



Whaley awesome animals!

SPECIAL SPECIES: ELEPHANT SEAL

When you think of seals, you might picture a small, playful animal lounging on a sunny rock. But the elephant seal is in a league of its own. These massive marine mammals are the largest seals on Earth, and they are full of surprises.

Elephant seals get their name from two things: their enormous size and the big, floppy nose found on adult males, called a proboscis. That nose isn't just for show. Males use it to make incredibly loud roaring sounds to scare off rivals and impress females during mating season. The louder and bigger, the better! There are two species of elephant seals: the Northern elephant seal, found along the Pacific coast of North America, and the Southern elephant seal, which lives near Antarctica and is the largest of all. Southern males can weigh up to 5,000 pounds, about as much as a small car!

One of the most amazing things about elephant seals is how long they can hold their breath. They are deep divers, regularly plunging more than a mile beneath the ocean's surface to hunt for fish, squid, and rays. A single dive can last up to two hours. Their bodies are specially adapted to handle the crushing pressure of the deep ocean, slowing their heart rate to just a few beats per minute while they dive.

Every year, elephant seals come ashore in large groups called colonies to rest, give birth, and molt, shedding their old skin and fur all at once. During this time on land, they don't eat at all, living off the thick layer of blubber they built up at sea.

These incredible animals were once hunted nearly to extinction, but thanks to conservation laws, their populations have made a remarkable comeback. Today, seeing a beach crowded with elephant seals is one of the most unforgettable wildlife experiences in North America.

Length: 10-16 feet
Weight: 400-5,000 pounds
Food: Fish, squid, rays
Lifespan: 9-14 years
Status: Least Concern
Number left: 225,000





This Month IN SPACE!

April 2 - Full "Pink" Moon (It's not really pink, just named after the first spring flowers)
April 4 - Mercury at greatest elongation (best visible right after sunset. Bring binoculars!)
April 21-22 - Lyrid meteor shower peaks (10-20 shooting stars per hour)

Visible to the naked eye: Total lunar eclipse!!! and the Pleides star cluster

Nature

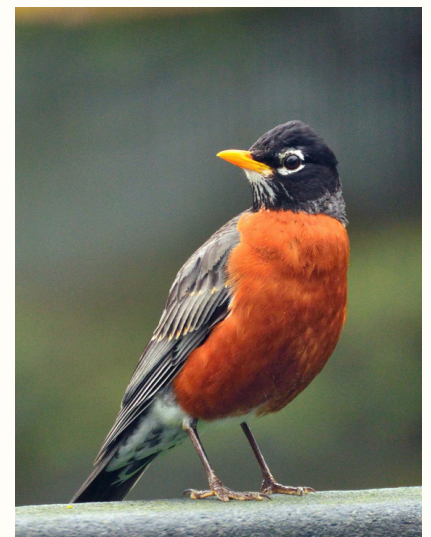
THE ROBIN: WISCONSIN'S SIGN OF SPRING

Every spring, something wonderful happens across Wisconsin. The American robin returns. For many families, spotting the first robin of the season feels like an official announcement that winter is finally over — and in a way, it is.

The American robin is Wisconsin's state bird, and it's one of the most recognized birds in North America. You've probably seen one before: a round-bodied bird with a cheerful orange-red breast, dark gray back, and a bright yellow beak. Robins love open lawns, forest edges, parks, and neighborhoods, basically anywhere people live. While some robins actually stay in Wisconsin through the winter, hiding in flocks deep in the woods and eating berries, the big migration happens in spring. As temperatures warm and the ground thaws, robins spread back across the state in huge numbers, and their cheerful, musical song becomes one of the first sounds of the season.

Robins are one of the first birds to begin nesting in spring. The female builds a cup-shaped nest from grass, twigs, and mud, often right on a porch ledge or in a backyard shrub. Inside, she lays three to five beautiful blue eggs, a color so iconic that we now call it "robin's egg blue." The eggs hatch in about two weeks, and the chicks grow fast, leaving the nest in just two weeks after that.

One of the robin's favorite foods is the earthworm. You've probably seen a robin tilting its head sideways on the lawn. It's actually listening and watching for the tiny movements of worms underground. It hops, pauses, tilts, and then... got one!



So this April, when you spot a robin, take a moment to appreciate one of Wisconsin's most beloved spring visitors.



BE A BIRD SCIENTIST

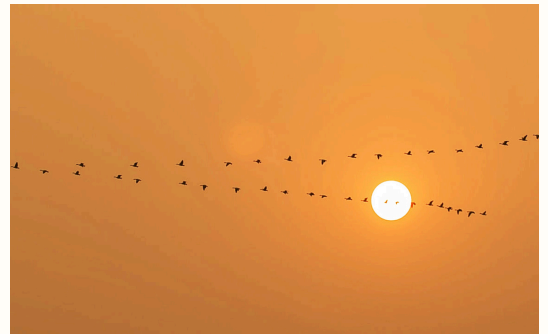


CLICK THE
BIRD TO VISIT
WEBSITE

Citizen Science

EBIRD

April is one of the most exciting months in the natural world, especially for birds. Hundreds of species are on the move across Wisconsin right now, flying north from their winter homes in the south. And you can actually help scientists track this incredible migration... just by going outside and looking up!

