

SCHOOLCRAFT CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the Schoolcraft Conservation District's Winter 2023 newsletter! Interested in receiving notifications about future issues? Head over to schoolcraftcd.org/newsletter to subscribe or follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

100 N. Cedar St. | (906) 286-2890 | 8am - 4pm MTWF
Manistique, MI | schoolcraftcd@macd.org | 10am - 6pm R



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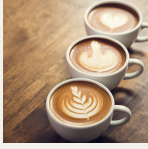
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UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 30

9am-4pm

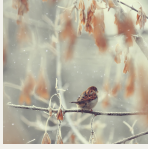


CONSERVATION COFFEE & OPEN HOUSE | SCD OFFICE

Do you have any conservation-related questions, like what tree species to plant, how to create a wildlife habitat, or what a career in natural resources is like? Drop by to our office during our open house for a cup of coffee and chat!

Feb 17

(Tentative)



GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT | ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION LAB

Be a part of this global event while making a difference in avian conservation. Run by the Cornell Lab, participants of the Great Backyard Bird Count identify, count, and report local birds.

Mar 13

(Tentative)



SEED STARTING WORKSHOP | SCD OFFICE

Seed starting can be a tricky business when you live in an area that's snowed in so late into the year. Join our workshop for some tips and tricks to successfully get your garden started early--no matter the weather outside.

Mar 23

(Tentative)



PRUNING WORKSHOP | TBD

Pruning your fruit trees can help them stay healthy, regulate their growth, and produce bigger, better yields--and spring is the best time of year to do it. Join us for this hands-on demonstration of how to prune safely for a happy tree.

NEW YEAR ANNOUNCEMENTS

TREE SALE

We're coming up on that time of year again: the SCD's annual tree sale will kick off February 19 and continue through April. Orders can be placed on our website, in person, or by calling our office.

CONSERVATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The SCD will be conducting a Conservation Needs Assessment this spring and summer to gather input from our community about natural resource concerns. Responding to this survey gives you an opportunity to help determine the SCD's future projects and priorities. A notification will be sent out when our survey goes live; please consider taking a few minutes to provide your invaluable feedback!

SCHOLARSHIPS AND COMMUNITY GRANT APPLICATIONS

2024 scholarship application forms for higher education, youth summer camps, and teacher continuing education; as well as for grant applications to fund conservation-related projects in Schoolcraft County, are available on our website. Anyone eligible is strongly encouraged to apply.

URBAN & COMMUNITY FORESTRY GRANT

We're excited to announce we've been awarded an Urban and Community Forestry Grant from the Michigan DNR, which will allow us to plant trees on public lands throughout Manistique this summer. Keep an eye on our social media pages for updates and community engagement opportunities.

BIODIVERSITY FIELD DAY



On an overcast day this October, our staff made a trek out into the Environmental Education Lab with Liz Birr's junior and senior environmental science class. The topic of the day's field trip was biodiversity--something that the lab, with its menagerie of tree species, has an abundant amount of. Biodiversity, or the variety of different organisms that can be found in a given area, is crucial for an ecosystem to adapt to the changes and challenges thrown its way, such as diseases or climate change.



Following a crash course by District Manager Ashley Reitter on how to identify some of the most common Michigan trees that can be found at the lab, the class broke off into groups to put their lessons into practice. Students identified the species of flagged trees along the trail system and calculated the area's biodiversity index. The groups also learned about the pests and diseases currently threatening Michigan's trees, including hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), beech bark disease, and oak wilt. Information about these and other issues can be found on our website.



URGENT: WE NEED YOUR HELP TO STOP THE SPREAD OF HWA! Do you have hemlocks on your property that you're willing to have surveyed? Please reach out to us to arrange a free site visit.



Are you a teacher who's interested in field trip opportunities? We want to help! The Schoolcraft Conservation District has a field trip fund to help support natural resource education. Contact our office to learn more.



