

THIS ISSUE

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**June: Life-and-Death
for Turtles**



Give 'em a brake! Turtles are crossing roads and falling victim to road-kill most abundantly in the month of June.

In last June's newsletter I dubbed the month of June "Turtle Egg-laying Month" in Michigan. Might as well call it "Turtle Road-kill Month," too. Females often need to cross roads on their way to, or returning from egg-deposition. The carnage is evident to any passing motorist especially next to wetlands. While offering tips on how to rescue turtles from the road, I also added that road-rescuing them is not enough to secure their future among us. June, for raccoons, is also "Turtle Egg-feast Month." Across the state this time of year coons are sucking down eggs like Cool Hand Luke. You can read my advice on how to keep raccoons from raiding the nest the night after deposition. It's must-reading for anyone interested in making a difference in regard to our imperiled turtle populations. Here's a link to it: <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20June12.pdf>

When any wild animal of a given species is road-killed, there is, of course, one less animal in the local population. However, species to species, not all road-kills are equivalent when it comes to their impact on the population. Common mammalian road-kills include deer, squirrels, rabbits, opossums, and, of course, raccoons. Individuals of these animals can be killed by cars indefinitely, and yet, their populations seem to suffer no declines. This is largely due to the fact that a relatively high percentage of their offspring survive to adulthood, then begin reproducing, themselves, within a year or two.



A raccoon usually locates, excavates and dines on turtle eggs the very night after deposition. Learn how to prevent it in the June 2012 newsletter.

On the flip side, for any that successfully hatch, turtles have naturally low survival rates in the first year of life – often in the vicinity of ten percent. They are also slow to reach reproductive maturity. Depending on the species, it takes four to twenty years! The handful that reach reproductive age are a tenuous bridge to the population's

future. With limited natural enemies they should live long, reproductive lives, but that's in a world without fast-moving chevies. Throw a burgeoning, egg-devouring raccoon population into the mix and well over half of baby turtles never make it out of the gate.

A basic rule of thumb that may not be evident to some: If rescuing a turtle from the road always place it off the road in the direction it is headed. Do not return it to the wetland next to the road if it is obviously moving in the opposite direction. The turtle knows where it wants to go, especially an egg-laden female.

Understandably, you may be less-inclined to rescue a large snapping turtle. Although almost any turtle species may take a shot at you if your fingers get too close to its head, the snapping turtle's extra long neck and ultra-defensive disposition requires that you keep your hands as far away from the business end as possible when moving it. One option may be to use a thick stick, broom handle or something similar to push the snapping turtle off the road. Unfortunately, large ones are so heavy and strong they often dig in and resist your attempts, all the while snapping violently at the air.

The first time, it takes some courage, but just do it! Reach down, grab the turtle firmly by the base of the tail as close to the carapace as you can, then lift, and carry toward the roadside. Be aware that, often, when you approach the turtle in a slow, tentative manner, it will have time to maneuver and face you. Once again, your best approach? Just walk up and do it! While keeping in mind, of course, there's little room for error...

Painted turtle, no problem. But the snapping turtle? Maybe you'd be more comfortable if you could "practice." The past two weeks, some elementary students at Montessori Children's House in Lansing and Stepping Stones Montessori in East Lansing (where we are weekly, specialist teachers), were given that very opportunity with our seven-year-old snapping turtle. Since this turtle has virtually been in the company of humans its whole life, she doesn't feel as threatened when approached, and tolerates being picked up in this way fairly well. While it's obvious the experience is not fun for the turtle, she is unknowingly providing a huge service to the survival of her kind.



We recommended that the students not try this with a wild one unless a parent or other responsible adult was present, but what a terrific confidence-builder. It's a slam-dunk that these kids will mature into concerned adults who harbor the understanding, motivation, and technique to do something about a snapping turtle or any other species caught on a busy road. Imagine Michigan turtle education, species by species, being taught as a mainstream curriculum in our public schools – right down to snapping turtle handling! No matter how tight-lipped a typical student can be when a parent asks how his/her school day was, the parent will definitely get an earful when the student arrives home after school on that day!

-Jim McGrath

Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths

SUNDAY, JUNE 9

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



At 2pm, we will present **Finding & Rearing Giant Silk Moths**. The largest, most impressive moths on the continent can be found right here in Michigan, yet, their numbers have declined dramatically over the past few decades. Beautiful photographs enhance this Powerpoint presentation featuring the life cycle and ecology of Cecropia, Polyphemus, Prometheus and Luna Moths. Over the past week, females



A large, beefy, fifth-instar Polyphemus caterpillar will eat up to ten whole leaves a day!

have begun to emerge from cocoons, attract mates, and lay eggs. All paying participants are welcome to take home a few fertile eggs of Polyphemus (pictured above) or another species. An information sheet offers detailed instructions on how to rear larvae successfully after they hatch. Take advantage of this completely unique opportunity and awesome summer project for adults as much as for children.

Come early or stay late to take a guided walk on our trails or to interact with the largest educational collection of live Michigan reptiles and amphibians in the state, including two unprecedented “grand slams” – all 10 turtles and all 13 frogs found in Michigan!

Our staff is always on hand to help you make the most of your visit.

