
THIS ISSUE

Raise Caterpillars in the Classroom
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Around the State in August

Four Lucky Little Snappers

***Tragedy Turns to Fortune for Students
as Well as for the Turtles***

On a rainy morning in mid-June, a friend and I were birding around some marshes at the shore of Saginaw Bay. At one point we found ourselves slowly bumping and splashing down a waterlogged, pot-holed, gravel access road to get to an observation deck.

Then, through the blurry windshield we made out a solid, dark mass on the road. A very large snapping turtle lay prostrate, positioned to the left of the road's center. We got out to have a look. As we approached, I could see the pit she had dug directly under her tail. Oddly, she exhibited no defensive posture or sense of unease at our approach.

Then, we saw why. A bloody crevice ran across the middle of her carapace. Another vehicle had very recently run over her. The turtle's eyes stared vacantly ahead, and her sharp beak was partially gaped. I couldn't tell if she was still alive. I nudged her with my foot. She gasped, but barely moved. I lifted her tail and peered into the hole. She had managed to deposit four eggs before the tire rolled over her. A scan at the muddy road behind and in front revealed a set of wide tire tracks, initially on our side of the road, which then purposefully curved out of its path and to the left side of the road, one track crossing over her shell, and then returned to its line.

Incidents such as this happen every day. It's illegal to kill not just a nesting turtle, but any turtle during egg-laying season. There are no witnesses or conservation officer to deter the law breaker. A nagging, frustrated "what if" turned in my mind. If this person had been exposed to a positive educational experience with snapping turtles anytime in his past, this turtle would not have been victimized.

I took the eggs home and buried them in a bucket of dirt which we then kept in our classroom to observe through the summer. In each week's day camp here, Carol or I showed the eggs to the students and explained what happened. The kids also viewed and fed the large and medium-sized snapping turtles we keep in our live educational collection.

The four eggs hatched on August 30 and 31. Students in our summer-ending entomology camp were lucky enough to see it in progress!



In mid-June, Jim took four snapping turtle eggs from beneath the body of their dying mother. The first hatchling emerged on August 30. By the following day, all four had hatched.



These four hatchlings are destined to be nurtured through the school year in designated classrooms.

In the wild, hatchling turtle mortality is very high. Only a few percent make it to see their first spring. However, given the circumstances under which their mother was killed, we are determined to give these special turtles much better odds.

Each will be destined to become a “school pet” for some lucky classroom of students. While they last, any teacher who schedules a program with us will have the opportunity to receive a baby snapping turtle. We’ll provide the care support to guarantee that the class mascot will thrive through the school year. By June it will have tripled in size.

Imagine a year-end picnic or field trip near a large pond or lake where the students intentionally – even ceremoniously - release it back to the wild. They’ll do it with a sense of confidence knowing they provided this turtle with a fantastic boost toward survival to adulthood. Here’s the most lasting impression of the experience, though. Having been provided the opportunity to nurture one, for the rest of their lives these students are sure to look at any wild snapping turtle with a sense of understanding, acceptance and empathy - and their actions will reflect it.

-Jim McGrath

Raise a Polyphemus Moth (or a Promethea Moth) Caterpillar in Your Classroom NOW



A bundle of young, tiger-striped Prometheas. The gold larvae are in their final 2nd-instar hours. The whiter ones recently molted into the 3rd instar.



By September’s end, classroom Promethea larvae will grow from that (above right) to this (a 2 ½ -inch, colorful, and very hungry 5th-instar caterpillar).

At the time the special link was posted on our website, we had an abundance of young Polyphemus caterpillars available. Now, we’ve got beautiful Promethea caterpillars as well! We’ll set your classroom up to nurture a few through the month until they spin cocoons in early October. Purchase them with care instructions, or receive some as a complimentary gift when you contract us to give an informative, interesting and highly entertaining presentation on Michigan butterflies & moths (or any other wildlife presentation) at your school. Take advantage of this unique, but limited opportunity. See the link on our website or contact us for more details.

CELEBRATE



Michigan Snakes DAY

SUNDAY,
September 25
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? Can a snake sense fear? 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!

Around the State in September

- ❖ Saturday, September 10: 9am-3pm. Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit; Sportsmen for Youth Day, Muskegon County Fairgrounds. Public is welcome.
- ❖ Sat & Sun, September 10 & 11: 12-5pm. Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit; Van Atta's Greenhouse Fall Festival, Haslett. Public is welcome.
- ❖ Saturday, September 17: 10am-3pm. Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit; Salmon Festival, Grand Haven. Public is welcome.
- ❖ Friday, September 23: 6:30-9pm. Michigan Reptiles Exhibit; Fall Family Fun & Camp Out, Lakefront Park, Novi. Public is welcome.
- ❖ Saturday, September 24: 1-4pm. Michigan Amphibians & Reptiles Exhibit; Hillsdale College. Public is welcome.



While field-collecting during entomology camp we found many colorful, spiny larvae of the beautiful Buckeye Butterfly. All molted into chrysalises within days. Butterflies will emerge this month. The Buckeye overwinters as an adult.

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