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The Cope's Gray Tree Frog (right) is rare in Michigan and hard to distinguish from the more common and widespread Eastern Gray Tree (left). The trill of the male Cope's is harsher-sounding than that of the Eastern. See these and every frog found in the state at our Sunday, July 17 event.

Unprecedented Michigan Nature

We've got some unprecedented stuff going on here! Look at every interpretive facility or zoo in Michigan from coast to coast, and you won't find a number of the things that make our home-based business one of a kind.

You may know about our "Grand Slam of Michigan Turtles." No where else can you find all ten Michigan species under one roof.

Last month we just attained another "unprecedented." All thirteen frog species found in the state, the "Grand Slam of Michigan Frogs" can now be seen (and sometimes heard) at our facility. Interestingly, some of Michigan's rarest frogs are dirt-common in states to the south. An early-June trip to central Illinois secured the three we were missing: the Blanchard's Cricket Frog, the Fowler's Toad and the Cope's Gray Tree Frog.

Still, a third "unprecedented" is hard to miss as soon as you walk in the door this summer. We've got a full-blown Michigan giant silk moth farm where we are raising a total of a couple hundred larvae of four large, beautiful, and impressive giant silk moth species. The deep-red Cecropia is the largest moth on the continent. The golden Polyphemus is the continent's second largest. The pastel-green, swallow-tailed



Jars and branches adorned with larvae of four species of giant silk moths take up a lot of room at our center this summer.

Luna is a symbol of wilderness, like the loon or the wolf. The still smaller, but no less impressive Promethea Moth exhibits marked sexual dimorphism. The color and pattern of the male and female look so different, you'd assume they are separate species.

I've been looking for cocoons of giant silk moths my whole life, then, raising larvae when opportunity presented itself. I've also developed a program entitled Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths that covers the various species, their one-year life cycles, how to find them in all metamorphic stages and how to successfully rear their impressive, huge larvae until they spin cocoons.

These moths have declined dramatically over the past few decades. Back in the day, as a kid-naturalist in Chicago, I'd find dozens of Polyphemus and Cecropia cocoons each winter. Walk the same streets with the same species of trees on which their larvae feed today and you won't find a single one. In fact, it has become a long-shot to find a single Polyphemus or Cecropia cocoon through a given winter anywhere.

That's why the winter of '10-11 was especially sweet. I already had Luna cocoons, thanks to last summer's Luna explosion (see the September 2010 newsletter), and I find the more common Promethea cocoons every winter on roadside sassafras and black cherry trees. Then, after many winters in a row of no luck, I managed to find a single Polyphemus and a single Cecropia cocoon, too, in our north Williamstown Township neighborhood. In early June, a female moth emerged from each. I put them out in a specially built "mating cage" to attract a male overnight, and they proceeded to lay fertile eggs over the next few nights.

In over forty years of looking for, maintaining and studying giant silk moths I've never seen larvae of all four species in one location at the same time... until now, here!

In late June, we presented on the giant silk moths at Ypsilanti District Library and passed out small larvae for participants to rear at home along with four pages of detailed care instructions. We also gave larvae and instructions to participants in last week's day camp.

While supplies last, anyone is welcome to contact us to arrange to rear larvae. We just ask for a small donation per caterpillar. We can even set you up to rear larvae of all four species. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

-Jim McGrath



From left, a 5th instar Promethea, a 3rd instar Cecropia, a 4th instar Luna, and a 5th instar Polyphemus are a few representatives of hundreds being reared at Nature Discovery.



Summer Volunteers Still Needed

Is your teen tired of idling the summer away? Or, are you tired of your teen idling the summer away? Arrange for him or her to spend a day volunteering for us. Who knows? They just may like it! We especially need help with animal care and grounds-keeping. Our summer programs along with constant maintenance of our huge zoo of Michigan reptiles & amphibians, uses up so much

of our time, there is little left for mowing, trimming, trail maintenance, and, alien invasive-clearing on our six acres. They can help over almost any hours or amount of time that fits their schedule. Stay for a few hours or all day. No need to pack food or drink. While our small business can't afford to pay staff, we'd at least be happy to feed you while you are here! Please contact us if you or someone you know, high school to adult, would like to lend a hand. Thank you!

FEEDING FRENZY SUNDAY

***Sunday, July 17
1 to 5pm \$5/person***



Watch our one-year-old hognose snake eat a live toad!

With over 100 Michigan reptiles and amphibians of 42 species, plus a red-footed tortoise and a bearded dragon, plus hundreds more rare and beautiful and always hungry giant silk moth caterpillars, there will be a LOT of feeding going on all day. Throughout the day, our staff will mingle with visitors, giving everyone up-close opportunities to watch snakes, turtles, frogs, salamanders and lizards eat a wide variety of foods – some fruits and vegetables and many kinds of small animals, including worms, slugs, insects galore, fish, frogs, toads and even mice.



A young, rare wood turtle anticipates a handout from anyone approaching its pool. Photo by Lily McGrath

- Catch your own insects around the yard and on the trails to feed to individuals of the only complete collection of 13 Michigan frog species in the state!
- Feed food sticks, worms and fish to the only complete collection of 10 Michigan turtles in the state! Some of the small ones can take food right out of your hand!
- Learn to identify all 3 species of garter snakes found in Michigan, then watch them gobble up live worms, fish and frogs.
- Watch a yearling hognose snake eat a small toad.

- Hold Michigan's largest snake, the black rat snake, and check out our newly hatched baby rat snakes.
- Pick wild raspberries and mulberries for box turtles (and people) to eat.
- Watch huge Polyphemus, Cecropia, Luna and Prometheus Moth caterpillars devour leaves of a variety of native trees.
- Arrange to take caterpillars to rear at home with written care instructions for a small donation.
- Our staff is always on hand to help you make the most of your visit!



A single 5th instar Polyphemus will devour up to ten whole leaves a day!

Summer Day Camp Openings Still Available!



All of our wild and totally unique camps still have openings. As of July 7, here are the weeks followed by the number of available spaces in parentheses. Check our website for details.

*July 11-14 Nature Discovery, 7-9 yrs (5)
July 18-21 Wetland Exploration, 10 yrs & up (3)
July 25-28 Budding Naturalists, 5-6 yrs (5)
August 1-4 Lepidoptera Week, 8 yrs & up (5)
August 8-11 Reptiles/Amphibians, 8-10 yrs (2)
August 29-Sept 1 Entomology, 10 yrs & up (4)*

Ask us about before and after care arrangements.

Around the State in July

- ❖ *Saturday, July 9: 11am to 3pm. Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit, Frog Fest, Cedarville. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Saturday, July 9: 2pm. Michigan Snakes presentation; 7pm Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians presentation, Ludington State Park. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Wednesday, July 13: 5:30pm. Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians presentation, Fowlerville District Library. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Saturday, July 16: 10am. Michigan Turtles presentation, Huron County Nature Center. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Saturday, July 23: 12:30pm. Butterflies & Moths presentation, Leila Arboretum, Battle Creek. Public is welcome.*

***Thank you** to Troy Garden Club for their generous donation of \$150!*

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