

THIS ISSUE

Around the State in November

Visit Us by Appointment

Thank You Donors!

A Global Thug Against Climate Action

Nothin' but SNAKES



The sign in the lobby of Petoskey District Library.

“Are you the snake guy?”

I respond affirmatively, but, like an actor who strives to not become type-cast, will add, “For today, I am.”

Nature Discovery educates on a wide range of Michigan nature and wildlife topics, birds, bugs, and beyond, but our attention-grabbing menagerie of Michigan-native reptiles and amphibians – especially the snakes – has a tendency to suck oxygen away from the wide diversity of other natural subjects we offer. On the other hand, rather than mess with success, why not embrace it?

Educating on such a broad diversity of natural subjects has always been our hallmark. However, given the overwhelming feedback we receive from audiences of any ilk, we’re quite confident that we could thrive as a business offering programs that feature nothing but live Michigan snakes. Yup, they’re *that* popular.

The snakes and I were just recently at it again in Northern Michigan communities. Since its onset in 2010, in conjunction with Cheboygan-based Straits Area Audubon Society, we’ve conducted various versions of *Michigan Snakes Alive* through what has blossomed into semi-annual sojourns - every October and March - to northern Lower Peninsula schools and libraries.

Despite inevitable windfalls, setbacks and evolving ways and means through the years, though, the core result has always remained the same, and to regular acclaim... Benign encounters in a controlled setting, with the very species they are likely to find around their neighborhoods and state, helps bolster perspectives of native snakes through more objective lenses. Tolerance, appreciation and conservation-minded attitudes follow; this, in contrast to the broadly tainted status quo, wrought by fears and biases, passed from one generation to the next. Given the lack of opportunities for so many to have actual first-hand experience with them, is it any wonder that intolerance of snakes in the yard and in the environment is perpetuated?

Last month's trip up north produced informative, hands-on presentations to fifth graders at Pellston Elementary School, Wolverine Elementary School, and Sheridan Elementary in Petoskey. We visited Petoskey Children's Nature School to present to preschoolers and many of their parents, then set up an after-school exhibit for a walk-by audience at Petoskey District Library. Finally, on the way home on Friday, students in a Clare High School environmental class also participated in *Michigan Snakes Alive.*

Captions accompanying the following photos provide further explanation...



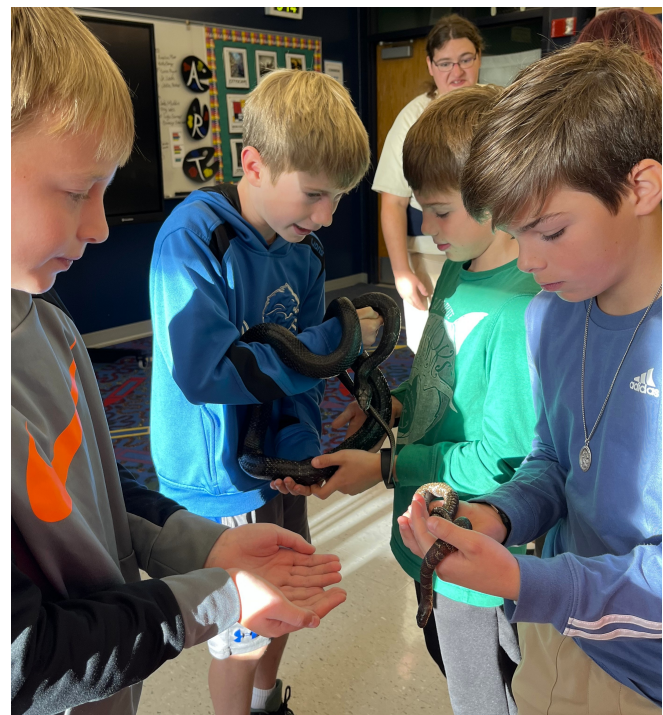
As we iterate in presentations, a snake that is not afraid is among the most docile creatures you'll ever encounter.



A fifth grader at Pellston Elementary poses with our young Blue Racer. Classmates handle and pass other species.



A fifth grader at Sheridan Elementary in Petoskey cradles one of our six-foot Black Ratsnakes.



*"What the hand does, the mind remembers."
—Maria Montessori.*



A fifth grader at Wolverine Elementary holds three Eastern Gartersnakes, chilling within a convoluted mass.



The snakes often move in a calmly exploratory manner from one set of arms to the next.



At Petoskey Children's Nature Preschool this little guy eagerly handles a Black Ratsnake that is way longer than he is tall. Photo by Cristin Stubbs.



Cheboygan naturalist Eowyn Bates assists Jim with hands-on support during most of the northern Michigan snakes programs: here, at PCN showing our Eastern Milksnake.



Two tables with tanks displaying twelve snakes of six different Michigan species were set up in the lobby of Petoskey District Library. The librarian said she was expecting maybe fifteen or twenty people to show up. She estimated over one hundred! Photo by Cristin Stubbs.



Kids and adults crowd around for snake touching, handling and photo ops. Anyone stepping through the library doors over the hour suddenly found themselves standing amid a sea of humanity holding and freely passing live snakes among themselves. Photo by Cristin Stubbs.



At PDL, a mother and daughter successfully quell their ambivalence. A first snake-handling experience for both.



A Clare High School student enjoys personal time with our adult female Eastern Gartersnake.

Students in a Clare High School environmental class pose with various snakes. They enjoyed an attitude-altering, extended version of Michigan Snakes Alive, complete with up-close, hands-on opportunities.



We'd like to extend a special thank you to Gene and Ann Wasserman and Bob and LeeAnn Brunetz whose donations cover the hefty travel costs. Thank you, as well, to Wayne and Cheri Beasley for providing lodging for the snakes and me through the week. These donations help to significantly defray the cost for all participating schools.

