Songbird Saturdays
8:00 AM to 10:00 AM
May 1, 8, 15, 22

Greet and meet a wonderful variety of bird migrants as they stop over in the campus Natural Areas to feed and rest. Feel free to attend as many sessions as you wish. **Binoculars are essential.** Also bring a bird identification guide if you can. **No registration necessary.** Adults only.

So Many Wildflowers, So Little Time!
Saturday, May 15
1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

Mid-May is the time to “spring” into wildflower watching. With so many spring ephemerals available for only a short time, wildflower watchers need to act quickly, but move slowly. Enjoy a relaxing spring stroll to catch the wave of woodland wildflowers before they’re gone!

Young Naturalist Summer Camps for Children
Ages 7-9, June 21-24
Ages 10-11, July 6-9

In these four-day programs, children will go outside to explore nature in the campus Environmental Study Area. Science and nature-oriented topics will include pond life, soil creatures, insects, and seasonal exploration. These programs are free and run from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Participants are expected to attend all the sessions.

**Please register your child by going to:**
[http://www.umd.umich.edu/eic/summerregistration.pdf](http://www.umd.umich.edu/eic/summerregistration.pdf)

Rain Garden Volunteers Needed!

We are looking for a few dedicated volunteers to share the responsibility of Rain Garden Maintenance at the Interpretive Center’s expanding rain garden. Volunteers will work outdoors to plant, transplant, pull weeds, spread mulch, and maybe propagate seeds. The volunteers would work under the direction of EIC Staff. If you're interested please contact Mike Perrin at: 313-583-6370 or mperrin@umd.umich.edu.
A Different Species of “Butter” Flies

“Jumbo shrimp.” Does this sound like an oxymoron to you? Life is full of them. Here’s another one for you: “large, hardy warbler.” ???? Why? Yup, that’s right—and they’ve been migrating north since early spring. In fact some of them may have even over-wintered in the north, here around the Great Lakes Region and up toward New Brunswick. Who is this feathered oxymoron, you ask? The most abundant wood warbler in Canada, the Yellow-rumped Warbler (Dendroica coronata), affectionately nicknamed the “butter-butt.”

Among the wood warblers, yellow-rumps are larger in size than most other warblers and differ in dining habits and social structure than most of the others of their kind. The name of the eastern subspecies, “myrtle warbler” indicates their fondness for the fat-filled berries of the plant genus Myrica, or wax myrtles and bayberries, where available. This is the same type of wax early settlers used in candle making!

Yellow-rumps define the term “opportunistic feeder.” Like other warbler species, they are expert foliage gleaners, snapping up insects deftly with their pointy tweezers. They have also been observed foraging for aquatic and marine invertebrates along lake and ocean shores as well as drinking nectar from red maple blossoms. Their ability to switch from insects to nectar and fruits such as myrtle berries, not to mention digest and gain energy from the waxy coating, is thought to allow them the flexibility in their migration schedule. They are often the first warbler to arrive in spring and one of the last to leave in fall—that is, if they ever leave!

Unlike the usually shy woodland warblers, yellow-rumps are often gregarious and conspicuous during the non-nesting season. Other warblers have yellow rumps, but the lemon yellow splotch at the base of the tail on these birds is as if they’ve been playing in a paint-ball arcade. If you are awash in a wave of yellow polka dots, you’ve got yellow-rumps. They frequently fly in flocks by the hundreds. Thinking back on an autumn ‘02 day at UM-Dearborn’s Rouge River Bird Observatory, I walked out to a bird net that looked more like a gill net for fish than a mist net for birds. Over 100 flighty yellow-rumps made the mesh jump and come alive as Julie Craves and I worked quickly to extract the birds for processing. That’s a LOT of buttery goodness where butterfingers were not allowed!

Yellow-rumps typically breed in coniferous and mixed coniferous forests in a cup-shaped nest of shredded bark, weedy stalks, twigs, and rootlets. Some nests incorporate feathers woven into the nest so feather tips arc inward to obscure the pale creamy-white eggs speckled brown or gray.

If you’re walking in the woods this spring, keep a lookout for flashes of yellow on a little gray bird. They’re only available for a limited time, though, so catch ’em while they’re passing through town to nest in the conifers of more northerly climes, including Michigan’s “up-north” forests. -Dorothy McLeer

Children’s Gardening Programs

Two of our popular programs for budding green thumbs will be held again this summer at the Community Organic Garden. We’re “planting” on all kinds of fun for the children as we introduce them to the enjoyment of gardening in pleasant and friendly surroundings.

Sprouts

Children ages 7-9 will sow and tend their own garden plot and take part in group activities that include science experiments, garden games, crafts and a visit to the campus honeybee hives. They will finish the season with a harvest day celebration to eat our garden goodies!

Kinder-Gardening

A program for 4-6 year olds and their parents. Share a common garden plot with other families and plant interesting vegetables and flowers. Sing songs, play games, and see how your garden grows while having all kinds of fun. Finish the season with a harvest day celebration to eat our garden goodies!

Lynn Hausch will lead this year’s Sprouts and Kinder-Gardening programs. Lynn is a friendly and outgoing UM-D student who lead the garden program last year.

