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In Area Neighborhoods the Tea-kettle is On



The Carolina Wren is now a well-established Michigan resident. Photo by Greg Smith

“What took you so long?” That’s what we’d say - if they could understand us - to the Carolina Wrens that have taken up residence on our rural property north of Williamston.

Fifty years ago this southern bird was definitely *not* considered a Michigan species. Milder winters due to our changing climate may partially account for its northward expansion, but a marked increase over the past few decades in backyard bird feeders has most certainly played a role, too.

I remember thrilling in the mid-90s at first notice of a Carolina Wren singing its loud, boisterous *tea kettle-tea kettle-tea kettle* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GLIFUtXj2M>) in an East Lansing residential neighborhood. Now, citizens who pay attention to birds and their songs in any local community can recognize this species, alongside the standard cardinals, doves and chickadees, as a regular avian fixture.

You can hear the Carolina Wren singing within any forested habitat south of Michigan, but here the bird seems slower to colonize rural woodlots than community neighborhoods. I suspect it has to do with, again, the closer proximity and accessibility to human-provided “restaurants,” and with the fact that available buildings provide solid cover in the event of inclement weather.

On and off over the past twenty years we have had a Carolina Wren show up, either at our feeders or singing around the yard in a given spring. In each case, however, the individual stuck around for only a handful of days before moving on, despite the readily available food provided via our feeders. When a male began visiting the feeder and singing here early this March we assumed it also wouldn’t last, but now, some two months later accompanied by copious song throughout each day, this bird is apparently here to stay. We have yet to see two wrens simultaneously (the sexes look alike), but we are assuming he has a mate and that the nesting process is underway in the woods off the southeast corner of our back lawn. This is where all of his territorial singing has been concentrated over the past few weeks.

Among all North American birds the Carolina Wren may be a chooser of the most eclectic locales in which to nest. Technically, the species is a cavity-nester, but, when you see some of the places it chooses to build, “cavity” becomes a *very* loose term. If a pair can gain access to the interior of a garage, shed or other outbuilding potential nesting sites within are almost inexhaustible. Unexpected nesting

sites might include the inside of a baseball cap, an empty flower pot on a shelf, or the pocket of a raincoat hanging on a hook.

Outside, the birds may take up residence in a standard nesting box meant for bluebirds, but are just as likely to cram dry grassy material into any hollow on or near the ground and call it a nest. North Lansing resident, birder and photographer, Greg Smith, has had a Carolina Wren pair nest near his home every year since first noticing them in 2006. Through this period Greg has found about ten nesting sites in his garage and knows that they successfully nested there at least four separate years. A pair has also nested



A beakful of nesting material on its way to a hidden location. Photo by Greg Smith

on more than one occasion in his neighbor's outside flower pots. Another recent year they nested deep within a pile of sticks inside his backyard fire pit. This year he believes they are nesting further back on his property possibly under some thickly-matted day-lily leaves or bent goldenrod stalks.

The woodsy patch off our back lawn where I suspect our wrens are nesting is bordered on the far side by our vernal pond. Much of the ground is nearly-impenetrably tangled with a mix of gray dogwood, invasive Amur honeysuckle and prickly multi-flora rose, all messily tied together with invasive oriental bittersweet vines.

My annual spring ritual of garlic mustard pulling will lead me toward the Carolina Wrens' as-yet-secret nesting nook this week. I'll be checking all potential cavities and hollows as I crawl and pull my way toward a self-imposed daily quota of 500 plants...

Speaking of which, we cannot let a May pass without mentioning this invasive biennial, in addition to the equally-invasive and ecologically-damaging scourges of Dame's rocket, Amur honeysuckle and oriental bittersweet. In case you missed it, I wrote more about these in last year's May issue (<http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20May16.pdf>).

Every adult and school child should be capable of identifying them, then muster up the will to do something about it on their property, in a local park, nature center, or *here*. We could definitely use your help! This Sunday you can listen to the *tea-kettles* while learning to identify all the above invasives right where they grow, in addition to identifying another hundred or so Michigan-native fauna and flora on our premises during Biodiversity Day. Details on the following page.

-Jim McGrath



Catch Us on LCC Radio's Coffee Break, Thursday, May 5

Jim is scheduled to appear on Friday, May 7 at 9:30am, discussing spring things and our Sunday open hours. 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 our Facebook fan page.



A male Baltimore Oriole forages among Redbud blossoms.
Photo by Steve Sage

Fifth Annual Biodiversity Day

Sunday, May 7

***Doors open from 1 to 5pm;
Admission: \$5/person***

We would like to help you recognize, appreciate and work toward preserving biological or natural diversity. Identify over 100 species of Michigan-native animal and plant life in a single afternoon!

