
- Wasserman*

*White Spruce*

# ***It's the Biggest Story on the Planet***

So claim the editors of *Inside Climate News*, and we agree. Consider a year-end donation to the cause of environmental journalism. We'll need it now more than ever.

Inside Climate News 2024 Impact Report

<https://insideclimatenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/ICN-2024-Impact-Report.pdf>

Microplastics Are Everywhere. Here's How to Avoid Eating Them.

[https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/reviews/how-to-avoid-eating-microplastics/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR39DdCuNMLid1min7EytS-H3SV9rZIqwJRP\\_Y1X\\_WwOwAErNVJA\\_M6QsCE\\_aem\\_tGVcL7rcHnStpxJ42KuecA](https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/reviews/how-to-avoid-eating-microplastics/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR39DdCuNMLid1min7EytS-H3SV9rZIqwJRP_Y1X_WwOwAErNVJA_M6QsCE_aem_tGVcL7rcHnStpxJ42KuecA)

Returning Grazing Land to Native Forests Would Yield Big Climate Benefits

[https://insideclimatenews.org/news/04112024/returning-grazing-land-to-native-forests-climate-benefits/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR2i9sTXZTQhVpmUTPZWpgW970AQ9eKq4a8ePnb4MKMmFlhySIXrt9O2bRU\\_aem\\_OMbzaBEvb7K\\_n8exdbcPw](https://insideclimatenews.org/news/04112024/returning-grazing-land-to-native-forests-climate-benefits/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR2i9sTXZTQhVpmUTPZWpgW970AQ9eKq4a8ePnb4MKMmFlhySIXrt9O2bRU_aem_OMbzaBEvb7K_n8exdbcPw)

War on Eagles? In Auburn, Federal Officials Investigate the Taking of a Bald Eagles' Nest They Permitted

[https://insideclimatenews.org/news/20112024/federal-officials-investigate-taking-of-bald-eagle-nest-auburn-alabama/?utm\\_source=InsideClimate+News&utm\\_campaign=8c1ccbb881-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2024\\_11\\_23\\_02\\_11&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_29c928ffb5-8c1ccbb881-327904609](https://insideclimatenews.org/news/20112024/federal-officials-investigate-taking-of-bald-eagle-nest-auburn-alabama/?utm_source=InsideClimate+News&utm_campaign=8c1ccbb881-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_11_23_02_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_29c928ffb5-8c1ccbb881-327904609)

For every frequent flyer to acknowledge...

<https://flightfree.org/>

-JM

***The next generation would be justified in looking back at us and asking, "What were you thinking? Couldn't you hear what the scientists were saying? Couldn't you hear what Mother Nature was screaming at you?" -Al Gore***

***I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act like you would in a crisis. I want you to act like your house is on fire, because it is. - Greta Thunberg***

***The personal actions that cut climate pollution fast are to go flight-, car-, and meat-free. Start with the one that feels most feasible for you; if you can't totally go without, aim to cut your consumption today at least in half. - Kimberly Nicholas, Under the Sky We Make***

***What if we had storytelling mechanisms that said it is important that you know about the well-being of wildlife in your neighborhood? -Robin Wall Kimmerer***





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**Union of  
Concerned Scientists**  
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