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Snowy view from the trail at Wolf Tree preserve. M. Luna

February 2023

SEEDLINGS

Wild Ones|Kalamazoo Area Chapter

What more substantial service to conservation than to practice it on one's own land?--Aldo Leopold



Beneath a budding Dogwood (Cornus florida) M. Luna

Dear *|FNAME|*,

After a warm, mostly snow-less January, I had the best time in search of Snow Fleas to accompany Ilse's article about them below. Give yourself an excuse to visit our beautiful preserves cloaked in white; it's the perfect way to beat the winter blues.

This month - we welcome Mike Weis to share some of his hard-won tips for successful garden design in a Zoom presentation. Ilse issues a challenge to Michiganders - regain the number one spot for the most Monarch Waystations by registering your garden. (We can do it!) Kim is back with a second installment of Plants to Consider as we look forward to our annual plant sale on May 20th. Mike and Carol Klug are in need of volunteers - see details in their article below.

Be sure to check out the Community Events to make the most of this shortest of months.

May your snowy path be sprinkled with

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Springtails,

Mel Luna
Editor



Announcement:

In-Person Meetings Resume in March at the Portage Library



We are excited to announce that the Portage District Library will be hosting our monthly programs in 2023, beginning next month. Their new facilities are state of the art, and will allow us to record in-person programs for our YouTube channel so you can share them or view at a later date.

[Click Here to visit our YouTube channel](#)

*You can also click on the small red YouTube icon above,
underneath the Table of Contents.*

Designing Native Plant Gardens:

Minimizing the Error in Trial and Error

February 22, 7pm-8pm on Zoom

Mike Weis, Owner of Dropseed! Native Gardens and Ecological Restoration



Whether you are wondering how to get started with native plant gardening or have years of experience, this program is sure to have something for everyone. Mark your calendars and bring your questions for this fun and informative slideshow presentation on Zoom. [Read more.](#)

Mike's first native garden design from 2005. M. Weis

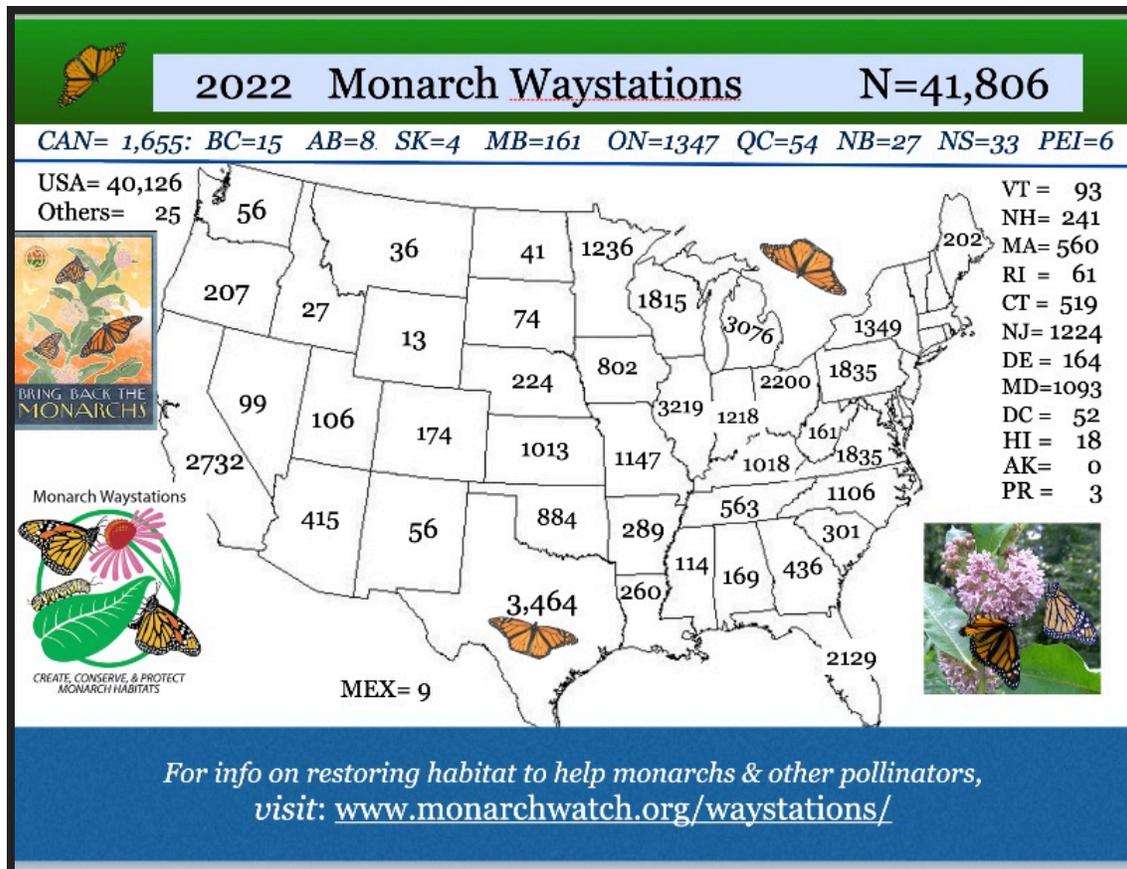
Register Your Native Planting As a Monarch Waystation

