



Depredation and freezing cull many hatchlings. Road-kill is an extra, unnatural hit that populations could do without.

THIS ISSUE

Thank you, Donors

Around the State in September

Raise Luna Moth Caterpillars

Visit Us by Appointment

You're Doing It Wrong

Learned Awareness Saves Baby Turtles, Snakes, More

It was some year in the 90s. Labor Day weekend. Our young family was in the northwest suburban Chicago area to visit with my parents and other relatives. At the time of this particular incident I was driving, my mother in the passenger seat, either to run an errand together or perhaps meet some others at a local restaurant.

Less than a mile from my parents' home there were no other vehicles in sight as we passed a small wetland. I suddenly hit the brakes. My mother, alarmed, clutched the dashboard and peered ahead through the windshield. "What!"

I quickly pulled over to the side and opened the door. As I stepped out I said over my shoulder, "Just a second," then hurried around to the front of the vehicle. I stooped to pick a tiny thing off the road that could have been mistaken at a glance for a small chunk of drying mud. Cradling it in my hands I walked over to the passenger side window which she had now opened.

The startled hatchling snapping turtle had pulled its tail to the side and underneath its carapace in a defensive posture and remained still in my hands. When I extended my arms through the open window to give her a better look, she leaned back slightly, frowned, then waved a hand in front of her face. "That's close enough. It stinks!"

Indeed it did. When disturbed, hatchling snapping turtles as well as larger ones will emit an unpleasant odor from scent glands located on their sides where the carapace and plastron meet.

I placed it in the vegetation off the shoulder. Seconds later we were moving again. My mother then asked somewhat incredulously, "How did you see that?" I explained that it was early September and that late summer is hatching time for snapping turtles. I am always anticipating and watching for baby turtles when I drive rural roads this time of year – especially when I pass wetlands. I added that I see far more smashed baby snapping turtles than live ones, and so, feel obliged to get the live ones safely off the road when I spot them.

The Common Snapping isn't the only Midwest turtle with late summer hatchlings. The young of nearly all Michigan turtles can be found wandering across land during the time frame loosely encompassing late August through September. Although young of the common Painted Turtle technically hatch at this time, too, they do not typically dig their way to the surface and become mobile until the following spring. Since the snapping is the most common and widespread, it is the one most often encountered now on roads while walking, biking or driving - dead or alive.



With mindfulness behind the wheel you might be surprised at your ability to spot a hatchling turtle.

The thought of saving hatchling turtles is naturally appealing, but taking the time to help an adult female across the road during egg-laying season (@ June) is even more beneficial to a local population's survival. On the journey from hatchling to breeding adult she managed to dodge a veritable gauntlet of natural and man-made killers of young turtles. Some 95 percent of her age-cohorts did not, particularly in their first season or two of life.

Death may come to many hatchlings by fast-moving Chevy, but all the road-kills combined may still be upstaged by the combined depredations of raccoon, skunk, mink, heron, bass, etc. Of course, should the coons and cars manage to miss them, merely freezing to death over the first winter is a common cull to hatchling turtles and to nearly all young animals. In the end, the precious handful who make it are bestowed the task of producing the next generation, annually, for as many years as they then can survive in this not-very-turtle-friendly environment we've created.



A recently-born Northern Ribbon Snake meanders onto a country road.

Late summer is also 'snakelet' season. Whether live-born (10 Michigan species, including garter and watersnakes) or hatched (7 Michigan species, including hognose and milksnakes), baby snake sightings are at their peak.

In relation to roads and cars, then - almost precisely reflective of the hatchling turtles' dilemma - snakelets also fall victim in great numbers in a host of ways. If you think a little snapping turtle is tough to see through the windshield of a moving car, a string-thin seven-inch snake could pass for any of an abundance of tiny twigs and cracks that smatter rural roads. A little snake may punctuate much of its meandering with lengthy pauses, and a motionless one is even harder to discern - often resulting in the poor thing being flattened by an oblivious motorist.

This is true with so many potential observations in nature that go unnoticed by the masses... Simply attaining the knowledge and having an awareness that an organism exists, including where and when to find it, enhances your chances many-fold of noticing its presence in the environment. From there, as in



Take a hatchling off the road and into the classroom to make the experience more personal.

this circumstance, a door opens for you to perhaps do something to *enhance* its odds of survival in lieu of the opposite, which is the current status quo.

