

SEEDLINGS - Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones Newsletter - June 2026

"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



Common ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) B. Bradburn

Dear friend,

As I write this we are between two of our biggest annual events: the plant sale, formally summarized below, and the spring plant exchange, which occurs this year on the last day of May and on which I'll report in the next newsletter. This busy season fills me with appreciation and admiration for all my KAWO colleagues, who work so hard to create a better habitat for the earth's creatures and a human community to sustain it. Enjoy the June Seedlings!

Beth Bradburn, editor

Memorial Services for Ruth Small

Memorial services for Ruth Small will be at Kalamazoo Friends Meeting, 508 Denner, at 2:00pm on Saturday, June 20, 2026, followed by interment in the Quaker section of Mountain Home Cemetery in Kalamazoo, just across the road from Friends Meeting house.

2026 Plant Sale Concludes



Our 2026 plant sale raised over \$5,700 to support the work of KAWO and distributed almost 2,000 native plants to gardeners in the Kalamazoo area. We are so grateful to KAWO president Quyen Edwards and vice president RosaLee Ward, who both volunteered countless hours of their time to make it a success. Ellie Shenker and Beth Bradburn helped manage the sale website. Sharon Dever, Mike Fahey, Haim Kenig, Ann Klobucar, Paul Laferriere, Cameron Lockwood, Mel Luna, Rachel

McGuffin, and Noel Ocen all helped with the logistics of packing up the plants and getting them to you. We also deeply appreciate Chad and Kristin Hughson of Hidden Savanna nursery for providing an amazing selection of native plants as well as the space for us run the sale. Please enjoy your new plants, and thank you for supporting Wild Ones!

Visit to a Native Landscape in Coloma Dunes

Join us **between 11am and 4pm on Saturday, June 13**, for a tour, picnic, and bocci (and horseshoes and beach volleyball!) at an incredible private residence with a beautiful native garden, stunning architecture, and peaceful woodland trails. This event is free, but you must **register by June 1**. Register by sending an email to bluemelluna@gmail.com. We will send you directions to the site once you register. For more details, visit [our website](#) or [Facebook page](#).



Oak Savanna Tour



On **Saturday, June 20, at 10am**, Mike Weis will lead a tour of the oak savanna restoration at Chipman Preserve. This event follows Mike's January presentation on oak savanna garden design, which you can view [on our YouTube channel](#). The tour is a joint program with Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy. It is free, but limited to 25 participants, with advance registration required. Please [visit the SWMLC website](#) to register.

Tulip Tree: Keystone Plant Species or Not?

by Ilse Gebhard

One of my favorite trees along the Kal-Haven Trail is a very tall tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) with three large stems and two smaller ones. Tulip trees may put up multiple stems when cut back to the ground, which is what the railroad would have done with any saplings that grew that close to the railroad bed before the line was abandoned in 1971. If my assessment is correct, the tree, therefore, is now between fifty and sixty years old.

Thinking about this tulip tree recently made me wonder where it falls on the keystone plant species scale. The Homegrown National Park plant finder does not even list it as a keystone tree species.

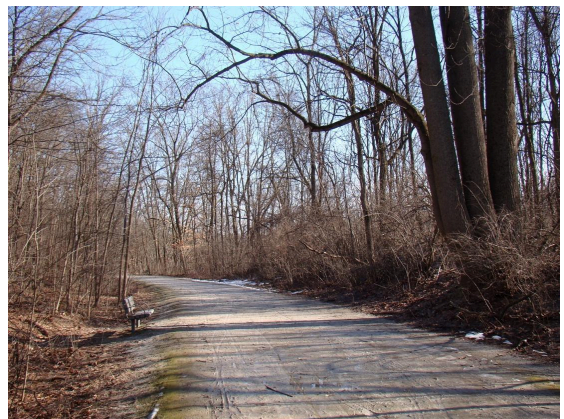


Large five-stemmed tulip tree along the Kal-Haven Trail (S. Hodapp)



Three large and two small stems of tulip tree (S. Hodapp)

The National Wildlife Federation plant finder lists it as fifty-third out of seventy-two species of shrubs and trees. It is a caterpillar host plant for twenty-two species of butterflies and moths. This is a very limited number when you compare it to the 452 species hosted by oaks.



