



A Bald Eagle with a pure white head is at least 5 years old and fully mature. Photo © Steve Sage

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## ***The Eagle Has Landed... in Lansing?!***

I was well into my teens before sighting my very first wild Bald Eagle. Granted, I grew up in inner Chicago through the 60s and early 70s, but baby boomers in more rural settings couldn't have had much better odds. Fallout from the heyday of DDT had a lot to do with it. Our national symbol had become a critically endangered bird.

For the next twenty years, spotting an eagle, usually while traveling "up north" in Michigan had always been a momentous occasion. As the years progressed, however, the sightings had definitely gained in frequency.

Data kept through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and locally, by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources corroborates the increase in encounters. In 1963 there were less than 500 nesting pairs found throughout the lower 48 states. However, by 1999, MDNR tallied 393 nests within Michigan's borders alone, and the number has continued to climb. Within our state there are now over 700 active nests!

In the northern part of its range the Bald Eagle is certainly considered a migratory species. Pairs vacate the breeding area as waterways freeze. Proximity to water and the associated foods (fish, waterfowl) is critical. These birds and their offspring may not have to travel far, though. The cold does not faze them. They merely need to find access to an open stretch of water. In the dead of winter here most open water exists in flowing rivers. Incidentally, but hardly coincidentally, these areas are also waterfowl magnets. The warm effluent from power plants located on rivers ensures open water through the coldest of winter's cold snaps.

Last week, I led a guided winter birding day around a few locations within the City of Lansing. Participants, Jan Heminger, Cathy Scott and Mary Lamson, birded with me at three locations between 8am and 1pm on Tuesday, January 27. We began at Potter Park, then visited Moore's Park, across the Grand from the Eckert Power Plant, then drove to a stretch of the Grand River in a residential neighborhood east of Grand Woods Park in North Lansing. By the end of our day we had tallied thirty species – a nice local total for late January.



I wanted to start our day at Potter Park for three avian-specific reasons: 1. a pair of Bald Eagles have been hanging out along the Red Cedar River here since late November; 2. a Merlin – a small, active, bird-eating falcon and migrant from the northern coniferous forest – had been hunting from the tree tops over the parking lot for at least the past six weeks; and, 3. local birders, just days before, located a Long-tailed Duck – a species that nests in the Arctic Circle - foraging on the river next to the lot.

We managed some great, prolonged looks at all three through binoculars and through our spotting scope, in addition to many other songbirds and woodpeckers. The passing crows don't like the Merlin. A crow will swoop at it and even chase it from one treetop to another, but the little falcon is so quick and agile it hardly seems bothered.

Our group next stopped at Moore's Park. Peregrine Falcons have nested and roosted on the imposing, cliff-mimicking Eckert Power Plant for years, but not always the same individuals. Once

again we were treated to bright, close-up looks through the spotting scope as both birds basked in the sunshine high on the southeast corner of the building, close to where the nesting structure can be found. Below the falcons, readily available groceries – mostly Mallards - swam in the river and occupied the banks. Suddenly, out of the blue, an adult bald eagle passed overhead. We marveled as it followed the river from west to east amid steady, lumbering wing beats.

We were prompted to visit the residential area in North Lansing next to the Grand River because of some previous internet posts on a local birders' list serve. A nice variety of duck species were being reported here. Boynton Street curves along the river before coming to a dead end at a small park with no houses along the bank. We were able to identify lots of Common Goldeneye - another Arctic breeder - along with American Black Ducks, Common Mergansers, Buffleheads, and a single Ring-necked Duck. Then, Jan spotted still another eagle. An adult bird perched majestically on a low limb of a tree overhanging the opposite bank.



*The Potter Park Merlin glides between treetops over the parking lot. Photo courtesy Jim Keller.*



*A Bald Eagle perches over a river bank in a North Lansing subdivision.*

Thrilled to have recorded a Bald Eagle in three separate locations, we headed back to our rendezvous point to end our day. Over thirty years of local birding, this was certainly unprecedented for me. As if that wasn't enough, we approached the intersection of Martin Luther King Drive and Oakland Avenue when Mary exclaimed, "There's another eagle!" The fourth of our day drifted eastward in wide circles high over the traffic!

Wouldn't it be something if the Potter Park pair begins to nest? The river floodplain is heavily wooded to the east of the lot. In the winter the bulky stick nests of a small Great Blue Heron nesting colony are visible from the river trail through the bare branches. Bald Eagles have



shown a propensity to claim one of these nests as their own in the winter while the herons are gone. They'll then add more sticky mass to it and already have eggs in the nest before the herons return in March. When was the last time a Bald Eagle nest existed within Lansing's limits? I'd wager no one alive today has witnessed it. We should know this pair's intentions in the coming weeks.

If you haven't seen a Bald Eagle here yet but would like to, my advice is to get to Potter Park. If you can't make the time, then, especially on sunny, winter days... keep looking up!

-Jim McGrath

*In the winter, especially on sunny days, there is a chance you can spot a Bald Eagle overhead almost anywhere in Mid-Michigan. Photo © Steve Sage.*

***Birding by Ear***  
***Late Winter Edition***  
***Sunday, February 8***  
***Doors Open 1 to 5pm;***  
***\$5 admission***

At 2pm, sit-in on the original presentation, ***Birding by Ear – Late Winter Edition***. Cued by our lengthening days, chickadees, titmice, cardinals and many other winter resident songbirds have ratcheted-up the intensity, and frequency of their breeding songs. Learning to identify birds by sight is a useful skill, however, when you are able to step outside and “bird by ear,” you graduate to a level of avian awareness that blows away identification by sight alone! February may be the best month to start. A manageable number of common species are singing their breeding songs now. As migrants return, the number of songs out your window increases steadily. By May, a boggling 30 or more may be heard on a country lot! Powerpoint slides and audio recordings are used to familiarize participants with who is calling now. At the presentation's conclusion we'll step outside to identify singers and elicit some responses with audio recordings. Bring your binoculars!

