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Christmas fern (Polystichum acrostichoides) [N. Tonelli, CC BY 2.0](#)

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



*Bird tracks near common sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*)* M. Luna

Dear Friend,

It wasn't until I started compiling the community events list for this newsletter that I remembered human activity does decrease a bit in the winter. In the Kalamazoo-area native plant community, the quality of our connection more than compensates. You can [meet our 2026 officers on our website](#), and we hope to see you in person this year too.

Beth Bradburn
Editor

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February Program: What Does It Mean to Be Rare?

Plant ecologist Tyler Bassett will present “What Does It Mean to be Rare?,” an in-depth discussion of MNFI’s management of the state’s rare-plant species data. Using case studies, he will illustrate how data is gathered and managed, how accuracy and quality is ensured, and how impactful high-quality data is for guiding conservation of rare species and the ecosystems in which they are embedded. [Learn more.](#)



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.

Haiku

Ilse Gebhard



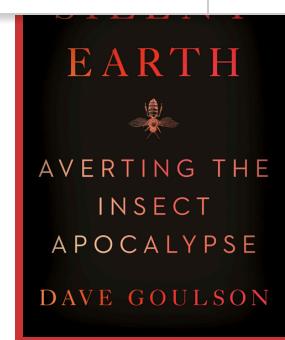
Outside my window
Purple coneflower seed heads
Beauty in winter

Book Review: Silent Earth

Molly Williams

Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse, by Dave Goulson. Harper, 2021.

much like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a warning that human actions are jeopardizing the biological interrelationships that have sustained life for eons. Insects are not just "creepy crawlies" deserving of extermination. They are critical to our food crops and to providing many other environmental services—becoming food for other species (especially birds and small mammals) or disposing of dead organisms and other messes. Read about why dung beetles had to be imported to Australia from Africa and Europe.



Goulson's appreciation of the many characteristics of this large and diverse class of animals is evident. He shares many vignettes about specific insects—their unique survival strategies that allow them to hide in plain sight, or to defend themselves from attack. For example, the bombardier beetle can squirt hot, corrosive liquid into the face of a predator by mixing chemicals from its twin storage tanks.

He thoroughly documents the consequences of human actions that seemed like good ideas at the time—the use of DDT and other insecticides and herbicides to manage our environment, when we failed to consider collateral effects. Finally, he makes many suggestions on what we can do to avert decline in biodiversity and environmental collapse, concluding with the hope that with appropriate choices we can learn to live within, not apart from, the natural world.

Both the Kalamazoo Public Library and the Portage District Library have hard copy, eBook, and eAudiobook available.

Physical Characteristics of Caterpillars Other than Color or Pattern

Ilse Gebhard

Butterfly and moth caterpillars can be divided into eleven groups depending on obvious physical characteristics, which to some extent can lead to their identification.

First there are the various kinds of "smooth" caterpillars like those of the tiger, black, and spicebush swallowtail butterflies. The caterpillars of the skipper butterflies can easily be separated from the others by their distinctive shape. They have a large head and their first thoracic segment is constricted so it looks like a neck.



Black swallowtail (Papilio polyxenes) R. Schipper



Silver-spotted skipper (Epargyreus clarus) I. Gebhard



Another easily distinguished group are loopers, inchworms, and spanworms. They have only two pairs of back legs, called prolegs, and therefore loop rather than crawl.

Looper moth sp. R. Schipper



Caterpillars of the giant silkworm family, like cecropia, polyphemus, and promethea moths, are "smooth with knobs or bumps."

Cecropia moth (Hyalophora cecropia) R. Schipper

Examples of the "smooth with rear horn or tail" are the sphinx or hawk moths like the tobacco hornworm or the white-lined sphinx. The caterpillar of the monarch butterfly is of the "smooth with fleshy filaments" type.



Tobacco hornworm (*Manduca sexta*) Q. Edwards



Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) I. Gebhard

So far, I have not come across any of the "sluglike" caterpillars of the hairstreaks, blues and coppers, the largest butterfly family. These small caterpillars are oval or tear-shaped and somewhat flattened, with the head often withdrawn into the thorax.

And then there are the fuzzy-looking caterpillars. The first category is designated "hairy" and includes such species as the spongy moth, fall webworm, and Virginian tiger moth, better known as yellow bear.

"Hairy with tufts or pencils" are my favorite caterpillars because they are so "cute." Who can resist loving the sycamore, hickory, or milkweed tussock moth caterpillars? While not as cute, the white-marked tussock moth caterpillar has such an unusual array of tufts and pencils that it looks almost comical.

When the hairs are thick, short and stiff they are called bristles and the wooly bear and giant leopard moth caterpillars fall in the "bristled" group. When disturbed they roll up, making them hard to pick up.



Fall webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*) I. Gebhard



White-marked tussock moth (*Orgyia leucostigma*) I. Gebhard



Hickory tussock moth (Lophocampa caryae) R. Schipper



Giant leopard moth (Hypercompe scribonia) I. Gebhard



Baltimore checkerspot (Euphydryas phaeton) R. Schipper

In this category are also two slug caterpillars that I have come across. They are the saddleback and the crowned slug, and their spines sting. One book calls the sting "intense and of considerable duration," so careful handling is advised.

The next group of caterpillars is called "internal feeders." This group includes the codling moth imported from Europe and one I've been familiar with since childhood. It is the proverbial "worm" in the apple but unless you bite into an apple from a tree not sprayed with pesticides, you won't have to worry about finding a half-eaten caterpillar.

The last group of caterpillars is called "structure building," the evergreen bagworm being an example.



Who Am I?

A native flora ID quiz from Ilse Gebhard



Photo R. Schipper

Look in [the June 2021 Seedlings](#) for the answer!

Community Events of Interest

Tuesday, February 3, and Tuesday, February 17, - 1:00pm-2:30pm: Winter Shrub Removal, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. [Learn more](#).

Sunday, February 8 - 10:00am-12:00pm: Volunteer Work Day, Kleinstuck Preserve. [Learn more](#).

Monday, February 16 - 6:30pm-8:00pm: Wild Ones River City Program: "Vernal Pools," with Abby Pointer. Online. [Learn more](#).

Monday, February 16 - 7:00pm: Michigan Botanical Society Program: "Restoration Ecology & Soil Health," with Dr. Kathryn Docherty, 2708 Wood Hall, Western Michigan University. [Learn more](#).

Thursday, February 19 - 7:00pm: Pints and Native Plants, an informal meetup at Brewery Outré in Kalamazoo. [Learn more](#).

Wednesday, February 25 - 6:30pm-8:00pm: "What Does It Mean to be Rare?," with Tyler Bassett,

Saturday, March 7, and Sunday, March 8: Michigan Native Plant Conference, presented by Wildflower Association of Michigan, Kellogg Convention Center, East Lansing. Registration is now open. [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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SEEDLINGS is edited by Beth Bradburn. It appears mostly monthly. The next regular issue will arrive in March. **Deadline for the March issue is February 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](#)