The schedule for this year’s program will be on Saturdays: Sprouts (7-9 yr olds) from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM, and Kinder-gardening (4-6 yr olds) from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Scheduled programs will take place on the following dates: May 22, June 5, June 19, June 26, July 10, July 24, August 7, August 21, September 11, September 18 - Garden Harvest Celebration. T

The program fee for Sprouts and Kinder-Gardening is $35 per child. Registration forms can be printed at www.umd.umich.edu/eic/kidsgarden.htm You will be contacted to confirm registration when payment is received and if you have any questions about this program call Rick Simek at (313) 583-6371.
Every field guide to birds includes range maps, indicating where in North America each bird species can be found in each season. It shouldn’t come as too much of a surprise that the maps are generalizations. For instance, Common Loons are waterbirds rarely found on land. Although their range map indicates that they can be found across most of the U.S. at some point during the year, you probably don’t expect to find them in the cornfields of Iowa.

It turns out that there is another hidden “inaccuracy” in range maps, one which technology is just beginning to help us unravel.

Let’s consider the Wood Thrush, a species that RRBO has studied for many years. The range map shows that Wood Thrushes nest across most of the eastern U.S. and winter in Central America. We already know from bird banding studies that many species of birds, including Wood Thrushes, are very faithful to the places where they nest or spend the winter. One male Wood Thrush nesting on campus returned each breeding season four years in a row. Less banding has been done in the tropics, but this same type of site fidelity has also been documented for wintering birds.

From these types of data, it’s probably safe to assume that Wood Thrushes are like lot of northern retirees: they have a house, say, in Pennsylvania, and a winter home someplace warmer. But whereas Michigan retirees might be found in Florida, Arizona, or other southern locales, we are now discovering that Pennsylvania-nesting Wood Thrush may only be found in eastern Nicaragua, not just any random site in Central America.

Geolocators are one-gram devices that measure the intensity of light. Seven Wood Thrushes nesting in Pennsylvania outfitted with geolocators returned the following year. The geolocators were removed and the light intensity data were downloaded. Researchers determined, based on the location of the sun, where these birds spent the winter. Stunnningly, all overwintered in a narrow band in the eastern halves of Honduras or Nicaragua. Meanwhile, geolocators placed on Wood Thrushes wintering in Costa Rica were found to have spent the summer in New York state. The current generation of geolocators doesn’t offer extremely precise geo-locating, but more resolution than previous studies using chemical markers in feathers, and the technology is only likely to improve rapidly.

Connectivity between breeding and wintering areas is critical in determining the conservation needs of migratory birds such as the Wood Thrush, which has experienced steep population declines. Where do Michigan’s Wood Thrush spend the winter? In 2011, RRBO may begin an exciting project using geolocators to find out! Stay tuned. -Julie Craves

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**Think Spring—Grow a Bird Feeder!**

That’s right; you can **plant and grow** a bird feeder. It’s easy. Just plant a native tree that feeds lots of caterpillars which in turn feed hungry nesting birds. It’s a great way to help bring back a greater variety of native bird species back to your neighborhood. It’s recently been determined that 97% of all North American land bird species **must** find insects to feed to their nestlings. So let’s say you decide to grow a bird feeder by planting a native oak. Good choice. It turns out that oaks draw in hundreds of moth species whose caterpillars find oak leaves critical to their development. In turn, the caterpillars provide essential protein for developing baby birds. And more baby birds mean restored populations of many bird species that have been long absent from our living spaces. It’s part of a plant-insect-bird link in the food web that has been severed in so many residential spaces due to landscaping with non-native trees. All those adult moths, also adding to the biodiversity of your backyard, will draw in other hungry creatures, such as bats, that will benefit from all the "six-legged steak" on the wing.

Here’s a short list of “living bird feeders” that are native to our area, which you can plant. All of these species host lots of moth (and sometimes butterfly, too) caterpillars.

- Common White Oak
- Northern Red Oak
- Eastern Cottonwood
- Black Willow
- Pussy Willow
- American Basswood
- Wild Black Cherry
- Hawthorn

For more information about this remarkable new development in restoring life to our home garden landscapes, check out the book “Bringing Nature Home” by Douglas Tallamy. It’s an insightful and important read for all of us who would like to help re-stitch the world back together where we live in a practical, fun way. -Rick Simek
**Going Green!**

It began as a simple post card 30 years ago, typed out on a mechanical typewriter. It grew into a single page, printed with a dot-matrix printer on colored paper to match the season. It expanded to become a two-sided edition as the activities and mailing list grew. Ten years ago it became a four page, colored publication renamed, Natural Explorations. It is now going through another evolution. After many years of sending out our newsletter by “snail mail,” it is with some sadness we announce that this will be the final printed issue.

This decision was reached after much debate about increasing costs and efficient methods of communicating with you. It seems more and more organizations are utilizing the internet to communicate more efficiently with constituents while taking advantage of the latest technology to make our information quickly and easily available.

If you currently receive our newsletter announcements via email, you need do nothing more. If you currently only receive our newsletter in printed format via standard mail, you must contact us with a valid email address to receive our next newsletter announcement beginning in this fall. You may do this by emailing us at eic@umd.umich.edu or going to our website at, http://eicmailing.wufoo.com/forms/eic-electronic-mailing-list-request/ to submit your information.

As in the past, the newsletter and other announcements will always be available on our web site at, http://www.umd.umich.edu/eic which will be redesigned and enhanced later this year.