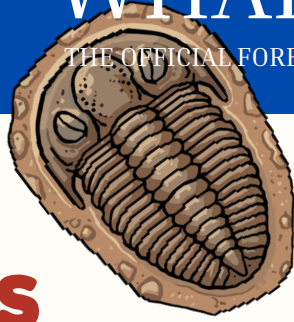


eBird is a free citizen science project run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It's simple: you go outside, count the birds you see, and report what you found using the free eBird app or website. That's it! Every observation you submit becomes part of a massive, real scientific database used by researchers, conservationists, and wildlife managers around the world.

Since eBird launched, more than 100 million bird observations have been submitted by everyday people: students, families, teachers, and backyard birdwatchers. Your data genuinely matters.

April is the perfect time to start because spring migration is at its peak right here in Wisconsin. You might spot warblers passing through on their way to Canada, sandhill cranes flying overhead, or, of course, robins staking out their favorite lawns. Keep your eyes and ears open, and write down what you see!

To get started, search for eBird at ebird.org or download the free app. The app even helps you identify birds you don't recognize. Whether you spend five minutes in your backyard or an afternoon at a local park, you're contributing to real science, and that's pretty cool.



Featured Fossil: **Trilobites**

Long before there were dinosaurs, before there were fish, before there were even plants on land, the oceans of Earth were filled with some of the most fascinating creatures that ever lived. Among the most successful of these ancient animals was the trilobite, and Wisconsin has officially claimed it as our very own state fossil.

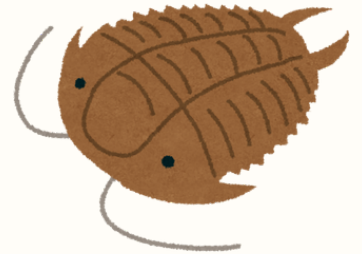
Trilobites were marine arthropods, meaning they were ancient relatives of today's crabs, lobsters, and insects. They first appeared about 520 million years ago and survived for an astonishing 270 million years before going extinct, making them one of the longest-surviving animal groups in Earth's history. By comparison, dinosaurs only lasted about 165 million years!



The name "trilobite" means "three-lobed," and it refers to their body shape. If you look at a trilobite fossil from above, you can see the body is divided into three sections running from head to tail: a left lobe, a right lobe, and a raised center lobe. They also had a tough outer shell called an exoskeleton, which they shed as they grew, much like modern crabs.

Trilobites came in an incredible variety of shapes and sizes. Some were tiny, barely the size of a fingernail. Others grew to nearly two feet long. Some had elaborate spines, horns, or enormous compound eyes that could see in almost every direction. Scientists have identified more than 20,000 different species!

In Wisconsin, trilobite fossils are found in ancient limestone and dolomite rock, particularly in the eastern part of the state. These rocks were once the bottom of a warm, shallow sea that covered much of the Midwest hundreds of millions of years ago. Fossil hunters have found trilobites in quarries, road cuts, and along lakeshores, sometimes beautifully preserved.



In 1985, Wisconsin officially named the trilobite its state fossil, a well-deserved honor for one of Earth's most ancient and remarkable animals.

THIS MONTH'S SCHEDULE:

- 4/11 - Elkhorn Agility Center (Public Event)
- 4/16 - School event
- 4/17 - School event
- 4/18 - Waller Elementary (Public Event)
- 4/25 - JC McKenna Middle School Burlington (Public Event)
- 4/28 - School event



BOOK AN EVENT

Want to inspire kids with a life-size whale? Contact Dave today with questions, size requirements, schedules, etc.



COMING SOON!

As of last month, our whale officially has a name, and it's Clara! Beginning next month, Whale Mail will feature a new section called "Clara's Corner," which will include fun new things like contests, prizes, and other exclusive things. As always, it's FREE, and its purpose is to make learning fun and exciting!

And now for a really bad joke...

Why don't oysters share?



Because they're a little shellfish.

Rib Mountain – Standing on Ancient Rock

If you've ever looked out over the city of Wausau from above, chances are you were standing on Rib Mountain. At 1,940 feet above sea level, Rib Mountain State Park is one of the highest points in Wisconsin.

But Rib Mountain isn't just a great place to hike, it's one of the oldest exposed rock formations in the entire world. The quartzite that makes up Rib Mountain is estimated to be around 1.5 billion years old. While mountains like the Rockies or the Alps are a few hundred million years old at most, Rib Mountain's rock formed when most of Earth's continents didn't even exist in their current form.

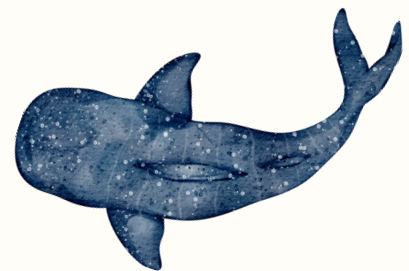
The mountain is part of a small range of quartzite ridges that rise sharply above the surrounding glacial plains. Quartzite is an incredibly hard rock, which is exactly why Rib Mountain is still here after billions of years. It refused to be worn down. During the Ice Age, glaciers flowed around and past the mountain rather than over it, leaving its ancient peak exposed.

Today, Rib Mountain State Park offers miles of hiking trails, a popular ski area in winter, and an observation tower at the top with sweeping views in every direction.

Whether you're hiking to the top for the view, exploring the trails below, or just thinking about the incredible amount of time written into those ancient quartzite rocks, Rib Mountain is a reminder that Wisconsin's story stretches back much, much further than any of us can fully imagine.

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Each month, we will have a featured whale and fossil, plus we will include fun activities, ideas, astronomy news, videos and even the occasional contest where we give away free prizes like fossils, or an official Forest Whales school/library program!!!