

THIS ISSUE

Williamston “Birdabout” Monday, May 9

Garlic Mustard Pullers Wanted

May Twilight & Vernal Pond Wade

Natural Diversiday, Sunday, May 15

Summer Day Camp Enrollment Now

Southern Illinois Nest-Finding Ecotour

Adult Field Birding, June 13-16

Around the State in May

Biodiversity: Knowing Means Caring

In recent visits to Montessori Children’s House and Okemos Nursery School, I pointed out this frustration to the students. There is so much happening in nature this time of year that, in a weekly visit of 30 minutes, I can’t come close to covering it all. I must choose between toads and towhees, although both are singing in my yard, and possibly, in their yards right now. We should be meeting three times a week at this time of year. They respond with enthusiastic cheers of agreement.

I try as much as possible to give any interpretive audiences information that is highly seasonal, and, therefore, useable right now. Next week may be too late. A huge list of Michigan natural phenomena only occur through a short stretch of the year, especially so in May. Here are a few bird-related ones:

For the next two weeks, the beautiful White-throated Sparrow and its close relative, the White-crowned Sparrow, migrate through Lower Michigan. If you scatter a seed mix with millet on the ground under you feeders, they will visit. You hardly need to see them to know they’re there. The White-throated’s song is a series of plaintive, almost ethereal, rising and falling whistles that can only be heard in late April and early May in the lower part of the state. Internet-search the song, then listen for it. Your May morning will become a bit richer.

By early May, all the common permanent residents around your yard are in full nesting-mode, either building, laying or incubating. Watch a robin on your lawn or a chickadee as it flies by. These birds are attending their nests countless times a day. If you can keep an eye on an individual bird for more than five minutes, it will lead you to its nest. Careful not to approach too closely. Predators, like raccoons, are known to follow human scent directly to a nest, then devour the eggs or young overnight.



A neo-tropical migrant Olive-sided Flycatcher perches on a dead twig at the tip top of a large cottonwood in McGrath’s yard last May. Jim photographed it through his spotting scope. For over an hour in early evening, the bird would repeatedly fly out, catch a flying carpenter ant and return to the perch to devour it. By the next morning it would have flown a couple hundred miles northward, fueled by the carpenter ants in the air over the yard.

With the leafing-out of trees and shrubs, there comes a corresponding glut of tiny, green caterpillars of various moth species that feed on the tender new growth. Gardeners, take note... Don't think it's bad! This is normal and necessary for the health of a forest and to maintain bird diversity. Most of these songbirds, timely migrants from the tropics, are colorful jewels that pass through our yards, parks and woodlots through May – warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, and more. They eat insects almost exclusively, and all are experiencing marked declines. Better get out and see them now. Their populations have dropped by half or more over the past thirty to forty years. How many will be left in another thirty? The reasons for their decline are wholly human-generated, and, with mainstream consciousness and resolve, totally reversible. Yet, in the face of the pervasive indifference through ignorance that exists today, these birds are doomed.

It's why we do what we do. As long as some still exist, it's not too late, and heaven knows we don't do it for the income, though we're trying to survive on it. At the core of our business is the drive to provide for this recognition and appreciation of natural diversity, so starkly absent from the public consciousness. After all, it's hard to care about something if you don't know about it. On the flip-side, I've never met anyone who recognizes natural diversity and doesn't care. I maintain that when you know, you can't help but care.

We've got the background, ability and enthusiasm to help you to know. Here's a valuable personal bonus. It makes your time outdoors far more interesting. No matter what your age, we've got something for everybody. Give us a try. There is no better time than May!

-Jim McGrath



Williamston “Birdabout”

Monday, May 9

7 to 11am

7 to 11am. Jim will be leading a maximum of five participants on a four-hour local birding excursion around our neighborhood north of Williamston. The goal, to encounter as many species as possible in our yard, then along roadside fields, forests, lakes and marshes, as well as on other private acreage. We'll ride together in our minivan from one location to another. Participants will be given Michigan Birds checklists to keep a record of the day's encounter. Weather-permitting, we should easily surpass 50 species. Enroll in advance. Fee: \$20.

Left: The Scarlet Tanager of Eastern deciduous forests sounds like a robin with a sore throat. We'll draw one in with the “birdpod” for a close look.

© Steve Sage

Garlic Mustard Pullers Wanted



Ask gardeners what draws them to gardening as a pastime and many will respond with “being outside” or “working in the soil.” We feel that way, too, but a walk around our yard reveals few flowers actually planted in flower beds. Most of our “outside time” in the spring is spent “working in the soil” over a pursuit that seems far too critical to put on the back burner in the pursuit of landscape gardening. We are ever aware that invasives - garlic mustard, along with oriental bittersweet and Amur honeysuckle - are steadily encroaching on the native growth that surrounds our vernal wetland. This is happening in natural areas all over mid-Michigan and elsewhere. Our ecological conscience won’t allow us, as stewards of this six acre natural community, to look past it or admit defeat and throw in the trowel. To tend pretty flower beds while the garlic mustard blooms in our woods is an ecologically misplaced priority.

Will you consider helping? You can come to pull it any day or for any amount of time you care to spend. Just call or email us to let us know when to expect you. We will have someone on hand to orient or pull with you. Families welcome!



