



An adult Cooper's Hawk rests outside the window after a near miss at the feeder birds. Note the rusty barring across the breast and blue-gray back and wings of the adult plumage.

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Cooper's Hawks Provide Bursts of Winter Window Drama at Home and at School

Through the winter, the Cooper's hawk is common in lower Michigan. Although this active raptor may not be seen with the frequency of a roadside red-tailed hawk, it is probably at least as common this time of year. A busy bird feeder outside the winter window can yield several opportunities a day to witness a Cooper's hawk as it bursts on to the scene amid a panicked flurry of songbird wings. Usually, the attempt comes up empty, and it's over as quickly as it started. The hawk disappears through the woods or around the side of the house in search of another ambush opportunity. Other times after a miss, the bird may land on an exposed perch to rest or preen for several minutes and, thus, present great photo ops through the pane. Given time, you'll eventually witness the excitement and drama of a Cooper's hawk actually catching a cardinal, a blue jay, a dove or some other feeder regular in its talons.

I am a specialist weekly teacher on natural science topics at Stepping Stones Montessori, in East Lansing. Students and staff have erected feeders outside nearly every classroom. Several times each school year, as I enter a classroom students rush to relate the story of a Cooper's hawk they witnessed that morning or the day before. Teachers don't mind the sudden interruption caused by the impressive predator, given the students' awareness and excitement over its appearance right outside their classroom.

As I entered the upper elementary classroom at the school one recent day, students relayed news of a first-year Cooper's hawk they had seen several times over the previous two days. Some thought it may have been injured. No sooner had I begun the lesson when I happened to glance toward the window as a first-year Cooper's hawk glided past. Suddenly, it crashed to the ground, tumbling forward from its momentum. Had it just caught a smaller bird? The entire class rushed to the window. The hawk lay sprawled on its back, talons up and wings splayed. No prey item was in sight. Apparently, the hawk had crashed to the ground because it wasn't able to sustain its flight. It really was injured!

The bird struggled and righted itself. We decided then that we'd try to capture it so we could deliver it to a rehabilitation center. Although some students were disappointed, the school staff decided it was best for their safety and less likely to scare the bird if they stayed back while I approached the bird alone. My plan was to throw a blanket over it then gather it in a bundle without exposing its razor-sharp talons.

When the bird saw my approach, it scrambled away from me across the ground. Its right wing hung unnaturally away from its body as it headed for the cover of a large tepee of sticks the students had made. When it saw me enter the tepee, the bird tried to jump over a log on the ground, lost its balance and fell flat on its back again. I lowered the blanket, gathered it around the hidden mass and lifted it in my grasp.

When I emerged from the tepee with the bundle held firmly in my hands, the students cheered. The bird then began to struggle in my grip. I held it more firmly, but the struggle caused the blanket to fall away from its head. Its golden, round eyes burned with hyper-alertness as the brown-and-white feathers rose on its nape and crown. The hooked bill opened in a menacing gape. As the frightened bird displayed this defensive posture, each of the students was able to gaze into eyes that shone with a different, greater intensity than those of the feeder-visiting birds.

These were *predator* eyes.

We managed to safely transfer the hawk into a box, then Stepping Stones principal, Tina Nauman, volunteered to deliver it to Nottingham Nature Nook, a small wildlife rehabilitation center in East Lansing. They, in turn, delivered it to MSU's Small Animal Clinic. It was apparent that the bird also had difficulty standing on its right leg. What we first thought to be a wing injury was later diagnosed as a possible neurological problem affecting motor function on the bird's entire right side. There is a good chance this hawk suffered the head trauma from flying into a window pane, probably in pursuit of prey. As of our last update from the clinic, the bird is alert and a vigorous eater. The vets will monitor the bird's progress over the coming weeks. Once it gains full motor function they will release it back to the wild.

The Stepping Stones students and staff saved this bird's life. With the inability to capture prey, it certainly would have starved to death in the coming days if it had not been caught and treated.

-Jim McGrath



A first-year Cooper's Hawk perches outside the window. Note the brown back speckled with white. The white breast is scattered with vertical brown streaks.



