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Pawpaw blossoms (*Asimina triloba*) K.Patrie

May 2021

SEEDLINGS

Wild Ones|Kalamazoo Area Chapter

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



Lupine (*Lupinus perennis*) K.Patrie

Dear *|FNAME|*,

WOW!!! You blew the plant sale out. That is quite the accomplishment. We had well over double the amount of sales this year, largely due to the ease of online ordering. (Kudos to The Plant Sale Team!)

You may have heard that we ran out of plants. That is true. Actually, our suppliers ran out of plants. Between the early freeze, unusually cool weather, and an increased interest and demand for native plants, we were all taken by surprise. (What a great problem to have!) But the result is the same: some of you didn't get the plants you ordered. And that makes us unhappy.

We are truly sorry about this. We want EVERYONE to have their plants! We will be emailing those who didn't receive their full order to let you know when your plants will be available, and to arrange for pickup. In the mean time, we very much appreciate your patience and

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understanding, and your continued support of Wild Ones!

Next week, our May 26 program will feature Ashley Bennet from the Electric Power Research Institute to give us the scoop on how the utility companies can turn power cuts into native habitat. This is our last scheduled Zoom program for the season. We are hoping that by September, we will be able to safely meet indoors again.

Until then: Plant, Water, Prune.

Kim Patrie
Editor



Ragwort (*Packera species*) at PawPaw Fen Preserve

Utility Rights-of-Way: **How Their Management Can Support Native** **Plants and Pollinators**

May 26, 7pm

Ashley Bennet, *Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI)*

Utility right-of-ways are those places where swaths of vegetation are cut away to make space for humans in the form of power lines, gas lines, and the like. In the process the existing habitat for native plants and animals is destroyed.



Powerline right-of-way at the Lillian Anderson Arboretum in Kalamazoo

Join us for our May 26 program when Ashley Benet from the Electric Power Research Institute will tell us about vegetation management practices that enhance the protection of native plants and pollinators supported on

right-of-ways. [Read more](#)

Zoom Registration for May 26 Presentation

Please join us ONLINE in the [Zoom app](#) this coming **Wednesday, May 26 at 7pm**. Although this meeting is free (as always!) you must register ahead of time, so we can send you the online meeting information through Zoom.

If you have questions during the meeting, please use the Chat function (tap or click on your screen to find it) as your microphone will be remotely muted. We will collate your questions and direct them to the presenter who will address them after the formal portion of the presentation.

Registration Instructions - Click >>>[Register Here](#)

When you click on the registration link above, it will take you to a Zoom registration page where you will see some meeting details. You will be asked to submit your name, email, and zip code. Then **check your email inbox for the meeting information**, and follow the prompts a few minutes before 7pm next Wednesday.

[Visit Our YouTube Channel](#)

If you've missed any of our previous presentations, not to worry. Visit the KAWO YouTube channel, where you can view our programs 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.

Some Caterpillars Like Company:

The Milkweed Tussock Moth

Ilse Gebhard

While checking Common Milkweed for Monarch Butterfly eggs, I found well over one hundred tiny caterpillars on the underside of a leaf. All huddled together, they had emerged from a white mass attached to the leaf right next to them. They were off-white with white hair and a black head. Often early instars (larval stages) look very different from later ones and my [Caterpillars of Eastern North America](#) by David L. Wagner, which mostly shows the

last instars, did not shed a light on what they might be.

To hopefully solve the mystery, I placed the milkweed leaf in a gallon pickle jar with a cloth cover. These caterpillars really liked togetherness. They ate together, moved around the jar together, rested together, went through instars together - all lined up next to each other. Unencumbered by the real meaning of the word, I called them Ilse's "Groupie." You have to have some name to call them when you bore your friends with the latest caterpillar story.



Even while small, these larvae consumed an amazing amount of milkweed and produced a lot of frass to clean out every day. After the first two instars shed their outgrown skin, the caterpillars still looked the same but after the third one the color of their hair was darker. There was hope they would turn into something I could identify. Their identity became clear at the 4th instar stage - Milkweed Tussock Moth.

Just hatched Milkweed Tussock Moth larvae
I. Gebhard



Thickly covered with hair, they were so "cute." The body was black, with many black and white tufts of different lengths along the front, rear and sides. The middle segments also had 6 pairs of thick, orange tufts curving upward over the abdomen and meeting over the midline. As with a number of other caterpillars, they had the tendency to roll into a ball and fall to the ground when disturbed, making it hard to pick them up.

5th Instar Larva. K. Kipp

We were going on vacation, so I reluctantly released the caterpillars to fend for themselves. Several large patches of Common Milkweed dotted our back field and I was sure the food supply was no problem.

After coming back from vacation in mid-August and not wanting to miss the next two stages of metamorphosis, I looked for and found just one caterpillar on the plant on which I had released a 100+ a week earlier. What happened to the others? I did not check the surrounding milkweed so don't know if this species disperses as later instars or was this one lucky and escaped predation?

