

Ice anglers need to be careful



**OUTDOOR
COLUMNS**
**BILL
PARKER**

The ice fishing season may soon be in full swing in southeastern Michigan. Peering out the window late Friday afternoon was a dismal affair. A river of mud and slush was flowing down the driveway the result of a day full of unseasonably warm temperatures and steady drizzle. Unfortunately for those of us who enjoy ice fishing, those two elements are devastating to lake ice.

Sure, the return of cold weather could smooth things over again, but don't count on it. Heck, it's the middle of February and we've already had more winter weather than most can remember having in years.

If winter returns and the lakes begin to look tempting, be sure to proceed with extreme caution. Ice doesn't freeze at the same rate or thickness across every body of water. Ice in some areas is considerably thinner than in others, and with the toll the recent spring-like weather has taken, you might be better off getting your warm-weather gear ready for action.

If you must venture out call a local bait and tackle store before heading out and get an

update. The weather forecast calls for cold weather over the weekend, then more warm weather well into the 40s, by the middle of the week. Remember, there isn't a fish out there worth risking your life over.

Good bare day

If you haven't had your fill of winter just yet consider a trip north. I spent last weekend in the Upper Peninsula where there is still two feet of ice on most lakes and two feet of snow on the ground.

The Michigan Outdoor Writers Association convened in St. Ignace for our biannual meeting and no one was at a loss for things to do. Aside from a plethora of seemingly endless snowmobile and cross country ski trails, the area also offers some exceptional winter hunting and fishing opportunities.

Whitefish and menominee were hitting with a vengeance on Lake Huron's Moquillo Bay and here hunting was nothing short of fabulous. The area just north of town in the Hiawatha National Forest is loaded with bunnies and plenty of fresh sign to start your beagles on. Snow is still quite deep, so a good pair of snowshoes is in order. Here's a word to the wise: Get a good snowmobile trail map, locate the nearest trail, then go the other way.

There are hundreds of thousands of acres of public hunting land in the U.P. and nothing puts a damper on a good hare hunt quicker than a pack

of snowmobiles flying down a nearby two-track at 60 mph. Not only is the noise annoying, but the dogs are also in danger of getting hit if they happen to wander up onto a trail.

Many hunters get all worked up over the intrusion of snowmobiles into their hunting area, but the bottom line is we have to coexist. Snowmobile trails are well marked and documented on trail maps. Pick up a map, look it over, and pick an area to hunt that is well away from all the commotion.

Zebra mussels spread

Four Oakland County lakes — Brendle, Crystal, Orion and Pontiac — are among a list of 30 that were found to be infested with zebra mussels, according to Michigan Sea Grant. Sea Grant is a cooperative program between Michigan State University and the University of Michigan in Great Lakes marine research, education and outreach.

These 30 lakes represent a 21 percent increase over the number of lakes confirmed as infested in 1999, and brings the total number of inland lakes found to be infested with zebra mussels to 149.

(Bill Parker writes a weekly outdoor column for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. Hunters and anglers are urged to report their success. Questions and comments are also encouraged. Send information to: Bill Parker, c/o Outdoors, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.)

Boating safety class advised



**GUEST
COLUMNIST**
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PARVANA**

Summer time is marching toward us at a steady pace. Those of us who own boats may have been tinkering on some small projects that they find themselves too busy to do once the boating season gets into full swing.

Weekends and evenings are instead spent cruising in our boats and relaxing after a hectic week.

This is also the time of year when boat shows abound, enticing us with gleaming new hulls and shiny chrome hardware. It seems that every boater you talk to is looking to move up a foot or two in boat length. Maybe the kids are growing up, or they now boat on a larger body of water and want the safety a bigger boat offers. Whatever the reason, folks around these parts love to go boating.

Michigan is home to more registered boats than any other state. The shores of the Great Lakes that surround us stretch into the thousands of miles, and let's not forget the hundreds of various sized inland lakes. Along with the boat shows, and flowers of spring, comes the return of the seasoned skipper and the novice alike.

This, too, is a time to brush up skills that have been in hibernation in the recesses of our brains. For the new boater it can also bring on a feeling of anxiety the first time they try to back that new rig down a busy launch ramp with hordes of spectators watching.

