

THIS ISSUE

Coffee Break, September 7
Sunday, September 10 / MI Snakes Day
LCC Saturday Youth GATE Classes
Thank you
Around the State in September
Walking the Walk...

Let's Mainstream Michigan Snakes

Our monthly open Sunday this week features our eighth annual Michigan Snakes Day. In keeping, over the past several years I've made it a point to compose a column for the month on a specifically snake-related theme. Last year's column, *Don't Fear the Racer*, discusses our grounds for calling it "Michigan's most misunderstood snake."

One broadly-circulated claim is that a racer will chase you. From the snake's perspective nothing could be further from the truth. If you missed it, here's a link to the issue: <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20Sept16.pdf>

As it should be, parents and society as a whole demand that each subject within a student's core curriculum be taught by a certified instructor - be it math, science, social studies, language arts or otherwise. Yet, imagine if we were *not* discerning about the qualifications of who taught what to our children, K through twelve. Just snatch any random man or woman off the street and declare, *You will be my tenth grader's math teacher!* Sound nonsensical?

Yet, this is exactly the means by which most of society learns about snakes in the environment. Formal lessons are nonexistent in public schools. At best, a specialized entity like Nature Discovery may be invited to give a one-hour presentation with live snakes to the students as a special treat. While an hour presentation can go a long way toward quelling fears this time restriction is no more adequate to fully understand the subject than expecting all aspects of math or language arts to be covered in an hour.

Since they have never had in-depth learning about snakes in the environment most teachers cannot fathom how much there is to teach about Michigan's seventeen species alone: identification, specific life histories, ranges, habitats, ecologies and unique behaviors, as well as the ever-present human factors leading to their decline. Disseminated in weekly lessons this breadth of information could easily take a semester to cover. In presentations to families at various events I will ask how many would like it if there were a regular class entitled *Michigan Snakes* in, say, every fifth grade classroom. The response is an enthusiastic thumbs up, even from many parents!



Brave? Many would say so, but we'd prefer to consider Theo, after many camps and lessons here, just very well-educated about snakes!

However, most school children never receive even this minimal hour-long instruction. They are left to fend for themselves – picking up random information about snakes from any of a host of mostly questionable sources in the form of friends, relatives and neighbors. They harbor what they learned as fact into adulthood and inevitably infect others with the same misinformation. I offer this bit of advice when trying to determine whether information coming your way is from a reliable source: Is the person who is disseminating the information projecting a positive or negative attitude toward them? If a source is projecting nervousness, a dislike or hatred toward snakes be careful of *any* information they so readily share. Although they may *think* they know snakes, in conversation we catch them uttering one erroneous statement after another and we are quick to refute or debunk it.



Day camp kids watched baby garter snakes being born during one of our weeks here in August.

Now, in over thirty years of communication with countless thousands of Michigan citizens about snakes (and many more natural topics) we've also got a firm grasp on the flipside of the issue – the *positive* effect of extended education on the individual. Three private schools in the area (Montessori Children's House, Stepping Stones Montessori and Okemos Nursery School) employ us as regular specialist teachers on Michigan wildlife topics of which education about Michigan snakes is a staple.

Children who attend summer day camps here also engage in hours of hands-on experience with an array of species, handling them, feeding them their prey items of choice and learning about the rest of the aspects outlined above.

These children really know, understand, like, and value snakes in their environment. They, in turn, share sound, positive information with family members and friends.

This weekend, Carol and I were giving a presentation to adults and families at Ludington State Park. When I mentioned that the garter snake I was holding had just given birth two weeks earlier to a whopping twenty-seven young, a mom piped up incredulously that she had always thought all snakes laid eggs.

The birthing event had occurred while one of our day camps was in session. Any camp child could have responded to the woman's claim based on the most *intimate* experience imaginable. They watched from inches away as one baby snake after another was slowly expelled from the mother's cloaca, each tightly wrapped within its own moist, amniotic sac. Then, within seconds, the struggling snakeling would puncture the membrane with its nose, the sac would collapse and it would wiggle free of the ooze. Just two weeks earlier, a different group of campers watched with the same level of intimacy as one of our large rat snakes laid eggs.

With experiences like this we are confident that none of these kids will grow into an adult who purposely kills a snake. We are also confident that they will be rightfully outraged at the prospect of anyone else persecuting snakes. And we are absolutely confident that if all kids had access to such opportunities, snakes and the environment as a whole would be a lot better off.



Olivia Sharp cradles a newly-laid rat snake egg.

Jim McGrath

Catch Us on WLNZ Radio's Coffee Break on Thursday, September 7

Jim is scheduled to appear on Thursday, September 7 at 9:30am, discussing Michigan wildlife topics. 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.



