

**THIS ISSUE**

***Sunday, September 9 Open Hours /  
Celebrate Michigan Snakes Day***

***Climate Change***

***Coffee Break***

***Education & Experience  
Stop Society's Senseless  
War on Snakes***

Theme is the same - only the reptile has changed...

In the September 2011 *Wild Times* (accessible on the website), I discussed an incident in June of that summer. We found a large snapping turtle in the process of laying eggs that had been purposely run over by a motorist. I had taken the four eggs that had been deposited before she was struck, brought them home and incubated them in a bucket of moist vermiculite. They hatched on the last day of August. We arranged to place the hatchlings in various school classrooms in September. Under our guidance, each participating classroom nurtured its turtle through the school year. By June all the little snappers had tripled in size. Before school was out for the summer, each classroom then released its turtle on an appropriate wetland of its choosing.

The end result was a classic win-win. They had given the young turtle a huge head start against naturally high mortality rates. At the same time, their close association with the little turtle would virtually guarantee that none of these students would grow into a driver who intentionally runs over them.

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Outside of seeing a car steer out of its lane to hit a snake on the road, neither Carol nor I have ever been witness to an act of snake persecution. However, in our many educational venues around the state, we've certainly heard more than our share of tales we call "true atrocities toward snakes." This past weekend, we exhibited Michigan reptiles and amphibians to walk-by audiences at Ludington State Park's beach house. Here are two fresh accounts. I'll leave the graphic detail to your imagination...

One father and son who spent hours at our exhibit, told of an experience in a Canadian campground next to a lake. The son had gone to explore the lakeshore, then returned to the campsite severely shaken and in tears. Some young teens about his age were "hunting" water snakes. He watched in horror as they tortured, killed, then mutilated the bodies of the snakes. When he yelled in protest they began verbally threatening him. The father reported the incident at the campground office. The employee on hand shrugged and stated that the lake had "too many water snakes" anyway.

Closer to home, a woman from Dimondale stopped at the exhibit. After stating that her husband didn't



*Black Rat Snake hatchlings are cryptically patterned with spots to make them less detectable to predators. The pattern fades and the background color darkens as they grow.*

want to visit the exhibit because he hated snakes, she told of how earlier in the summer he had found a 3-foot spotty-patterned snake in the basement. It was rattling its tail so he assumed it was dangerous. His wife looked at the snake and studied its markings, then told him to keep an eye on it while she went upstairs to try to identify it on-line. She discovered that it was a harmless, mouse-hunting Eastern Milk Snake. When she returned to the basement, her husband had already cut off its head with some shears.

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Our Black Rat Snakes continue to breed. Over the years we've placed many hatchlings into school classrooms and nature centers. One is even in the petting zoo at Binder Park in Battle Creek.

Currently, we're maintaining thirteen individuals of various ages. The matriarch, the female who originally, then regularly, bred with our late albino, is 15 years old now and in the last years of her life. Others we've known and kept since the day they hatched include two 4-year-olds, two 3-year-olds, two 1-year-olds, and another six healthy month-old hatchlings from this year's breeding effort. Every one is easy to hold. Bites are never an issue. You'd swear they actually enjoy being handled!

We educate audiences using live specimens of an impressive twelve species of Michigan snakes, but, by far, the species that we utilize in the most programs is the Black Rat. Why? It's due to the "wow factor."

Capable of maxing out at eight feet it's the largest snake in the state. However, if you are a wild snake trying to survive among a human society rife with snake-phobia, largeness gets you killed. This species is listed by the Michigan DNR with a "special concern" conservation status, but many herpetological academics will tell you its increasing rarity should warrant an up-listing to "threatened."

The Black Rat is basically a constrictor of southern forests. The northern limit of its range extends about two-thirds of the way up Michigan's Lower Peninsula. However, we've lost most of our forested areas in this portion of the state. Aside from habitat loss, intentional persecution and road-kill (also, often intentional) take significant tolls on populations of large snakes, in general. It need not be this way if all citizens were educated... And this is what drives us.



