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Foxglove Beardtongue (*Digitalis penstemon*) K.Patrie

July 2021

SEEDLINGS

Wild Ones|Kalamazoo Area Chapter

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



Wild Petunia (*Ruellia humilis*) K.Patrie

Dear *|FNAME|*,

Rain! We've had a lot of it these past few weeks. I hope your gardens are thriving, and that you're not getting waterlogged with tending the tremendous growth that has ensued. (Or bitten up from all the bugs!)

Milkweed has been listed as a noxious weed in the state of Michigan for a long time. If you're so inclined, please take a few minutes to contact Julie Alexander about removing it from the list. The monarchs can use all the help they can get! More info below.

We have some wonderful articles this month, as usual. Tom Small has blessed us with not one, but TWO articles, as well as Ilse's. ALL well worth your time.

Don't miss the information below about the Annual Photo contest. Get out there, shutterbugs, and show us what you've got!

See the Community Events section for information on our upcoming Fall Plant Exchange on August 29.

And lastly, going forward ALL memberships and renewals must be processed through the National

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Office. [Look here](#) for more info on that.

BE well, and BE outside,

Kim Patrie

Editor

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias Syriaca*) M.Luna



Some Reminders From the Plant World

Tom Small

Don't think of it as just an unwelcome "hitchhiker." Or think that you're just another poor "beggar." Consider it a reminder—that you're a partner in the dance.

Hylodesmum nudiflorum, perhaps better known to you by its former alias, *Desmodium nudiflorum*—a.k.a. naked-flowered tick trefoil.

Seeds of Hylodesmum nudiflorum K.Patrie



By whatever name, it's a pesky practitioner of *exozoochory*. That's where you come in. You're the animal in the outside-the-animal circular "chory" or dance (from Greek, *chorus*).

On that tall leafless stem (up to 3 feet), its delicate clustered blossoms—ranging from pink to violet, occasionally white—transform into those short chains of hairy, triangular pods that stick to you like ticks or "beggar's lice." You become the dancer in the seed-dispersal phase of the life cycle.

Our naked-flowered friend has an Asian cousin, *Desmodium gyrans*, famous for its dancing abilities. It visibly, and quickly, moves its leaves when exposed to touch, sunlight, warmth or even small vibrations – most notably, to music and rhythmic sound. Charles Darwin, fascinated by *gyrans*, featured it in his late publication, *The Power of Movement in Plants*.



Nudiflorum itself serves as reminder of transitions, the passing of life's seasons. The bloom comes in late June or July, the peak of summer. The *loment*, or seed pod, forms in August and September, as summer wanes into fall and seedtime. Then *you* become part of the movement and transition to next year's return.

Habit K.Patrie



You're also part of a very large, wonderful community, ranging from the soil bacteria in symbiotic partnership with this nitrogen-fixing plant, to the Eastern blue-tailed butterflies or silver-spotted skippers for whom *nudiflorum* is a host, to the bees and wild turkeys for whom it is food, to the whole community of its ecosystem, the Dry-Mesic Southern Forest. These oak or oak-hickory forests of southern lower Michigan include white ash, ironwood, choke cherry, flowering and pagoda dogwoods, witch hazel, serviceberry, woodland brome, rosy sedge, bellwort, bedstraw (another sticky one), and downy yellow violets.

You might also keep in mind the vanished species that was a keystone in the tick trefoil's ecosystem—the passenger pigeon.

Remember also another long-time partner in the community, the Native Americans for whom naked-flowered tick trefoil has been part of their culture. Various tribes made a tea from the leaves for curing colds and lung troubles. The Cherokee have used the root as an analgesic, for cramps or for sore gums.

K.Patrie



So this is just a reminder. Don't be pained by your beggar's ticks. You're part of the link or connection (that's the meaning of the Greek word *desmos*, as in *Hylodesmum* or *Desmodium*).

Enjoy your participation in the dance. Swing your partners. They are many.

[Help Remove Milkweeds from the Invasive Species List](#)

Several representatives introduced **Michigan House Bill No. 4896** on May 25, 2021, which would remove milkweed (any species of the genus *Asclepias*) from the Michigan Noxious Weed List. The bill was referred to the Committee on Agriculture and would keep milkweed from being designated as a noxious weed by local ordinances.

One of the reasons for the Monarch population decline is the loss of milkweed. Not only do we need to stem that loss but we need to plant more.

[Please write Julie Alexander](#), Chair of the Committee on Agriculture, in support of this bill.

[Follow the progress of the bill in the House](#)

[Read the bill](#)

Not All Twigs are Twigs

Ilse Gebhard

On May 23rd I got a text from Kim Patrie, our Seedlings Editor, with a photo of a critter she had found on one of her Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*) plants. While I did not know the species, I quickly recognized it as the caterpillar of a large group of moths in the family Geometridae, also known as Loopers, Inchworms or Spanworms.



