**Showcasing the DNR: A shared wildlife experience**

**By HANNAH SCHAUER**

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

Michigan is full of opportunities to enjoy wildlife recreation, and full of people who do just that, including people who work for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Many DNR staffers are outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy participating in wildlife recreation pastimes like hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing – just like Michigan’s citizens who benefit from the work the department does.

Along with many others across the state, DNR employees value these outdoor pursuits and want to preserve these opportunities for the future.

“It is our privilege to manage the state’s wildlife resources on behalf of all the citizens of Michigan,” said Jared Duquette, chief of the DNR Wildlife Division. “We all benefit from having a diversity of wildlife and habitats on the landscape.”

Duquette said maintaining the plethora of wildlife recreation opportunities in Michigan is vital to supporting funding for conservation projects and continued public support for conservation efforts.

Wildlife recreation has a significant impact on Michigan’s economy. According to a 2019 [Michigan United Conservation Clubs economic impact study](https://mucc.org/about-us/economic-impact-study-2019/), hunting- and fishing-related purchases in the state generate more than $11.2 billion annually.

In Michigan, MUCC’s study estimates there are 700,000 hunters and 1.1 million anglers. Many DNR staff are among those ranks of outdoor enthusiasts.

In fact, DNR staff often seek out a career in the natural resources management field because they enjoy some related outdoor recreation as a personal pastime.

“Hunting was a major part of my childhood growing up,” said Chad Stewart, the DNR’s deer, elk and moose program specialist. “I enjoyed the camaraderie and traditions associated with hunting season, and as I got older, grew to appreciate the animal’s biology and influence on the landscape even more.

“Having a job where you can uphold those same traditions that were valuable to your youth, while understanding more about the animal itself, is so incredibly unique. I think it’s safe to say without my early exposure to hunting, I wouldn’t have the same level of appreciation I have now for hunters, and certainly would have another job.”

Like Stewart, many DNR Wildlife Division staffers got started in wildlife management because they grew up with fond memories of experiences such as watching birds or other wildlife or hunting and trapping with their family and friends.

“I know that I wouldn’t have found this career without the experiences I was introduced to when I was young,” said DNR wildlife biologist Shelby Adams, who covers Pigeon River Country, in parts of Otsego and Cheboygan counties. “I feel so fortunate to get to work with wildlife and encourage the next generation of hunters and wildlife managers. Appreciation of wildlife and the outdoors is something I was taught and is integral to all parts of my life.”

Adams recalls fondly her first deer hunt with her father.

“To this day, it’s still the largest buck I’ve ever harvested,” Adams said. “I love that memory with my dad.”

Kristie Sitar, a DNR wildlife biologist covering Luce and parts of Chippewa and Mackinac counties in the eastern Upper Peninsula, recalled as a kid one of the things she loved was hearing great horned owls at night and seeing bluebirds hunting insects in the fields. This early interest in birds and other wildlife spurred her to pursue a career in wildlife.

“Memories associated with cool sightings of birds, elk antler shed hunting and watching ermine hunt, all got me where I am today,” Sitar said. “Once you have an appreciation for a bird or animal the next logical step is an interest in maintaining or improving their habitat.

“For example, many bird species are in decline, and having this awareness of a critical habitat need helps me in my job as I work on habitat management for species conservation.”

Duquette has a similar story.

“My love for exploration of wild places started at a young age. I grew up in a family that was active in outdoor recreation, including camping and deer hunting in remote areas of Michigan. Over time I have expanded my interests to also include studying plants and birding.”

In the United States, an estimated 103.7 million residents 16 years old and older, or 41% of the population, participated in wildlife-related recreational activities in 2016, according to the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation](https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2018/demo/fhw-16-nat.html).

Wildlife watchers made up a wide majority of those residents at 86 million, anglers made up 35.8 million and there were 11.5 million hunters.

