

**State Fish:**  
Brook Trout  
Named in 1988



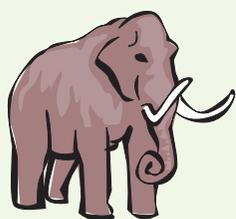
**State Flower:**  
Apple Blossom  
Named in 1897



**State Game Mammal:**  
White-tailed Deer  
Named in 1997 after a campaign by Zeeland fourth-graders



**State Stone:**  
Petoskey Stone  
Named in 1965

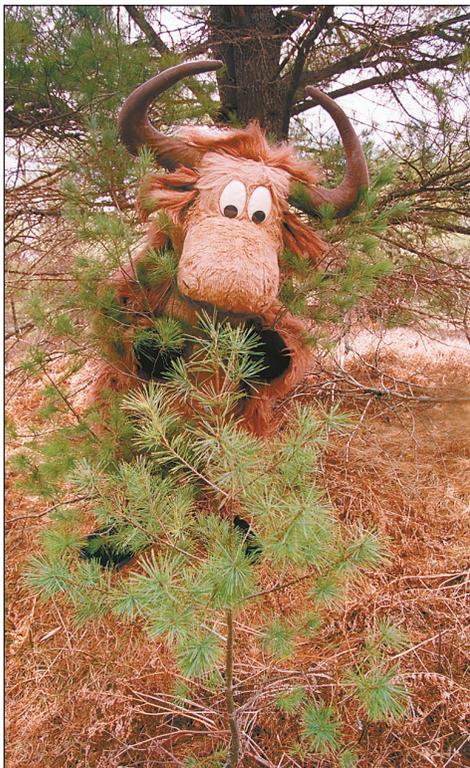


**State Fossil:**  
Mastodon  
Named in 2002 after a campaign by a group of Ann Arbor eighth-graders



**State Bird:**  
Robin  
(*Turdus migratorius*)  
Named in 1931

Our state symbols  
**CELEBRATE  
MICHIGAN**



These pines are among the last surviving old white pines in Michigan. They tower above the Mertz Trail at Hartwick Pines State Park.

# DEEP IN THE FOREST, THE WHITE PINES WHISPER

Like the robin, the painted turtle, the white-tailed deer and the apple blossom, the white pine tree is common throughout Michigan — and much of the eastern United States.

Many people have one in their backyard.

But to truly appreciate why *Pinus strobus* was chosen as Michigan's official tree — from among 113 native species — you have to visit one of the state's last remaining old-growth forests.

**Native Americans felt white pines whisper. The Yak did, too.**

So the Yak headed north to Hartwick Pines State Park, near Grayling, to see the largest stand of uncut white pines in the Lower Peninsula — and to revisit the famous Monarch, the park's largest pine, which he hadn't seen in more than a decade.

It was dead! It had stood 155 feet tall, the height of a 15-story building. Severely damaged in 1992 by winds that sheared off its top, the tree was pronounced dead four years later when park officials realized it had stopped growing — after more than 300 years! Now the park's tallest old pine — of those measured; there are about 100 — is a 158-footer that is nearby but unmarked. "We're not going to name another Monarch because we don't want people to come here to see just one tree," said park historian Rob Burg.

"That's what they did for years — and this whole place is special."

The old forest feels primeval, as if it has existed for all time. In fact, the giant pines and other old trees probably are the offspring of earlier trees that were even older and taller — and eventually died and toppled.

"This central Michigan area — Crawford and Otsego counties — was the last place to be logged in the Lower Peninsula," said park interpreter Craig Casmer.

Between 1834 and 1897, about 160 million trees were cut in Michigan, possibly more, he said.

Michigan provided most of the lumber that was needed to rebuild Chicago after Mrs. O'Leary's cow is said to have kicked over a lantern, starting a fire that destroyed much of the city.



PHOTOS BY MARY SCHROEDER



The most prized boards were white pine, which had few knots, or scars from lower branches.

That's because the trees didn't have many lower branches. They were mostly trunk, growing so close together that only branches near the top of the canopy received sunlight.

That's what the park's old pines still look like. The park's new, unmarked Monarch is probably 100 feet of trunk and 50-plus feet of branches and needles, said Casmer.

The needles were so high up the Yak could barely see them. But he could hear them.

"Whispering pines — that's what the Native Americans called them," he said.

Looking up, the Yak could see the majestic crown gently swaying in the wind.

Close up, the white pine's needles are soft and delicate.

"You feel like you want to pet them, like a big shaggy dog — and I have," said Patrick Fields, a biologist and president of the

Michigan Botanical Club. "These trees are like living time machines. They were alive hundreds of years ago and they're still with us.

"It's like talking to your great-great-grandmother — to think of the history that these trees have endured is exciting and intriguing and should bring on a reverence.

"Go in, sit down, listen to the wind blowing through the needles way up high and just look at nature — all the different plants and animals living together."

By Patricia Charget

**White pines are easy to spot because they're the only Michigan tree whose needles grow in bundles of five. If you have any doubt about what you're looking at, all you have to do is count.**



Until recently, the largest known white pine in both Michigan and the United States was at Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park in the western Upper Peninsula. When it was last measured in 1998, it had a 200-inch girth and was 150 feet tall, though one of its main twin trunks had broken off. Last spring, a park interpreter noticed the other trunk was gone, too — and with it, the rest of the tree's once magnificent crown. Technically, the tree is still alive, but just barely.

Source: Woody Ehrle, coordinator of the state's big tree data list.