Ilse Gebhard



Before you get too busy making plans for what you might plant this coming spring, consider registering your native planting that you already have as a Monarch Watch Waystation. All you need are some milkweeds for the monarch caterpillars to eat and some nectar plants for the adult butterflies. Any milkweeds native to our area are acceptable.

No, the monarchs don't look at the registry and say "aha, here is a waystation I can visit", but if you put up a sign, the neighbors or passers-by might get curious and maybe even become inspired to plant their own. Planting milkweed and nectar plants is more important than ever. The prediction for the 2022-23 overwintering population in Mexico is that it will be very low.



As of December 2022, there were 41,806 Waystations registered. Michigan is in 3rd place with 3,076 (7.4% of all) behind TX with 3,464 and IL with 3,219. To my chagrin we were knocked out of 1st place, which we held for a number of years.

Click [here](#) to register a Waystation or [here](#) to explore the Waystation registry.

Plants to Consider:

American Alumroot and Spotted Bee Balm

Kim Patrie, 2023 Plant Sale Committee

Hello native plant friends! This month I bring you American Alumroot (*Heuchera americana*) and Spotted Bee Balm (*Monarda punctata*). These are a couple of lovely plants you'll be pleased to add to your native plantings. Here we go!



American Alumroot (*Heuchera americana*)

Also known as Coral Bells, alumroot is a plant I formerly avoided, mostly due to the word “alum” in the name, which for me brought up images of old Warner Brothers cartoons. Luckily someone shared the plant with me. I now associate the name with a beautifully variegated mounding plant with ethereal flower stalks and panicles of tiny cream or green blossoms in early summer which attract a wide variety of bees. And birds love the seeds!

American Alumroot (Heuchera americana) Missouri Botanical Garden (Both Images)



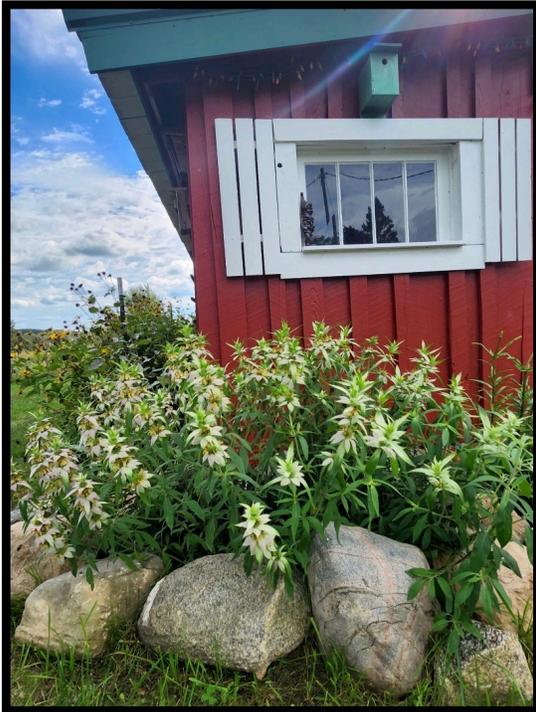
Alumroot gets its name from the mineral alum found in its roots. It is also high in tannins, which make it distasteful to mammals. For humans, however, it is a wonderfully manageable plant good for borders and rock gardens, as well as forest plantings and moist to dry partial shade settings. Its round, gently lobed leaves have attractive fall colors, and in milder winters may remain green all year long.



