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NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES
KALAMAZOO AREA CHAPTER



Dutchman's Breeches (Dicentra cucullaria)

March 2020

SEEDLINGS

Wild Ones|Kalamazoo Area Chapter

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



Soon the Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*) and the Southern Blue Flag Iris (*Iris virginica* var. *shrevei*) will be in bloom!

See below if you are interested in seeing these plants at our Annual Native Plant Sale on Saturday May 16.

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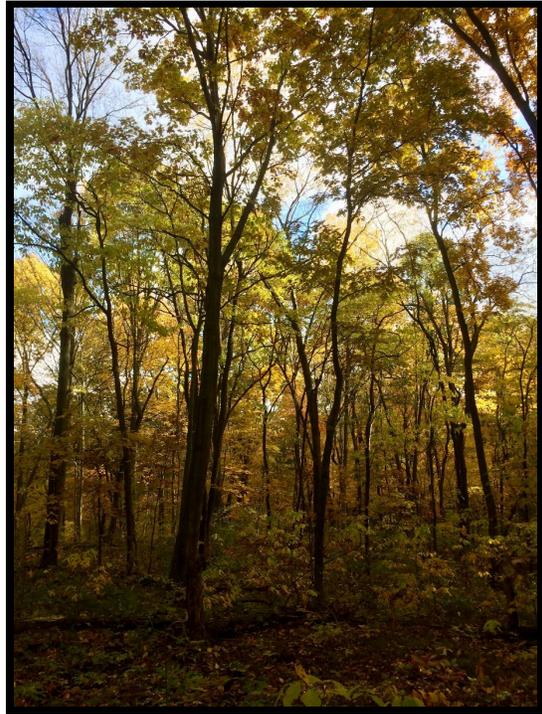
The Language of Trees

Wed. March 25, 7pm

Dr. Ellen Holste, Program Coordinator at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute

Forests are to trees as communities are to people. Trees have their own systems of communication, cooperation, and even criminal tendencies. They can send chemical, hormonal, and even electrical signals both above ground and below ground to warn their neighbors of nearby herbivores or other dangers.

Join Ellen Holste as she explores the hidden world within and below our forests, and learn to listen to the language of trees. [Read More](#)



The Punctuation Mark Butterflies

Ilse Gebhard

Two of Michigan's common and closely related anglewing butterflies are the Comma (also known as Hop Merchant) and the slightly larger Question Mark. They are called anglewings because of their ragged wing borders.

(Question Mark caterpillar)



Their similar orange color and black spot pattern makes them hard to distinguish, unless you are lucky and get to see their tiny silvery comma or question mark on the underside of the hindwing.

Both the Comma and the Question Mark exhibit an unusual feature not found, to my knowledge, in other butterflies in our region. The black or "summer" forms have significant black shading on the upper side of the hindwings, while the orange or "fall" forms are mainly orangish-brown. The underside of both hind and forewings also show these two forms, with the "summer" forms heavily mottled and the "winter" forms less so. Both forms exhibit superb camouflage against tree bark when their wings are

closed and the two forms correspond largely, but not completely, with the summer and fall broods.

But the similarity does not stop at appearance. Both species prefer woodlands and adjacent open areas. They rarely nectar on flowers but usually feed on tree sap, rotted fruit and decaying organic matter, and take moisture and nutrients from damp soils. They are both known to overwinter in Michigan by hibernating, but the Question Mark also exhibits a pattern of migrating further south in the fall and repopulating our area in spring. The increased cold hardiness of the Comma is corroborated by its early flight date of March 22, a full month earlier than for the Question Mark.



The caterpillar host plants for both the Comma and the Question Mark are mainly elm, nettle, and hops on which they lay their light green eggs. It was on nettle that a friend found caterpillars of both species in mid-July and gave me some to raise. While the caterpillars of both species are covered with branched spines, the color of the body and the spines differ. (*Comma caterpillar, left*)



After feeding on nettle for about a week, the caterpillars of both species attached themselves to form their chrysalises. Chrysalis shape and coloration for both species were very similar and well suited for camouflage against a twig. The basic color was tan, mottled with yellow and orange hues. The shape was irregular with protuberances along one side. It had an axis of symmetry down the middle, and on either side of this axis was a row of silvery spots. This axis of symmetry is of course carried through to the butterflies that emerged 7 to 9 days later. (*Comma chrysalis, left*)

Can you find the tell-tale comma and question mark to distinguish the adults?



We Need Your Suggestions

Submitted by the Plant Sale Team

|FNAME|, we'd like your input for this year's KAWO Plant Sale, which is fast approaching. (May 16; mark your calendar!)