HABITATS WORKSHOP

Throughout the summer, our staff has been working hard to expand and maintain our five deer habitat sites throughout Schoolcraft County. Made possible through funding by the Michigan DNR's Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (DHIPI) grant program, these sites aim to enhance wildlife habitats on private lands in the UP.

This fall, our Mead Road DHIPI site served as host to our workshop on creating and maintaining wildlife habitats, as well as cost-sharing opportunities available to area landowners. Are you interested in building a habitat of your own? Michigan's DNR offers a wealth of helpful guides to get you started; hard copies are available at our office. In addition to cost-share programs, the SCD and its partner organizations offer free technical assistance and site visits to Schoolcraft County residents. Those who wish to learn more about available resources are encouraged to get in touch with us.



BASIC NEEDS OF COMMON MICHIGAN SPECIES

DEER	Winter food source (such as white pine, white cedar, red maple, yellow birch, dogwood, viburnum); winter thermal cover (prefer at least 70% canopy cover); bedding locations, such as long grasses
RABBITS	Shrubs (raspberry, rose, sumac, highbush cranberry, dogwoods); conifers which retain low branches (spruces, balsam fir, yew, hemlock); grasses near cover; prefer brush piles or other horizontal cover
TURKEY	Food source (nuts and fruit, seeds, greens, insects, acorns, crabapples, hawthorn, waste grains); mix of open areas with mature forests (white and red oak, ash, beech, white and jack pine)
WOODCOCK	Moist soil for earthworms and other invertebrates; small forest clearings and grassland; young shrubs for nesting and brood cover (alder, birch, aspen)
GROUSE	Food source (young aspen leaves, buds, catkins, fruit trees or shrubs, willow or birch throughout winter); young aspen forests; drumming logs
BEAR	Spring food source (vernal pools and ants) and year-round food source (berries, hard mast like acorns and other nuts, down dead wood for ants and grubs); denning locations with cover and brush piles; unfragmented habitat with wetlands/swamps

HABITAT COST-SHARING & ASSISTANCE

FORESTRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Forestry Assistance Program (FAP) is intended to provide technical assistance (including wildlife habitat management recommendations, tree and shrub planting recommendations, and tree pest or pathogen identification) to private woodland owners wanting to improve the management of their forests. With the guidance of knowledgeable Conservation District foresters, landowners can better plan, manage, protect, and use their forest resources to meet their goals. All services offered through the FAP are completely free to the public, and landowners with any amount of forest—whether it be a single tree or thousands of acres—are encouraged to reach out if interested.

QUALIFIED FOREST PROGRAM

The Qualified Forest Program (QFP) offers owners of 20+ acres of forest land a tax break in exchange for obtaining and following a forest management plan that includes sustainable commercial harvesting, wildlife habitat enhancement, and improvement of other non-forest resources. While participating landowners have to pay an annual 2 mill fee to be in the program, they receive a 16 mill reduction in school operating taxes on non-homestead property and an average 40% reduction in property taxes.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial assistance to implement conservation practices on working lands, while also improving production. Common EQIP practices include building and maintaining wildlife habitats (including for upland and aquatic species), brush management, forest stand improvement, and windbreak establishment.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is an opportunity for agricultural producers to receive financial assistance to enhance wildlife habitats on their land while practicing conservation methods that reduce energy consumption while improving soil health and water quality. Examples of wildlife habitat enhancements include planting ideal species of trees, building wildlife corridors, and water management.

In addition to these resources offered by our partners, there are a number of other area programs available for those interested in wildlife habitat, natural resources, and/or land management.

Upcoming events include:

Agriculture for Tomorrow

Scheduled for March 9 at Bay College in Escanaba, this conference gives UP producers the latest information on making farms, homesteads, and gardens more productive and sustainable.

UP Beekeeping Conference

Head to NMU on March 30 for this symposium covering all things bees, including hive handling, starting a hive at schools, balms and lotions, pollinator planting, dealing with deadouts, and more.