Note bench on the left for size comparison with the five-stemmed tulip tree (S. Hodapp)

Of course, if you are a tulip tree borer, it is very important to you, as the tulip tree, being the sole host for your caterpillar, means your survival. Among those twenty-two species are some of our most spectacular butterflies and moths, namely, spicebush swallowtail, eastern tiger swallowtail, tulip-tree silkmoth, promethea moth, luna moth, Polyphemus moth, io moth, and cecropia moth.

These large, beautiful moths have become quite rare and any tree that hosts them is a good tree, as far as I am concerned.



The tulip tree is shade-intolerant, fast-growing, and moderately long-lived. It is one of the tallest deciduous trees in Eastern North America. Its trunk is free of lower branches, giving it its columnar shape. Its wood has many uses and Native Americans made dugout canoes from the trunks.

Tulip tree flower (P. Gibelli, public domain)

Like other species in the magnolia family, the tulip tree has large, showy flowers, reminiscent of tulips in shape. They yield large quantities of nectar that attract pollinators like beetles, flies, and bees. Yes, the leaves don't feed many butterfly and moth caterpillar species, but feeding pollinators is pretty important in my estimation, moving the tulip tree up a few notches on the keystone pole.

Because the flowers are so high in the canopy, I learned to identify the tulip tree from its unique four-lobed leaf shape. While it was a stretch of the imagination, in my early-on ignorance, I thought the tree was named for the tulip-like shape of its leaves.



Tulip tree leaf (Q. Edwards)

The fruit of the tulip tree is a conelike cluster of long, flat samaras that are seed cases containing one or two seeds. Upon maturity, the samaras separate from the cluster, although some clusters keep an outer ring of samaras, giving them a tulip-like shape in winter. Several bird species feed on the seeds, as do mice and squirrels.

If you have room on your property and are thinking of planting a closely-spaced grouping of tree saplings, as recommended by some tree ecologists, you might want to include a tulip tree. Because it is fast growing, it will provide some shade to the slower growing, shade to part-shade tolerant tree species. By the time those have reached maturity, the only moderately long-lived tulip tree will be reaching the end of its lifespan.



Tulip tree seeds remaining on tree in winter
(B137, CC0, via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Also, tulip tree roots are deep and wide-spreading. They might help stabilize nearby trees with shallower root systems by intertwining with their roots. The tulip tree is really a southern species, reaching its northern edge in the lower half of the lower peninsula. As climate changes, it might do really well here— especially if precipitation increases, as it prefers moister soils.

Have I made the case for the tulip tree?

Read more illustrated natural history of southwest Michigan by Ilse Gebhard [on our blog](#), or order Ilse's digital book, *Without a Net: Adventures with Butterflies and Moths*, [on our sale website](#).

Book Review: *How Flowers Made Our World*

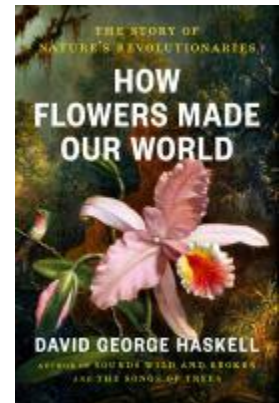
by Joyce Leppard

How Flowers Made Our World: The Story of Nature's Revolutionaries, by David George Haskell (Viking, 2026).

I loved this book!!!

I've read the just-published *How Flowers Made the World*, by David George Haskell. He has awards and nominations for several of his other books about the natural world, and he deserves them. He writes with such enthusiasm and knowledge.

The book covers the millennia of evolution involving flowers, how vital they have been to the world as we know it, and how interconnected they are with so many life forms. We wouldn't be here without flowers! The book is divided into discussions of various flowers from magnolia to grass to pansies. As you read, you'll be instructed, entertained, filled with wonder, and enchanted by Haskell's writing skill. Lovely illustrations by Lucy Smith enhance one's enjoyment of the book.



Treetop Feeder: Tiger Swallowtail Caterpillar

by Ilse Gebhard

Having found caterpillars of black, spicebush, and giant swallowtails, I realized one day I had missed finding the larva of the tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*). With a wingspan of 3.1–5.5 inches and bright yellow color, the adult butterfly is hard to miss and we had them in the yard every summer. I had read that two of its favored host plants were black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). We had black cherry trees of all sizes on the property, as birds love the fruit and plant the seeds in a nice package of fertilizer when they poop. We did not have a tulip tree in the yard and when several saplings were brought to a spring plant exchange by a Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones member, I quickly snatched one up.

