



A pair of Trumpeter Swans prepare to settle in for the night. Sunset at Seney National Wildlife Refuge offered stunning photo ops for our amateur photographers.

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June: The Month, the Miles, the Birds & the Blind

Whew, what a June! We squeezed so many miles and educational endeavors into the month that the few day trip Carol, Lily and I made to central

Indiana and Illinois the first week of the month feels like ages ago.

If you know your Michigan cities and locations, plus a couple in Indiana and Illinois, you can appreciate the distances from Williamston since June began: Ithaca, Ludington, Greenville, Benton Harbor, Bloomington (IN), Marshall (IL), Cadillac, then up to Cedarville, Paradise and Seney in the U.P., followed by Detroit, Battle Creek, Flint, and finally, Ludington again.

Interspersed among the road miles, we managed to host a day of open hours with a presentation, plus two weeks of nature camps out of our home-based facility. Carol also developed and taught a special week-long class for 2nd-3rd graders at Lansing Community College, called Get SMART, integrating science, math and art into a functioning model farm village of little learners.

June is a great month to offer bird-specific trips and camps because this is peak breeding month for hundreds of species across the state. Thus, bird activity while tending young is high, and for most of them - the songbirds - breeding territories are defended with song. Learning the art of "birding by ear" allows for identification of way more birds than strictly by sight alone.

In previous newsletters we advertised a "Breeding Birds of the U.P." trip which took place from June 11 to 14. Three participants enrolled. Although their backgrounds were quite varied, a common strong drive to experience bird life and diversity united them into a cohesive birding unit.

For years now, Jan Heminger of Williamston, has been a steadfast Nature Discovery patron in nearly everything *birds*, from day trips to week-long treks to distant locales. Thank you to Jan for ensuring that no matter what we offer in the way of birding trips, she's almost automatically Participant #1 on the roster.

Andrew Nowicki just graduated from Fowlerville High School and will be starting at NMU in Marquette, majoring in Zoology. We've gotten to know Andrew through his steady participation in our

monthly Sunday programs and monthly birding trips to various locations. He wrote a bird trip report that you'll find in this issue.

Finally, I received a call last month from the mother of Baton Rouge, LA, 9th-grader and avid birder, Alex Haun. His parents were scheduled for a two-week business trip to Saginaw, and she was looking for things related to birding in Michigan for him to do. She found our website and enrolled him in the U.P. trip. When she found we would be willing to let him spend the night, he stayed with us the following week and participated in our birding day camp for kids, too.

The U.P. trip was a blast and everyone picked up personal "life" birds never encountered before, despite an unsettling setback at the outset just south of Mt. Pleasant involving a road commission lawnmower in the median, a rock projectile and the back window of our minivan.

This past week, we hosted a group of visually-impaired teens and young adults in a special Birding by Ear camp funded by the nonprofit organization, Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind. Most of them first met us when we presented earlier in the month at Camp Tuhsmehta, an outdoor education facility near Greenville specifically for the visually-impaired. The group included leader, Donna Posont, visually-impaired herself, and the woman responsible for tracking us down a few years ago for wildlife-related programs geared specifically for them.

Members of the group came from Lansing, Kalamazoo, Flint, Detroit and Dearborn and camped for four days at Sleepy Hollow State Park. They took two field trips to Nature Discovery, where we birded by ear around the property and the neighborhood and also spent time with our on-site reptiles and amphibians. On two other days I met them at their site, then birded the park and as far north as Maple River State Game Area.

By camp's end, two students, 15-year-old Steven Crouch from Flint, and the group's youngest member, 12-year-old Taylor Arndt from Kalamazoo, had become bona fide birders, capable of identifying far more species by ear than most sighted people could. On the last morning at Sleepy Hollow, Taylor flaunted her new-found ability and heightened awareness gained over three days of focused listening. Led by their canes, the group took its final walk about the trails. With every avian noise near and far that her keen ear registered she called out the species with confidence: cardinal, chickadee, nuthatch, robin, mourning dove, wood thrush, catbird, downy woodpecker, pewee, red-eyed vireo, redstart, killdeer, song sparrow, yellowthroat, ...



Jim & Taylor listen for birds under the beach pavilion at Sleepy Hollow State Park.

The nonmonetary rewards connected with teaching? Priceless.

-Jim McGrath



***Tune in to WLNZ Radio's morning show,
Coffee Break, for Monthly Visits
with Nature Discovery***

After we appeared on the show July 2, host, Jack Robinson agreed to have us in to talk Michigan nature on a monthly basis. The show airs weekdays from 9 to 10am on 89.7 FM. There is also a TV simulcast of the show on Comcast stations 15, 21 or 31. Our next appearance is on Monday, July 23. We'll post a Facebook reminder prior to the show.

Lion in the Sand

Finding & Rearing Antlions

SUNDAY, JULY 8

Our home-based nature center is open from 1 to 5pm. Admission:\$5/person.