BUILDING A BRUSH PILE

Creating brush piles is an easy, affordable way to provide food and shelter for numerous animal species. Brush piles are exactly that--sticks, leaves, and other organic debris stacked together into a pile. Small mammals like mice, squirrels, and woodchucks, as well as amphibians and reptiles, will use brush piles for shelter and protection from predators, harsh weather, and disturbances.

In addition, many species of birds and small mammals use brush piles as nesting and breeding sites, as the dense structure provides a secure location for building nests, laying eggs, and raising young. Brush piles can also act as steppingstones between different habitats, allowing wildlife to move and disperse more easily; they are often important links for animals traveling between fragmented landscapes or seeking new territories. Over time, worms and insects will feed off these piles as the debris decomposes.

Setup

- Select a suitable location for your brush pile. Ideally, it should be in an undisturbed area of your property, away from buildings or high human activity. Consider placing it near habitat features like trees or shrubs. Although any amount of area can make a difference to your local wildlife, the golden rule for brush pile size is 10-20 feet in length/width and about five feet tall.
- Collect a variety of plant materials like branches, twigs, logs, and leaves. Note that it's important to use natural materials versus treated or painted wood.
- Remove any grass, weeds, or large rocks from the area where you plan to build the pile. This will reduce competition from other vegetation.

Construction

- Begin by laying down a foundation of larger logs or branches (at least six inches in diameter). This will elevate the pile slightly, allowing air circulation and preventing it from sitting directly on the ground. Arrange the logs in a crisscross pattern, creating pockets and gaps for wildlife to access.
- Add successive layers of branches, twigs, leaves, and smaller logs on top of the base. Vary the sizes and orientations to create a more diverse structure. The pile should be about 4-5 feet high and have irregular shapes to provide a range of hiding places and niches. Leave some open spaces or tunnels within the pile to allow wildlife to enter/move through it.
- Scatter leaves, dried grass, and other plant debris over the pile. This helps create additional microhabitats, encourages decomposition, and attracts insects.



Lay out foundational logs



Add more layers of branches



Add leaves/grass for cover

HALLOWEEN & WINTER SOLSTICE HIKES




The Environmental Education Lab, a two-mile trail network just outside the City of Manistique, is one of Schoolcraft's hidden gems with its gorgeous scenery, wheelchair-accessible paths, and natural resource educational opportunities.

In an effort to raise more awareness of its presence, the SCD held two different hiking events at the lab this quarter. The first was a lamplit Halloween hike--one we'll definitely be repeating next fall thanks to this first year's overwhelming success! Equipped with hot apple cider, glow sticks, and some pretty creative costumes, kids and adults alike trekked out to collect candy and enjoy the autumn woods.



Our second hike took place on December 21 in celebration of the winter solstice. Despite the scarcity of snow on the ground, there was nonetheless a bitter chill to the air as we set out (Manistique winds never fail). Thankfully we had warm cocoa and cookies to come back to!

Whatever the weather, the Environmental Lab serves as a beautiful, accessible place to enjoy the great outdoors 24/7. To get to the lab from Manistique, go east on US-2, turn left (North) on CR-433, and then turn left on Krummich Road (West). The roads curves to the south and ends at the trail system entrance/parking lot.



In addition to the Environmental Lab, Schoolcraft County is home to a number of recreational opportunities for those interested in hiking, trailing, and nature appreciation. These include the Riverbank Audubon Sanctuary, Rainey Wildlife Area, Ashford Lake Pathway, Indian Lake Pathway, Colwell Lake Trail, and the horseback-riding friendly Pine Marten Run trail.

HERBALIST KITCHEN WORKSHOP



The Manistique School & Public Library partnered with the SCD in hosting our Herbalist Kitchen Workshop this November. The workshop covered the basics of growing indoor and outdoor herbs, methods of preserving them, and the myriad of ways herbs can be used in the kitchen and elsewhere. Following a presentation by District Manager Ashley Reitter, attendees made their own herb-infused oils using plants of their choosing. A huge thank you to the library for providing the space for this event!