Geometrid caterpillars are easily distinguished from other moth and butterfly families because instead of the typical 5 sets of hind legs, called prolegs, there are only 2. They all “loop” when they move, extending the front of their body as far as possible and then looping the rear of the body to meet the front.

Larva pretending to be a twig K.Patrie

Geometers are masters at disguise, mimicking plant tissues and organs like bark, flowers, buds, twigs, or leaves. This particular one was tan, skinny, and looked like a twig.



I, of course, volunteered to raise it and Kim agreed to it. Not having *P. digitalis* growing here where we recently moved to at Friendship Village, Kim carefully placed some leaves between moist paper towel in a baggie that I could keep in the frig and use as needed. In addition, Noelle Zaleski, owner of the new native plant nursery, [Bee Friendly Nursery](#), gave me a pot with small *P. digitalis* plants in case I ran out of leaves from Kim.

Larva chomping away on Penstemon digitalis I.Gebhard

After 6 days of munching, “the twig” stopped feeding and 2 days later curled up into a coil under one of the leaves. I took this as a sign that it was either going to shed its skin for the next larval stage or it was getting ready to pupate. Four days later it had done neither, nor was it decomposing.

Not dead, but not alive, likely meant that the caterpillar was parasitized. Sure enough, 17 days later a bunch of tiny (less than 1/16th of an inch) wasps emerged from the caterpillar. I tried to count them and came up with about 150. With that many wasps emerging from just one larva means that this wasp species has to be obligately polyembryonic.



Polyembryonic means that one egg can lead to over a thousand offspring, depending on species. In humans we get identical twins.

Unless I come across another caterpillar like it, we won't know the moth species. And I did not even consider trying to figure out the species of wasp. Way too small!

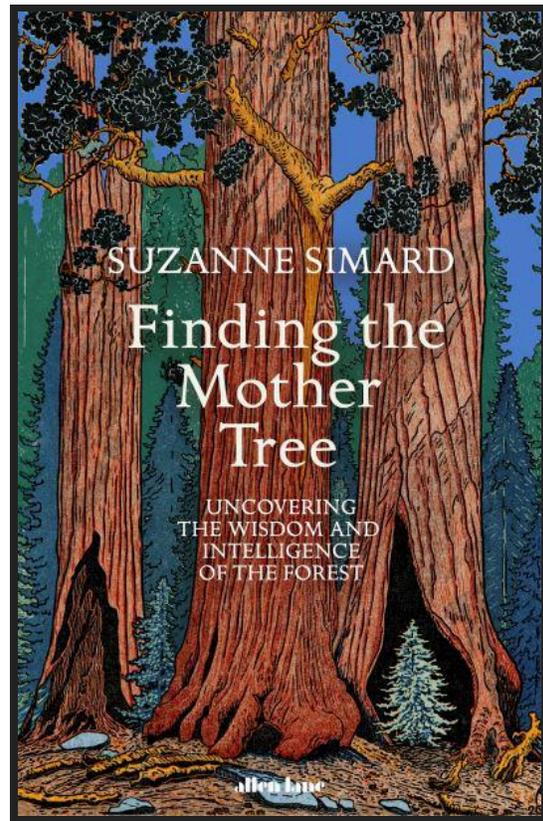
Tiny wasps that emerged I.Gebhard

Finding Your Family - In the Forest

Tom Small

Dr. Suzanne Simard, in her first book, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, has a story to tell. She tells it very well, with a keen sense of the dramatic. And she plays many roles. Foremost, she's the mystery-story detective. She follows the clues, "step by step—puzzle by puzzle," seeking the truth—slowly, painfully, "becoming a sleuth of what it takes to heal the natural world" (p. 3).

A pioneer in discovering the ways trees and other plants communicate with and aid one another, Simard also plays the role of Mother, with two intrepid daughters. Her ancestry and family include old-style lumbermen, tough farm women, and bull-riding cowboys. For all of them, the great cedar and fir forests of the Canadian Northwest "would always be our life's blood" (38).



But the family is not complete until, at one of her story's great climaxes, Simard, working for a large lumber corporation, makes an exhilarating series of discoveries. First, that different species—birch and fir—not only do not compete but adjust sensitively and intelligently to one another's changing *needs*, trading photosynthetic carbon in a "sophisticated exchange pattern," a kind of "reciprocal alchemy" (175-176). Far from being the "demon weed" of the forest industry, birch plays an essential role in the system by which forest regenerates itself (161).

Then, soon after, comes her climactic discovery. The elder trees are *Mothers* of the forest. To the young and the seedlings, the great Mothers pass both nourishment and information, their wisdom, both during their long lives and, especially, as they die. Simard, as a mother of two daughters, facing the strong possibility of death from metastasizing breast cancer, has discovered her counterpart in the forest. She realizes that "the link between generations, as with all living things, is the legacy of the forest, the root of our survival" (266).