Spotted Bee Balm (*Monarda punctata*)

I first encountered this plant at a workshop on how to grow natives from seed. I liked the interesting picture that went with the very tiny seeds! I came home with an entire seeded flat. About 8 weeks later it was a sprouting phenomenon, and I had a load of Spotted Bee Balm, (also known as Horsemint, but not a mint!) all over my yard.

Spotted Horsemint (Monarda punctata) K. Patrie



This relative of the better known Bee Balm (*Monarda fistulosa*) lives up to its common name by attracting an astounding number of bees and many butterflies. Spotted Bee Balm is also one of the host plants for the gorgeous [Raspberry Pyrausta](#) moth. More drought tolerant than other monardas, it loves the sun (though it will also thrive in partial shade) and is naturally found in prairies and oak savannas. The 2' flower spikes of Spotted Bee Balm are nothing short of exotic, with complex blossoms in tones of pinkish-purple, green, beige and maroon. It will make an impressive planting alone, or an eccentric diversion when planted with short sedges or on the edge of a forest.

Spotted Bee Balm (Monarda punctata) E.S. Hoffman

Our 2023 plant sale plans are rolling along nicely; the committee recently placed our order with our supplier, [Wildtype](#). We plan to have both Alumroot and Spotted Bee Balm for you on May 20th, so mark your calendar and we'll see you there.

Snow Fleas aka Springtails

Ilse Gebhard

You are walking along on a snow-covered trail and suddenly see tiny black flecks on the otherwise pristine white snow. These flecks can appear scattered or even in entirely black patches. If you get down on your knees and look closely, you will find that these flecks move. And if you are prepared and have a hand lens in your pack or pocket, you will see that the flecks appear to jump, a dead giveaway that they are Snow Fleas.

Despite their name, Snow Fleas aren't actually fleas. They're called "fleas" because they travel by jumping around, much like the fleas found on pets.

Snow Fleas are and indicator of healthy soil. M. Luna



And they are called "Snow" Fleas because that is when people like you and I become aware of them. Unless on snow, their color and size make them blend in with the soil and decaying leaves. Only people who study top soils, and how they are formed, are likely to see them.

Snow Fleas are important decomposers of organic matter in the soil or leaf litter. This adds nutrients back into the environment, building up the topsoil. They also eat fungi that cause diseases in plants, reducing the need for pesticides on crops. Plus, they're a food source for insects, including beetles and small spiders. And, unlike fleas, they do not bite.

A sprinkling of Snow Fleas. M. Luna



Both fleas and Snow Fleas have six legs, no wings and they "jump." The way they jump is different, though. Fleas jump using their feet and shins, whereas Snow Fleas use a forked, tail-like appendage (called a furcula) under the abdomen to propel themselves. Hence another common name is springtail.

Like the many insects that survive our winters at one life stage or another, Snow Fleas do so because they have antifreeze-like molecules in their body that prevent the formation of ice crystals that would otherwise kill them.

Bring Back the Monarchs

Mike and Carol Klug, Monarch Committee Co-Chairs

A question we often get is ‘why we are concentrating on the Monarch butterfly when we know that all insects are in decline’. One reason is that the Monarch is one of the most recognized butterflies. It is also the most publicized, partly because of its amazing migration to and from its wintering location. Another reason is that, aside from the necessity of milkweed species on which the female Monarchs lay their eggs, their requirement for nectar plants is the same as many other insects. Monarch Joint Venture (<http://monarchjointventure.org>) considers the Monarch to be the ambassador of all insect conservation. Others consider them to be an indicator species, analogous to the “canary in the mine.” If the indicator species is in trouble, all insects are in trouble.



