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Foxglove Beardtongue (Penstemon digitalis) B. Bradburn

July 2025

SEEDLINGS

Wild Ones|Kalamazoo Area Chapter

"There can be no purpose more enspiriting than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us." —E.O. Wilson



Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) B. Bradburn

Dear *|FNAME|*,

Yes, that's a whole field of *Penstemon digitalis* pictured above. Blandford Nature Center and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan have, to paraphrase Mark Twain, unspoiled a good walk by turning a golf course into [a beautiful natural area](#), filled with native wildflowers, right in Grand Rapids. I'll also share [this New York Times story](#) about a social media influencer on a (successful!) mission to protect native plants in Alabama. I hope you enjoy one or both of these recommendations.

Beth Bradburn
Editor

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Most of our past presentations are available on YouTube to view at your convenience.

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

You can also click on the small red YouTube icon above,
underneath the Table of Contents.
Past issues of Seedlings can be found [here](#), and by clicking the link between the
Facebook and YouTube links above.

2025 Spring Plant Exchange

On June 1, we gathered to talk, enjoy refreshments, honor our friend Paul Olexia, and of course share native plants with each other and the rest of the Kalamazoo community. Mel Luna's joyful photos say it best! Please visit our website to see an [album from the spring plant exchange](#).

Photo M. Luna



Two Wildlife-Pond Events



Join us on Monday, July 7, 6:30pm at Portage District Library for [a presentation by Bart Litjens](#) on incorporating a wildlife pond into any garden or space, no matter the size. Then come back to Portage on Friday, July 11, at 6:00pm for [the first of our summer garden tours](#), featuring backyard wildlife ponds.

Photo B. Litjens

Site Visits for New Members

We offer site visits to new KAWO members! An experienced native plant gardener will visit your land and help you assess its conditions and figure out what to plant, with continuing mentorship available for up to a year. To arrange a visit, please contact [Ann Klobucar](#).

Moonseed Vine Host to Moth Caterpillar

Ilse Gebhard

Not all bird droppings are what they seem. For example, the first three instars (larval stages) of the Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillar and the late instars of the Giant Swallowtail caterpillar look uncannily like bird droppings.

Giant Swallowtail (Papilio cresphontes)



So also do the horned bird-dropping mimic caterpillars of the Viceroy, White Admiral and Red-Spotted Purple butterflies.

But the list does not stop there, as I found out one year in June. There is an area at the edge of the pond of our former home where native Moonseed (*Menispermum canadense*) vines were spreading. This is one of those plants where the flowers are not only unisexual but the male (staminate) flowers are not on the same plant as the female (pistillate) flowers.

Moonseed (Menispermum canadense)



I was examining the one-eighth-inch Moonseed flowers to see if I could tell male and female apart when I noticed some "bird droppings" on the leaf stems. Somehow that did not seem right and on closer inspection they turned out to be caterpillars.

Moonseed Moth Caterpillar (P. compressipalpis)



I looked at other species of plants in the area but found the caterpillars only on Moonseed, reaching the conclusion that they were Moonseed specific feeders. "Go to it cats," I said, "and keep those plants in check."

While the brown, tan, gray, and white coloring of the inch-long caterpillars was similar to the above-mentioned butterfly species, their shape was much more slender and they only had two pairs of mid-abdominal prolegs instead of four.

Viceroy Caterpillar (Limenitis archippus)



This reduction in prolegs enables them to curl up their mid-section like inchworms or loopers do, and makes them look more like bird droppings than when they are stretched out.

I brought nine of the caterpillars in to raise in pint jars and all of them formed cocoons in a couple of days.

Some of them formed them on the Moonseed leaf ribs, incorporating small pieces of leaf and making the cocoon look like part of the leaf.

Moonseed Moth Cocoon incorporating Moonseed leaf



Others made their cocoons on the pieces of cloth covering the jars. I knew that the salvageable pieces of old cotton pillowcases were starting to show wear but it was not until several of the cloths showed small holes that I looked closer.

The caterpillars had cut tiny pieces of cloth and incorporated them into the cocoon, again making them look like the substrate, in this case the white cloth. What masters of camouflage.

Moonseed Moth Cocoon incorporating cloth over jar



About two weeks later moths emerged from six of the cocoons. I was able to identify the moth using Covell's *Eastern Moths* field guide, and not too surprisingly it is called Moonseed Moth.

Moonseed Moth (Plusiodonta compressipalpis)



Unlike any moth I'd seen before, it had a band across the forewing that tapers to a tuft of hairlike scales protruding from the inner margin and that sticks up above the moth when its wings are held at rest like a tent. The general wing description fit as well, as did the wingspan of one to one-and-a-half inches.

According to David L. Wagner in *Caterpillars of Eastern North America*, the Moonseed Moth is in the *Catocala* genus, one of about 75 found in the East. He states that all are dietary specialists, supporting the conclusion I had already reached about my caterpillars. Another interesting fact that Wagner mentions is that many *Catocala* are new-leaf specialists that starve if forced to feed on older foliage. I wonder if their mouthparts can't deal with older foliage or if the plants in self-defense produce toxic compounds in their leaves as they age.

All photos by Ilse Gebhard, except Moonseed Moth photo from Wikipedia.

Read more by Ilse Gebhard [on our blog](#).

Who Am I?

A native fauna ID quiz from Ilse Gebhard



Photo I. Gebhard

Click [here](#) for the answer!

Community Events of Interest

Monday, July 7 - 6:30pm-8:00pm: Wildlife Ponds: Your Garden's Missing Piece, a KAWO presentation at Portage District Library. [Learn more](#).

Thursday, July 10 - 10:30am-3:00pm: Natural Shoreline Workshop, Kellogg Biological Station. [Learn more and register](#).

Thursday, July 10 - 11:00am-3:00pm: Field Station Tour: Conservation on the Ground, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Learn more and register](#).

Friday, July 11 - 6:00pm-8:00pm: Garden Tour: Portage Backyard Ponds. [Learn more](#).

Sunday, July 13 - 10:00am-12:00pm: Volunteer Workday, Kleinstuck Preserve. [Learn more](#).

Thursday, July 17 - 7:00pm: Pints and Native Plants, an informal meetup at [Brewery Outré](#) in

Kalamazoo. [Learn more.](#)

Monday, July 21 - 6:30pm-8:30pm: Wild Ones River City Event: Hudsonville Nature Center
Prairie Tour, Hudsonville. [Learn more.](#)

Thursday, July 24 - 5:00pm-6:30pm and Saturday, July 26 - 10:00am-11:30am: Foraging the
Edible Wilderness, Kalamazoo Nature Center. [Learn more and register.](#)

*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 Beth Bradburn. It appears mostly monthly.
The next regular issue will arrive in August. **Deadline for the August issue is July 20.**

[Contact the editor](#)

Contributing Editor:

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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