At 2pm, we invite you to sit in on the presentation, *Four Woodland Invasive Plants Everyone Should Know*. Two biennials, a shrub and a vine – all very shade-tolerant – are invading woodlands throughout Mid-Michigan. The result? The natural diversity of our local forests is eroding rapidly. Some of our most loved native spring woodland wildflowers are being crowded out of existence. Simultaneously, healthy, mature trees are being strangled and dragged down. After the presentation we will traverse the property identifying garlic mustard, Amur honeysuckle and oriental bittersweet, see the impact of their invasion, then pull and cut a few down while we're at it.



Garlic Mustard blossoms.

Throughout the afternoon participate in a list of other activities offered to help you become more knowledgeable about the tremendous but underappreciated natural diversity that surrounds us. Knowledgeable staff will be on hand all day to assist in a range of highly-interactive, indoor and outdoor encounters for all ages. Take the challenge to encounter 100 species of Michigan life in a single afternoon here! Checklists will be provided to help you keep a tally of species encountered.

Stations and activities include:

- ✓ Take a Michigan Frogs Quiz with live specimens.
- ✓ Identify "The Grand Slam of Michigan Turtles" on the premises, featuring all 10 species found in the state. Help feed them, too!
- ✓ Meet 12 of our state's 17 species of snakes. Lots of handling and feeding opportunities, too.
- ✓ Identify over 20 species of birds by sight and by sound.
- ✓ Identify a long list of wildflowers, shrubs, vines and trees.
- ✓ Identify insects encountered around the yard and trails.
- ✓ Inspect pans teeming with diverse invertebrate life from the vernal pond.
- ✓ Identify invasive species that are eroding natural diversity in our natural areas.
- ✓ More!



Six-spotted Fishing Spider.

2017 Summer Camp Notes

Rosters are filling up!

Openings still remain in...

Michigan Field Birding for students 10 yrs & older,
June 19-22.

Budding Naturalists for students 5-6 yrs, July 10-13.

Nature Discovery for students 7-9 yrs, August 7-10.

Reptiles & Amphibians camp for students 10 yrs &
older, August 21-24.

For details...

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



Tree Swallow. Photo by Steve Sage



“100 Michigan Birds” Tour, June 12-16

Join our economical 5-day guided tour for a small group of adults that starts locally and ends Up North! For details, fees and enrollment info see the description in our April newsletter: <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20Apr17.pdf>
There are only two spaces remaining!

Volunteers Needed

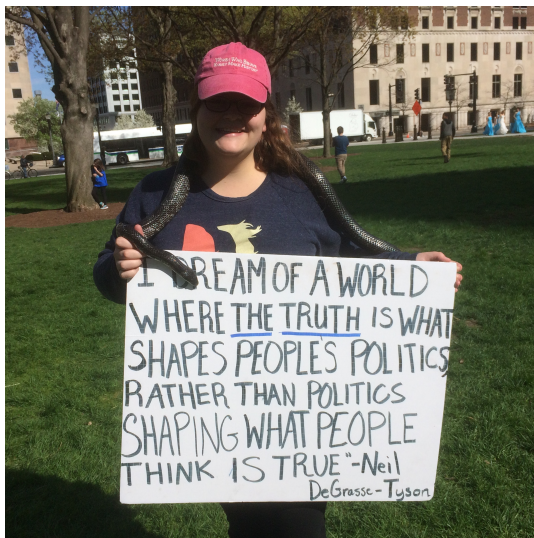
If you have some time to spare AND you like working outside AND you like working in the soil AND you would like to do something that's good for the environment AND you'd like to do something to help our overworked and understaffed business, please contact us! During the growing season it is difficult for us to keep up all our appointments, plus all the animal care, in addition to rampant plant growth. Can you help us clear invasives out of our woods, help with our organic vegetable gardens or help to beautify our flower beds? Choose any days or hours that are convenient for you.
Contact us!



Around the State in May

- ❖ Saturday, May 13: 10am-3pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Huron County STEAM Showcase, Bad Axe.
- ❖ Friday, May 19: 9am-2:30pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Isabella Conservation District Environmental Ed Day, Chipp-a-Waters Park, Mt. Pleasant.

Lansing March for Science Saturday, April 22



Nature Discovery offered to set up a small exhibit of Michigan wild things at Lansing's March for Science - and the organizers were thrilled. Our booth was packed with visitors all afternoon - handling snakes, staring into a diverse, living soup of aquatic invertebrate life; identifying turtles, and otherwise coming together in opposition to an administration that is ignorant of, and openly-hostile toward decision-making based on sound scientific inquiry.

We only wish we were available to do it again at last weekend's climate march...

Left: sign-holders pose with a Black Rat Snake.

-JM

Union of Concerned Scientists **350.org**
Science for a healthy planet and safer world

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