Anyone who has traversed a busy river or entered a bustling marina can appreciate the confidence they get when they know how to handle any circumstance that may present itself.

I remember getting lost in a dense fog some years ago when my wife and I were new to boating. I did not have a clue how to determine my position, nor did I have any charts on board. Before we knew it, visibility went from bad to worse in a matter of minutes. Luckily for us, it was a matter of slowing down to less than no-wake speed and being on a narrow enough channel that we found a safe place to anchor and wait until the sun burned off the fog. One can only imagine what it would have been like had we been out on one of the Great Lakes in this same predicament. A very scary thought indeed.

Every year we hear of some tragedy that could, in most cases, have been prevented. Our best defense in a sport that can be very rewarding and very dangerous is knowledge. Sometimes people will buy a boat because they went on a friend or relative's boat and

saw how enjoyable and family-oriented boating can be. What they fail to realize is the great responsibility you incur when you take the helm.

We have all seen them out there, operating their vessels with little concern for those around them. One common occurrence is a boater passing a marina at cruising speed, causing possible damage to the boats docked there from the wake created.

Maybe it's a PWC (personal water craft) in or near a designated swimming area with swimmers close by or getting too close in to a passing boat's stern just to jump its wake. Not only does this pose a safety risk to the rider but to the people nearby. And I might add that it's illegal.

So much of the enjoyment we derive from boating can be multiplied tenfold if we take the time to learn even the most rudimentary of skills.

As you can see just from the few points made here, boating can be both a responsibility and a source of great pleasure. Everyone who enjoys this sport must understand what it takes to make the experience unforgettable. Take the time this spring to enroll in a safe boating course offered by a United States Power Squadron near you.

Li. James Parvana is the public relations officer of the Dearborn Squadron of the United States Power Squadron.

Bird counters to record data



**NATURE
NOTES**
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Mark your calendar for the Great Backyard Bird Count — Feb. 16-19. During this time period the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in Ithaca, N.Y., is asking people to submit data about birds seen at their feeders, parks, schoolyards or any other areas.

This year marks the fourth year that this web based project has been providing information about the location of birds during the winter. It was started by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in an effort to gather information on the movements of birds during winter. Scientists can take the Christmas Count data gathered from late December to early January and compare it with this mid-February count.

All data will be submitted by the Internet to Cornell's web site www.birdsource.org. Immediate feedback is provided to all those entering the site, because information is updated every hour so you can see where certain species of birds are concentrated. Last year 64,000 people provided observations to this project. Will they reach the 100,000 mark this year? If you participate that could happen.

Individuals, schools and groups of various kinds are encouraged to participate. Information can be submitted for one of the four days, all four days, or any combination.

All they ask is that you identify the species of bird, count the highest number of individuals of that species seen at any time that day and record the amount of time you spend counting the birds. Then log onto the web site and submit your data.

This could be a project for school groups with feeders in their courtyard. They could see their data contributing to a scientific study and realize how valuable amateurs can be when collecting data. Students will see animated maps and colorful graphs that incorporate their data.

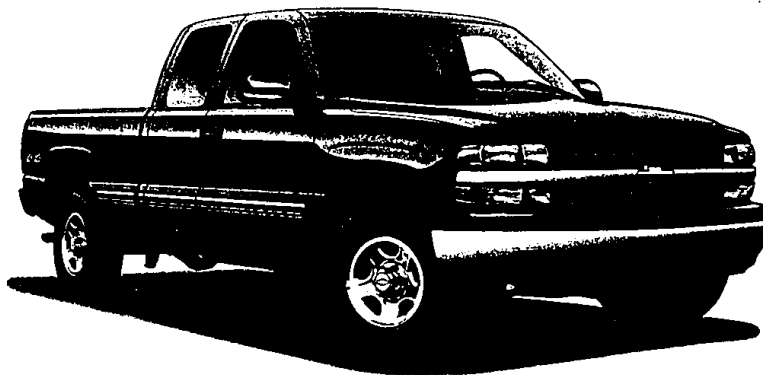
This would be a great integrated learning experience. As an encouragement to get involved, the lab is willing to provide a prize for groups that make a contest of who can contribute the most observations.

If you don't have a computer, you can go to your local library and use their computer to get on the Internet.

Observations made by people like Observer & Eccentric readers help scientists gather the information they need to help.

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