

Syllabus for Birding & Beyond

Age: All Ages
When: Thursdays, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.
How Often: Ten Thursdays during the semester
Total Hours: 20
Where: Various birding spots around the county
Instructor: Sherry Manison
Contact Info: 7sherrym@gmail.com -- email is the best way to reach me
Instructor Qualifications: I love birds and I go birding 1-3 times a week year round. I have spent several years birding with the naturalists at Love Creek, and while I do not have a degree in ornithology, I have more knowledge about birds than most people.

Note: Parents are asked to accompany pre-teen students.

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, migration patterns, bird families, identifying features, and some basic bird anatomy, including feathers, beaks, and bills. We will introduce being in tune to bird sounds, recognizing that learning the songs of birds can help us identify them.

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 ten Thursdays during the semester, in-person if possible. If we are rained out (or snowed!), we will accommodate. Love Creek will be our in-person home base and the site of our first class, but we will also go birding at different locations and habitats around the county.

Note: Depending on our "And Beyond" part of the class, we may need to meet one Thursday evening during the semester.

Note: If face-to-face, we will meet formally for a short time, and use the remaining class time to look for birds in the woods, prairie, beach, swamp, and other habitats. If necessary, we will divide the class into two groups, an hour per group. If we are online, our whole class will meet for an hour on Zoom. You need to have two hours of birding per class, so if we go to one-hour classes, each family group will be asked to go to suggested spots on their own for at least an hour outside of class, and report back. The internet is useful for resources, so we may opt to do a zoom class once or twice during the semester, even if we are otherwise face-to-face.

Course Objectives

1. Students will be introduced to birds and birding, and gain an appreciation of our feathered friends
2. Students will learn how to find birds, and how to behave around them
3. Students will identify some of the usual birds seen in our area
4. Students will be exposed to various topics about birds (feathers, migration, etc.)
5. Students will find birds around their own homes, and observe the behavior of “their” birds
6. Students will participate in the “Beyond” part of class (frogs, flowers, environment, etc.), and be aware of not only birds, but of other plants and wildlife in nature

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

Schedule for Birding and Beyond

Note: We will meet on scheduled Thursdays unless weather does not permit. In that case, we will either meet on an unscheduled Thursday or hold a Zoom class. Here are our scheduled dates; locations may change:

1. January 26 -- -- Introduction to Birding, Love Creek
2. February 9 – Silver Beach / Tiscornia
3. February 23 – Lisa’s Feeders & Waco Beach
4. March 9 – Grand Mere North Lake, Grand Mere park, and/or Lincoln Township Park
5. March 16 – New Buffalo Harbor & Three Oaks Sewage Ponds
6. March 23 – Possible Peacock Farm
7. April 6 – Sarrett
8. April 13 – Chickaming Township park
9. April 20 – Kesling Preserve
10. April 27 – Warren Dunes

Our venues will vary, based on where birds are being found at any given time. I will let you know via email where we will be each class time. Here is a list of potential places we may go:

Mid-County:

1. Love Creek County Park
2. Warren Dunes, Floral Lane
3. Warren Dunes State Park (main entrance)
4. Grand Mere North Lake and vicinity
5. Grand Mere Park
6. Lincoln Township Park
7. A friend’s feeders in Bridgeman (she has lots of feeders and lots of birds :)
8. A friend’s peacocks and mallards near Niles (she raises peacocks; mallards are wild)

North County:

9. Sarett Nature Center
10. Brown Sanctuary
11. Benton Harbor Airport
12. Tiscornia

13. Silver Beach
14. Riverview Park, St. Joseph
15. Paw Paw River at Ox Creek (near Tiscornia)
16. Paw Paw Lake (a few public spots around the lake)

Southwest County:

17. Harbert Road Preserve
18. Chickaming Township Park
19. Warren Woods State Park
20. Galien River County Park
21. New Buffalo Harbor
22. Kesling Preserve
23. Three Oaks Water Treatment Ponds

Southeast County:

24. Mud Lake Bog
25. Lake Topinabee
26. Dayton Wet Prairie
27. Madeline Bertrand County Park

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 we usually go to Warren Dunes at least once.

If we go to someone's house to see their tame birds or feeder birds, it is requested (not required) that as a courtesy and a thank-you, we bring something to feed their birds --for the peacocks, frozen blueberries or strawberries, and for feeder birds, wild birdseed mix, thistle seed, black oil sunflower seeds, etc. You may also opt to donate toward birdseed. The homeowners are not requesting this, but it is courtesy.

Assignments:

1. Attendance and participation is expected at each class; individual family field trips may be part of the class
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 (5 minutes for small children)
 - 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.
 - v. Morning may be the best time for this observation, as birds are more active in the mornings, but whatever time of day you choose, keep it the same.

- 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 other birds approach, or 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. You may choose a specific species (like Cardinals, Blue jays, Crows, White-breasted Nuthatches, etc.) to especially observe during your observation time.
 - e. Observations will be recorded for each class on the same online google document. The link will be supplied. You will be able to see everyone's contributions.
3. Attendance should be 80 - 100% of classes.
 4. Your learning partner will work with you on your Parent Partnership project.