

Syllabus for Birding & Beyond

Birding and Beyond is a great introduction to the world of nature! Our main focus will be on birds, but we will also notice other flora and fauna around us. Students will learn to be more aware of the birds around them wherever they go, particularly around their own homes. We will learn to recognize birds in the wild using their common names, and develop a beginning familiarity with their habits, habitats, bird families, identifying features, and some basic bird anatomy. We will introduce being in tune to bird sounds, recognizing that learning the songs of birds can help us identify them. Each semester that the class is taught we will highlight another area of birds and birding (such as feathers, beaks and bills, migration patterns, bird songs, etc.).

Studying birds and being outside to observe them will open doors for other nature areas. During each semester we will have a class or two on other aspects of nature, such as frogs, flowers, ecology, etc.

Birds are more active in the mornings and evenings. Therefore, we will meet from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. on nine Thursdays during the semester, if face-to-face. If online, Thursday mornings can be used for each family group to go birding on their own for 1-2 hours, and we will meet in the afternoon. Love Creek will be our face-to-face home base and the site of our first class, but we will also go birding at different locations and habitats around the county.

Note: If we are face-to-face, we will meet formally for a short time each class, and then use the remaining class time to look for birds in the woods, prairie, beach, swamp, and other habitats. If we are online, we will meet for up to an hour on Zoom. Each family group will be asked to go to suggested spots around the county on their own for one-two hours per class. We will then use part of our class time to report which birds (or other flora and fauna) we have seen. We may include a combination of face-to-face and online classes.

Class content will be adjusted according to the level and interest of the students.

Schedule for Birding and Beyond

Note: This schedule may be adjusted, according to how migration is going, and when we focus on other nature topics. If weather cancels our class, we will choose an unscheduled Thursday to meet.

1. September 3 -- Introduction to Birding, Love Creek
2. September 17 -- Floral Lane (the north part of Warren Dunes) (may need rubber boots)
3. October 1 -- Chickaming Township Park
4. October 15 -- Brown Sanctuary or Mud Lake Bog
5. October 29 -- Grand Mere / Lincoln Township Park
6. November 5 -- Warren Dunes
7. November 19 -- Silver Beach / Tiscornia / possible woods area
8. December 3 -- Sarrett
9. December 17 -- Love Creek

Required Materials:

Bring your own binoculars (8x42 or 10x42 are most common), and dress for the outdoors, including bug spray when needed. We may need rubber boots at one or two places. A field guide is handy, but not required. A Michigan recreational passport is recommended, as Warren Dunes will be one of our birding spots.

Assignments:

1. Attendance and participation is expected at each class; family field trips are part of the class (if online)
2. Observation assignment:
 - a. Each child will choose one specific "sit spot," around their home or within walking distance
 - i. They will stay in this spot for 10-15 minutes at a time
 - ii. They will observe here at least three times each week.
 - iii. It should be at the same time (always at 8 a.m., or always at 10 a.m., etc.)
 - iv. Choose a spot that can be observed even in rain or snow. Your front or back yard is highly suitable for this exercise!
 - b. During this time:
 - i. Remain quiet and still; observe what is happening in the bird world around them.
 - ii. Notice such things as birds feeding, sitting and singing, giving alarm calls when danger approaches, etc.
 - iii. Take note of such things as what each bird is eating and how they are eating it, how many of each bird species there are, how they interact with each other in the same and in different species, their different songs and calls, etc.
 - c. Students are encouraged to identify the birds, but the goal is to learn what is the baseline for that spot, and then be aware of, and try to understand what's happening, when baseline is broken (such as when a cat approaches, or a hawk flies overhead).
 - d. Observations will be made in a journal (younger ones will need the help of parents). A short time will be allotted during each class period to share observations.
3. Your learning partner will work with you on a project for the Parent Partnership. We will make time during our class time for students to share their projects and learn from each other.