Age-appropriate lessons that highlight natural awareness (There are countless case studies throughout the seasons in Mid-Michigan alone.) could be presented to students at any grade level in any public or private school. Why not start now at the onset of the school year by igniting cognizance of baby turtle and snake movements, as well as the man-induced perils that they face? Bring a hatchling found on the road into the classroom for young children to personally experience, then watch their reaction.

Decades of teaching on these topics has repeatedly demonstrated that given the knowledge, children innately care. They want to do right by the wild life in question. They will harbor the awareness and put it to good use now, when they reach driving age, and beyond.

- Jim McGrath



Around the State in September

- ❖ ***Friday, September 8: 5-7:30pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Washtenaw Promise Block Party, Ypsilanti.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, September 9: 9am to 3pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Sportsmen for Youth Day, Muskegon Co. Fairgrounds.***
- ❖ ***Sunday, September 10: 10am to 2pm. Feeding Frenzy Interactive Exhibit; Eastern Ingham Farmers Market, Williamston.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, September 16: 10am. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Presentation; Dahlem Environmental Center, Jackson***
- ❖ ***Tuesday, September 25: 7pm. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Presentation; Kalamazoo Audubon Society.***
- ❖ ***Saturday, September 30: 11am. MI Reptiles & Amphibians Presentation; Petoskey District Library.***



Raise Luna Moth Caterpillars Now!

In the classroom or at home, here is a unique opportunity to raise and observe larvae of the large and beautiful Luna Moth.

Young larvae are available now. Five larvae with complete printed care instructions, only \$15.

No need to buy any other accessories. A large jar and a bottle for water, plus access to the leaves of either walnut or hickory are all that is required.

The caterpillars grow rapidly and will be ready to spin cocoons by the end of September, so contact us soon to get your Luna project started. You can make an appointment to pick some up at our nature center almost any day.

Teachers, as an educational supplement you can arrange for us to give a presentation about the moth's life cycle and ecology along with helpful tips on rearing your caterpillars. Beautiful Powerpoint images are enhanced with live larvae, live pupae in cocoons and pinned specimens of moths for up-close inspection. Contact us for pricing info.



Nature Discovery

5900 N. Williamston Road Williamston, MI 48895
517.655.5349 naturedisc87@gmail.com www.naturediscovery.net

Visit Our Nature Center by Appointment

Suggested Minimum Donation:
\$5/person/hour



The sky's the limit for natural science learning here – with a Michigan twist! Individual adults, couples, individual families and small groups are welcome to schedule a safe, intimate outdoor or indoor visit to what we call “The Biggest Little Nature Center in Michigan,” and “Home to the Largest Zoo of Michigan-native Reptiles and Amphibians.” The unique, hands-on experiences offered here can be found nowhere else! We will bring snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders out of tanks to interact with adults or students of any age or grade-level.

Identify and feed “the grand slam of Michigan turtles,” all 10 species native to our state, as they swim in pools at your feet. Meet, pet and feed “Milberta”, our always hungry Red-footed tortoise.



Handle Michigan's 3 species of garter snakes while learning how to tell them apart, then watch them eat worms and live frogs. Handle a gentle 6-foot Black Rat Snake – the largest in the state!

Many more snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders, as well as caterpillars of Luna Moths and Giant Swallowtails to encounter. Take a guided walk on our trails to identify birds, insects, trees, vines, and invasive plants.

Ask about...

- ... arranging a guided interpretive experience at a local natural area of your or our choosing for your small group of students, adults or families.
- ... weekly or biweekly drop-off visits with experiential activities for your elementary student(s).
- ... volunteer opportunities for students, middle school thru high school, or adults.

Contact us for more information or to make an appointment.

You're Doing It Wrong: Recycling and Other Myths About Tackling Climate Change

https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2023/08/28/climate-action-poll/?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20230829&instance_id=101397&nl=the-morning®i_id=97652655&segment_id=143146&te=1&user_id=e2b8dd8c9b543fb8c35d5dd30658067e

90 percent of Great Lakes Water Samples Have Unsafe Microplastics Levels – Report
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/17/great-lakes-water-microplastic-pollution-contamination?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR2XyZMj7eI2DLKPEfZyj8k2bUEXJP19T4tIlr15445vhrQh6q1yvMBWLSs

-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



Less Beef = Less CO₂
Cowspiracy.com

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



Flightfree.org



RSPO.org



insideclimatenews.org

Become a fan of *Nature Discovery* on Facebook!

NATURE DISCOVERY 5900 N. Williamston Road Williamston, MI 48895

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