Milkweed Tussock Moth larvae are obligate milkweed feeders, just like Monarchs. No milkweed, no Monarchs, or Milkweed Tussock Moths, or several other insects. Safe from predation in a jar, I supplied the caterpillar daily with fresh milkweed leaves and after a few days it formed a hairy cocoon. This cocoon protected the pupa inside while it overwintered in our screened-in porch.



The following spring the moth emerged from its cocoon. While its wings are mouse gray, it does have a yellow abdomen with black spots, helping to distinguish it from many other moths with similarly drab wings. This individual turned out to be a female, as upon release in the evening it quickly attracted a male by broadcasting its pheromone.

Moths Mating after Female Emerged. I.Gebhard

REMINDER: **28th Annual Spring Native Plant Exchange**

June 6, 2021 12pm-6pm *Sign-up details below*

|FNAME|, this is a quick reminder that our 28th Annual Spring Native Plant Exchange is coming up on Sunday, June 6 from 12 noon to 6pm at the home of Tom and Ruth Small (2502 Waite Ave in Kalamazoo). **Masks and social distancing are required.**

This event is fr*e and open to the public, **though you must sign up in advance.** There are six 1-hour time slots with 15 people allowed each hour. (We've expanded to 12-6pm.) Please [Sign Up Here](#). If you are coming with a friend, please use a separate entry for each person. [More Info](#)

Celandine Poppy (Stylophorum diphyllum) K.Patrie



All About Milkweed

Paul Olexia



Milkweeds (members of the Genus *Asclepias*¹) are characterized, at least in part by the fact that when they are injured (e.g. breaking a leaf) they give off a white, milky liquid. Some plants produce chemicals that are not essential for their metabolism. Such chemicals typically are called “secondary compounds” and their purpose often is defense – to protect themselves from invasion by pathogens or to prevent predation by animals.

Butterfly Weed (Asclepias tuberosa)

K.Patrie

The “milk” produced by milkweeds contains such secondary compounds, among them are “cardiac glycosides” which can cause nausea, diarrhea, weakness, and confusion in small amounts, and seizures, heart rhythm changes, respiratory paralysis, and even death in large amounts. Consequently, milkweeds commonly are not grazed, especially by larger herbivores.

But some insects appear to be able to consume milkweed plant tissues with seemingly no ill effects. Among these are the larvae (caterpillar) stages of monarch butterflies. Not only are these larvae not poisoned by these chemicals, but they store them (unmetabolized and unaltered) in their bodies, conveying the properties of bad taste and potential toxicity to the larvae and adult butterflies. Videos of birds that have attempted to eat monarchs show the birds trying desperately to remove the bad taste from their mouths. It is said that a bird will never attempt to eat a *second* monarch. Milkweeds are the only plants that monarch larvae will eat.



Monarchs have attracted much attention and recently concern has focused on their declining numbers, much of which has been attributed to reductions in numbers of milkweed plants. KAWO has a [“Wild For Monarchs” Committee](#). Their purpose is to encourage people to grow more milkweeds to provide more opportunities (food) for the survival of the monarchs.

Monarch caterpillar on Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*). *K.Patrie*

The flowers of milkweeds typically occur in clusters somewhat reminiscent of the flowers of Queen Ann’s Lace (wild carrot) or elderberries with the petals of the individual flowers spread open bent “back” toward the stem of the flower exposing the inner parts of the flower. An interesting feature of these flowers, although it is not extremely evident, is that the pollen is not released as a dust or powder, as with many other flowers, but the “pollen sacs” (where the pollen is produced) remain closed and two adjacent pollen sacs (referred to as “pollinia” or “pollinaria”) remain attached together somewhat resembling miniature saddlebags. The tissue connecting the two pollen sacs gets caught on the legs of visiting insects and “saddlebags” are carried to another flower the insect visits where the pollen can germinate leading to fertilization and seed and fruit (pod) development. As seeds mature within the pods they develop fine filamentous hairs in tufts that, when mature, act as “parachutes” that allow the seeds to be distributed by wind currents (somewhat similar to dandelions) once the pods break open.

A total of twelve species of milkweed occur in Michigan of which only six species (briefly described below) are rather common. The different species of milkweed are distinguished from one another based on a variety of characteristics. One trait by which the different species can be recognized is by the arrangement or distribution of leaves along the stem. Leaf arrangements are either: 1) “alternate” – with leaves arranged along the stem in a rather scattered fashion, each attached individually or 2) “opposite” – with two leaves attached to the stem in pairs, opposite to one another or 3) “whorled” - with more than two leaves attached at each point along the stem.



Only one species of milkweed, appropriately called “whorled milkweed” (*Asclepias verticillata* - species names are derived from Latin words often describing some distinctive trait of the species; for example “verticillate” in Latin refers to a “whorl”) has leaves arranged in whorls, making it rather easy to distinguish from other species. In addition, the leaves of this plant are very thin and almost needle-like.

Whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)

K.Patrie

Whorled milkweed typically occurs in very dry habitats with abundant sunlight such as prairies and savannas. It also occurs along sandy roadsides and the edges of fields with sandy soil. The flowers are more or less white with some green and, at times with purplish tinges.

Another species that is distinguished at least in part by the leaf arrangement is “butterflyweed” (*Asclepias tuberosa* - see photo at top). Although it most commonly is recognized primarily by its bright orange flowers, it is the only species of milkweed that has an alternate arrangement of leaves. The species name refers to the fact that this plant produces a rather thick and “tuberous” underground root-like structure. This species also occurs only in rather dry areas with full sunshine such as prairies, “oak openings” and along roadsides with sandy soils.

The four remaining milkweed species all have their leaves arranged “opposite” – in pairs along the stem. “Poke milkweed” (*Asclepias exaltata*) gets its common name from the fact that its leaves look like those of common poke weed (which is not a type of milkweed). Poke milkweed is the only species of milkweed that is shade tolerant, typically found primarily in woodlands, especially those dominated by oaks. The undersides of the leaves are somewhat distinctive in that they have a grayish, somewhat waxy coating. The flowers are white to pale purple and are arranged in loose clusters, in contrast to most other milkweed species.



“Swamp milkweed” (*Asclepias incarnata*), among other things, is distinguished by the fact that (as the common name implies) it grows in very wet habitats which is unusual for milkweeds. Its species name refers to the rather bright “rose” (reddish pink) color of the flowers which stand out readily because of their color. The leaves are rather narrow and the undersides are green and smooth (not covered by hairs or grayish in color).

Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*). K.Patrie

“Green milkweed” (*Asclepias viridiflora*) (meaning “green flower”) is so named because the flowers typically are some shade of green or slightly cream-colored. The leaves are quite narrow (described as “linear” – somewhat needle-like) and the undersides of them are covered with fine hairs. Like many other milkweeds, this species prefers dry, sandy habitats and full sunlight.



The last species to mention most likely is the most familiar and most abundant of the milkweeds. “Common milkweed” (*Asclepias syriaca*) typically is found in meadows, old abandoned fields, along roadsides, at the edges of agricultural fields, and other disturbed locations. It prefers slightly more moist conditions than some of the other species. The leaves are opposite, wide and covered with hairs on the undersides. The flowers are rose to purple in color and appear in dense clusters that often hang down. As the common name implies, this typically is the most abundant, most familiar, and most frequently encountered milkweed and the one that generally is considered the most important food source for the larvae of monarch butterflies.

Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

The next time you are out for a walk in an area that is not heavily urbanized, especially, somewhat dry and free of shade, keep an eye out for the interesting and important milkweeds. Better yet, plant some in your yard (or in a pot) and have the butterflies (and other insects) come to you.

¹Asclepias - The genus name, **Asclepias**, commemorates Asklepios, the Greek god of medicine. Some of the **milkweed** species have a history of medicinal use including common **milkweed** (wart removal and lung diseases), and butterfly weed, *A. tuberosa* (also known as pleurisy root, used for pleurisy and other lung disease).

Community Events of Interest

May 26 - 7:00pm: "How Utility Rights-of-Way and Their Management Can Support Native Plants and Pollinators" Ashley Bennet, Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) *An online Zoom presentation from [KAWO](#), more info to come.*

June 3 - 2:00pm: Community Garden Workday at Tom & Ruth's house (see next entry). Get hands-on knowledge about maintaining native plants in a garden setting, and improve your community! Please bring your own garden gloves and hand tools if you have them, some tools and supplies may be available to share. [More Info](#)

June 6 - 12:00pm-6:00pm - KAWO 28th Annual Native Plant Exchange on Sunday, June 6 from 12 noon to 6pm at the home of Tom and Ruth Small, 2502 Waite Ave in Kalamazoo. **Masks and social distancing are required.** [Click Here to sign up for a time slot.](#) [More details](#)

June 21 - 6:30pm-8:00pm - "Go Beyond Beauty" Shelly Stusick, Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network *An online Zoom presentation from [River City Wild Ones](#) (Grand Rapids)*

June 24 - 2:00pm: Community Garden Workday at KPS Admin. bldg. Get hands-on knowledge about maintaining native plants in a garden setting, and improve your community! Please bring your own garden gloves and hand tools if you have them, some tools and supplies may be available to share. [More Info](#)

July 21 - 5:30pm-7:30pm: Wild Ones River City Chapter (Grand Rapids) Annual Native Plant Sale, Pre-order and Pick-up only. Ordering begins June 23. [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,

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

Thank you for your interest and support of Wild Ones!

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

The next regular issue will arrive mid-June. **Deadline for June issue is June 15.**

[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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and www.Facebook.com/KalamazooAreaWildOnes



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