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Once you've decided what herbs you want to grow, take a few minutes to research whether they can easily be started from seed. If not, consider checking out the produce section of your grocery store; you can often find cheap potted herbs there.
- Looking for a starter herb? We suggest basil! It's easy to grow and has a versatile range of uses.
- Be careful about what herbs you plant in ground, as some of them (including mint and chives) grow prolifically and can become invasive.
- There are a number of herb preservation methods, including air drying, dehydrating, microwaving, oven drying, or freezing. One isn't necessarily better than the other. Do what works best for you!
- Experiment with both fresh and dried herbs, as they can have different flavors, textures, and potency.
- Want to preserve fresh herbs for future cooking? Chop them up, sprinkle them in an ice cube tray, pour melted butter on top, and freeze. When you're ready to use them, just pop the butter cubes out.



FURTHER READING

The Herbalist's Kitchen by B. Nickerson
Wild Remedies and Alchemy of Herbs by R. de la Foret
The Modern Herbal Dispensatory by T. Easley & S. Horne
Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide by R. Gladstar



HARVEST CELEBRATION

The week before Thanksgiving, community members gathered at the SCD office to join in our Harvest Celebration. The event, in which participants made Thanksgiving table centerpieces from locally sourced natural resources, served as an opportunity to reflect on the many blessings those of us who live in the UP have. It's easy to feel hopeless in the midst of so many catastrophic environmental concerns, from climate change to invasive species to pollution and more. However, despite the doom-and-gloom headlines that tend to dominate the world of conservation, there is an incredible amount for which we can be thankful.

Take one look at the UP's sweeping scenery of dense woods or pristine shorelines and this will be evident enough. 90% of our peninsula is forested, with an estimated 14 billion trees statewide. Our landscape is geologically rich, including in mineral and ore deposits. Most notably, we're afforded an abundance of water, not only in our 35,000 inland lakes and ponds and 49,000 miles of rivers and streams, but also in our proximity to the Great Lakes, which together hold a tremendous 21% of the world's fresh water.

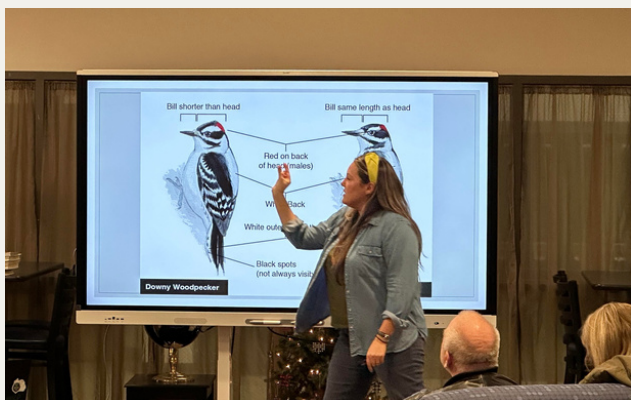
And, of course, we at the SCD are blessed by the tremendous resource that is you! Our work wouldn't be possible without the continued support and involvement of the people who make up Schoolcraft County. We're sincerely grateful to have such an encouraging, passionate, and engaged community backing us. Thank you for all that you do in helping us conserve our natural resources for future generations.



WINTER BIRDING WORKSHOP



Our partnership continues! In conjunction with the Manistique School & Public Library, we hosted a workshop this December covering all things winter birding, from how to identify common winter species in our area to creating an ideal backyard bird habitat and more. After District Manager Ashley Reitter's presentation, participants had an opportunity to make pinecone birdfeeders--a cheap and easy way to attract more birds to your yard.



Winters in the UP can be both long and bleak, and birding--whether it's watching the colorful, acrobatic displays of the tufted titmouse or listening to the sweet chirping songs of the black-capped chickadee--can be a wonderful way to add some joy to the season. Those who want to explore this hobby further are encouraged to join us for the Great Backyard Bird Count on Saturday, February 17 at the Environmental Education Lab.