As Simard solves one mystery after another, there slowly emerges yet another role she plays in the drama of fulfilling and redeeming her own family legacy. She becomes a magician, a magus—both enchanted and enchanter. She realizes she is "Passing the Wand" (title of her final chapter). But, as followers of Harry Potter know, the magic of the Elder wand is generated from Death, and only a person capable of facing death can be its master. Out of death comes the magical power of survival, of generation and regeneration. Magical circles: mother salmon who ensure survival of their young in their final dying return to home; mother bears who feed themselves and their young as well as feeding mother trees far inland from the rivers, with the flesh and bones of half-eaten salmon (289-93). Passing the Wand.

Suzanne Simard leads us on a journey to the mysterious underworld, to trace the complex webs of roots and mycorrhizae connecting all the plants of the forest, in a “web of interdependence” (4). She returns from her perilous journey with a solution to the mystery and key to the future: “Turning to the intelligence of nature *itself* is the key” (305).

As she tells us, this is not a book about saving the trees, but about “how the trees might save us” (6). But only if we “heed the answers we’re being given” (294). By the trees themselves. We must begin by “recognizing that trees and plants have agency. They perceive, relate, and communicate... cooperate, make decisions, learn, and remember” (294).

The final story Simard tells is not hers but one she is “increasingly enchanted by,” told by Bruce “Subiyay” Miller of the Skokomish Nation. He tells basically the same story as Simard, about the symbiotic nature and diversity of the forest and the underground network, but with an added dimension.



Simard in the Hollow of a Mother Tree D.Markosian

He “talks of the trees as people. Not only with a sort of intelligence—akin to us humans—or even a spiritual quality perhaps not unlike ours. Not merely as equivalent to people, with the same bearings. They *are* People. The Tree People” (294).

Simard has spent “a lifetime as a forest detective” (5). *All* of her lives -as detective, Mother, magician-are intertwined with the lives of the forest. “I can’t tell if my blood is in the trees or if the trees are in my blood” (25). All the trees, all the plants, all the indigenous peoples who belonged to the forest long before us--all are part of the same ancient heritage, the same intergenerational, interdependent family.

Can we learn from the many ways “all the plants in the forest belong to one another” (169)? Can we *imagine* (and then *recognize*) the trees as kin? Can we *participate* in the wisdom of the forest?

Simard leaves us with a final injunction: “Go find a tree—*your* tree. Imagine linking into her network connecting to other trees nearby. Open your senses” (305).

Imagine how this deceptively simple course of action might ultimately change our perception of ourselves, our relationships, our behavior, and our sense—to borrow a phrase from Wordsworth—of “something far more deeply interfused.”

Shall we begin?

The National Wild Ones Annual Photo Contest Now Open!



Wild Ones wants to see what native plants mean to you! The Wild Ones Annual Photo Contest is the perfect opportunity for you to show off your creativity and photographic talents while inviting us in for a look at your unique view of native plants and natural landscaping.

Categories include Flora, Fauna with Flora, It's Alive, Natural Landscaping, Photos by Kids, Pollinators, Scenery and Wild Ones Projects. \$50 cash prizes will be awarded to 1st place category winners as well as Best in Show and the People's Choice winners.

You don't have to be a professional photographer, you don't have to have a fancy camera, and you don't even have to be an expert on native plants. All you need to do is follow the rules and guidelines, snap some good shots, and [Submit Your Entries on the National Website](#) between July 1st - Aug. 31st @ midnight central time. Good Luck!

Community Events of Interest

July 19 - Aug. 17 1:00pm-2:30pm: New Directions in the American Landscape offering Summer Virtual Learning Sessions Discounted for Wild Ones Members [More Info](#) (scroll down for the current offerings) [Discount Code Here](#)

August 4 - 5:00-7:00pm: [Walkabout at Calvin Ecosystem Preserve and Native Gardens](#), A River City Wild Ones event. 20 mini gardens display over 200 species of native plants. Experts on site to answer questions, some native plants for sale. [More Info](#)

August 16 - 6:30-8:00pm: [Invasive Species Action: Best Practices to Protect Michigan's Native Flora & Fauna from Intruders](#), A River City Wild Ones event. Impacts, recognition, reporting, and control methods discussed. [More Info](#)

August 29 - 1:00-5:00pm: KAWO Annual Fall Plant Exchange, Jessie and Bill's Home. Check [our website](#) or the [KAWO Facebook page](#) for details closer to the date.

September 22 - 7:00pm: KAWO September Program, [The Language of Trees](#), presented by Ellen Holste, Program Coordinator, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. Check [our website](#) or the [KAWO Facebook page](#) for details closer to the date.

October 5 - TBA: Save the date for Doug Tallamy webinar where he will share about his new book "[The Nature of Oaks: The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees.](#)" [More Info](#) about the upcoming webinar.

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,

[Log In to the Member Only Area.](#)

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SEEDLINGS is edited by Kim Patrie. It appears mostly monthly.

The next issue will arrive mid-August. **Deadline for August issue is August 1.**

[Send Submission](#)

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

We look forward to hearing from you!

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