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Purchase our Michigan Birds Checklist at 2 for \$1.

***Michigan Birds Checklist:
That's a Lotta Birds!***

A couple of years ago, I designed and printed Nature Discovery's own Michigan birds checklist. With over 300 species printed on six pages, a mere glance gives anyone an instant impression of our state's tremendous, but largely overlooked avian diversity.

They're available for sale to any birders, teachers or others who want to get to know Michigan's bird life, species by species. Participants - kids or adults – who enroll in any of our field trips are each given a checklist to keep track of species encountered through the day. When you spot a bird and need to check it, having to search for the bird through the sea of printed species may seem daunting at first, but with my lead it becomes easy. I've used the checklist and directed users to specific birds so many times that I can just call out the page (one through six), the column (first or second) and whether it can be found at the top, middle or bottom of the column, immediately as each new species is encountered.

Any naturalist who has attempted to take a group of kids birding knows that it can be a challenge keeping them focused. Many have a difficult time adapting to frequent stops and having to hold still and keep quiet in order to look and listen. Additionally, even if a child has a good pair of binoculars, he or she may not be adept at using them effectively.

However, if children are old enough to read, I've found the checklist to be a wonderfully effective extra element to keep them focused. Many become so engrossed in the list-keeping, they forget to find the bird through the binoculars. For these students, I make sure that the bird is more than just a name on the checklist. I pull a field guide from my pocket and turn it to the illustration of the bird for them to see. The educational bottom line - recognition of, and appreciation for avian diversity – has been achieved, plus, a bonus. They take home a record of what they encountered. A review of the birds with a parent elicits one detail after another about the bird, the habitat or another aspect of the experience.

Many adults enjoy "keeping score" on a birding excursion by way of the checklist. I like to add a competitive element to it. At the onset of the trip, given the season, the weather and the birds to expect at the destination, I guess the number of species we'll check by day's end, then see how close we can

get. On some days we come up short of our “quota,” but often, we blow well past it. On these days the checklist is filled with unexpected surprises.



Student, Jon DeVries, got to check Peregrine Falcon at the Edison power plant on a field trip last winter.

Since the majority of birds that spend the summer here migrate out of the state in the fall, it is easy to come to the conclusion that there’s not much to see here through winter. But, while the number of species is definitely less, there are a couple of bonuses that make a field trip to a choice natural area during these months well worth the effort. For one, it’s a reason to get outdoors during a time of year when we are much less inclined.

Here’s the second. There is a lengthy list of Canadian or Arctic species that fly south for the winter. They cannot be seen in Michigan in the summer, but for many of these hearty birds in winter, Michigan is south!

You can see examples in your yard, in a farm field or on a lake that hasn’t frozen over. A flock of raspberry-capped Common Redpolls suddenly overwhelms the goldfinches at your thistle feeder. A flock of hundreds of Snow Buntings swirls around the air over the MSU farmlands. A Red-throated Loon, a bit smaller than Michigan’s Common Loon, visible with a spotting scope from the boat launch, bobs and dives in the middle of Lake Lansing.

The Great Lakes shorelines are even better locations for viewing northern birds in winter. The north-south Lake Michigan shoreline is a natural migration corridor for all birds, and the Great Lakes, in general, are magnets to a host of Arctic-origin water birds.

Starting this month and monthly through March, we will be offering at least one weekend-day-excursion for adults to view birds over the winter. There will also be regular birding opportunities for kids throughout the winter, mostly on select holidays when school is not in session. Give it a try!

-Jim McGrath

Raise a Hatchling Snapping Turtle in Your Classroom

We are raising four hatchling snapping turtles in our zoo that we would like to pass on, complete with care instructions and support, to any participating classroom, preschool to high school. When you schedule a presentation with us we’ll bring one along! Contact us to make arrangements. If you missed the history of these “orphans,” read about it in the September issue of our newsletter on the website. Jim wrote an associated column that should appear in this weekend’s *Williamston Enterprise*. Go to www.lsj.com under *Communities – Williamston*.



The snapping turtles share a shallow tank with our yearling musk turtle. At hatching the young of Michigan’s largest turtle are already larger than a one-year-old of Michigan’s smallest turtle (middle).