April of 2022 marked the onset of annual *Michigan Snakes Alive* presentations in Mason County schools. Contracted by the Ludington-based environmental organization, A Few Friends for the Environment of the World (<https://www.affew.org/>) the program is presented each April to fourth graders throughout the area.

Closer to home we're currently regular specialist teachers on Michigan nature/wildlife topics in many schools, including Okemos Nursery School, Stepping Stones Montessori in East Lansing, Montessori Children's House in Lansing, and additionally over the last two years, North and Forest View schools in the Lansing Public School system and Go Like the Wind Montessori in the Whitmore Lake Public School system.



Sixth graders at North School in Lansing handle and pass our Black Ratsnakes.



A sixth grader at North School confronts her ambivalence about snakes.

Of all the Michigan wildlife topics traversed in these schools over a school year, those featuring our live native snakes are, hands down, the most popular across all grades. In contrast to the one-and-done format highlighted above - demonstrably impactful though it may be - students in these schools enjoy the fortune of *repeated* contact, and with it, far more in-depth education about the serpentine subjects than a single hour of exposure can possibly match. They handle the snakes with a palpable ease that evinces familiarity and understanding.

I acknowledge to students who have had these lessons that they are now far more educated on the topic of Michigan snakes than over ninety-five percent of adults that live here. Knowledge empowers. No matter



"I, (state your name), promise to never kill or harm a wild snake. I also promise, to the best of my ability, to never allow anyone in my company to kill or harm a wild snake."

your age, the educated can become the educator whenever the opportunity presents itself. I encourage them to freely disseminate factual information they've learned with friends and relatives, especially when they encounter anyone who projects negativity toward snakes.

We composed a pledge as an effort to counter acts of persecution toward snakes. Its vocal recitation by students serves to fuel their resolve. We also designed and produced an accompanying sticker for distribution to the program participants - a *physical* reminder to use their knowledge to foster the acceptance of snakes as valued, functional members of local ecosystems.

Would you like to arrange an educational encounter with our live Michigan-native snakes? The venue, format and age range of the recipients are remarkably variable, i.e., a school classroom, a library, a youth or adult organizational gathering or a simple scheduled visit to our big little nature center with an intimately-sized group of your choosing. Just contact us to make it happen.

—Jim McGrath



Around the State in November

- ❖ ***Sunday, November 2: 9:30am-3pm.
Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit;
MDNR Outdoor Adventure Center, Detroit.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, November 22: 11am-12:30pm. Michigan
Snakes Presentation; Jay's & Webber Wildlife & Education
Center, Clare.***

Our Michigan Reptiles & Amphibian interactive exhibit, ready to open at MDNR's Outdoor Adventure Center.

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Visit Our Nature Center by Appointment

***Suggested Minimum
Donation: \$5/person/hr***



Eastern and Butler's Gartersnakes.

The sky's the limit for natural learning here – with a Michigan twist! Adults, couples and families are welcome to schedule an intimate indoor and/or outdoor visit to what we call “The Biggest Little Nature Center in Michigan,” and “Home to the Largest Zoo of Michigan-native Reptiles and Amphibians.” We will bring snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders out of tanks to interact with adults or kids of any age. A terrific option for visiting families over the extended Thanksgiving weekend.



Hatchling Painted Turtles.

Identify and feed “the grand slam of Michigan turtles” - all ten species native to our state! Meet, pet and feed “Milberta”, our always hungry Red-footed tortoise.

Handle any or all of our ten species of Michigan-native snakes on hand here while learning how to identify them, then watch them gobble up worms, minnows or maybe even a frog or mouse. Hold or “wear” a gentle 6-foot Black Ratsnake – the largest in the state!

Many more Michigan creatures to learn about and feed. Take a guided walk on our trails to identify birds, bugs, trees, vines, and invasive plants.

Ask us about...

- ... field trips for academic classes, pre-K thru college.
- ... volunteer opportunities for high school students and adults.
- ... guided birding outings for individuals, couples and small groups.
- ... November 26, limited-enrollment day camp for students, K thru middle school.

*Thank you to all past and current supporters of our mission,
including these most recent donors...*



*Wayne & Cheri Beasley * Bob & Lee Ann Brunetz
Gene & Ann Wasserman * Le'on Yehuda*

U.S. Now a Global 'Thug' Against Climate Change Action

Bullying like this wouldn't be tolerated in any third grade classroom community.

https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/06/climate/trump-climate-international-bullying.html?campaign_id=54&emc=edit_clim_20251109&instance_id=166084&nl=climate-forward®i_id=97652655&segment_id=210269&user_id=e2b8dd8c9b543fb8c35d5dd30658067e

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/10/31/opinion/trump-autocracy-democracy-report.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20251031&instance_id=165513&nl=the-morning®i_id=97652655&segment_id=209690&user_id=e2b8dd8c9b543fb8c35d5dd30658067e

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1444796789961633>

-JM

The next generation would be justified in looking back at us and asking, "What were you thinking? Couldn't you hear what the scientists were saying? Couldn't you hear what Mother Nature was screaming at you?" - Al Gore

I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act like you would in a crisis. I want you to act like your house is on fire, because it is. - Greta Thunberg

The personal actions that cut climate pollution fast are to go flight-, car-, and meat-free. Start with the one that feels most feasible for you; if you can't totally go without, aim to cut your consumption today at least in half. – Kimberly Nicholas, Under the Sky We Make

What if we had storytelling mechanisms that said it is important that you know about the well-being of wildlife in your neighborhood? –Robin Wall Kimmerer

Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you. – Frank Lloyd Wright



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