Making a birdfeeder of your own is simple! All you need is a dried pinecone, some twine or yarn, peanut or other nut butter (or even margarine in a pinch), and birdfeed. First, wrap the yarn around your pinecone and knot it to form a secure loop. Next, slather a fair amount of your butter onto the pinecone, making sure to get it into the crevices. Pour your seed onto a plate and roll the buttered pinecone in it to coat it thoroughly. Voila! Hang your new feeder from a tree branch and watch the birds come!



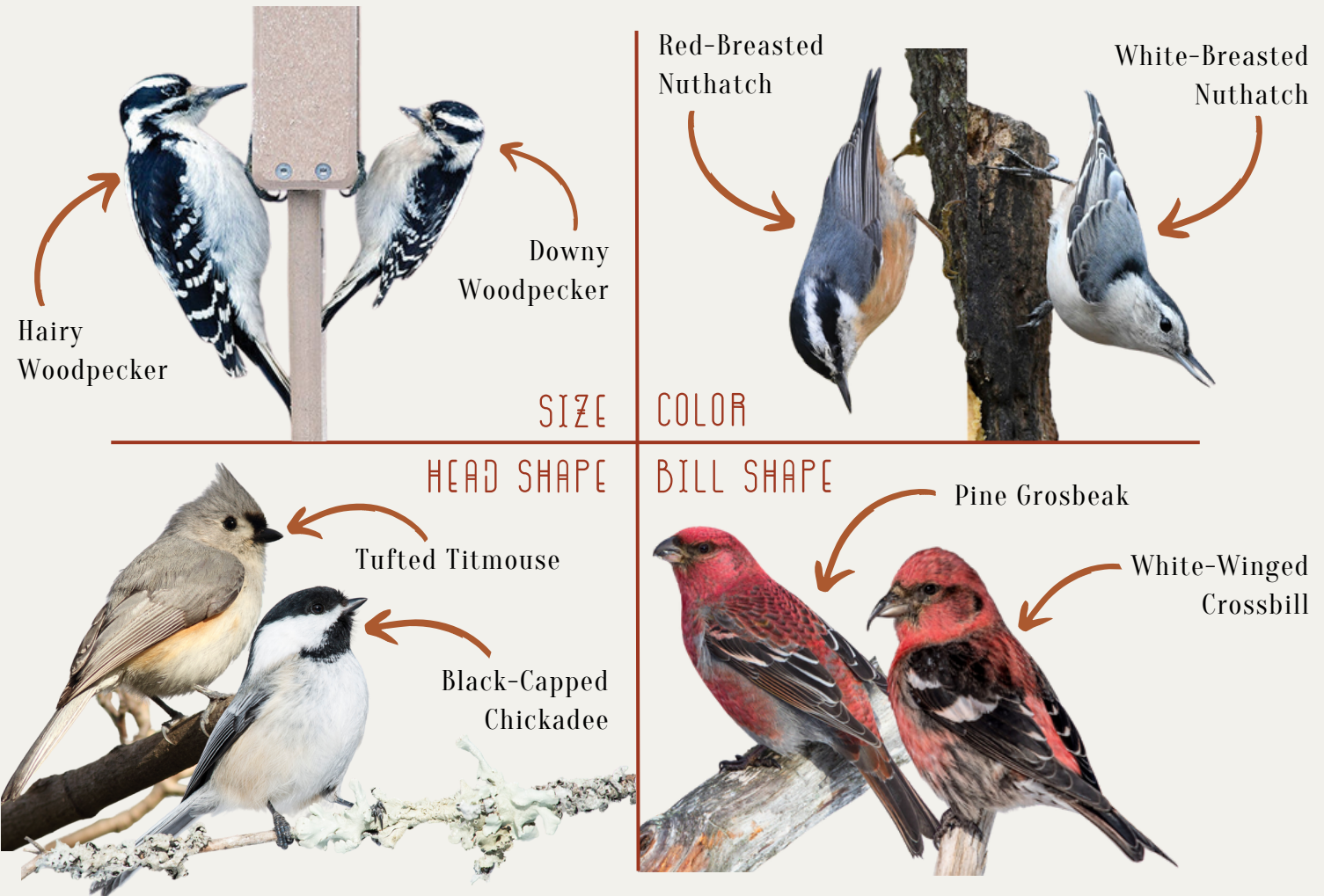
Are you or someone you know interested in birding? Consider joining us for our Warbler Wonderland Birding Festival on May 18 & 19 for guided bird hikes to various local habitats and presentations from expert birders.