On the second Lake Erie trip, our group discovered more than 50 robins feeding in and around some crabapples in an apartment complex parking lot. Photo © Tina Nauman

January Recap

Finding Owls in Winter, during our Sunday, January 8 open hours, drew a whopping 36 walk-in participants! Afterward, Jim led 6 of them to view wild Short-eared Owls near Fowlerville. This species was a first life-sighting for everyone!

Lake Erie Birding Day, Saturday, January 14, quickly filled to its capacity of 5, so we opened a second date the following Saturday. On the first trip the group tallied 47 species for the day. The second, 49. Nice totals for mid-January birding!

Owling Night Encore, Friday, January 27 had a full roster of 10 participants, most of which stuck around long enough to hear, then see a pair of screech owls as they responded to our recording.

Thank you to all participants!



The Blanding's Turtle shows a permanent smile... no matter how it's feeling!
Photo © Steve Sage

Thank you

To **TROY GARDEN CLUB**. For the second consecutive year the club has made a \$150 donation to Nature Discovery to help offset our animal-care expenses.

To the **DeVRIES FAMILY**. For the second consecutive year, the family has funded the cost of a Nature Discovery presentation for son, Jon's grade in school. This month, Carol will conduct an electricity lab for the Montessori program at Kinawa 5-6 School, in Okemos.

YOUR GENEROSITY IS APPRECIATED!

Open Hours

Sunday, February 12

1 to 5pm; \$5 admission

2pm Presentation

Birding by Ear *Late Winter Edition*

The Tufted Titmouse and a dozen other winter resident songbirds ratchet up their breeding songs in February. Photo © Steve Sage



At 2pm, **Birding by Ear – Late Winter Edition**, will be presented. Cued by our lengthening days, chickadees, titmice, cardinals and many other winter resident songbirds have ratched up the volume, intensity, and frequency of their breeding songs. Learning to identify birds by sight is a useful skill, however, when you are able to step outside and “bird by ear,” you graduate to a level of avian awareness that blows away identification by sight alone! February may be the best month to start. A manageable number of common species are singing their breeding songs now. As migrants return, the number of songs out your window increases steadily. By May, a boggling 40 or more may be heard on a country lot! Powerpoint slides and recordings from the “birdpod” are used to familiarize participants with who is calling now. At the presentation’s conclusion we’ll step outside to identify singers and elicit some responses with the birdpod. Bring your binoculars!

Don’t forget! Our **Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Interactive Zoo** is open to all ages for visitation before, during and after the presentation. Handle snakes. Feed frogs and turtles. Upon request, one of our staff will be happy to lead you on the trails. Refreshments are available, too!



Muskegon Area Birding Day Saturday, February 18

On Saturday, February 18, from 7am to about 5pm, join us on a guided trip to the Muskegon area for some great, late-winter birding. Jim will drive and lead an intimate-sized group on this full-day odyssey to tally as many species as possible through habitats that harbor thousands of birds.

The morning will be spent at Muskegon Wastewater Treatment Facility where we will drive the dikes around vast holding ponds loaded with waterfowl of many species. Snowy Owls have resided here all winter. Snow Buntings, Northern Shrikes, eagles, several species of hawks are automatic here, as well. We'll continue to the Lake Michigan shoreline to identify deep-water fowl, like loons, grebes long-tailed ducks and other divers.

COST: Only \$50/person, includes transportation. Meet at Nature Discovery. With notice, we may be able to arrange pick-up and drop-off right at your door!

Williamston Walkabout Monday, February 20 9 to 11am



Get some exercise, some fresh air, and a roadside nature lesson within an intimately-sized group of enthusiasts! There is a wealth of bird life along the 3.4-mile loop to identify by sight and by “ear,” and other wildlife to experience. Jim will help you identify trees and native and invasive shrubs lining the roadways. At the walk's conclusion, participants can converse over hot or cold beverages and bagels. A Michigan birds checklist will also be distributed on which to tally species encountered during the walk.

COST: \$15. Enrollment is limited to only 4, so register soon. Like the idea, but can't make the date? Do you have your own small group who would like to do the “walkabout?” Arrange a special date with us!

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