The first winter the deer nibbled the tulip tree sapling to the ground. In spring, when it resprouted with two stems, I remembered the five-stemmed tulip tree along the Kal-Haven Trail that I had admired for years. That tree survived some sort of pruning at ground level and still managed to grow into a magnificent tree. (See accompanying article on tulip trees.)



Tulip-tree silkmoth (R. Schipper)

Time for Russ to put a wire cage around our resprouted sapling. Tulip trees are very fast-growing and three years later ours reached just above the fence. Time to check the tree regularly, not only for caterpillars of the tiger swallowtail, but also for the tulip-tree silkmoth (*Callosamia angulifera*) and the tulip-tree beauty (*Epimecis hortaria*) whose favored hosts are, as their names indicates, tulip trees. Southern Michigan is at the northern edge of the tulip-tree silkmoth's range and we had seen this spectacular moth in Florida.



Tulip-tree beauty (I. Gebhard)

Some might say the name of the tulip-tree beauty is a misnomer as it is much drabber than the tulip-tree silkmoth. But beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, and I had “beheld” the tulip-tree beauty in two different years at our house.

I did not find any tiger swallowtail caterpillars that first year, but the following year, I did find a tiny one. At first I was a bit confused as the caterpillar looked like that of a giant swallowtail that I had found a few days earlier on a nearby hop tree. Then I remembered that early instars of tiger, giant, and black swallowtails all look like bird droppings. And indeed, later instars confirmed its identity as tiger swallowtail, as did the adult butterfly when it emerged from its chrysalis.



Left: early instar (I. Gebhard); middle: last instar (I. Gebhard); right: chrysalis (R. Schipper)

The tiger swallowtail is unusual in that the female has both a light form and a dark form. When you see a bright yellow tiger swallowtail it can be either a male or a female but when you see a dark tiger swallowtail, you know it is a female.



*Tiger swallowtails nectaring on ironweed
Left: female; right: male or female (P. Larson)*

Who Am I? A Native Fauna ID Quiz from Ilse Gebhard



Visit [iNaturalist](#) for the answer!

(Photo by R. Schipper)

Community Events of Interest

Thursday, June 4, 6–7:30pm. A Walk in Nature with Dr. Kadeem Gilbert, Kellogg Bird Sanctuary. Registration by June 2 required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, June 6, 2–3pm. Prairie Wildflower Walk, Kalamazoo Nature Center. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, June 13, 10:30am–1pm. Film Screening: The Little Things That Run the World, Comstock Township Library. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, June 13, 11am–4pm. KAWO Field Trip to Coloma Dunes. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Sunday, June 14, 10am–12pm. Volunteer Workday, Kleinstuck Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

Tuesday, June 16, and Wednesday, June 17, 8:30am–5:00pm. Aquatic Plant ID Workshop, Kellogg Biological Station. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Thursday, June 18, 7pm. Pints and Native Plants, Brewery Outré. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, June 20, 10–11am. Life in the Forest: Guided Nature Walk, Oshtemo Township Park. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, June 20, 10am–12pm. KAWO and SWMLC Tour of Oak Savanna Restoration at Chipman Preserve, with Mike Weis. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, June 20, 10am–12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip to Praire Ronde Preserve. [Visit event web page.](#)

Friday, June 26, 8–11pm. Firefly Night Hike, Kalamazoo Nature Center. Registration required. [Visit event web page.](#)

Saturday, June 27, 10am–12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip to Oak Openings and Mesic Sand Prairie in Fort Custer Training Area. [Visit event web page.](#)

Monday, June 29, 10am–12:30pm. Wild Food Hike, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute. Registration required. [Visit PCCI event page.](#)

Saturday, July 4, 10am–12pm. Michigan Botanical Society Field Trip to Dry-Mesic Prairies in St. Joseph County. [Visit event web page.](#)

SEEDLINGS appears mostly monthly and is edited by Beth Bradburn. Ilse Gebhard is Contributing Editor. The next regular issue will arrive in July. Submission deadline is June 20.

[Contact the editor](#)

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