*This Montessori student is completely comfortable cradling a large and gentle Black Rat Snake.*

What better way to get to know a snake (or anything/anyone else for that matter) than to share living quarters with it? Three years ago, the elementary classroom at Stepping Stones Montessori in East Lansing adopted one of our hatchling black rat snakes. It is now over four feet in length and handled multiple times a week by students who are anything but apprehensive. Undoubtedly, as with the students who nurtured a hatchling snapping turtle, these students will grow into adults who are not snake-killers. In fact, many will go on to positively influence friends, family members, and even their own children some day. This is the way it *should* be.

Teachers, would you like the unique opportunity to keep a gentle and highly-handleable Black Rat Snake in your classroom? Just schedule a program with us and we will make it happen while the hatchlings last. Parents, would you like this opportunity in your child's classroom this school year? Run it by the teacher and contact us. Project Snakes in Schoolrooms has begun!

Love 'em or loathe 'em, we're here to help. Read on about our special program this Sunday.

*-Jim McGrath*

# *Celebrate the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual*



## *Michigan SNAKES Day*

***SUNDAY,  
September 9  
1 to 5pm  
\$5/person***



Join us for **Celebrate Michigan Snakes Day**. If you love snakes, this day is for you. If you loathe snakes, this day is *definitely* for you! Meet live specimens of 12 of our state's 17 species!

Do you know someone who is afraid of, dislikes, hates, or otherwise has uncomfortable feelings toward snakes? Try to coax them into coming. We **GUARANTEE** that anyone who attends this informative and completely benign event will walk away feeling better about snakes!

At 2pm, we will present ***Facts Over Fear: Things Everyone Should Know About Snakes***. We'll discuss a host of erroneous beliefs spread through society that produce bad feelings toward these surprisingly gentle reptiles. Will a snake bite? Will a snake chase you? Are snakes slimy? Do snakes have fangs? Will a venomous snake ever appear in your yard? One question after another produces a factual explanation that sheds light on the unthreatening reality of these needlessly-persecuted creatures.

Learn how to identify one from another through close inspection. Watch a **snake climb a tree**. See **snakes eating** worms, fish and frogs. Lots of **snake-handling** opportunities, too. We'll take a **picture of you holding a snake**, then email it to you. Refreshments, too!

# Climate Change

In the previous issue of *Wild Times* we made a declaration to do our part to openly support the overwhelming majority within the scientific community who acknowledge man-made climate change. Like it or not, there is no stopping the pending impact of the big, fossil-fueled wheel we've put in motion across the planet. The sooner we face it and begin to take concerted action, the better. Since the mainstream media won't treat it as a major issue, we feel an obligation to. We're going to provide links to recommended reading on the topic each month. We look forward to respectful comments from readers on any side of the fence. Have you read something worth sharing on the topic? Contact us about it. We may include the link in our next newsletter.

Here's one forwarded to us by a Nature Discovery supporter and written by *New York Times* op-ed columnist, Richard Muller, entitled *Conversion of a Climate Change Skeptic*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/30/opinion/the-conversion-of-a-climate-change-skeptic.html?scp=1&sq=&st=nyt>

Here's another one that derides the media's propensity to give academically and professionally unqualified critics equally-weighted credibility against the scientific conclusions of climatologists. It's entitled *Don't Give Climate Change Heretics a Free Ride* published in *The Guardian* by Jay Griffiths.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/31/climate-change-heretics-media-easy-ride>

## Catch Us on WLNZ Radio's Morning Show, Coffee Break, September 24



Nature Discovery is a monthly guest now on WLNZ Radio's *Coffee Break*, with hosts Jack Robinson and Karen Love. Our next appearance is slated for Monday, September 24, at 9:45am.

The show airs weekdays from 9 to 10am on 89.7 FM. A TV simulcast of the show is on Comcast stations 15, 21 or 31. Listen live online at [lcc.edu/radio/onair/](http://lcc.edu/radio/onair/) or watch it live (or later in the day at 6pm) online at [lcc.edu/tv/watch](http://lcc.edu/tv/watch). We'll post a Facebook reminder prior to the show.

Become a fan of *Nature Discovery* on Facebook!

Check out our Youtube channel, *Wild Williamston*.

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