May Twilight & Vernal Pond Wade

**Thursday, May 12
or Friday, May 13**

7:30-10pm

Find out first hand why this dwindling habitat is one of the most biologically-rich on Earth. Before dark, we’ll walk the trails or visit a nearby wetland to call in some Virginia Rails. Then, as darkness sets in, we’ll wade into the vernal pond while being serenaded by breeding tree frogs. We’ll spotlight them as well as their eggs and tadpoles of other species. With hand nets and small buckets, we’ll also scoop up a huge array of aquatic invertebrates then take them back to the classroom for closer inspection and identification under bright lights and magnifiers. After dark, we’ll also turn off the lights to find glowworms, the predatory, dimly-glowing larvae soon to become the fireflies of summer. Bring a strong flashlight. Headlamps work best. Wear old shoes, socks and long pants. Bring extra clothes, a towel, and a plastic bag in which to put your wet wading clothes. Boots are not recommended. If the above dates don’t work for you, contact us to make a special appointment on another night for your small group. It’s a fun and unique outing for adults, families, scouts and special occasions!

\$10/person. Limited enrollment. Contact us to enroll.

Natural Diversiday

Sunday, May 15

Doors open from 1 to 5pm.

\$3/person

2pm Presentation:

Five Invasives Everyone Should Know

Non-native plants are prevalent across our landscape, but some are far more troublesome than most. These are plants that seed profusely, yet, native insects and wildlife will not eat them. As a result, they are eroding the botanical diversity of natural areas, especially woodlands and wetlands, across the country, across the state, in local parks and

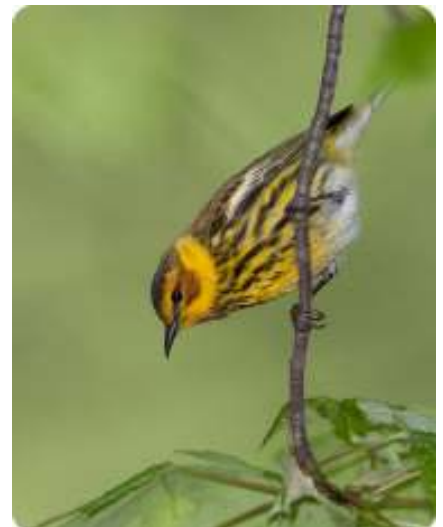


natural areas and on our own properties. Five species that are most troublesome in mid-Michigan include two biennials – garlic mustard and dame’s rocket; a shrub – Amur honeysuckle; a woody vine – oriental bittersweet; and a grass – *Phragmites*. In this powerpoint presentation, participants will learn to identify each through photographs and clippings of live specimens. Jim will share ecological information about each. A short carpool drive around the neighborhood follows in which all will be identified on roadsides. Participants are encouraged to stay and help us pull garlic mustard on our natural area afterward or any time during the day.



Aquatic Invertebrate Diversity It’s a jungle in there! By mid-May, our vernal pond is, literally, crawling with life. In addition to breeding frogs and tadpoles, the waters are thick with aquatic invertebrate species. We will have trays on hand that are loaded with pond action. Magnifying glasses will help you get up-close looks, and our knowledgeable staff will help you to identify them and learn which are herbivores, predators and prey.

Bird Diversity More birds can be seen in Michigan in May than in any other month. Join us in the morning for a Sunday version of “Williamston Birdabout.” Our goal, to encounter as many bird species as possible in a three-hour period, 9am to noon beginning around our yard, then visiting various habitats around the neighborhood. We’ll distribute Michigan Birds checklists to participants to keep track of the morning’s finds. Bring binoculars. Contact us to reserve spaces. FEE: \$10/person.



Cape May Warbler

© Steve Sage

Visit our Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Zoo * Walk the Trails * Hot Dogs, Chips & Pop, Too!

Enroll for Summer Day Camps Now!

Check the link on our website for weeks, topics and details .

Southern Illinois Nest-Finding Ecotour, June 4-11

Check the link on our website for details of this unique opportunity to intimately explore the forests and cypress swamps of Southern Illinois while aiding songbird conservation research.

Lower Michigan Field Birding Mon-Thur, June 13-16, 2011

6:30am to 1:00pm. This intensive set of field trips for adults focuses on visiting as many habitat types as possible to experience as many breeding birds as possible in a 4-day span. Each day's destination is within about an hour of the Lansing area. Upwards of 80 species should be tallied by week's end. (See the front page of our April issue for more.) Fee: \$230 (\$100 NR deposit) includes all transportation to birding locales. Max enrollment: 5 adults. Call or email to enroll!

Around the State in May

- ❖ *Saturday, May 7: 11am. Live Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians presentation, Hartley Outdoor education Center, Owosso. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Saturday, May 14: Noon and 3pm. Live Michigan Reptiles Presentations, Ypsilanti District Library. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Sunday, May 15: 2pm. Live Michigan Snakes presentation, Waterloo Recreation Area Discovery Center. Public is welcome.*
- ❖ *Friday, May 20: 9am to 2pm, Live Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit, Isabella Conservation District, Mt. Pleasant. Public is welcome*
- ❖ *Saturday, May 21: 7am to 4pm. Live Michigan Turtles Exhibit, Frogging by Ear Presentation and Guided Birding Tour, Kirtland's Warbler Wildlife Festival, Roscommon.*
- ❖ *Saturday, May 28: 10am and 1pm. Live Michigan Turtles presentation, Carl T. Johnson Hunting & Fishing Center, Mitchell State Park, Cadillac.*

Become a fan of ***Nature Discovery*** on Facebook!

NATURE DISCOVERY 5900 N. Williamston Road Williamston, MI 48895

(517) 655-5349 naturedisc@cablespeed.com www.naturediscovery.net