“Getting people into the outdoors to experience wildlife in some manner is essential to maintaining and increasing the number of people who are stewards of wildlife conservation,” Duquette said.

Conserving wildlife species and their habitats, especially on [public lands](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79136_79262---%2C00.html), provides a place for people to participate in outdoor and wildlife-based recreation.

“Personally, I really enjoy the challenge of exploring new places and finding the unique wildlife or plants that are there,” Duquette said. “I love doing the homework using field guides and other tools to find areas, like good spots to hunt or places I might find rare plants. This often takes me to locations I may not otherwise explore. And to have the homework pay off in harvesting a deer or photographing a native orchid is icing on the cake.”

Lately, Duquette has been visiting state-managed lands in southern Michigan and has enjoyed exploring the fens and wetland habitats at [Waterloo Recreation Area](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=506&type=SPRK) in Jackson and Washtenaw counties.

Adams said her favorite hunting activity is archery deer hunting.

“I also enjoy goose and duck hunting with my husband, brother and cousins,” she said. “I love the community atmosphere of those hunts and the excitement that hits you when you can tell that the birds are coming your way.”

Adams adds that she prefers hunting with others and sharing those moments of excitement or disappointment.

When asked what his favorite wildlife-related activity is, Stewart said picking just one is difficult because it varies from season to season.

“I really love spring turkey hunting because of the ability to interact with the bird from a distance, while trying to beat its amazing eyesight up close,” Stewart said. “I also enjoy archery hunting for whitetails in the fall as their activity combined with the time of year is tough to beat. And I have a blast taking my German shorthair pointer out pheasant hunting, too.”

While Stewart enjoys hunting, he never passes on the chance to go birding, hiking and geocaching with his family throughout the year. Places they enjoy exploring include local community parks, [Rose Lake State Wildlife Area](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/sga/Rose_Lake_SWA_map.pdf) north of East Lansing and also the Marquette area in the Upper Peninsula.

In addition to abundant hunting and fishing opportunities, Michigan offers chances at some unique wildlife watching you’ll be hard-pressed to find anywhere else.

Elk viewing opportunities during the fall months in the northern Lower Peninsula draw people from all around. Birdwatching opportunities are abundant year-round and statewide with multiple migratory routes converging in the state.

Sitar said that while there are many kinds of enjoyable outdoor and wildlife-related recreation, her favorite activity is bird watching.

And she’s not alone. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife survey, of the 86 million wildlife watchers in the United States, 45.1 million people participated in bird watching.

“I enjoy the challenge of bird identification from sound alone and identifying species at different times of year, when they are changing plumage and as they become more secretive during nesting activities,” Sitar said. “It requires a lot of patience and is very rewarding to finally identify a bird you’ve been watching or hearing.”

[Dollarville Flooding State Wildlife Management Area](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/sga/Dollarville_Flooding_SWMA_map.pdf) and the [Silver Creek Birding Trail](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIDNR/bulletins/2399878), both near Newberry in Luce County, are places with diverse habitats where Sitar enjoys birding.

She also likes searching out and finding local rarities, like boreal chickadees she photographed recently in Marquette County. Sitar said another great thing about bird watching is it is free, and you can do it anyplace.

“You can hike, bike, kayak, camp or stack wood and be bird watching,” she said. “And with the wide variety of bird species found in Michigan, and that migrate through the state, there is always something new to look for.”

From birdwatching to hunting and fishing to camping, off-road vehicle riding, geocaching, photography and more, DNR staffers enjoy the diverse range of outdoor recreation and wildlife opportunities Michigan offers.

Just like you do.

Learn more about the wide range of outdoor and wildlife-related recreation activities Michigan has to offer on the DNR’s [Things to Do](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79119---%2C00.html) page.

Find out more about [wildlife management](http://www.michigan.gov/wildlife) and how the DNR [manages your resources](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79136---%2C00.html) at [Michigan.gov/DNR](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

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