***Making
The Ultimate Winter
Bird-feeding Station***

***Sunday, November 13
1 to 5pm; \$5/person***

The presentation begins at 2pm. By way of Powerpoint images and a walk through our two active feeding stations, participants will learn why treating your feeding station as if it is your own upscale restaurant is sure to bring in the maximum abundance and variety of birds. Learn about the best variety of seed, the best mix of feeders, and how to easily enhance the “ambiance” to suit the taste and comfort of the pickiest patrons.

Doors open from 1 to 5 pm. Visit our huge Michigan reptiles & amphibians zoo (including our hatchling snapping turtles!) before, during or after the presentation. Walk the trails. Our staff is always on hand to help make the most of your visit!



A flock of 22 Common Redpolls engulfs a screen-tube thistle feeder outside a Nature Discovery window. They're sporadic winter visitors to Lower Michigan.



***Thanksgiving Eve
Michigan Wildlife
Day Camp***

***Wednesday, November 23
9am-3pm***

For K thru middle school. If your children have the day before Thanksgiving off school (or even a half day – we'll pro-rate it!) enroll them in a day of in-your-face Michigan wildlife. All students will spend time learning about, holding and feeding cold-blooded occupants of our huge zoo of Michigan snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders. We'll also spend activity time outside. Older students have the option of going on a few-hour birding excursion (see opening essay) to tally as many species as possible while visiting a few local natural areas. A hot lunch is provided. COST: \$50/student. Call or email to enroll in advance. Ask us about after care options. Spaces are limited!

Join our
Muskegon Area
Birding Day
Saturday,
November 26



On Saturday, November 26, from 7am to about 4:30pm, join us on a guided trip to the Muskegon area for some great, late-fall birding. Jim will lead and drive a maximum of five participants on this full-day odyssey to tally as many species as possible through habitats that harbor thousands of birds.

Wastewater treatment facilities are typically hot birding locales. Holding ponds of various depths are magnets to waterfowl and shorebirds. Density of water birds in turn, attracts predatory hawks and eagles. Unfortunately, most of these facilities are off-limits to the public. However, the expansive Muskegon Wastewater Facility, several miles from Lake Michigan, allows birders to acquire a special permit to access their facility. Jim has one!

Miles of dikes surround vast holding ponds crammed with thousands of ducks of over a dozen species, plus geese, swans, grebes and other surprises. Miles of open area north and south of the ponds offer a slew of other species, including bald, and sometimes, golden eagles, rough-legged hawks, kestrels, shrikes, snow buntings and lots more. Snow Geese and Cackling Geese make regular appearances, too.



You can't get a Purple Sandpiper on the rocks from a bartender. Migrants appear on Lake Michigan breakwaters later in November.

We'll stop for lunch then head to Lake Michigan to pick up more birds from the shore and on the breakwater. Diving ducks, loons, grebes and more, forage everywhere in the water. The uncommon Purple Sandpiper, migrates through Michigan and forages on rocky shorelines. We'll search the huge rocks that line both sides of the breakwater for their presence.

Weather-permitting, we should tally over 50 species on personal checklists we'll provide. Most of the birding will be in or near the vehicle. The only extended walking will be on the breakwater. Dress warmly, bring binoculars and a camera. Jim will have his spotting scope available for extra-close-up viewing.

COST: Only \$50/person, includes transportation.

(You'd spend close to that on gas if you went by yourself!) Meet at Nature Discovery. With notice, we may be able to arrange pick-up and drop-off right at your door. Contact us to make a reservation. Limited spaces available.

Around the State in November

Monday, November 14: 1:30-4:30pm. Michigan Amphibians and Reptiles Exhibit; Baldwin Elementary School, Baldwin.

(The school has arranged for our full exhibit to be set up and staffed through the afternoon school hours. Each classroom in the building will rotate through at its assigned time. An additional hour is then given to children in the school's after-care program. Exhibits set up during the school day are captivating, hands-on, and highly educational. Consider this unique opportunity for your school. Contact us for details.)



This female brown-phase European Praying Mantis is surviving in our toasty classroom low-level long after all wild mantises have succumbed to the killing frosts. Sustained on a hand-fed daily diet of crickets and cluster flies, how long can she survive? Mantis populations in Michigan survive the winter in egg masses attached to vegetation in field habitats.

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