We are looking for suggestions for native plants that you would like to see at our sale.

Our plant choices will be based on your suggestions, plant availability, and practicality. Send your suggestions to [Dave Wendling](#) by March 14.

We look forward to seeing you at the plant sale, and thanks for your help!



American Plum

In Praise of Stinging Nettle

Ilse Gebhard



Not to be outdone by my friend who had found Comma and Question Mark butterfly larvae on Stinging Nettle, I started to look on the underside of nettle leaves. Ouch! I hate to admit it but I often forgot to wear gardening gloves or take Sting Eze along on these searches.

(Left: Question Mark butterfly eggs)

Eventually I was rewarded by finding two eggs, species unknown. I knew they were not Red Admiral eggs as they looked different from those. Were they Comma, Question Mark, or even Milbert's Tortoise Shell eggs? (The latter butterfly is also found in Michigan and lays its eggs exclusively on nettles.)

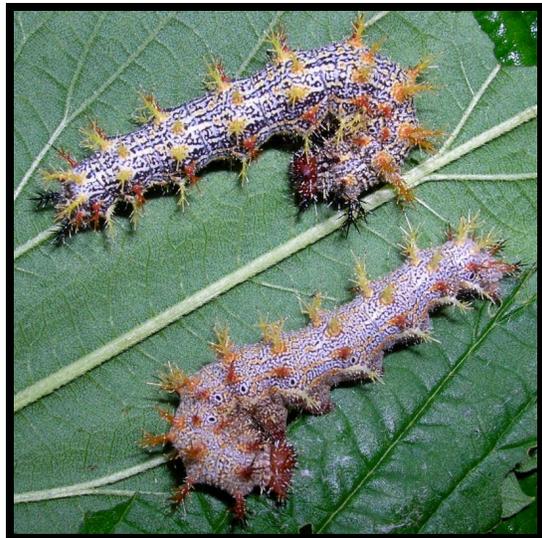
(Photos below: Stinging nettle patch, and early instars of the Question Mark butterfly)



The eggs hatched 5 days later but the tiny caterpillars did not look like the ones shown in my books. Having raised quite a few species of butterflies and moths, I was not dismayed. Early instars (larval stages) often look very different from later instars. And late instar larvae of the same species can look different from each other, as in this case. I settled on Question Mark, and after 15 days at the larval stage and 9 days at the pupal stage, the butterflies that emerged confirmed my identification.

Our native nettle species, Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica* subsp. *gracilis*) and Wood Nettle (*Laportea canadensis*), both have small, greenish flowers and do well at a woodland edge. While they are great larval host plants for several of our butterfly species, their non-flashy flowers and their propensity to sting apparently make them unpopular with even native plant enthusiasts, as I don't see them for sale by our local native plant nursery, Hidden Savanna. Both species spread by rhizomes and could be shared at a plant exchange and planted in some out of the way spot like behind the compost bin or a utility shed. 😊

(Photos below: Mid- and late instars of the Question Mark butterfly.)



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.](#)
Thank you for your interest and support of Wild Ones!

Not a member? [Click Here](#) for information on how you can support Wild Ones.

Community Events of Interest to Wild Ones

March 16 - 7p.m - Kalamazoo Public Library Reading Together Event: [How Can Plants & First Nations Help Us To Believe?](#) with Dr. Tom Small of KAWO. KPL Van Deusen Room

March 25 - 7pm - [KAWO Monthly indoor program](#): *The Language of Trees*, with Dr. Ellen Holste, Program Coordinator, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute

April 3-4 - [Kalamazoo Foodways Symposium](#) - Plant Forward: Savoring Our Past, Eating For The Future. Kalamazoo, MI Featuring **Dr. Tom Small** on Sat. April 4, 9:30am: *The Language and Intelligence of Plants*. Also **Ruth Small, Ph.D.** on Saturday April 4 at 11am: *Our Plant Kin: Rethinking, Decolonizing, and Restoring our Relationships to "Others" (e.g. to the Earth, Plants, Food)* No fee and open to the public.

April 17-26 - [Run For The Trees](#) - Raise money to plant trees in Michigan State Parks.

April 25 - 9am-12pm - [Native Plant Propagation Workshop](#), Pierce Cedar Creek Institute, Hastings, MI \$20-\$25

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!

SEEDLINGS is edited by Kim Patrie. It appears mostly monthly. The next regular issue will come early in April. **Deadline for April issue is March 20.**

[Send Submission](#)

Contributing Editors:

Tom Small

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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