Garlic Mustard Pull Together
April 23, Saturday 9:00 am to 12:00 noon

Celebrate Earth Day by helping to remove an invasive plant species that has negative impacts on the health of our forests. We’re teaming up with the Stewardship Network and the Henry Ford Estate Fair Lane. For questions leading up to the event, contact Rick Simek at the Environmental Interpretive Center, (313) 583-6371. Register online with the Stewardship Network.

Songbird Saturdays
May 7, 14, 21; 8AM-10:30AM each day

Over several weeks in spring, “waves” of colorful and interesting northbound migrant songbird species arrive in our area. We’ll go afield each Saturday during the main migration period to try to encounter early to late season migrants. Feel free to attend any number of the sessions. Binoculars are a must. Also, please bring a field guide to birds if you have one. Each time we meet, we’ll also sample a different flavor of “bird friendly coffee” which helps to conserve wintering habitat for Neotropical migrants.

Counting All Frogs and Turtles!
Saturday, June 11; 9:30AM-11:30AM

Experience a mix of science and fun as we set out on our annual population counts of Green Frogs at the pond and turtles at Fairlane Lake. We’ll hone our nature observation skills while also helping to assess important indicators of habitat health. Bring the entire family!

Visit Our NEW Website!
The Environmental Interpretive Center officially launched its new website on March 7, 2011. The redesign of the website began in spring, 2010. At that time, we recognized the need to update the layout and navigation scheme for the website, and to provide more information about our research and education activities to the public. The new website incorporates a number of user-friendly features, including an online calendar of our public nature programs, detailed pre-K-12 educational program summaries, and information about the Center’s sustainability initiatives.
The address for the new EIC website is: http://www.umd.umich.edu/eic
If you have any suggestions or comments about the website, please send them to Mike Perrin, the website administrator at mperrin@umd.umich.edu.
As you enjoy your spring walks in the woodlands, you may be wondering while you wander about all the delicately colored wildflowers that welcome spring back to Michigan. One welcoming blossom, standing tall in the understory, offers five lovely pale purple or lavender-colored petals that give it the moniker “shameface,” as if the flower were blushing.

This wildflower has a few names. It is related to some of the colorful cultivated flowers that share the same family name (Geraniaceae) familiar to porches, patios, and gardens. It’s scientific name is *Geranium maculatum*; *Geranium*: from the Greek *geranos*, “crane,” from the beak-like fruit, and *maculatum*: Latin for "spotted" or "mottled." This leads to other names, such as Spotted Geranium, Wild Geranium, and Stork’s Bill or Crane’s Bill. The mature fruit from the blossom is long and spikey, much like the long pointed beak of birds in the stork or crane family. At the very tip of the point, five leftover parts of the flower’s stigma resemble tiny grappling hooks, as do the seeds within the fruit. These hooks are considered to be powerful medicine in certain cultures.

In medieval times, the Doctrine of Signatures influenced European thinking with regard to which plants would cure what maladies by observing the physical form of a plant, the size and texture of the leaves, the stem, the roots, taste and smell of the plant, color, habitat, and way and time of flowering. For example, the rootstock of cut-leaved toothwort (*Dentaria laciniata*) resembles teeth, so it was used to relieve toothaches. Indigenous cultures practiced a similar form of this philosophy. For both, belief in the cultural basis for the treatment reinforces the afflicted one’s confidence in and motivation to continue the treatment, as well as providing peace of mind and reduction in stress, enhancing the ability of the body to heal. In the case of *Geranium maculatum*, there are also scientific properties at work in these treatments.

When made as an herbal tea or topical astringent, tannic acid in the geranium root dries and heals open wounds like cold sores and other skin afflictions. Tannin is a bitter-tasting polyphenol produced by the plant. Polyphenols bind and concentrate proteins, explaining tannin’s properties as both an astringent and hemostatic. A hemostatic substance is any agent that stops bleeding through mild coagulation of skin proteins.

Indigenous North American cultures treated mouth sores with several remedies made from this plant. Ojibway Indians used dried, powdered rhizomes mixed with grape juice as a mouthwash for children with thrush. A tea boiled from the root was used to treat sore throats and mouth ulcers, while a tea made from the leaves treated dysentery. Additional Ojibway uses included an eyewash made by steeping the plant in water and a poultice from the plant applied to relieve swollen feet.