*****If you can't make Sunday's program but would still like to acquire eggs or larvae and care instructions, contact us to make special arrangements! *****

Catch Nature Discovery on WLNZ Radio's Coffee Break on June 21

Jim is scheduled to appear on Friday, June 21 at 9:30am, discussing giant silk moths. The show airs weekdays from 9 to 10am on 89.7 FM. Listen live online at lcc.edu/radio/onair/ or watch it live (or later in the day at 6pm) online at lcc.edu/tv/watch. We'll post a reminder on Facebook.



Summer Camps & Classes

In addition to summer day camps on-site at Nature Discovery, Jim and Carol are leading programs for youth in other venues, as well. Here is a list.

LANSING COMMUNITY COLLEGE (East Lansing)

Adventures in Science (Grades 4-5), June 24-28, 1-4pm.

Mystery Festival (Grades 4-5), July 8-11, 9am-12pm.

Science with Experiments (Grades 2-3), July 8-11, 1-4pm.

Build-a-BOT (Grades 4-5), July 15-18, 9am-12pm.

Robotics & Rocketry (Grades 6-8), 1-4pm.

Science Wizards (Grades 2-3), July 22-25, 9am-12pm.

Adventures in Science (Grades 4-5), July 29-Aug 1, 9am-12pm.

MI Reptiles & Amphibians (Grades 2-3), Aug 5-8, 1-4pm.

Science Wizards Advanced (Grades 2-3), Aug 5-8, 1-4pm.

For tuition and enrollment information, visit <http://lcc.edu/lifelong/youth>.



STEPPING STONES MONTESSORI (East Lansing)

There are still openings for a special Nature Discovery day camp for 4-6 year-olds, July 8-11, 9am-12pm. Stepping Stones offers other day camps over the summer for students, 4 years of age through elementary. For tuition and enrollment information visit

<http://steppingstoneseastlansing.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/Summer-Camp-Primary.pdf>

NATURE DISCOVERY DAY CAMPS

Several of our summer day camp weeks have reached maximum enrollment. Here are the camp titles and dates that still have openings:



Budding Naturalists (5-6 yrs), July 22-25, 9am-12pm or 9am-3pm enrollment options.

Okemos Nursery School Nature Day Camp (4-6 yrs), July 29-Aug 1, 9am-12pm. This camp, on-site at Nature Discovery has given first enrollment option to Okemos Nursery School students. It is now open to any students.

Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians (9 yrs & up), August 5-8, 9am-3pm.

NEW! **Nature Discovery** (7-9 yrs), August 12-15, 9am-3pm.

For more details or to enroll, visit

<http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/summercamps.pdf>.

Around the State in June

- ❖ **Tuesday, June 4: 7pm.** *Giant Silk Moths Presentation; Hartland Audubon Society, Hartland Senior Center. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ **Saturday, June 8: 10am-2pm.** *Michigan Reptiles Exhibit; Webber Twp Parks & Recreation, Baldwin. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ **OUT OF STATE! Saturday, June 15: 10:30am.** *Giant Silk Moths Presentation. Elgin Public Museum, Elgin, IL. Enrollment required. Visit www.elginpublicmuseum.org for details. Here's an opportunity for relatives or friends you may know in the Chicago area to catch Nature Discovery close to home. Pass the word!*

Climate Change Realist: Hey, They're Indicating!

It is common knowledge that frogs are considered living environmental indicators. In fact, it borders on cliché. Yet, ironically and alarmingly, how many in our society are in a position to recognize it if the frogs today were, indeed, indicating something's awry with our environment?

For 25 years Carol and I have been closely connected, annually and seasonally, to local frog populations breeding in our vernal pond and dispersing through our neighborhood north of Williamston. Over the past several, we've witnessed dramatic declines despite the fact that the physical habitat continues to exist. Today, it appears that our resolve to protect this habitat is no longer enough. We can't protect the frogs from the atmosphere. If you missed it last spring, read the opening essay in our April 2012 newsletter entitled *Vernal Ponds and Coal Mines*. If you'd like to know more about these species, the specific manifestation of the trends, as well as our most recent observations, please drop us a line.



In less than 5 years, the Northern Leopard Frog has gone from common to nearly absent on our property and around our neighborhood north of Williamston.

It appears scientific research is beginning to corroborate what we're seeing here. A new study published by U.S. Geological Survey scientists "found that amphibians in the United States are disappearing so rapidly that they could vanish from half of their habitats in the next 20 years." Here's a link to an article by Morgana Matus in Inhabitat.com for your perusal: <http://inhabitat.com/study-shows-u-s-amphibians-disappearing-at-alarming-and-rapid-rate/>.

What can you do in the face of such a bleak prognosis? For starts, become more personally-educated about the natural environment, locally and globally; second, acknowledge the reality of climate change, industrial society's role in driving it, and your own personal responsibility to shrink your carbon footprint, one step at a time; and, finally, repel the rebuttals of the sophisticated, well-funded, climate-change-denial machine which relies heavily on the environmental-disconnectedness of those who heed it, in order to assure the continuation of robust fossil-fuel consumption.

Become a fan of *Nature Discovery* on Facebook
Check out our Youtube channel, *Wild Williamston*

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