Cinco de Mayo Birds!
Saturday, May 4
8AM-10AM

Celebrate the arrival of birds the day before Cinco de Mayo (the 5th of May) that might have spent the winter in or near Mexico and even farther south! As insects and other invertebrates become more accessible as food in the warmer months, birds migrate north to gorge on this valuable protein. Join the feast, or at least enjoy watching them feast, as they fuel up for whatever spring and summer brings! Binoculars are strongly recommended.

"A Long Day's Journey Into Night"
Friday, June 21
8:00 PM-Midnight

Spend a sultry evening, on "the longest day of the year," exploring the significance of the Summer Solstice to neolithic cultures around the Earth as well as the property that was once Henry and Clara Ford's backyard. Meet at the Environmental Interpretive Center to enjoy a guided walk through the UM-Dearborn Environmental Study Area, convening at sunset (around 9:00 EDT) near the Estate terrace to watch the sunset. Activities after sunset include an illuminating, astronomical visit to the UM-D Observatory to enjoy the night sky through powerful telescopes, weather permitting.

**SUMMER PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN**

**Summer Young Naturalist Program**
9:30AM-12PM
10-11 year olds: June 24, 25, 27, 28
7-9 year olds: July 8, 9, 11, 12

Get your child outdoors and learning about nature! Led by UM-Dearborn student interpreters, this science-oriented program provides direct, hands-on learning in a beautiful natural setting. Session topics will include pond life, birds, insects and spiders, and frogs and turtles. The program is free of charge. You can register your child online HERE.

**Sprouts Gardening Program for Children**

Children ages 6-8 are invited to participate in another exciting season of gardening at the campus Community Organic Garden. The children will directly experience the joys of gardening as they plant, tend, and harvest their own vegetables. This year, we’re also going back to the program’s “roots” of including crafts, sing-alongs, and stories as part of the on-site program experiences. Each session will also find our group exploring some of the life we share space with at the garden, such as insects and birds.

Leaders for the program will be Center interpreters Sarah Jorgenson and Mary Fastiggi. Sarah brings years of personal gardening experiences with her own children at the site to her program leadership. Mary is a highly enthusiastic and knowledgeable interpreter with years of experience leading educational programs at the Center. Nine program sessions are planned, from 6PM-7:30PM on the following Wednesdays: May 22; June 5, 19, 26; July 10, 24; August 7, 21; September 4 (harvest party). Each child must be joined and supervised by an adult companion at each session.

The program fee is $35 per child. There is no fee for adult participants. The deadline for registration is May 20.

You can register your child by going to http://www.umd.umich.edu/eicprogramregister
Recently, you may have read that coyotes were seen just outside the windows of the Environmental Interpretive Center in February. In fact, one environmental science class held in our building interrupted their lecture, watching as their textbooks came to life while coyotes explored our mushroom garden in full view of the students. It is unusual for urban coyotes to be so active in front of people and in the middle of the day, but for a while it was almost as common to see coyotes as cardinals around the bird feeders. This phenomenon was brief but enjoyable, and after less than a week the coyotes faded back into the forest.

Do people on campus and visitors to the Environmental Study Area need to be concerned about the presence of coyotes? Generally, no; as with any wild animal from bees to bears, it’s a good practice to give wildlife space and not alter its behavior. Picnicking and dogs are not permitted in the Environmental Study Area, which would be two things potentially “interesting” to coyotes. Often, coyotes are perceived as a threat simply because of their presence, but not based on any negative activities. Their typical behavior is to avoid people and conveniently stay out of sight, making it easier for both humans and coyotes to share the landscape.

Although coyotes have a current distribution that spans across most of North and Central America, their historical range prior to 1700 was restricted to the prairies and desert areas of Mexico and central North America. Since then, with the expansion of human settlement and clearing of forests, coyotes have dramatically expanded their range across North America and are now found in an increasing number of downtown areas in cities in the United States and Canada.

We have been aware of their presence here for many years. As “HSIs” (Habitat Scene Investigators), we have seen the clues everywhere: tracks, scat, remains of possible meals, as well as the rare visual confirmation of coyotes. A chorus of coyotes has been heard on several occasions this winter, too. Over the years, folks who work the wee hours between dusk and dawn on campus have shared their wildlife sightings with us, including coyotes. The animals have always looked healthy when seen, which speaks well of the ecological health of our 300-acre urban Environmental Study Area. From an ecological standpoint, prey availability determines where predators live and, looking at the top predators in our habitat such as hawks, owls, coyotes and foxes, the buffet table in the Environmental Study Area is full and the hunters are well fed.

There are numerous ongoing studies of urban coyotes, including a Wayne State study by PhD candidate Bill Dodge. Bill and his team were featured on The Environment Report (http://www.michiganradio.org/post/tracking-city-dwelling-coyotes-night) and have been collecting observation data from southeast Michigan residents as well as tracking the movements and behaviors of radio-collared coyotes for about three years. One well established study focuses on Chicago coyotes (http://www.urbancoyoteresearch.com). Overseen by Dr. Stanley D. Gehrt of the Ohio State University, the Cook County, Illinois, Coyote Project has revealed a small slice of the urban coyote’s world while illustrating how little is known about this adaptable animal.