Come Celebrate our 8th Annual Michigan SNAKES Day



Sunday, September 10 1 to 5pm \$5/person

Join us for **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 13 of our state's 17 species! Do you know anyone who is afraid of, dislikes, or otherwise has uncomfortable feelings toward snakes? Coax them into coming. We bill this event as the most benign setting you will ever encounter to help you feel better about them!

At 2pm, sit-in on the presentation, ***Facts Over Fear: What Everyone Should Know About Snakes***. While showing live Michigan-native specimens discussion touches on an array of erroneous beliefs spread through society that produce bad feelings toward these surprisingly gentle reptiles. Will a snake bite? Are snakes slimy? Will a snake chase you? 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 reptiles. We will help you identify all of them through up-close inspection.

There's more! Watch a snake climb a tree. See snakes eating worms, fish, frogs and mice. Lots of handling and photo opportunities, too. Visit Nature Discovery's entire zoo that also includes Michigan-native turtles, frogs, salamanders and lizards. Knowledgeable staff is on hand to help visitors of all ages make the most of their visit.



*Watch a Black Rat Snake eat mice.
Photo ops galore!*

Saturday Gifted/Talented Youth Classes thru LCC



Carol is teaching 5-week Saturday LCC Fall GATE classes (East Campus) beginning October 21.

Michigan Wildlife Adventure (9am-noon, Grades 2-4) Learn about Michigan wildlife, plenty of live animals in class each day! Includes a field trip to Nature Discovery.

Advanced Fun with Physics (1-4pm, Grades 4-6) Learn how to build a simple motor, generate electricity from renewable sources, build a solar cooker and more in this hands on, project based class.

To register or for more information visit lcc.edu/seriousfun and click on Fall/Spring GATE.

Thank You!

To volunteers, Zachary Sundin and Elisabeth Baumann for much-needed help with animal maintenance and program assistance.

To David Meyer and family for their generous donation.

To John McCoy for sponsoring two separate Nature Discovery presentations again this summer at Huron County Nature Center.

Around the State in September

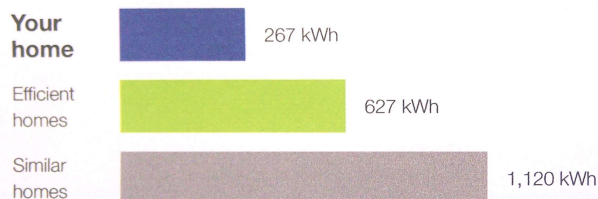
- ❖ Saturday, September 9: 9am to 3pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Sportsmen for Youth Day, Muskegon Co. Fairgrounds.
- ❖ Sunday, September 10: 12 to 4pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; AARP Grandparents Day Event, Lansing.
- ❖ Saturday, September 16: 10am to 3pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Salmon Festival, Grand Haven.
- ❖ Sunday, September 17: 10am to 2pm. Michigan Snakes Interactive Exhibit; Williamston Farmers Market.

Zach Sundin helps visitors identify Michigan turtles at the Kirtland's Warbler Festival. Thank you for all your help this summer, Zach!



Walking the Walk with a Shrinking Carbon Footprint

Here's how you compare



Jul 8, 2017 - Aug 5, 2017

This is based on 100 similar homes within approx. 2 mi. Efficient homes are the 20% who use the least amount of electricity.
See back for details.

With a daily mindfulness of our energy usage and carbon footprint we continue to reach new lows in our fossil fuel consumption. The graph on the right, taken from our Detroit Edison home energy report for July 8 to August 5, 2017, shows how we compared to other homes in our vicinity. Our kilowatt hours were a whopping 57% less than the area's most energy efficient homes! Our "home" usage also includes energy used by our business and by an operational nature center with a huge zoo encompassing 24 aquariums and two pools.

Despite counter-efforts by the stubborn, shamelessly self-serving, climate change-denier occupying the White House, we are all on our own and on our honor to do what's right for the health of the planet and ALL of its occupants.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hurricane-harvey-previews-our-stormy-future/2017/08/28/cd4737cc-8c26-11e7-91d5-ab4e4bb76a3a_story.html?utm_term=.700c07de0781

<https://www.thenation.com/article/how-donald-trump-and-elaine-chao-bartered-flood-control-policy-to-the-highest-bidders/>

<http://www.npr.org/2017/08/30/547396137/trump-wore-usa-hat-to-visit-hurricane-zone-and-trump-fans-can-buy-the-look>

Become a fan of *Nature Discovery* on Facebook!

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

350.org

NATURE DISCOVERY 5900 N. Williamston Road Williamston, MI 48895

(517) 655-5349 naturedisc87@gmail.com www.naturediscovery.net