Don't forget! Our **Michigan Reptiles & Amphibians Interactive Zoo** is open to all ages for visitation before, during and after the presentation. Handle snakes. Feed frogs, turtles and more!



*The Tufted Titmouse and many other winter resident songbirds ratchet up their breeding songs in February. Photo © Steve Sage*





## Catch Nature Discovery on WLNZ Radio's *Coffee Break*, February 9

Jim is scheduled to appear this month on Monday, February 9 at 9:30am. The show airs weekdays from 9 to 10am on 89.7 FM. 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 also post a Facebook reminder prior to the show.

## *Michigan Owls & Owling Night Monday, February 16; 7-9pm*

The two-hour evening begins with a Powerpoint presentation over hot beverages and a snack. We'll present *Michigan Owls Up Close*, featuring all 10 species found in the state, plus one more that's now considered extinct here. We'll offer insight into their identification, vocalizations, behavior and ecology, as well as where to go in the state to find them. At the presentation's conclusion we will go into the night and attempt to "call one in" with audio recordings. Dress warmly and don't forget your binoculars and camera! Maximum 10 participants. Not recommended for young children. Fee: \$12/person. Contact us in advance to register.



*A Snowy Owl watches the watchers from the peak of a snow-covered, roadside pole barn on a past U.P. winter birding trip.*

## *"Snowy Owl" U.P. Birding Weekend Saturday - Sunday, February 28 - March 1*

Jim will be leading an intimate group of no more than 4 participants on a quick, intensive, overnight jaunt across the bridge and up to the Soo area. Snowy Owls sightings are abundant in the Eastern U.P. this winter.

Many other Canadian winter birds not found this far south are in store, too. We will depart Saturday morning and return by early evening on Sunday. FEE: \$200, includes all transportation and overnight lodging. Contact us for more details or to register.

# LCC Saturday Classes Start February 28

Carol is teaching two Saturday science classes for gifted & talented students at Lansing Community College, East Lansing Campus. The five-week course runs from February 28 to March 28.

**Toy Stories:** 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> graders investigate the science behind the toys. They will also design and build their own working toys.

**Science Experiments Advanced:** 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders will explore biology, chemistry, physical science and natural science through a variety of engaging, hands-on experiments.

To register call 517-483-1860 or visit LCC Marketplace at [www.lcc.edu/mall](http://www.lcc.edu/mall).

## *Around the State in February*

- ❖ ***Tuesday, February 3:*** 7pm. *Butterfly Larva Food Plants presentation; Capital Area Master Gardeners meeting, MSU.*
- ❖ ***Wednesday, February 11:*** 8am-3pm. *MI Snakes presentations; Cheboygan Middle School.*  
6pm. *Michigan Salamanders presentation; Straits Area Audubon Society; Cheboygan.*
- ❖ ***Thursday, February 12:*** 9am-12pm. *MI Snakes presentations; Onaway School.*  
1:30pm. *MI Snakes presentation; Wolverine School.*
- ❖ ***Friday, February 20:*** 2-6pm. *MI Reptiles & Amphibians Exhibit; Benzie Water Festival, Platte River Elem., Honor.*



## *Thank you, Cedar Creek Vets!*

*Our hognose snake has had two separate cysts under its skin for over a year. When they continued to enlarge, the vets at Cedar Creek Veterinary Clinic, south of Williamston, surgically removed them at no cost to Nature Discovery. The clinic continues to provide us with pro bono medical care for our large menagerie of “herps.” Reptiles and birds are their specialty! Visit [www.cedarcreekvets.com](http://www.cedarcreekvets.com).*

*Post-surgery, Veterinary Assistant, Emily Reyes, handles our hognose snake before sending it home.*

# *DTRT: Conscientious Snackage*

As if fossil fuel companies and their political mouthpieces weren't a big enough threat to our climate, PepsiCo and other corporations are churning out snack food with questionable ingredients as fast as we can eat them. Read how each is contributing to rainforest destruction around the globe, and how we are aiding and abetting with every bag we tear open.

Andrew Nowicki, a long-time program participant, volunteer and part-time employee with us, sent this link of a parody Doritos commercial created by SumOfUs, an organization that calls itself "a global movement of consumers, investors, and workers all around the world, standing together to hold corporations accountable for their actions and forge a new, sustainable and just path for our global economy." <http://abc7news.com/474877/>

Check out Rainforest Action Network's take on what it coins "Conflict Palm Oil."

[http://www.ran.org/palm\\_oil](http://www.ran.org/palm_oil)

RAN has also made a list called "The Snack Food 20," the top manufacturers of "a wide range of popular snack foods in the United States and abroad that contain conflict palm oil."

[http://www.ran.org/snack\\_food\\_20](http://www.ran.org/snack_food_20)

We highly recommend perusal of this fact sheet on the topic produced by the Union of Concerned Scientists: [http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/legacy/assets/documents/global\\_warming/palm-oil-and-global-warming.pdf](http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/legacy/assets/documents/global_warming/palm-oil-and-global-warming.pdf)

On your next grocery run, take your reading glasses and check out the ingredient label on each package, then, think twice about tossing it in the cart. As we are, you'll be stunned at the sudden prevalence of palm oil in so much of what we consume.

Become a fan of *Nature Discovery* on Facebook!

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