Like their larger canine cousins, gray wolves, and rural coyotes living in family groups, urban coyotes also occupy designated home ranges and defend territories against other coyote family groups. There is a canine “pecking order” when it comes to eliminating competition for resources: wolves will kill coyotes; coyotes will kill foxes; and both wolves and coyotes consider dogs as resource competitors. This can make living near either wild canine a challenge for domestic pet owners.

Often referred to as “ghost dogs of the city,” urban coyotes have learned traffic patterns and are shown to avoid residential areas and prefer natural areas within their urban home ranges. They typically hunt individually or in loose pairs but not as a pack, unlike wolves. Contrary to the belief that coyotes are relying on domestic pets and garbage, urban coyotes in the Cook County Project exploit some of the same prey items that rural coyotes eat: small rodents (42%), fruit (23%), white-tail deer, typically fawns (22%), and eastern cotton-tail rabbits (18%). They are opportunistic feeders and their diets shift seasonally, so they are “locavores” in a sense, and flexibility is an asset. One might even look upon coyotes as a wildlife co-manager as they prey upon animals that people often complain about, including adult Canada geese, their eggs, and offspring. Free-ranging cats are an occasional food opportunity. California coyote studies show that the reduction in feral cat numbers due to coyote predation in small habitat fragments results in an increase in songbird reproduction.

Part of Gehrt’s intensive urban coyote study also includes their interactions with other urban wildlife. I have listened to him speak about the amazing problem solving abilities of urban raccoons and their relationships with other city dwellers, the efficient resource use of striped skunks in their tightly knit territories, and how urban cats interact with all of these other species. There is a broad network of covert intelligence operatives working undercover in the shadow of darkness, keeping a low profile and learning how to successfully avoiding human interactions.

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We are pleased to announce that the Center is in the process of developing a formal, systematic analysis and action plan for improving the ecological health of the campus Environmental Study Area. We intend to share this ongoing experience with you, our newsletter readers, through our upcoming newsletter issues.

We will be utilizing the following highly recommended, 10 step process for analyzing ecosystems with a mind toward ecological restoration, gleaned from the excellent book “Restoring Ecological Health to Your Land” by Steven L. Apfelbaum and Alan Haney.

1. Inventories and mapping
2. Investigate the history of the landscape
3. Interpretation of landscape changes
4. Develop realistic goals and objectives
5. Prepare a plan
6. Develop and initiate a monitoring program
7. Implement the plan
8. Document changes and maintain records
9. Periodically reevaluate the program
10. Communicate and educate

To better investigate and interpret the ecology of the Area, we have already initiated steps 1-3, which will be a 2 year effort. Wonderful volunteers have already stepped forward to help out with this process: Thaddeus Lewandowski has spent 60 hours surveying the density and distribution of the invasive Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) in the Area; Robin Danilowicz is setting up a GIS mapping system to plug in layers of information gathered, such as the buckthorn survey data; Alanna Punch is piecing together historical information about the land and its natural history through various written resources, historical vegetation maps, and more, from about the mid-1800s to the present (see Alanna’s fascinating account of what she gleaned from the wonderful book *The Bark Covered House* on page ** of this newsletter). We are also gathering and analyzing data from field research and other forms of observations made in the Area by UM-D faculty, alumni, and local residents over several decades. A fascinating ecological story is slowly emerging. That story will be our guide as we develop an effective and informed ecological restoration and habitat management plan.

Once we implement the plan, we will remain attentive to what nature wants, and align our management efforts within that context. It will be exciting to observe how nature responds to our management actions, and to figure out which of those responses fit best with the following management goals we have set:

1. Maintaining and/or enhancing native species diversity
2. Improving degraded habitats
3. Restoring ecological processes that have been damaged or lost

Every management decision we make for the Area will also involve considerations relating to its various uses and values, including educational programming at the Center, university classes, scientific research, and access to the public.

Rick Simek, EIC Natural Areas Manager
Coyote intelligence and the ability to learn things quickly has earned them the role of “trickster” in folk tales and creation stories in many cultures, held in high regard. Several cultures refer to coyotes as “God’s dog.” In other circles, they are considered “vermin” and a nuisance animal. They are one in the same animal, yet it is all in the interpretation of the individual and his or her beliefs. Scientific data collected through the studies previously mentioned may help bridge the gap between these polarizing viewpoints.

