



PHOTO BY PER KJELDEN

## COME ALONG ON THE YAK'S ADVENTURE

The Yak loves this state and loves the way we celebrate Michigan every year with Michigan Week.

In the spring of 2002, the Yak set off on one of his best adventures yet. He traveled across Michigan to rediscover each of the state's 12 symbols for a special Yak issue in celebration of Michigan Week.

His trip took him to many parts of our beautiful state — to hear robins singing at sunrise, to search for Petoskey stones on a Lake Michigan beach, to watch a biologist dig baby painted turtles from their winter nest, and much, much more.

The Yak fell in love with Michigan all over again, and we hope you will, too, when you read this special edition of "Celebrate Michigan."

### NOTE TO TEACHERS:

If you want to learn more about the Yak's Corner classroom delivery, go to our Web site at [www.dnie.com](http://www.dnie.com).

### ON THE COVER

One of Michigan's new painted turtle hatchlings.

PHOTO BY KATHY KIELISZEWSKI

The Yak strolls through the largest state park in the Lower Peninsula, Hartwick Pines, to learn about two state symbols: the white pine and Kalkaska sand.

PHOTO BY MARY SCHROEDER



# On the wing to hear robins sing

Do you remember where you saw your first robin this year?

The Yak saw his — a red-breasted male — on March 12 in Lansing, on the lawn of the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame.

The thin, early returner was looking for food — and he was alone. It was way too cold for courting, and most robins were still winging their way north from their southern winter homes.

So the Yak waited. And waited. Finally, on April 8, Ray Adams, who spends more time counting Michigan robins than almost anyone, called to say that warm weather was on its way and to get to Kalamazoo — fast!

Kalamazoo County — along with Berrien County, next door — has the highest robin density in the state, said Adams, coordinator of the state's annual breeding bird survey. Male robins already were claiming territory, chasing off challengers and singing sweetly to attract females.

By April 11, three days later, a distinct robin section could be heard within the growing choir of avian voices at the Kalamazoo Nature Center.

"We're hearing at least three robins, a couple of cardinals, a song sparrow, an American crow, a blue jay and a common grackle," said Adams, identifying the songbirds faster than the Yak could count songs.

It was 7 a.m., about a half-hour after sunrise, when the concert began.

"I think robins are fascinating," said Adams, leading the Yak down a nature trail.

"Their song is so representative of the early

morning, and they have adapted so well to man's environment."

Pale golden light poured through the eastern trees, illuminating everything it touched, including a robin trilling atop a tall oak. Its breast blazed brightly, a little sun unto itself.

"It's claiming territory and looking to attract a mate," said Adams. "Of course, just the fact that we don't see a mate doesn't mean it doesn't already have one."

Another male flew in and perched atop a nearby tree, chasing the first male off.

"I would have thought he would have held his ground. But the bird in flight displaced the one that was the territorial bird.

"It may be that because the second bird was coming in from up above that gave him a dominant advantage. The first bird got chased off his singing perch, but he's still in his territory. His territory is all of the places he uses for his singing bouts."

Sure enough, bird No. 1 soon started singing from the top of a really tall black cherry tree.

"I'm king of the world," he seemed to chirp.

Bird No. 2 took off. A third male flew in and landed on the same tree, causing male No. 1 to go silent.

"He's watching the other robin to see what to do," Adams said of the territorial bird.

Then bird No. 3 went quiet, too. An American kestrel, a small falcon, flew overhead.

"Kestrels don't usually kill robins, but other robins were giving alarm notes, and they responded to that," explained Adams, still eyeing bird No. 3.

"I could see his gaze shift,

and then he saw that kestrel."

Just up ahead, the damp grass glistened with baby daffodils and purple and white crocus.

A male and a female robin hopped about, looking for breakfast — fresh earthworms.

"I would guess they're a pair," mused Adams, marveling anew at one of the state's most common love stories.

Similar stories will soon unfold in every Michigan

county, from suburban backyards and golf courses to farms and old-growth forests.

Last year, Michigan had an estimated 4.6 million breeding pairs of robins. That's more than nine million birds, not counting the babies — three to four to a nest, with two broods commonly born between April and July.

Welcome home, *Turdus migratorius*. Happy courting!

By Patricia Charget



PHOTO BY JENNIFER GIESEY

This male robin is protecting his territory at the Kalamazoo Nature Center. Only female robins are welcome. Other males get chased away.

Yak's Corner is brought to you by Cathy Collison, Janis Campbell, Patricia Charget, Marty Westman, Mary Schroeder, Martha Thierry, Susan Tusa, Marcy Abramson, Will St. John and Richard Walker.