In the Iroquois culture, mouth sores were presumed to be a consequence of breaking social rules within the community, such as smoking someone else’s pipe or speaking unkind things about neighbors. The “catching hooks” would take away the negative aspects of the offense. The Iroquois also used these hooked plants as a remedy to catch and ensnare other things, such as love interests or wandering and/or unfaithful spouses. Basket artists and other craftspeople might sprinkle “peddler medicine,” made from geranium root powder, onto their wares to “hook” a buyer at the market.

Whatever your beliefs regarding this ephemeral spring wildflower, I hope I’ve “caught” your interest and that your refreshing walk in the woods will be just what the doctor ordered to cure your spring fever!

*Dorothy McLeer*
The 19th year of RRBO's Winter Bird Population Survey has been completed. Over the 20 December to 20 February survey period, 44 species were tallied. The previous annual average number of species is 38. There was a new species for the count this year, Tundra Swan, bringing the cumulative total over the years to 70 species.

This is only the second year in which we have recorded Red-shouldered Hawk. Although only seen during one survey, the bird was observed several times throughout the period. A small number of Common Redpolls were recorded on three occasions late in the count period.

One species that has been showing a dramatic trend is American Crow. The average number of crows counted per year from 1993-2002 was 139. Then West Nile Virus (WNV) entered our region and greatly reduced their numbers. In Dearborn and much of Wayne County, their numbers have not recovered. The average number of crows counted per year since then has been just 9.

That number represents the cumulative number of crows counted over an average of 13 surveys days per year. Over the past decade, crows are often not seen on any given survey day, and the average number of crows per visit has been under 1.0 since 2004. This year it was 1.5, mostly owing to a flock that flew over campus on 1 January, the day of the Christmas Bird Count. Thus, that modest increase probably does not really represent a solid gain in numbers. The graph below tells the sad story.

Another species that people were concerned was impacted by WNV was the Black-capped Chickadee. I last reviewed their status in 2002 and 2003. Our data showed a long-term decline that preceded WNV in our area, but this decline seemed to become more pronounced and numbers stayed depressed after WNV became established here. One interesting aspect of chickadee ecology is that every so often, very large numbers of young birds come south in the fall after a year of high productivity in the north. This phenomena occurred in fall 2010. It was much more pronounced east of here, even as closely as across the Detroit River in Canada. At Ontario's Long Point Bird Observatory along the north shore of Lake Erie, the number of chickadees banded over a few days in November exceeded any annual totals for the past 50 years! They ended up banding nearly 2000 chickadees, almost 25% of their 50-year total.

Numbers here were nowhere near as remarkable, but they were noticeable here on campus during fall banding and evident in our winter survey numbers. The cumulative total of 355 chickadees during the survey period was the highest since RRBO counted 417 in 1995-1996, and the second highest total ever. The average number of chickadees per visit was the highest since 1998.

On the RRBO web site, you can find the full results of all 19 years of surveys, along with information on the protocol.

For resident species like crows and chickadees, this type of long-term data set is invaluable in seeing how birds react to various environmental changes, including diseases like WNV. It’s critical to have monitoring programs like this in place, ready to provide "before" data when some unanticipated natural event occurs.

Next year, after our 20th annual survey, I will be doing some more serious analyses on our data set, with an eye towards publication.

Now, on to spring surveys… -Julie Craves
Young Naturalist Summer Day-Camps

Children are invited to join our staff interpreters for exciting outdoor explorations of plants and animals in their natural habitat. Science-oriented session topics include pond life, insects and spiders, soil creatures, and birds.

We will be hosting two, four-day camp sessions that will meet from 9:30AM-12PM on the following dates:

7-9 yr olds: Monday, June 27, Wednesday, June 29, Thursday, June 30, Friday, July 1.

10-11 yr olds: Tuesday, July 5 through Friday, July 8.

This program is free and registration is required. Online registration is available on our web site.

Contact Rick Simek at 313-583-6371 or rsimek@umd.umich.edu if you have any questions.

COME GARDEN WITH YOUR FAMILY

You and your children are invited to join other families in the enriching experience of growing food together. Accompany UM-D student interpreters to learn tips and techniques involved in sowing, tending, and harvesting organically grown vegetables. We’ll also have fun exploring soil, worms, composting, garden creatures, and pollination at the beautiful and interesting Community Organic Garden on the UM-D campus.

The program fee is $35 per child. Family size is limited to 4 people including adults. One adult guardian must attend each session with their registered children. This program is for children 4-10 years of age and their parent.

Registration is required and is available on our web site. The deadline for registration is May 25. Please register as early as possible so we know how many families to plan for.

We will meet eight Saturday sessions that will take place from 10AM-11:30AM on the following Saturdays:

May 28; June 4, 11, 25; July 9, 23; August 13, 27.