At 2pm, attend the presentation, *Lion in the Sand*. This combination of Powerpoint images, live specimens and outdoor exploration in search of antlions in the wild features the life cycle and behavior of this unusual, seldom-noticed, but quite common insect. The predatory larva resides under the surface of sand or other loose, dry soil. It makes a pit trap to capture ants and other small insects to devour, then metamorphoses into a harmless, winged adult that looks much like a damselfly. While they last, each participant or family can take one home inside a cup of sand along with easy care instructions.



From left to right, 4th instar Promethea, 3rd instar Cecropia, and 3rd instar Polyphemus. Raise any or all into huge, beautiful giant silk moths!

Larvae and eggs of huge and impressive Cecropia, Polyphemus, Luna and Promethea Moths are also available to take home with instructions for a minimal fee. Raising these insects is an engaging natural experience for kids as well as teachers, parents and other adults.

Visit our huge interactive zoo of Michigan reptiles and amphibians, too. There is a lot to see and do!

Nature Discovery Day Camp **July 9-12; 9am to 3pm**

There are still spaces available in this coming week's camp geared toward students who exhibit a strong interest in the natural world. Parents are amazed at the breadth of natural knowledge that gushes from the child when he/she comes home!

This week, recommended for students 7 to 9 years old, offers engaging hands-on opportunities with a range of Michigan wildlife through a mix of inside and outside activities, including exposure to our huge collection of live Michigan frogs, salamanders, turtles and snakes, as well as bird-watching, insect collecting, tree, shrub, vine, and wildflower identification, and more. We will take a couple of short field trips to experience a diversity of habitats and wildlife, and also arrange for students to take home and rear a Cecropia caterpillar, the larva of the largest and most impressive moth in North America!



COST: \$180 per student. Contact us by phone or email to enroll.

Breeding Birds of the U.P., June 11-14, 2012, Trip Report

Birding in the Upper Peninsula is a great experience even apart from the rarities and target species. Birds that can be difficult to find in the Lower Peninsula appeared almost commonly throughout the trip. These included: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Common Nighthawk, Hermit Thrush, and Pine Warbler.

During the drive north the group stopped at a few locations in the Lower Peninsula such as Maple River State Game Area, north of St. Johns, and prime Kirtland's Warbler habitat in Roscommon County. Before crossing the Mackinaw Bridge we had already tallied some great birds such as Prothonotary Warbler, Kirtland's Warbler, Black Tern, and fantastic looks at Upland Sandpiper.



From right to left, Alex Haun, Andrew Nowicki, Spotting Scope, Jan Heminger, Jim McGrath.

The next few days spent birding in the Upper Peninsula would yield some more rarities. We heard a LeConte's Sparrow along with Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Northern Parula. Also saw Piping Plover, which have three nests being monitored at Whitefish Point this year.

On the last day we stopped at Seney National Wildlife Refuge where we saw Common Loon, Trumpeter Swan, Sora, Virginia Rail, and Wilson's Snipe. This location had some cool non-bird sightings as well. Mink frogs and a beaver were spotted near the water's edge. Overall the group tallied 129 bird species!

—Andrew Nowicki

*** Andrew has come on to work part time for Nature Discovery for the rest of the summer before he starts at Northern Michigan U. in late August. You'll probably see Andrew around during a Sunday program or when you are dropping off or picking up a child at one of our summer day camps. Check out his photos of the U.P. trip on our Facebook page.



- ❖ **Tuesday, July 23: 1:30pm. MI Turtles Presentation; Huron Co. Master Gardeners, Bad Axe.**
- ❖ **Saturday, July 28:10:30am. MI Snakes Presentation; Huron Co. Nature Center.**

Around the State in July

- ❖ **Friday, July 6: 7:30pm. MI Frogs Presentation; Hartwick Pines State Park, Grayling.**
- ❖ **Saturday, July 7: 2pm. MI Snakes Presentation; Hartwick Pines State Park, Grayling.**
- ❖ **Monday, July 9: 6pm. MI Wildlife Presentation; Independence Twp Library, Clarkston.**
- ❖ **Saturday, July 14: 11am-3pm. Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Frogfest, Cedarville.**
- ❖ **Saturday, July 21: 10am & 1pm. Michigan Wildlife Presentations; Mitchell St. Park, Cadillac.**

This Scarlet Tanager made an appearance outside the Hartwick Pines visitor center on our return from the U.P.

Photo by Andrew Nowicki.



Near sunset in Roscommon County, Andrew Nowicki watches an Upland Sandpipers alight atop a dead jack pine nearby.



*An Upland Sandpiper alights at the top of a dead jack pine in Kirtland's Warbler habitat in Roscommon County
Photo by Andrew Nowicki*

Become a fan of *Nature Discovery* on Facebook!

Check out our Youtube channel, *Wild Williamston*, too!

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