WINTER BIRDING BASICS

Birds are usually associated with the warmer months; the sparrow's cheerful melody has long been associated with the spring snowmelt, and the honk of geese flying overhead is a sure sign that summer is wrapping to a close. But, thanks to the vast array of species that stay in Michigan year-round or migrate here to escape the even colder north, winter can be an equally good time for birding.

When identifying these winter birds, pay special attention to their size and color, as these are often dead giveaways to their species (true with males in particular, which are often more vibrantly colored than their female counterparts). The shape of a bird's head, length of its bill, flight patterns, foraging behaviors, and songs and/or calls can all be of additional use in identification.



Don't want to venture out to bird habitats? Bring the birds to you! Create an ideal habitat in your yard by ensuring there is adequate cover, nesting sites, and water sources. Specific types of birdfeeders (e.g., tray or platform feeders vs. tube feeders) and feed can be used to attract different species.

An identification guide for winter bird species common to the UP can be found on our "Workshop Materials" webpage. Physical copies are available in our office.



HEMLOCK SURVEY PSA

Landowners of Schoolcraft and Delta: Help us stop the spread of a deadly infestation!

Our partners at the Lake to Lake cooperative invasive species management area (L2L CISMA) will be inspecting Eastern hemlock trees along the Lake Michigan shoreline now through February 2024 to look for signs of invasive hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). If you own property on or close to the shoreline AND have hemlock trees on your property, reach out to us as soon as possible to schedule a free site visit. (Not sure if you have hemlocks? No worries! The SCD can help identify them.)



Parasitic HWA insects, which pierce hemlocks and drain them of their nutrients, are very small and hard to see, but they can be easily identified by the white woolly masses they form during winter months on the underside of branches at the base of the needles. There are many look-alikes, so a site visit is recommended for identification.



HWA has recently been found as far north as Benzie County in the Northern Lower Peninsula. It has been previously thought that UP winters would be too harsh for HWA to survive. However, considering climate change and the insect's ability to adapt, it is becoming more and more possible that HWA could survive milder winters in the UP. It is crucial that we catch any populations early to protect our hemlock forests!

HWA can be moved by birds and other wildlife, and on gear or equipment that has come into close contact with HWA. It can also be moved when infested branches are trimmed and disposed of, and by vehicles or equipment brushing against infested branches. HWA is on the Michigan Invasive Species Watchlist and has not yet been confirmed in the Upper Peninsula. If you notice white, waxy material at the base of the needles on hemlock trees, take photos, note the location of the affected trees and report it to:

IDENTIFYING HEMLOCKS

▲ Conical shape with a mature height of 100+ ft

Bark is cinnamon-red to gray and relatively smooth, furrows and ridges develop with age



Flat needles are attached individually on branch, two racing stripes on underside of each needle



Small (>3/4 in) cones

MI Department of Agriculture and Rural Development,
MDA-Info@michigan.gov

Or - Use the Midwest Invasive Species Information Network (MISIN) online reporting tool.

Or - Call or email the L2L CISMA directly at (906) 251-3068 or l2lcisma@gmail.com

To prevent spread, do not move potentially infested material!