Monarch on Swamp Milkweed (Aesclepias incarnata) J. Allen

Planting milkweed in association with other native plants provides habitat for monarchs and a high percentage of other insects. “Plant them and they will come” is a saying used to describe the near immediate response of insect visitation to a planting of native plants. Even small plots, including container plantings, are located by a wide diversity of insects.

Many (hopefully all) of you are already planting native plants. We encourage you to consider adding a patch of milkweed species to your plantings if you are not already doing so. Evidence has shown that *Monarchs are more attracted to milkweed if they are planted on the edge of a patch* of native plants rather than being incorporated in to the middle of the planting. If you are already doing this, we encourage you to register your planting as a Monarch Waystation. Ilse Gerhard’s article above provides more detail on Waystations. Let’s make Michigan the state with the largest number of Monarch Waystations!

Our chapter has a Monarch Committee which is in need of more volunteers to help spread the word about the importance of conserving Monarchs. We are continuing the efforts of Ilse Gebhard, our regional Monarch Conservation Specialist, who has worked for years to establish Monarch Waystations, distribute literature, seed packets, table at local events, and train site monitors. Each year our group distributes thousands of pieces of literature, milkweed seed packets and plants at various events in the area. We also have permanent literature displays and milkweed seed packets at a number of libraries and nature centers. We could do more with more volunteers.



Ways you can help:

- Transplant seedlings in the spring
- Assemble seed packets
- Refill displays at libraries etc.
- Staff at tabling events
- Monitor sites for Monarch activity
- Serve on a steering committee
- Collect Milkweed seed in the fall

*Monarch Caterpillar on Common Milkweed
(Aesclepias syriaca) M. Luna*

Let us know if you can help in one or more of the areas listed by emailing us at klug@mei.net. If you can't make a long-term commitment, consider being on a call-list for an occasional need for extra help. Please spread the word. Thank you!

Community Events of Interest

February 1 - April 10: Kalamazoo Conservation District Reforestation Seedling Sale is now accepting pre-orders. Many native tree species are available. [Learn more.](#)

February 9 - 8:00pm: "Ferns and How Ferns Help Make Us Better Naturalists" an online presentation with Joe Walewski from the SE MN Prairie Partners Wild Ones Chapter. [Details](#)

February 11 - 4:30pm-6:30pm: "Couples Snowshoe Hike: Lichen Edition" at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Register here.](#)

February 16 - 5:00pm-6:00pm: "Social Hike at Chipman Preserve" hosted by Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC). [More details](#)

February 20 - 6:30pm-8:00pm: "Manoomin: The Story of Wild Rice in Michigan" a Zoom presentation with Barb Barton. Hosted by River City Wild Ones (Grand Rapids). [Read more.](#)

February 22 - 7:00pm-8:00pm: "Designing Native Plant Gardens: Minimizing the Error in Trial and Error" a Zoom presentation with Mike Weis. Hosted by KAWO. [More info](#)

February 24 - 10:00am-3:00pm: 3rd Annual Virtual Herpetology Conference: Conservation Concerns and Extinction Avoidance. Hosted online by Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Register here.](#)

February 25 - 1:00pm-4:00pm: Saturday Workday at Hidden Marsh Sanctuary with SWMLC. Check their [website](#) for details.

March 5th: "36th Annual Michigan Native Plant Conference" hosted by Wildflower Association of Michigan (WAM). [More info](#)

April 5 - 7:00pm: Tickets on sale now for "Our Planet Live in Concert" at Miller Auditorium. [More info](#)

Editor's note: If you know of any local events pertaining to native plants that you feel may interest our readers, please send them along to us at the address below. Thanks!

What's Happening at the National Office

Check out our [National Office web site](#)

To read the most recent reports from the board of directors,

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Thank you for your interest and support of Wild Ones!

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SEEDLINGS is edited by Mel Luna. It appears mostly monthly.

The next regular issue will arrive in March. **Deadline for March issue is February 20.**

[Send Submission](#)

Contributing Editors:

Ilse Gebhard

To share comments and suggestions, simply reply to this email.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Find more information and news at www.KalamazooWildOnes.org

and www.Facebook.com/KalamazooAreaWildOnes



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