Gehrt cautions, “Coyotes are watching and learning from us; we influence their behavior, and it will be our actions that determine what the future holds for our new neighbors.” To that end, humans can be a partner in keeping wild things wild by not “teaching” wildlife that we are associated as a source of food. Leaving pet food outside your home is a direct invitation that will be accepted by most animals, so take food in when not in use. If you are feeding birds, you are likely feeding squirrels and other seed-eating animals. Coyotes eat seed-eating animals. We experienced most of our coyote sightings at our bird feeders…think about it. Your pet’s behavior may also indicate changes in your neighborhood: new smells that interest them or if they are “on alert” more often than before. Do not under any circumstances try to “tame” wildlife by hand feeding them or throwing them food. This only teaches them to lose their healthy fear of humans; the fear that often keeps them alive. Do not alter their behaviors by coaxing them to approach you or your car. The phrase often said in National Parks, “A fed animal is a dead animal,” is based in truth. Once a smart animal such as a coyote learns how to get food from people, this may become its method of choice in “hunting.” This also may leave no other choice for wildlife managers but euthanize such food begging animals.

Become a Habitat Scene Investigator in your own neighborhood: be aware of your surroundings and make note of changes you and your family observe. Make changes as necessary to attract wildlife you want to see in your yard and to deter what you don’t. We teach our children to behave in certain ways and, in a sense, we can also teach wildlife to respect boundaries if we can learn how to respect their space, too. (Please visit the two web sites for more fascinating, current research on urban coyotes.)

-Dorothy McLeer

Upcoming Stewardship Saturday Volunteer Work Days

June 15, July 20 and August 17
1-4 PM
Join other volunteers in this monthly series of invasive plant removal work days. It’s a great way to get outdoors and help local nature. Children must be over 10 years of age. We’d appreciate your help! Go here for more info.

The Rouge River Bird Observatory now has its own electronic newsletter. To view past issues and sign up for future issues, please visit http://www.rrbo.org/connect/newsletters

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We also invite you to join us as a volunteer in the habitat management efforts already underway. Check out our Adopt-a-Habitat and Stewardship Saturdays for on-the-ground, “habitat healing” activities for individual and group volunteers. We also need volunteers to photograph various habitat improvement groups for the Center’s website, and to post Adopt-a-Habitat fliers in nearby communities. Let’s pull together to encourage the best possible habitat health in the Environmental Study Area for generations to come. Stay tuned!
“Bark Covered House”

Offers A Glimpse of 19th Century Local Ecology

by Alanna Punch

When Mr. Simek first brought up the topic of a historical investigation of the ecology of what now includes the UM-Dearborn Environmental Study Area (ESA) several months ago, I was intrigued because it was a different look at history for me. Unlike humans, natural habitats do not have artifact items: the written record or structures to identify their past. Their stories are locked away in the rings of trees, subtle layers in the soil and the yet unspouted seeds found there — altogether some of the most difficult natural history for us to access and interpret. Fortunately, the observations different generations of local people recorded about the world around them provides the clues.

Facing the fairly formidable archives of the Environmental Interpretative Center, we relied on a strategy of making notes whenever passages or articles mentioned local plants or animals by name, or described a Dearborn regional habitat in detail. While the latter was a rare find, one gem did appear: a copy of *The Bark Covered House*, a book written by William Nowlin, whose family was one of the first to migrate from the eastern U.S.—in their case New York—and settle in what is now Dearborn. William’s reflections stretch from when the family first carved out a patch of woods and built a bark-covered house in 1834, when he was 13 years old, through the time he penned the book in 1875. It provides excellent descriptions of Dearbornville’s natural landscapes and life, sometimes by then-popular names now unfamiliar to us. What could a ‘French bog’ have been? Or a ‘Pontiac’ fly? There are also accounts of plant and animal life more familiar, at least by name, in our own time. For example, the author recounts how on his father’s later farm, which he bought in the 1860s (and which would now be located near the intersection of Telegraph and Van Born Street), there was “a ridge covered by chestnut trees. Father enjoyed himself there very much, a few of the last falls of his life, picking up chestnuts.” Those were *American chestnuts* (*Castanea dentata*), a native tree species which played such a major part in the ecology of forests in our area in Nowlin’s time, would soon be completely wiped out by the chestnut blight. Black ash swamps are also mentioned several times. As for animal life, Nowlin writes about seeing and hearing wolves and hunting bears. He also had encounters with blue racer snakes and massasauga rattlesnakes. For the latter, he describes how, in driving cattle home... “There was some danger then, in going barefooted as there were some ‘massasauga’ all through the woods. As the country got cleared up they disappeared...”

Today, armed with biological and ecological guides and databases, interpreting key descriptions of local ecosystems from several sources, including such historical treasures such as *The Bark Covered House*, are helping us to put together the characteristic pieces of our local natural environment. In the last few months, we have come to recognize an additional two “lost” native ecosystems that in the last two centuries existed within a five mile radius of the U of M-Dearborn campus: wet prairie, and oak savannah. Perhaps most promising is the potential to restore some semblance of these ecosystems in years to come.

To read *The Bark Covered House* for free online, go to [http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9949](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9949)

Editors note: Alanna is a UM-Dearborn student majoring in Earth Science.